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EDITORIAL

Christopher H. Tienken, Editor
AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice

Social Inequity and High School Test Scores: More Strong Correlations

I presented data illustrating the correlation between SAT scores and family income in the Summer 2010 issue. The correlations were strong and raise troubling questions about what the SAT really measures. The relationship between income and student test results is not relegated to SAT results. The same relationship plays out on every state test in the nation, at every grade level. In this commentary I present a sample of data I collected recently as part of a national study of state-mandated high school exams in Language Arts (LA) and Mathematics (M).

Table 1 presents data from select states to illustrate a national pattern of the achievement differences between students labeled as *Economically Disadvantaged* (ED) and *Non-Economically Disadvantaged* (Non-ED): (a) abbreviation for each state, (b) the proficiency cut-points, in scale scores, for the LA and M portions of the high school exams, (c) the mean scale scores for students categorized as (ED) and those categorized as (Non-ED)*,* and (d) the effect size difference favoring the *Non-Disadvantaged* group.

In 37/50, (74%) of the states that reported mean scale-score data for the (ED) and (NonED) student sub-groups, in no instance did the ED subgroup ever achieve a higher mean score on the LA or M portions of the mandated high school state tests than the Non-ED subgroup. In all instances, in 100% of the 37 states that reported scale scores for ED and Non-ED sub-groups, the children in the ED subgroup scored closer, and in some cases, below the proficiency cut-score for their respective states' state mandated high school exams in LA and M. In 12/37 (37%) of the states that reported data, children in the ED subgroup scored below their state's proficiency cut-score in mathematics. In 13/37 (35%) of the states that reported data, the ED subgroup of students scored below their states' proficiency cut-points in LA.

Furthermore, the ED sub-group scored closer to their states' proficiency cut-point in every state that reported data. Because every state mandated test has measurement error (the reported score is not the true score), and no state accounts for it appropriately, students in the ED sub-group can be disproportionately mis-categorized as not proficient, compared to their Non-ED peers, due to the error inherent in all state test results. Because the ED sub-group score so closely to their states' proficiency cut-scores, even a few points of error (and the error in high school state test results ranged 3.3 scale-

score points to 89 scale-score points in a recent national study [Tienken & Rodriquez, 2010]) can make a big difference.

The achievement differences are striking in terms of scale score and effect sizes. The effect size differences in mean achievement between the students in the ED subgroup and their non-ED peers ranged from 0.39 to 1.05 in LA and 0.36 to 1.02 in M. The effect size was 0.50 or higher favoring the non-ED in LA an M in 27/37 (73%) states that reported data. To put a 0.50 effect size into perspective, it would mean the difference between a child scoring at the 50th percentile on a norm-referenced test and a student scoring at the 67th percentile. An effect size of 1.00 would translate to the difference between a student scoring at the 50th percentile compared to the 84th percentile.

These data make me wonder. Are these tests overly sensitive to out-of-school factors? If being Non-Economically Disadvantaged provides such a boost to student achievement, why are we not, as a Nation, focused on the factors that contribute to being disadvantaged instead of churning the education system?

Common Core Standards, merit pay, charter schools, more high-stakes testing, etc. are not going to eliminate poverty, inequity, poor neo-natal and child health care, limited sight vocabulary prior to entering kindergarten, chronic illnesses in children from poverty, and all the other impediments to high test scores, that as a group, ED students face more frequently and persistently than their Non-ED peers.

Table 1

A Representative Sample of Scale Score and Effect Size Differences in LA and M for Economically Disadvantaged and Non-Disadvantaged Students

State	Proficiency Cut-Score LA/Math		Economically Disadvantaged Scale Score	Non-Economically Disadvantaged Scale Score	Effect Size Difference Favoring Non-Disadvantaged
CA	(LA)	350	365.91	389.78	0.69
	(M)	350	370.68	391.55	0.57
CO	(LA)	663	650.38	692.47	0.68
	(M)	627	544.33	600.18	0.78
IL	(LA)	155	148.39	159.69	0.81
	(M)	156	147.62	160.60	0.94
KY	(LA)	1040	1039	1048	0.61
	(M)	1040	1127	1139	0.63
LA	(LA)	299	292	314	0.50
	(M)	305	309	337	0.65
ME	(LA)	1142	1134	1143	0.65
	(M)	1142	1136	1142	0.61
MI	(LA)	1100	1091	1110	0.58
	(M)	1100	1078	1098	0.63
MN	(LA)	1040	1048.3	1058.8	0.77
	(M)	1140	1129	1144.6	0.82
MT	(LA)	250	249.8	268.3	0.53
	(M)	250	245.3	261.7	0.61
PA	(LA)	1257	1220	1410	0.75
	(M)	1304	1210	1390	0.74
SC	(LA)	200	218.26	234.76	0.79
	(M)	200	215.19	232.27	0.74
TX	(LA)	2100	2217	2296	0.60
	(M)	2100	2115	2217	0.59

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The Viability of Online Education for Professional Development

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Abstract

Information technology is influencing continuing education for K-12 administrators and in-service teachers, especially with regard to asynchronous education for professional development. Implementation of instructional technology applications has required a major restructuring of the learning environment. The restructuring has included the use of computer software applications to introduce new pedagogies; enhanced electronic communications; multimedia and video graphics; wireless and mobile technology; and importantly, Internet-based education. This is causing faculty to make changes in their teaching approach to afford opportunities beyond the traditional classroom in a unique and accessible way. This case study reveals that the implementation of online technology-based curriculum not only fosters learning but offers a multifaceted experience for administrators and teachers to capitalize upon professional development opportunities.

Key Words

Internet, Learning, Accessibility

Professional development (PD) performed well can be an asset for K-12 administrators and teachers. It offers a means to broaden content knowledge, expand upon teaching and learning strategies, deepen connections to theory and research, examine standards and diverse student learning needs and enhance pedagogy that enable opportunities so that every child can learn (Vandiver, 2008). PD also is necessary for informing administrative and teaching practice as it offers new concepts and ways to teach and work using technology. However, with demanding work and teaching schedules, after school meetings and programs, class preparation in tandem with multiple life roles, there is little time for administrators and teachers to engage in PD opportunities within traditional educational formats (Salpefer & Bray, 2003).

Problem and Research Questions

Many administrators and teachers struggle with the desire to obtain new knowledge and skills while trying to meet the demands of their work. Due to this need to create a balance, a shift has been recognized in the consideration of pursuing PD programs where online educational opportunities are offered.

The current empirical literature on the perceptions of teachers of asynchronous learning environments and the challenges faced by administrators when they use asynchronous learning environments to deliver PD to teachers is not well developed. Instructors of these programs are incorporating advanced curriculum in order to maintain educational quality found in traditional formats. Therefore, some important research questions arise including:

- What are the differences in academic quality of learning in an online versus traditional learning environment?

- What types of learning strategies are offered in the learning environment to fit the diverse learning needs that allow the acquisition of knowledge?

- What opportunities are provided in the learning environment that encourage participation/active learning, allow for efficient time on task and offer prompt feedback?

- What are the perceptions of academic rigor in both settings?

The purpose for this study is to provide the perceptions of K-12 administrators and teachers on the advantages and challenges of online education for PD. This study can provide insight for administrators and teachers who are considering online PD opportunities.

Additionally, this study can be considered by other academic institutions—those considering or interested in possibly expanding or administering PD opportunities through online courses and programs.

Theoretical Perspectives

The literature indicates that the utilization of Internet-based education is eliminating boundaries for learning given the new methods of communication and a shift in focus from teacher to student. This shift is helping to develop new types of learning communities. These learning communities have increased access to the professor and other students, resources for research, and increased control over their time, place and frequency of learning. It can be noted that the primary rationale for taking an online course includes convenience, time constraints and geographical location (Dennen, 2005).

Motives for engaging in online education are greater access to learning given schedule conflicts, earning PD credits, and obtaining an advanced degree. Individuals are provided with time allowed for contemplation and removal of inhibitions that some may experience in a regular classroom. It has also been found that there is the ability to be candid when participating in an online discussion, where students can share knowledge and receive beneficial feedback (Allen & Seaman, 2004).

Synchronous online chat rooms allow the students to expand their world by interacting with people from other countries, who are culturally diverse, economically and socially. Instructors evaluate assignments and provide detailed comments on student work personalizing the interaction with their students (Weimer, 2002).

Internet-based education is offered through a variety of formats, such as e-learning and asynchronous learning environments that involve emerging technologies, such as WebEx online meetings for video conferencing and synchronous, chat-room discussions.

The asynchronous, online classrooms offer many advantages addressing multiple learning needs and involving e-learning that includes Web-based learning, computer-based learning and virtual classrooms (Matuscov, Hayes & Pluta, 2005). The asynchronous delivery can be made in various formats thereby allowing opportunities to continue education while meeting demands for professionals.

Given time constraints and work-related demands on time, multiple life roles as well as life commitments, adult learners are provided

with a greater opportunity for continuing education at anytime, anywhere (Darabi, Sikorski & Harvey, 2006).

Many of the PD opportunities are now found through correspondence courses, interactive TV, online courses and a hybrid mode that includes both synchronous, face-to-face class meetings as well as asynchronous, online meetings. The cable TV system allows students to view a live class broadcast and interact with an instructor by phone and email. Correspondence courses contain DVDs and compact disks, which teachers can access at any time, complete assignments and return to the instructor (Gilbert & Dabbagh, 2005).

Interactive, synchronous or live classes can be broadcast to an individual's location with sight and sound occurring on both terminals. Online courses utilize a course management platform such as Blackboard or WebCT, so that retrieval of course documents, assignments, discussion boards, grades and resources can easily be accessed. Assignments and messages can be sent to the instructor by email or links provided on the platform.

The hybrid model for teaching and learning allows for individuals to participate in a traditional synchronous face-to-face course, which is supplemented by online assignments, discussions and tests (Finkelstein, 2006).

Instructors at many university campuses currently tend to adopt curriculum to meet the needs of professionals today for tomorrow's workforce. The traditional classroom environment, in tandem with the asynchronous learning environment, is moving from professor to student instruction and evolving to student involvement, a student-centered approach (Palloff & Pratt, 2005).

The professor has become more of the facilitator of the learning process and therefore the students are becoming more responsible for their learning.

Because of this, asynchronous education is seen as valuable since the student-centered approach for delivering the learning process is attractive to increased populations of adult learners. This approach is therefore giving the professor increased time to interact with the student moving away from solely delivering information and knowledge (Merrill, 2002).

The valuable benefits for asynchronous education share similarities with campus-based programs designed to address adult learning theories, given that online education attracts a greater population of adult learners, and infuses learning strategies geared toward self-directed learning. The benefits include, but are not limited to students having greater responsibility for learning since the online course-work can be accomplished whenever or wherever the student accesses the course. This benefit directly correlates to the flexibility in completing course-work given the availability of course access (Smith et al., 2003).

In addition to this flexibility, the course-work is reduced to learning modules that are organized over a given course semester within a prescribed number of weeks, usually 10-12 weeks. This can be particularly helpful if learning modules fall during an academic year whereby in-service teachers and administrators have the ability to apply the new knowledge they are learning and transfer a new understanding to competency in their work.

Further benefits include the option to host online course content in a primary location that can be easily reviewed and updated while being distributed to multiple students simultaneously. Additionally, links to helpful resources and reference materials for the

courses can be made readily available that can in turn reduce the costs for print and distribution of materials (McVay, 2001). Most online course management systems also have the capacity to collect valuable student learning outcomes and report data on student progress. Reports can be generated and students can access and share (use active voice) this information with their supervisor (Macdonald, 2003). This can be particularly beneficial when there is a need to provide evidence that a course has been completed to reveal PD credits earned. Information in this manner can then be provided within a professional portfolio for career advancement.

Research Design

The design of this study includes collecting perceptions of K-12 administrators and teachers enrolled in an asynchronous, online learning environment as well as a traditional, synchronous face-to-face on-campus classroom.

The online program curriculum is a mirror image of the on-campus program as the course offerings are only differentiated by the mode of delivery. The research began with a literature review that included theoretical, research-based, peer-reviewed and professional journals. The literature focused on guidelines for online teaching and learning as well as learner-instructor interactions. The literature selected for this study was published within the last ten years.

The study included the voluntary, confidential and anonymous participation of teachers and school administrators seeking PD at a private university where PD offerings in educational leadership, management and policy were offered.

After review of the registration listing of course offerings, specific faculty members were approached via phone and in person to

obtain class lists for those teaching in the desired settings.

Students were randomly identified to participate. The sample size for this study included two courses whereby 33 teachers and administrators participated. The median age of the participant group was 28 and there were 18 females and 15 males.

Through quantitative outcomes, insight into whether or not differences exist in the quality of student learning, whether barriers exist with the use of instructional technology for student learning and the degree to which students were engaged in the learning experience.

Survey questions were developed by the researcher to address the research questions, used to make comparisons among student responses and to collect relevant data based on the effective uses of technology and the impact on the quality of the student learning experience in both conditions.

The researcher developed the survey questions based upon the literature with reference to *Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as a Lever* by Chickering & Ehrmann (1996). Reference to the seven principles in relation to educational technology served as a guide for the development of 50 survey questions within a five-part survey to obtain student perceptions of performance and learning, student interaction with the professor, information technology usage in the course, the student learning environment, professor encouragement of active participation, efficient time-on-task and prompt feedback.

A sample of ten survey questions geared toward student perceptions of performance and learning include:

- I learned material that enabled my critical thinking.

- Assignments aided in my learning and class performance.

- I felt encouraged to take an active part in the course.

- I learned what was explicitly detailed in the learning objectives.

- I integrated new facts learned in the course.

- I was motivated to perform at my best in the course.

- The professor provided an opportunity to learn based on individual needs.

- The professor was supportive of open dialogue and freedom to express ideas in the course discussions.

- The professor provided a stimulating learning environment.

- The professor increased my level of competence to engage in active learning.

Additionally, the survey instrument focused on the frequency of use and interaction with instructional technology in the course, perceptions of individual work performed in the course, perceptions of individual student learning and satisfaction, comfort with the level of instruction and communication with the professor.

Students were asked to rate their perception of the learning environment on a five-point Likert-type response set, from 5 as

'Strongly Agree' to 1 as 'Strongly Disagree.' In combination with the survey instrument, course grades, gender and age were variables also included.

The survey instrument was tested among a small pilot group of five graduate students to ensure reliability and validity prior to the survey dissemination. The pilot yielded 100% response rate and the reliability satisfactory with a Cronbach alpha of .78. Pallant (2007) indicates that alpha values, 0.7 and above, are sufficient for reliability and students in the pilot group indicated that the survey questions were in a logical and adaptive manner. The quantified-option based on the five-point Likert-type response set, and fully completed.

Following this, the survey instrument and request for proposed research was presented to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval.

Once permission to use the survey instrument was granted by the IRB, an information letter was presented to the students in writing confirming student confidentiality and the survey instrument was used to assess students during the academic semester in which they were enrolled.

All students voluntarily participated and complete anonymity was guaranteed.

Analyses and Findings

Quantitative results in aggregate form, calculated for both the survey responses and course grades, were developed utilizing the computer software program Statistical Package

for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Survey results were analyzed by using an analysis of variance (ANOVA).

As appropriate, one-way ANOVAs were used to determine if differences existed between the students' perceptions of the traditional, synchronous learning environment and the online, asynchronous learning environment. Independent samples t-tests were also provided to measure these effects.

However each t-test has its own level of Type I error. The culmination of Type I error with the various t-tests, was actually reduced by using the ANOVA procedure because it performed all of the tests simultaneously with a single, fixed alpha level (.05). Cross-tabulation provided a breakdown of the individual student responses and frequencies were also used for interpretation of the quantitative data outcomes for course grades, gender and age.

The results from the statistical analysis revealed similarity in both settings and there was essentially no significant difference found in reference to student perception of performance and learning in both the asynchronous, online learning environment as well as the traditional, synchronous face-to-face environment.

As shown in Table 1, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) demonstrated that statistical significance between and within the groups was not prevalent in a sample of questions regarding perceptions of student performance and learning. Students in both settings responded similarly with little to no difference between and within the groups.

Table 1

One-Way ANOVA—Student Performance and Learning

Question	Modality	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
I learned material that enabled my critical thinking	Btwn. Groups Within Groups Total	1.495E-02 26.355 26.355	1 32 33	1.495E-04 .356	.000	.984
Assignments aided in my learning and class performance	Btwn. Groups Within Groups Total	1.916E-03 24.185 24.187	1 32 33	1.916E-03 .331	.006	.940
I integrated new facts learned in class	Btwn. Groups Within Groups Total	1.979E-02 23.980 24	1 32 33	1.979E-02 .328	.060	.807

Additionally, the data analysis showed no significant result regarding the learning environment.

There were no significant differences in responses as the students reported that they were equipped with the resources and means to think critically about the material/facts presented to them and the assignments aided in learning, enabling them to perform well.

This was confirmed when comparison was drawn among average course grades that also were similar for both groups.

Statistical significance, however, was obtained in the data analysis as shown in Table 2 for customization of the learning environment to meet student individual learning preferences and styles.

Table 2

One-Way ANOVA—Student Learning Environment

Question	Modality	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The professor provided an opportunity to learn based on individual learning needs	Btwn. Groups Within Groups Total	7.032 55.280 63.312	1 32 33	7.032 .737	9.540	.003
I felt encouraged to take an active part in the course	Btwn. Groups Within Groups Total	1.137 29.747 30.883	1 32 33	1.137 .397	2.866	.095
The lectures conducted by the professor stimulated participation	Btwn. Groups Within Groups Total	5.516 31.557 37.072	1 32 33	5.516 .471	11.71	.001

Statistical significance was also obtained between the two groups on opportunities for active participation, efficient time on task, and prompt feedback.

The obtained statistical significance may be related to the rationale that the rigor and intensity of the online program was greater for the online students due to the condensed time-frame the online course was held over a given semester within a learning module. Traditional on-campus courses run 15-16 weeks whereas an online course module runs 10-12 weeks.

Professors in the online courses had the ability to meet various and diverse learning needs by fostering learning within a structured learning environment, open-communication through threaded discussions, and student-group project participation. The professors were encouraging of group work and required the students to present their work to the class, similar to activities in the on-campus program.

Students in both settings had similar final grades in the courses, the students in the on-campus program received a final average course grade of 3.86 and the online course grade average was 3.67.

Overall, very little significant difference existed in comparing the two delivery modes of learning therefore providing similar levels for engaging in learning within both the online and on-campus programs of study.

Recommendations

The researcher has sought to discover the effectiveness of asynchronous education and the role of internet-based learning for PD. The researcher's interpretation of study results was shaped from what the researcher has learned from the study as asynchronous education is

widespread among educators today. This study indicates that there is a challenge for K-12 administrators and teachers is to stay abreast of the newest strategies and technologies to implement in multiple learning environments and situations.

However, online PD programs might be a consideration for meeting this need based on the following findings in this study:

- The online learning model brings education opportunities for adult learners who never have to leave their careers for PD opportunities;

- Administrators and teachers can maintain their work schedules and therefore minimize their compromising performance and achievement;

- A viable option if offered for those who work in remote or rural areas where transportation is not easily available for those who want or need to obtain PD;

- Online PD education may offer a solution to heightening skills, enhancing strategies, and expanding upon theory to inform practice better.

A steady increase in online education for PD reflects the curricular and education needs, growth of technology and the globalization of the economy. It can be perceived that instructional technology will most likely continue to evolve as technology resources improve and new ones are developed.

It appears that opportunities for learning are endless with the online technology that is available such as: logic models, virtual reality, data analysis, software on any conceivable topic, and smart mobile and multimedia

technologies. These changes provide the basis for administrators and teachers to reflect more on the educational process. Instructors should be willing to attend workshops and classes to learn how to work and teach using sound instructional design principles.

With significant commitment, the opportunities to provide the means to acquire new skills through professional development may open new education opportunities for tomorrow's students.

Author Biography

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Research Article_____

Superintendent Practices and ISLLC Standard 1

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Abstract

Sixteen superintendents from the Southern Gulf Coast area were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the connection of ISLLC Standard One to practice.   A comprehensive analysis of superintendent responses to questions related to five research questions suggests 11 major themes. Superintendents discussed the importance of vision, data-driven decision making, communication, purposeful change, maintenance of positive relationships, collaboration, systems management, instructional leadership, balance, politics of leadership, and the importance of interpreting trends to make decisions for the future. The three themes cutting across responses to all questions most often are communication, vision, and the importance of understanding political undercurrents of a superintendent's leadership.

Keywords

Leadership, Communication, Vision

Introduction

Williams, Tabernik, and Krivak (2009) contend that superintendents impact teachers' behaviors in the classroom. Given their observation that "No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has placed a spotlight on school improvement efforts designed to increase achievement for all students" (Williams, Tabernik, & Krivak, 2009, p. 437), it is important to understand how superintendent behavior meets students' instructional needs in classrooms within the districts they lead. With this in mind, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) crafted six standards that are utilized in higher education for the preparation of effective educational leaders.

The purpose of this research is to ascertain the degree of connection between this nationally created standard of leadership practice and superintendent perceptions of the demands and responsibilities of the role of district executive leadership.

Methodological Framework
ISLLC standards
The ISLLC Standards were written by representatives from state and professional associations in partnership with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration. The Standards were published in 1996 and have been used by most states in developing administrative standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). Each of the six

standards includes knowledge, disposition, and performance components.

ISLLC Standard One states: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community. This standard specifically addresses various leadership aspects of the development, communication, initiation, and stewardship of a shared vision of learning.

A literature review examined key components of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standard One and superintendent practice. From this review, five research questions were generated. Each of the research questions was then probed using an interview protocol in which the interviewer elicited responses to address each research question. The interview questions were chosen based on their congruence with ISLLC Standard One and related research.

Furthermore, each interview question was classified according to the research question to which it most directly applied, thereby becoming a probing question for the overarching research question. Research questions were framed based on expectations and outcomes that arose from the literature review. Thus, the review of the literature provided the guiding framework for the research.

The research questions which emerged from the review of the literature follow:

Research Question 1: How does an effective superintendent initiate change through building and implementing a shared vision?

Research Question 2: To what extent do superintendents without experience in the educational field, business leaders, etc., have a sufficient knowledge base to effectively lead school districts?

Research Question 3: To what extent do superintendents continue to spend a disproportionate amount of time on non-instructional tasks despite increased accountability standards for student achievement?

Research Question 4: To what extent do successful superintendents perceive their roles with school boards as leadership-oriented, as opposed to managerial?

Research Question 5: To what extent do effective superintendents have a primary function to manage organizational change?

The findings allowed the researchers to make recommendations based on practices that link educational research with ISLCC standards.

Research Question One

The first research question considered how effective leaders initiate change through building and implementing a shared vision. A shared vision stems from shared knowledge, and shared knowledge must be systematically delivered to ensure a consistent message and common vocabulary (DuFour, 2003). This process should afford stakeholders information needed to collaborate and share.

It is important to involve stakeholders in the decision-making process. Holding open meetings, organizing focus group meetings, and using gathered information to make decisions are some ways to gain that input (Winand & Edlefson, 2008). Additionally, leaders must take note of the staff background knowledge in certain areas in order to make concerted efforts for sharing knowledge, creating focused dialogs, and eliminating false assumptions (Aitken & Aitken, 2007). Leaders must forge the vision and goals with collaboration, carefully including all stakeholders (Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2007).

Effective leaders realize the motivation behind involvement and empowerment as first noted by Mayo in the Hawthorne Studies and

further developed by Sergiovanni in his school reform research (Owens & Valesky, 2007).

Research Question Two

The second research question sought to determine opinions of practitioners regarding the degree to which superintendents without experience in the educational field have a sufficient knowledge base to effectively lead a school district. Fusarelli (2006) suggested nontraditional superintendents tend to be more uncomfortable with the political aspect of running school districts when compared to traditional superintendents. Bredeson and Kose (2007) found that superintendents held at least three different educational positions before being named superintendent, and 57% of surveyed administrators had only worked in one school district during their educational career, while 39% of administrators had worked in at least two different school districts prior to their current administrative position.

Domenech (2009) stated the best training for the superintendency is the principalship. The researchers found this topic important because of the degree to which alternative certifications have impacted state school administrator licensing.

Research Question Three

Research question three explored how superintendents spend time on non-instructional tasks in light of increased accountability standards for students. Rammer (2007) stated superintendents are responsible for implementing "initiatives, policies, personnel, and strategies that support and improve student achievement" (p. 67). Williams, Tabernik, and Krivak (2009) held "superintendent commitment and support empower teachers to risk change and provided them with effective teaching tools and methods" (p. 437).

Superintendents in Texas and across the nation are faced with addressing accountability. Harris, Irons, and Crawford (2006) asserted that superintendents have an obligation to focus on student achievement and not testing programs. The purpose for the accountability system as it relates to superintendent behavior should be "to use accountability systems that work to equip children to achieve" (p. 190).

Bredeson and Kose (2007) reported superintendents spend more than 60% of their time on management tasks such as budget and finance, communications, personnel administration, and curriculum development with approximately 12% of that time given to curriculum development. Bredeson and Kose additionally stated "the time for more important priorities such as planning and curriculum development and instructional leadership is subsumed by time spent on less important priorities such as legal and political issues and facilities management" (p. 10).

Research Question Four

The fourth research question examined whether successful superintendents have leadership roles as opposed to managerial roles with their school boards. According to Smith (2008), leaders are willing to take risks and are oriented toward success-seeking strategies. They are more than managers who realize organizational goals because they create a vision and inspire others to achieve established goals.

A superintendent's success in implementing change is dependent on the superintendent's relationship with the board and is predicated on the superintendent's ability to unite groups around a common vision (Fusarelli, 2006). Leadership skills, including effective communication, are perceived to be valuable when implementing change. Lowery and Harris (2002) asserted that a superintendent must be a communicator of a shared ideology, especially when working with the local school board. Moore, Dexter, Berube, & Beck (2005) stressed that while the school board is ultimately responsible for student achievement, it is the superintendent's responsibility to make certain plans are implemented and results are communicated. Still, Bredeson and Kose (2007) found that school boards held superintendents accountable for management issues such as budget, personnel administration and communication. The perception of role ambiguity between superintendent perception and board expectation is examined through this line of questioning.

Research Question Five

The final question attempts to determine the degree to which effective superintendents perceive their primary function as managers of organizational change. Superintendents manage change by implementing procedures which ensure facilitation of change (Smith, 2008; Rammer, 2007; Sullivan & Schulman, 2005).

Superintendents have many roles, and those roles do not always match public perceptions (Bredeson & Kose, 2007). Superintendents must find a way to balance the need to serve as an instructional leader with community demands, pressure from the school board, and organizational matters. They are

increasingly asked to provide evidence justifying all decisions (Honig & Coburn, 2008).

Each research question ties to ISLLC Standard One, addressing aspects of the development, communication, initiation, and stewardship of a shared vision of learning. Vision, communication, and leadership are explored throughout each question. The researchers interviewed 16 superintendents to explore their attitudes and perceptions of superintendent behavior.

Method
Instrument Design
The research team developed a list of research questions and related questions to create an interview protocol. Interviewing can be defined as "a conversation with a purpose … to gather information (Berg, 2009, p.101)." The interview protocol was designed to elicit responses from the superintendents that would describe current practices and was based on previously researched issues. Information was gathered from the participants in their natural setting through interviews. Due to the number of researchers, standardized interviews were conducted.

Participants
The participants were chosen through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling occurs when the inquirer selects participants and sites for the study because they can purposefully provide an understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2007). In total, 16 superintendents from the Southern Gulf Coast area of Texas participated in the study. These 16 superintendents provided a diverse representation of school districts. As Table 1 (Appendix A) indicates, the percentage of economically disadvantaged students among the represented districts ranged from 22% to 81%. Table 1 shows the total enrollment of the represented school districts ranged from 4,747

students to 199,524 students. Table 2 (Appendix A) shows the faculty and staff demographics of the represented districts. This diverse range among the represented districts allowed the researchers to generalize the findings to other populations.

Procedure
The individual interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and prepared for analysis. A team of researchers analyzed and coded the data using constant comparative method. In the constant comparative method, researchers take information from data collection and compare it to emerging categories (Creswell, 2007). Each researcher took responsibility for a research question and analyzed the interview questions directly linked to that research question. Once all data were coded, the researchers constructed themes, both within and between the interview questions for analysis. Any differences in coding were discussed and collaboratively agreed upon in order to increase reliability and validity. When coding the interviews, certain themes emerged. As the researchers found common themes across interviews, they referred to the literature review.

Limitations
There are a number of limitations for making generalizations with the results of this study. Because the study was conducted exclusively with superintendents in the greater Houston area, conclusions may not be consistent with perceptions outside this region. The researchers addressed this limitation by including a diverse group of school districts, as illustrated in Table 1. Further, data collected and reported on are based on interviews alone. The implication is while superintendents self-reported perspectives and opinions, no observations were performed for the purpose of considering the congruence of superintendent behavior and superintendents' self-reported perspectives and opinions.

Other limitations to consider include inconsistencies in interviewer questioning because of working with a research team and superintendent responses. Some interviewers felt their superintendents answered question number two sufficiently in their response to question number one and, therefore, did not ask the second question. Similarly, superintendents sometimes declined to answer a question because they felt they had already answered it in response to a previous question.

Results
Analysis of research questions
For the purpose of analysis, results will first be organized by research questions. An analysis will follow in order to show common themes across the research questions. This organization will allow the reader to distinguish between responses by research questions and messages that are consistent throughout the data.

Research Question One analysis
The first research question considers how effective leaders initiate change through building and implementing a shared vision. Ninety-three percent of the superintendents mentioned communication as the way to create a shared vision. Additionally, 68% discussed the importance of gathering input from other stakeholders. Superintendents stated they commonly use committee meetings, electronic media, and daily interaction to reinforce their visions. One superintendent described his process as one that starts with a "connection to the community." He detailed the process of passing a bond election for 50 million dollars as one that included holding 53 meetings in three weeks. These responses confirm research findings about eliminating misinformation and delivering a consistent message (Aitken & Aitken, 2007; DuFour, 2003; Murphy et al., 2007).

The importance of building a shared vision as a change strategy is confirmed as successful by 73% of the superintendents who explained how they use specific processes to engage stakeholders in building a shared vision. Fewer than 10% of the superintendents described a specific strategic planning process that involved gathering data from all sources. Superintendents described the use of town hall meetings, cabinet meetings, and district education committees to deliver messages about goals and to gather input from interested groups. Reinforcing the importance of respecting the input of all stakeholder groups, 93% of the leaders stated they realized the motivation inspired by involvement and empowerment for stakeholders. This confirms research first noted by Mayo in the Hawthorne Studies and further developed by Sergiovanni in his school reform research (Owens & Valesky, 2007).

Implementation, as a practical matter, was addressed. Interestingly, 53% of the superintendents referred to the act of challenging others to think in a broader sense, to see the future realities of the district through concerted efforts based on the shared visions. One superintendent stated, "The role of a good leader, though, is to first assess the current reality and work toward an agreement upon of a desired state in the future." Research defines this phenomenon as interpreting the future and making meaning of proposed changes (Peel & McCary, 1999). In contrast, less than 10% of the interviewees stated they build a shared vision through the use of book studies or a yearly theme.

Research Question Two analysis
The second research question sought to determine the perceptions of superintendents about a sufficient knowledge base to effectively

lead a school district. Of the superintendents interviewed, almost 31% believed superintendents must have an instructional background in order to be effective, while 19% supported business leaders as superintendents. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents conditionally supported business leaders as superintendents as long as they had strong instructional leaders within their administration to fill instructional voids. One superintendent stated that although instructional and business leadership was necessary in the success of a superintendent, political understanding was more important.

The major theme emerging from the superintendents' responses was sufficient knowledge of both the instructional aspect and the business aspect were needed to successfully lead a school district. Responding to a question about the capability of superintendents without educational backgrounds to lead school districts effectively, one superintendent stated superintendents could be strong or weak leaders regardless of their specific training and experience. This individual said "I think that being a good leader can't be restricted to someone's background or education."

The majority of the superintendents stated balance was necessary for the success of any school district. Discussing this balance, one superintendent said "I'm not sure it makes a difference. But I think if you're a business person, you have to have people to support you in what area of strength you don't possess."

While it may seem superintendents ought to come through the ranks of the educational system, 57% of the respondents felt that superintendents from the business field should not be ignored when being considered for the position. As supported by Fusarelli (2006), to be successful in the superintendency, educational outsiders need to demonstrate a

combination of people and leadership skills, as well as political savvy.

Thirty-one percent of the respondents, however, indicated that successful superintendents had instructional backgrounds. As one superintendent stated, "Would you hire a baseball coach to run the Dallas Cowboys?" This was a recurring theme.

Domenech (2009) described the principal's job as "great preparation for the superintendency" due to the many roles that the principal serves. While the ideal superintendent would have an instructional background, most respondents believe, with balanced support, a superintendent without an instructional background can fulfill the necessary roles of the superintendency.

Research Question Three analysis
Research question three explored how superintendents spend time on non-instructional tasks in light of increased accountability standards for students. Superintendents' responses revealed two major themes.

There are superintendent behaviors directly related to instructional leadership and those directly related to systems management. State and federal accountability systems clearly impact how superintendents spend their time. Seventy-five percent specifically referenced behavior focused on improving student achievement. The strategies varied. In the interviews, 50% specifically referenced the importance of instructional leadership. By their definitions, this included being present on campuses, interviewing teachers, and leading in curricular alignment.

Additionally, 50% of the superintendents also referenced the importance of using data to drive programmatic and

instructional decision making. One superintendent spoke of making "programmatic instructional changes that meet the needs of particular sets of kids," rather than trying to create a program that assumes all students need the same interventions. Approximately 31% of respondents referenced the importance of programs and partnerships that support instruction. Some of the programs mentioned include science and math magnets, cooperative agreements with local colleges, and summer tutorial programs.

However, 88% of the interviewees referenced time taken by responsibilities related to systems management. Consistent with research conducted by Bredeson and Kose (2007), superintendents reported instructional tasks fall in priority due to circumstantial needs.

One superintendent observed, "You do tend to get sidetracked by more important issues. So my time is dictated by what occurs that day." Sixty-three percent of the superintendents alluded to the needs of the moment or the will of the board influencing how they spend time. One superintendent spoke of the "tyranny of the urgent," and discussed the priorities of many stakeholders. Added to the routine interruptions, one superintendent discussed the extraordinary impact of hurricanes and the swine flu on his time.

Specifically, issues cited as diverting focus from direct instructional leadership were financial concerns (25%), structuring and maintaining internal accountability systems (13%), designing facilities (6%), clarifying and collaboratively developing vision and philosophy, and communicating with publics (31%).

Still, the importance of spending time to build relationship was stressed. One superintendent commented about going "to a

local restaurant every morning and having coffee with a group of people." This allowed this superintendent to check the pulse of the community.

Clearly, many factors distract superintendents from a focus on instructional leadership; however, this research makes it clear that there is an awareness of the need for instructional leadership in school districts.

Research Question Four analysis
Question four examined the degree to which successful superintendents have leadership roles as opposed to managerial roles with their school boards. Superintendents were asked if they perceive their function with their board as that of a manager or as a leader. Fifty-six percent responded that they function as both manager and leader, while 31% responded that they have leadership roles as opposed to managerial roles.

Three themes emerged from the interviews: the importance of communicating with the board, focusing on a vision, and maintaining positive board relationships.

Superintendents must be communicators of a shared ideology, especially when working with school boards (Lowery & Harris, 2002). Sixty-nine percent indicated the importance of communication with the school board. One superintendent reported that he spends time with each board member before board meetings to ensure that each member understands the issues. Another superintendent said his job was to be a "great communicator," and another advocated holding open and honest conversations with the board. The responses indicated that these superintendents view communication as crucial.

The second theme was aligning the board with the district's vision. A superintendent should be a visionary for the

district (Sullivan & Shulman 2005), and 31% of the interviewees referred to focusing the board on the district vision. Board members get distracted by personal issues and are swayed by their constituents to respond in a specific manner. Nearly a third of the superintendents believe they are responsible for advancing the district vision by "keeping the board focused," and "helping them to look at the big picture." According to the responses, the key to maintaining that focus is communicating with the board to ensure it understands the significant issues.

Maintaining a positive relationship with the board was the third theme that emerged from the interviews. An unstable relationship between a superintendent and the school board is detrimental to school improvement (Fusarelli, 2006). Forty-four percent of the superintendents discussed their relationships with their boards. One superintendent focused in sharing as key, "They (board members) have to be willing to share with you why they are doing what they are doing." Another personalized the message, "Part of my job is to know and understand each one of the seven and what their priorities are. So when we come up with an issue, I can explain each issue seven different ways to meet their particular seven needs." Another added, "You have to build that personal relationship. They have to understand that if it's important to them, it can be important to you."

The responses indicated the impact that superintendent-board relationships have on district goals. As a result, superintendents strive to maintain positive relationships with the board in order to advance the district vision.

Research Question Five analysis
The final question attempted to determine whether or not effective superintendents have a primary function to manage organizational change. Three themes emerged. First, the idea

that changes must occur for specific, research-based reasons. Second, the processes a superintendent uses to implement change are vital to the success of implementation. Finally, communication with stakeholders is a crucial element to implementing and sustaining change within a district.

The first question asked how a superintendent would be able to act as a change agent within an organization without causing conflict. Fifty percent of the superintendents emphasized that conflict was an unavoidable part of change; yet, they felt that proper handling could minimize the amount of conflict. Consistent with this observation, one superintendent said the "first thing I'm going to tell you is that I think you create conflict no matter what you do."

Another superintendent spoke of good communication mitigating conflict; however he clarified "there's going to be some conflict." A recurring suggestion was to include data-driven decisions as a basis for change. Half of the superintendents specifically named data as key to making changes that stuck within the district. The data could include testing data from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests, benchmark assessments, and even Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports on drop-outs and attendance rates. Several superintendents recommended finding three to five district goals and making sure issues that were raised within the district could fit into those goals.

Change processes were a recurring concept in 63% of the interviews. In discussing the decision making aspects of the change process, one superintendent proposed a systematic weighing of positives and negatives. He said of proposing change, "you list all the positives on the other side and unless you have for every negative three or four positives, I would be very reluctant to make that change."

The processes recommended included both the length of time for change to occur (56%), as well as input from stakeholders and collaboration (75%). Superintendent had different definitions of change processes; however, consistent ideas were communicated. Superintendents, as a group, explained they interacted first with their cabinet members, then with their campus administrators, teachers, and finally parents and other community members.

The idea of the pace of change was mentioned several times. One superintendent discussed the error of a new superintendent immediately making changes. He said, "first of all you've got to be familiar enough with the staff and with the plans that are currently in place, the systems that are at work. And that takes a little time." A superintendent who has been hired from within the district may be able to make changes sooner; however, the recommendation from over half of the superintendents was that a leader should take time to learn the district and the issues before attempting any major change.

The final theme centered on the idea of communication. While communication is a crucial component of vision sharing in a district, it has connections to many aspects of effective leadership. Two-thirds of the superintendents discussed communication with stakeholders in various forms as a key instrument of implementing and sustaining major changes. Several superintendents reiterated the importance of continued communication.

Some superintendents recommended that these be private conversations, informal communication in many venues. While many superintendents focused on open communication, there were several examples in which superintendents chose their words carefully and were certain not to promise more than possible.

Themes
An analysis of superintendent responses across the five hypotheses suggests 11 major themes. Superintendents discussed the importance of vision, data-driven decision making, communication, purposeful change, the maintenance of positive relationships, collaboration, systems management, instructional leadership, balance, the political piece of leadership, and the importance of interpreting trends to make decisions for the future. The three themes cutting across hypotheses most often are communication, vision, and the importance of understanding the political undercurrents of leadership.

According to the respondents, communication happens in many places and contexts. The consistent message is that it must happen. One superintendent responded that he communicated with individual board members on a daily basis.

In order to communicate effectively, one superintendent "had conversations with the appropriate people concerning any changes that needed to be made and I involved our public information office in that also to make sure that people were communicated with properly." The overarching message of the participants seemed to be without communication, organizational goals cannot be accomplished.

A second theme was vision. According to the respondents, the superintendent has a primary purpose to ensure the district's vision is shared and communicated. This needs to be accomplished by including various stakeholders. One superintendent talked about making a "connection to the community" as he started to develop the shared vision.

Others cited the importance of communication with the school board. There were some differences in responses as they

related to communicating vision, but none that were contradictory. While the context for working with a vision changed, the need for it and for clear communication of the vision was constant.

The third theme that appeared was the importance of understanding the political undercurrents of a superintendent's leadership. Superintendents consistently spoke of the importance of understanding others' priorities, patience in making change, and understanding "process." The overarching message suggested that without an understanding of the nature of individual priorities, processes, parts of a district's culture, and the relationship building necessary for establishing and maintaining trust, superintendents are not be able to accomplish district priorities.

Several other themes emerged in superintendent responses within multiple hypotheses. Data-driven decision making and the importance of engaging in collaborative decision making were mentioned in responses tied to three different hypotheses while systems management, instructional leadership, and the importance of balance were discussed in response to questions related to two hypotheses.

Summary, Significance, and Future Research

Through the interviews, the most important characteristics were the ability to collaboratively develop a shared vision with various stakeholders, to clearly communicate that vision and the needs and priorities of the district, and to understand and be able to navigate political undercurrents. While the importance of instructional leadership did not rank in the greatest priorities communicated by participants, this aspect was contextually inherent during their interviews.

While these interviews give clarification on the interaction of superintendent behavior with the ISLLC standards, more research is needed to determine time spent at various tasks. Observations of superintendents could clarify the difference between what superintendents say they value and how they actually spend time.

This research is significant to those involved in programs of preparation. The connection between preparation standards and practical experience are a subject of debate. By considering the implications of superintendents' responses to the hypotheses developed from a review of the literature, superintendent preparation programs can create meaningful learning experiences and authentic tasks to future district leaders. Those experiences will provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate a functional understanding of skills and knowledge necessary to lead at the intersection of the practical needs of school districts and any national standards of preparation or practice.

Expanding the scope of this study to include interviews with superintendents outside the greater Houston area would ascertain the degree of similarity between superintendent perspectives and opinions in the greater Houston area and those of superintendents from other regions. Observations would also be useful for correlating superintendent behavior with self-reports.

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Appendix A

Table 1
Student Demographics of Represented Districts

District	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Total Enrollment	15983	6249	8546	37045	4748	12499	5565	20519
African American	12.40%	15.40%	14.10%	9.30%	10.20%	2.60%	25.40%	18.30%
Hispanic	41.40%	39.70%	69.30%	20.40%	22.90%	42.50%	48.70%	51.30%
White	39.10%	43.80%	15.00%	59.50%	66.30%	52.70%	23.40%	28.80%
Native American	0.30%	0.40%	0.10%	0.30%	0.20%	0.30%	0.40%	0.20%
Asian/Pacific Islander	6.80%	0.70%	1.50%	10.40%	0.40%	2.00%	2.20%	1.30%
Economically Disadvantaged	52.30%	53.90%	76.00%	22.00%	50.70%	36.60%	76.80%	64.50%
LEP	12.80%	7.30%	26.70%	7.30%	9.00%	10.40%	13.90%	11.50%
At Risk	38.50%	41.60%	66.40%	28.50%	54.30%	36.40%	60.10%	48.40%

District	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
Total Enrollment	199524	56191	7888	22867	51266	17551	6175	5903
African American	27.80%	10.00%	9.30%	19.00%	7.50%	17.20%	25.00%	20.90%
Hispanic	61.10%	30.50%	37.20%	44.70%	77.30%	25.50%	60.60%	38.70%
White	7.80%	48.90%	51.60%	31.00%	11.80%	47.10%	13.60%	39.70%
Native American	0.10%	0.20%	0.30%	0.30%	0.20%	0.30%	0.20%	0.30%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.20%	10.40%	1.60%	4.90%	3.30%	9.90%	0.60%	0.40%

Economically Disadvantaged	81.00%	27.90%	43.90%	45.20%	74.90%	23.20%	78.50%	64.00%
LEP	31.00%	13.80%	7.30%	13.50%	28.80%	8.90%	27.70%	8.10%
At Risk	67.60%	37.80%	43.70%	42.10%	56.70%	30.10%	62.00%	47.00%

District	Q
Total Enrollment	5183
African American	13.50%
Hispanic	39.50%
White	45.80%
Native American	0.50%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.70%
Economically Disadvantaged	54.90%
LEP	21.50%
At Risk	51.30%

Table 2

Faculty and Staff Demographics of Represented Districts

District	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Total Staff	2125.9	831.8	1148.8	4606.3	645.9	1720.8	1123.6	2760.8
Professional Staff	1299.7	491.2	677.5	2956.6	379.9	1013.9	672.3	1724.9
Teachers	1058.3	3.983	564.2	2401.3	303.1	821.8	519.8	1423.2
Professional Support	163.2	62.5	66.4	405.4	48.5	138.1	107.5	176.5
Campus Admini-stration	73.3	19.8	35	99.3	18	44	34	75.2
Central Admini-stration	5	10.6	11.9	50.6	10.3	10	11	50
Educational Aides	201	114.3	63.9	110.9	74.4	208.1	72.8	171.9
Auxillary Staff	625.2	226.4	407.4	1538.8	191.6	498.8	378.5	864

District	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
Total Staff	24485.9	7240.5	1088.1	2812.3	7153.8	2141.4	818.9	849.5
Professional Staff	15500.3	4642.1	664.5	1783.2	4268.8	1360.6	493.9	497.4
Teachers	11993.8	3913.6	507.9	1448	3456.6	1079	385.1	391.2
Professional Support	2730.5	509.7	113.8	240.1	558.6	207.4	65.8	67.2
Campus Admini-stration	630.5	172.8	30.8	74.6	180.6	63.2	23	32
Central Admini-stration	145.5	46	12	20.5	73	11	20	7

Education al Aides	1619.2	589.4	102.6	268.3	585.7	112.9	3	98.7
Auxillary Staff	7366.4	2009	320.9	760.8	2299.3	667.9	322	253.4

District	Q
Total Staff	707.9
Professio nal Staff	430.9
Teachers	351.2
Professio nal Support	50.1
Campus Admini- stration	20.7
Central Admini- stration	9
Education al Aides	59.5
Auxillary Staff	217.5

APPENDIX B

ISLLC Standard One

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

Knowledge
The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:

- learning goals in a pluralistic society

- the principals of developing and implementing strategic plans systems theory

- information sources, data collection, and data analysis strategies

- effective communication

- effective consensus-building and negotiation skills

Dispositions
The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to:

- the educability of all

- a school vision of high standards of learning

- continuous school improvement

- the inclusion of all members of the school community

- ensuring that students have the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become successful adults

- a willingness to continuously examine one's own assumptions, beliefs, and practices doing the work required for high levels of personal and organization performance

Performances

The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that:

- the vision and mission of the school are effectively communicated to staff, parents, students, and community members

- the vision and mission are communicated through the use of symbols, ceremonies, stories, and similar activities

- the core beliefs of the school vision are modeled for all stakeholders

- the vision is developed with and among stakeholders

- the contributions of school community members to the realization of the vision are recognized and celebrated

- progress toward the vision and mission is communicated to all stakeholders

- the school community is involved in school improvement efforts

- the vision shapes the educational programs, plans, and activities

- the vision shapes the educational programs, plans, and actions

- an implementation plan is developed in which objectives and strategies to achieve the vision and goals are clearly articulated

- assessment data related to student learning are used to develop the school vision and goals

- relevant demographic data pertaining to students and their families are used in developing the school mission and goals

- barriers to achieving the vision are identified, clarified, and addressed

- needed resources are sought and obtained to support the implementation of the school mission and goals

- existing resources are used in support of the school vision and goals

- the vision, mission, and implementation plans are regularly monitored, evaluated, and revised

APPENDIX C

Research Question 1:
How does an effective superintendent initiate change through building and implementing a shared vision?

> Related questions:
> How do you create a shared vision?
> How do you facilitate implementation of a vision?

Research Question 2:
Do superintendents without experience in the educational field, business leaders, etc., have a sufficient knowledge base to effectively lead school districts?

> Related question:
> Research states that in order to be a successful superintendent, one must be an instructional leader in his or her district. What are your thoughts on the trend of business leaders becoming superintendents?

Research Question 3:
Do superintendents continue to spend a disproportionate amount of time on non-instructional tasks despite increased accountability standards for student achievement?

> Related questions:
> How do superintendents' priorities compare to how they spend their time? What difference has accountability made?
> What reforms has your district implemented to meet the rising expectations of the state and national standards?

Research Question 4:
Do successful superintendents perceive their roles with school boards as leadership-oriented, as opposed to managerial?

> Related question:
> Do you perceive your function with your board that of a manager or a leader? Please explain.

Research Question 5:
Do effective superintendents have a primary function to manage organizational change?

> Related questions:
> How does a Superintendent act as a change agent in a mature organization without creating too much conflict?
> How does a new superintendent create strategic, significant, and systemic changes in a school district's culture and structure?
> What are the primary components and supportive structures you have in place to sustain continual improvement?

Great (And Not So Great) Expectations: The Demographics of Proficiency Cut-Scores

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Abstract

Advocates of uniform standards frequently argue that disparate standards produce unequal opportunities to learn. Holding some students to a lesser set of standards, the argument goes, discriminates against students at the low end of the standards spectrum. While states clearly establish different definitions of proficiency, little research explores how this affects different demographic groups. This study examines the demographics of students in states with low expectations of proficiency when compared to those with high expectations. The findings indicate that although lower performance standards are expected of some demographic groups, the pattern is not uniform: In the 4th grade, the median African-American student faces a lower proficiency cut-score in both math and reading than the median white, median Hispanic, median ELL and median poor student. By 8th grade, however, there is virtually no "expectations gap." These findings suggest that the achievement gap is not primarily the product of different formal expectations facing students. In short, schooling contexts likely better explain the continued existence of the test-score gap.

Key Words

Federalism, Proficiency Standards, Race

Advocates for greater consistency in educational standards frequently advance the argument that disparate standards lead to unequal opportunities to learn. By holding some students to a lesser set of standards, the argument goes, and ensuring that others are challenged by more rigorous standards, our educational system, in effect, discriminates against students at the low end of the standards spectrum.

From this point of view, we are systematically undermining their education by not educating them to a sufficiently high level. This criticism extends, as well, to the definitions of proficiency used to determine whether a child has met a state's educational standards. These definitions of proficiency vary wildly, with states exhibiting large variation in the performance standards needed to earn the label "proficient" and in the percentages of students who in fact do earn the label (Cronin et al. 2007).

Under No Child Left Behind, this criticism has gained traction as it has become apparent that the accountability mechanisms of NCLB have little capacity to take into account higher and lower standards or definitions of proficiency.

Indeed, the definitions of proficiency that states use to establish the all-important categories of "basic," "proficient" and "advanced" are not substantially similar at all. One author has noted that the definition of proficient achievement varies so "wildly from state to state" that the idea of proficiency "lacks any semblance of a common meaning across states" (Linn 2008, 29).

It is clear that we do hold students in different states to different standards of

performance. Proficient in Mississippi is not the same as proficient in Massachusetts.

Because of this unequal treatment across states, we need to pay particular attention to whether those state-based unequal treatments compound or intersect with other, demographic-based differences. In other words, are students of a particular race, linguistic or economic grouping clustered in low-proficiency states?

If so, then the argument against the state-based differentials in proficiency definitions grows stronger because they reinforce existing disparities in educational opportunity. It also raises the concern that racially or class-based differentials in proficiency standards might contribute to the national black-white and rich-poor test score gap.

In order to determine how much of these test-score gaps are the product of different proficiency standards, we need to know the extent of the demographic clustering of students in states with high and low definitions of proficiency.

This article reports the results of a recent study that undertook an examination of this demographic clustering (Reed 2009). The findings of this study indicate that while lower performance standards are expected of some demographic groups, the pattern is not uniform:

In the 4th grade, the median African-American student faces a lower proficiency cut-score in both math and reading than the median white, median Hispanic, median English Language Learner (ELL) and media poor student. By 8th grade, however, there is virtually no "expectations gap," with the median African-American and median white

student confronting virtually identical proficiency cut-scores for both reading and math.

These findings suggest two things: First, a modest expectations gap exists for African-American students, at least in the fourth grade. Because of the demographic distribution of African-American students into states with comparatively low proficiency standards, the median African-American student faces a lower definition of achievement than the median white student, at least at the fourth grade level.

Second, the relatively modest size of this expectations gap pales in comparison to the size of the achievement gap among these students. This suggests strongly that the achievement gap between demographic groups is not primarily the product of different expectations facing students within these groups.

In short, we need to look to other, contextual explanations for the continued existence of the test-score gap. It also suggests that the views of some scholars concerning the relationship between higher standards and a closing of the black-white test score gap are misplaced. Indeed, given the current modest demographic inequalities in proficiency expectations, it is not clear that raising standards across all students will narrow the existing performance gaps.

This article arrives at these conclusions through a demographic analysis of proficiency cut-scores that draws on a recently developed comparative ranking of state-level cut-scores.

This index enables us to make more meaningful comparisons among states than has been possible before, and by combining these comparable state-level measures of

performance with district level demographic data we can explore with nuance how these proficiency standards are distributed across U.S. students. In large part because of No Child Left Behind, every state has now promulgated performance standards against which its students are evaluated, annually, in grades three through eight.

The national commitment to educational federalism, however, ensures that different states employ different tests to assess student learning and, more importantly for the purposes of this article, rely upon different cut-scores to establish whether students have successfully met the "proficient" or "basic" levels of achievement.

This state-level variation could be sensible if a state with rigorous curricular standards or a particularly demanding test established a lower cut-score than a state with a less demanding curriculum or test. From an assessment point of view, it could make sense to have a range of proficiency cut-scores, depending on the state contexts. But without a common benchmark of performance comparison, it is very difficult to evaluate systematically the degree to which some states expect more of their students than others.

The primary response of educational researchers to this problem has been to compare percentages between the pass rates on state tests and the pass rates on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test within that state (Hall and Kennedy 2006). These differences in percentages are firm evidence of the existence of divergent performance standards, but just knowing the percentages of proficient students within a particular state does not allow us to make systematic inferences *across* states about the populations of students studying and taking tests under those divergent standards.

Recently, however, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) has published a report that places the cut-scores of state-level tests on a common benchmark, using the state-level NAEP test as the metric (National Center for Education Statistics 2007). Using the distribution of student achievement in the 2005 state-level NAEP tests, NCES was able to locate a point within the state test distribution at which a similar percentage of students scored.

For example, assume 30 percent of students in the state of Euphoria scored at or above the cut-score deemed to demonstrate proficiency on Euphoria's own standards-based annual standardized test. We could then turn to the state-level NAEP test that was administered in the State of Euphoria and find the point within that test score distribution at which a comparable percentage of students demonstrated proficiency according to the NAEP's definition of proficiency.

This would then give us a "NAEP-equivalent" proficiency cut-score for Euphoria's test. Repeating this technique for math and reading tests at the 4th and 8th grade levels across the states with comparable data, the authors of the NCES study produced a common index of "NAEP-equivalent" cut-scores of state proficiency standards for roughly 30-35 states (some states are excluded because of data incomparability).[1]

Reed (2009) used this range of "NAEP-equivalent" cut-scores for the state-level tests to determine the demographic distribution of cut-scores across the US. To do so, I first calculated the mean and standard deviation of these scores, for fourth and eighth grade

reading and math. Then, using the 2005 district-level demographic data from the NCES Common Core of Data (National Center for Education Statistics 2005) I assigned to each school district in the country, the proficiency cut-scores of their respective states for 4th and 8th grade math and reading.[2]

I then summed the numbers of students within particular demographic groups who attended school districts that fell within nine standard deviation bands (ranging from greater than 1.75 sd below the mean cut-score equivalent to greater than 1.75 sd above the mean, in 0.5 sd increments. I then calculated where a hypothetical median student for each demographic group would be found.

For our purposes, the median student is simply the student located at the midpoint of students along the range of proficiency scores. For each demographic group, the median student lies at the point where half the students of that demographic group face proficiency standards lower than the median student and half the students face proficiency standards that are higher. This metric enables us to compare directly the average experience of white students or Hispanic or African-American students.[3]

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[1] The number of states for which NAEP-equivalents could be calculated for 2005 test scores ranged from 32 to 36: 32 states for 4th grade reading, 34 states for 8th grade reading, 33 states for 4th grade reading and 36 states for 8th grade math.

[2] I could have also used state-level, rather than district-level, demographic data to perform these calculations. I chose district-level data, however, because I also want to explore, in another paper, the extent to which there are correlations between inter-district school expenditure levels within the U.S. and the exposure of students to different proficiency cut scores. That paper asks (in a fashion similar to this article) whether students exposed to lower levels of educational expenditures are also exposed to lower proficiency cut scores. Relying on state data would not enable me to capture inter-district variation in expenditure levels, and I wanted to ensure that the two sets of data were comparable. Thus, this article uses summed district-level data, rather than just state level data.

[3] A fuller account of the relative clustering of demographic groups within particular proficiency bands can be found in Reed (2009).

The results for six demographic groups (white, African-American, Hispanic, English Language Learners/Limited English Proficiency, Free and Reduced Price Lunch recipients and all students) are presented in Table One. The same results are produced graphically in Figures 1 and 2, with the actual NAEP cut-scores for basic and proficient also represented. These are *not* the median scores produced by students within these demographic groups; rather, these figures show us the proficiency cut-score at which half the students within each demographic group face a higher cut score and half face a lower cut-score.

Table 1

NAEP-Equivalent Proficiency Cut-Scores of Median Student, By Demographic Group

	All Students	White	African American	Hispanic	FRPL	LEP/ELL	NAEP Basic	NAEP Proficient
4th grade reading	206.0	203.2	198.0	204.6	206.2	205.2	208	238
4th grade math	228.8	228.0	222.0	228.4	231.7	230.8	214	249
8th grade reading	256.4	253.6	253.7	257.2	255.0	268.3	243	281
8th grade math	274.2	274.1	273.6	274.8	272.9	272.4	262	299

NV and TN omitted in Table 1 due to missing race and ethnicity data

Figure 1. "NAEP-Equivalent" proficiency cut-scores of median student, by race or ethnicity.
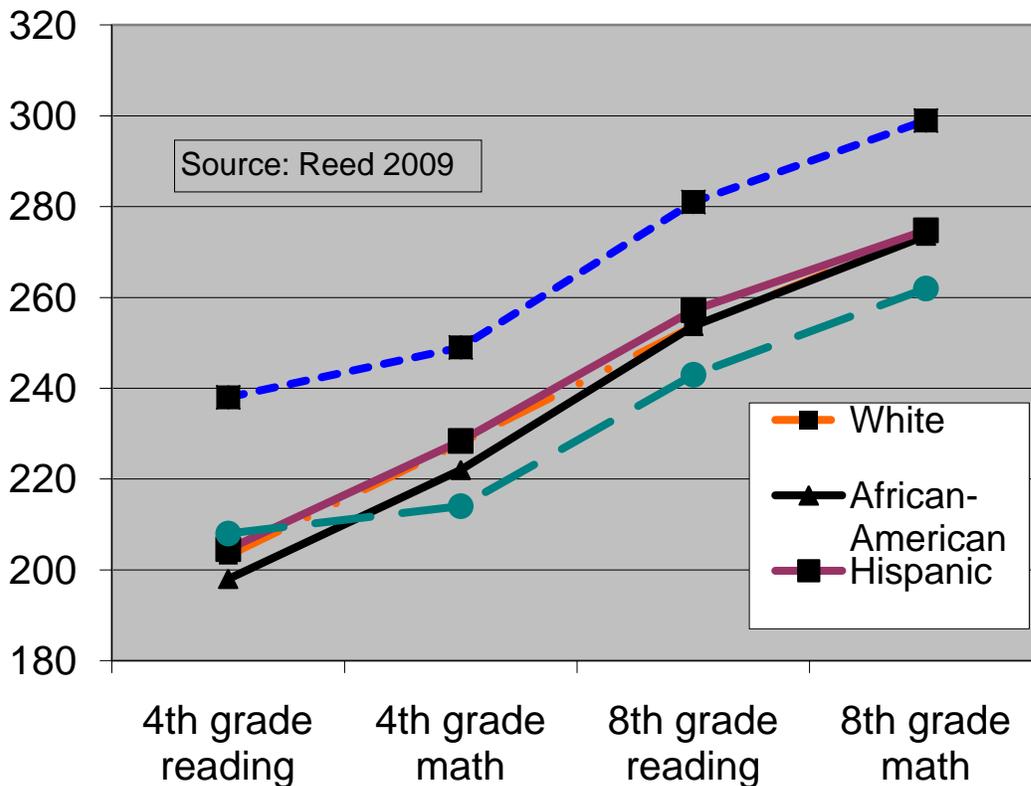
If we look at the median 4th grade reading and math cut-scores for each group, we see that the median proficiency cut-scores for whites in 4th grade is the second lowest cut-score, with only the median African-American student facing lower proficiency cut-scores. The median Hispanic, median student in poverty and median LEP/ELL student all confront 4th grade reading and math proficiency cut-scores that are higher than those faced by the median white student. While the differences may not be large (particularly for math), the relative placement of whites among these groups strongly challenges the notion that all minority groups are uniformly face lower systems-level expectations.

Figure 2. "NAEP-Equivalent" proficiency cut-score of median student, by poverty and language.
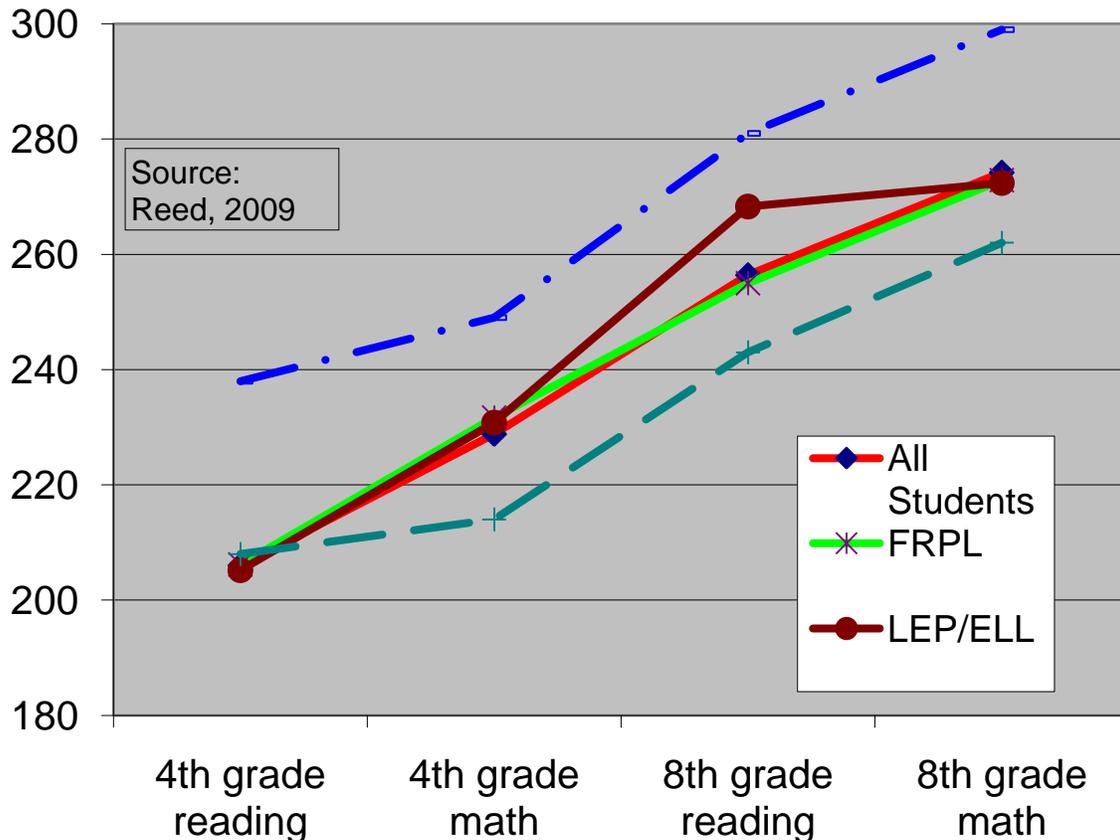
Nonetheless, it is clear that the median African-American student faces a lower proficiency cut-score than all other groups. It is in 4th grade that we see the clearest expression of an expectations gap. The median African-American fourth grader faces a lower proficiency cut-score in both math and reading than the median student in poverty, the median ELL/LEP student, the median Hispanic student and the median white student. If ten NAEP points translate into a full grade level, the median African-American fourth grader who

achieves proficiency under state definitions in math or reading is one-half year behind the median white fourth grader who achieves proficiency in those same subjects.

In the eighth grade, however, those gaps are largely gone. The median African-American 8th grader faces a NAEP-equivalent proficiency cut score in reading that is essentially the same as the white median student (253.7 for African-Americans, 253.6 for whites) and the gap in math between the two groups in the 8th grade is negligible (273.6 vs. 274.1). In fact, in terms of race and ethnicity, the median cut-scores for both reading and math converge dramatically in 8th grade, with the greatest spread between African-Americans and Hispanics, with the median Hispanic facing an 8th grade reading proficiency cut-score 3.5 points higher than the median African-American.

One surprising result in the 8th grade is that ELL/LEP students face, on average, a higher proficiency reading cut-score than any other demographic group. In fact, the median ELL/LEP student confronts a cut-score that is nearly 15 points higher than the cut-score facing the median white student. Again, if an increase of ten NAEP points equals one year of schooling, our system of educational federalism defines proficiency for the median ELL/LEP student at a level that represents one and a half years beyond the level of proficiency it asks the median white student to meet.

While this result is most likely due to the concentration of large numbers of ELL/LEP students in relatively high proficiency standard states, it also highlights the inequities that educational federalism is capable of creating.

Overall, these median student calculations show a clearer expectations gap for the median African American student in the fourth grade, in both reading and math, when

compared to the median students of other demographic groups, but little racial or ethnic difference in the formal proficiency expectations for 8th grade students. In addition, we hold the median ELL/LEP student to a *higher* proficiency standard in reading than we do for the median student in any other group.

Policy Implications
While the determinants of (and changes in) the black-white achievement gap have been extensively studied (Hall and Kennedy 2006; Jencks and Phillips 1998; Lee 1998; Lee 2004), there is much less agreement on the relationship between higher standards and closing the achievement gap.

To date, the policy debate surrounding high standards has been characterized by two distinctive understandings of the consequences of setting high performance expectations. On one side, scholars, analysts and policy advocates have contended that high perform-ance expectations (either in the form of high-stakes testing and increased graduation requirements or in the form of higher standards for proficiency) will induce greater achieve-ment, more rigorous course-taking and improve educational opportunity for previously disadvantaged groups (Alexander 2002; Carnoy and Loeb 2002; Harris and Herrington 2006; Haycock 2001). Indeed, Peterson and Hess contend that setting high standards is a "crucial first step" in realizing the promise of NCLB (Peterson and Hess 2006, 29).

Another side of the debate has focused more on the undesired or unanticipated consequences of heightened standards, high-stakes testing and high threshold cut-scores—reductions in equity within U.S. schools (Kim and Sunderman 2005); increasing drop-out and force-out rates (Jacob 2001); higher rates of grade-level retentions (Haney 2008), the narrowing of the school districts curricula (Tyree 1993) and, in general, a myopic view of

what counts as learning (Darling-Hammond 1994).

The primary finding of the research presented here—that the expectations gap, while real, is comparatively small—changes the debate over the relationship between proficiency expectations and academic achievement. Compared to the achievement gap, the expectations gap is both much smaller and much less consistent. There is only a negligible eighth grade black-white expectations gap. The median Hispanic student faces a higher proficiency cut-score than the median white student. Yet both black and Hispanic students achieve at much lower levels than the median white student.

Even where there is something of an black-white expectations gap, it does not approach the size of the black-white achievement gap: Comparing the size of the black-white 4th grade reading expectations gap (5 NAEP points, at most) to the size of the black-white 4th grade reading achievement gap (27 points in 2004; 24 points in 2008),[4] it becomes clear that other factors besides divergent proficiency standards are driving the continued existence of the achievement gap.

Those who argue that reducing the black-white achievement gap requires raising systems-level proficiency expectations for African-American students can only point to modest evidence that African-American students systematically confront definitions of proficiency that are lower than the definitions of proficiency that confronting white students confront. Aside from 4th grade reading proficiency standards, there is not much evidence of this.

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[4]

http://nationsreportcard.gov/ltt_2008/ltt0009.asp?tab_id=tab2&subtab_id=Tab_1#chart [accessed May 21, 2009]

Taking proficiency standards out of the policy discussion of the black-white test score gap enables us to devote greater attention to other issues that may be more important determinants of the gap. Indeed, the system-level definitions of what constitutes "proficient" most likely have little to do with the daily routines, resources and informal expectations within a student's life that will enable her to meet those standards (Elmore and Fuhrman 1995; Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine 1996; Lee and Wong 2004).

Establishing higher proficiency cut-scores for greater numbers of African-Americans in fourth grade will quite possibly accomplish little if the daily expectations (and abilities) of teachers, principals, staff and parents are not correspondingly high.

And, as recent studies have shown, the ratcheting up of systems expectations most likely will only harm students at-risk if they are imposed in a punitive, high-stakes fashion (Heilig and Darling-Hammond 2008).

Finally, the overwhelming focus on the achievement of "proficiency" as the only hallmark of both good schooling and good learning is obscuring other metrics of school quality and student learning, metrics that may not be closely correlated with the achievement of proficiency on a standardized test. As a result, we are paying insufficient attention to reforms and institutional reforms that might improve those other metrics and outcomes.

Beyond the relationship of a possible black-white expectations gap to the black-white achievement gap, other issues also merit the attention of policy makers. In particular, these finding suggest that the present accountability regime's reliance on state-level standards helps produce perverse or irrational policy outcomes, outcomes that are desired by no one and may exacerbate the least desirable consequences of

NCLB. In particular, the system's exposure of the median LEP/ELL student to an 8th grade reading proficiency cut-score that is 15 points higher than the cut-score confronting the median white student is simply irrational.

Setting a higher bar for precisely those students who understandably will have difficulty meeting even the median student cut-score is virtually impossible to justify on policy grounds. This consequence of educational federalism sustains criticisms that NCLB is not promoting equality of educational opportunity for LEP/ELL students, but represents an unfair double standard.

So, what is to be done? What ought policymakers do in light of this evidence?

Some advocates claim that uniform standards with common cut-scores to ascertain proficiency would help reduce the dysfunctionalities of educational federalism.

At a minimum, this would be a difficult policy to enact and implement. Recent history suggests that federally-defined standards are not politically popular: Multiple efforts to create national standards have foundered on objections that a federal government intervention would lead to either a stifling educational uniformity or to watered-down standards that do not provide sufficient rigor (Superfine 2005).

A current effort led by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers seeks to circumvent the idea of federally-imposed standards by creating an agreement among states to voluntarily adopt a set of common standards that is currently being developed.

The initiative, dubbed the Common Core of State Standards Initiative, might reduce significant inter-state variations in educational content, creating in effect a national curriculum. In order to be fully effective, however, states would also have to adopt similar, if not equal, definitions of what constitutes "proficiency" in meeting these standards.

This would require, in short, a move to common cut-scores in those tests that emerge from these standards. That would most readily be accomplished through an adoption of a common assessment system, which is not yet developed.

It is clear, however, that the organizers of the Common Core Standards Initiative envision a close relationship between the common standards and assessments.

To quote organizers: "States know that standards alone cannot propel the systems change we need. Assessments aligned with the common core state standards will play an important role in making sure the standards are embedded in our education system" (Common Core State Standards Initiative).

The rhetorical and political appeal of a common assessment lies in its apparent equality. What could be more equal than holding all children to the same standard of proficiency?

And there certainly is a significant amount of dispersion of proficiency cut-scores across the states. A Mississippi parent who is satisfied that his child is proficient in reading would be very concerned about that child's reading ability if the family were to move to Boston. Mississippians, arguably, are being underserved by an assessment system that defines proficiency at such a low level.

But redefining proficiency at a higher level for low proficiency states—in and of itself—will never address the existing

inequalities of the U.S. educational system. The narrow metric of proficiency does not capture the ways schools are successfully teaching (or not teaching) our students. This article shows that the "soft bigotry of low expectations" is not borne out in state proficiency cut-scores, at least not in the way that many supporters of higher standards contend. It follows, therefore, that creating common systems-level definitions of proficiency, in which the bottom states would increase their standards, will do nothing to address the prevailing educational inequalities between white and minority students.

Indeed, given the current punitive climate for students and schools that do not meet existing systems-level proficiency standards, and given our large racial test score gap, adopting more stringent definitions of proficiency will only create a *more* unequal educational terrain, as increasing numbers of minority students drop out of school and schools with large minority populations suffer ever-growing sanctions and leadership turmoil..

Our unrelenting focus on "proficiency" is limiting our ability to institutionally recognize and improve other measures of excellent schools and a well-educated child.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is, in many ways, beside the point—if the point is to transform failing schools. While it might standardize an American curriculum (which might not itself be a politically desirable outcome, given our attachment to state and local control in education), CCSSI would do nothing to address a broader array of inequalities in school environments (ranging from educational spending, teacher preparation, and administrative capacity within local districts) which contribute, in greater or lesser ways, to the various test score gaps that exist among demographic groups in the United States.

These broader inequalities, linked to more fundamental opportunities to learn, must be addressed before the nation makes progress on reducing the test score gaps within the United States.

Moreover, the shift to a common system of assessment to ascertain proficiency will only further detract us from the hard work of determining what metrics of school quality and student learning we should be developing to create equitable and excellent schools in the United States.

Author Biography

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Stepping Into the Fray: Using the Law to Create Common Ground

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Abstract

The purpose for this article is to explore the juxtaposition of legal expectations, conflicting community cultural values, and the role of the superintendent in these connected but often conflicting issues. The authors explore several issues through the lens of Gay-Straight Alliance clubs, the *Equal Access Act*, and the role of the superintendents and boards of education. Legal and leadership perspectives share equal footing in the discussion which is aimed at helping superintendents, and through their decisions, boards and communities, successfully navigate around the legal and cultural shoals found in such situations.

Key Words

Equal Access Act, Community Issues, Superintendent Leadership

Superintendents make multiple decisions hourly about the business of public schools. Some decisions are easier to make than others because of precedent, traditions, and the law. However, there are decisions that have precedent, community traditions, and the law all in conflict with one another. One such issue that has been frequenting school districts across the USA is the proposal of students to establish Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs in public schools.

For many school superintendents, such a proposal can pose large and controversial issues. This article suggests that the decision-making of a superintendent needs not come to a halt over this issue or others like it, and proposes a safe haven where superintendents can weather the conflict that very often comes when such a proposal is brought forth.

The controversy around permitting GSAs in public schools is not the kind that simmers slowly, whirls about your feet, causing only faint notice. At least that is the case in communities where people experience a jolting collision between community norms and cultural justice. Some in this fight are willing to take a winner-take-all approach: core community beliefs that homosexuality is a sin must prevail, or conversely, must be stamped out so that justice is the new social contract.

While this may be acceptable for some, not all leaders are willing to accept such fault lines in their community. How can leaders create a philosophical common ground from polar opposite views on sexual orientation? The key is to look to the law. Our laws are not an inconvenience, a nod to the value of consistency or the focus of bureaucratic compliance: Laws are social contracts that Americans have agreed to follow. Moreover, in issues where personal values may be so

different, laws may offer a good opportunity to reach resolution.

So let's take a look at a microcosm of changing America to explore this further. "Typical County", North Carolina is a rural county 40 miles northeast of Charlotte. While driving along the country roads one sees modest homes set off from the road, farmland, and many churches. In 2008 there were 51,000 households with an average size of 2.5 members; families made up 70% of the households; median age was 38.2 years; 77% of people over 25 graduated at least from high school; whites made up 78% of the population; African Americans represented 15%; Hispanics made up 6% of the residents; the poverty level was 14.1% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). There are over 150 churches (Hometown Locator, 2009).

Like much of rural America, "Typical County" is changing. It is fast becoming a bedroom community for Charlotte with resulting shifts in the population demographics and philosophies. These often positively perceived changes can also cause fault lines in cultural norms, especially in insulated communities.

In the issue at hand, "Typical County's" citizens who have not considered sexual orientation as an issue affecting schools are becoming more aware that young people in their schools are identifying themselves as gay or lesbian. Gates (2006) estimated that 3.4 percent of North Carolina residents identified themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Gallup estimated the number was around five percent nation-wide (Robison, 2002). If pollsters ask about same-sex attraction, then the percentage increases.

Zeroing in on the schools of "Typical County," North Carolina, we find an elected

local board of education. The board members previously expressed their opinion on sex education by voting to require the curriculum to provide an abstinence-only approach, consistent with the default curriculum in North Carolina. An observer would find a local board policy governing student-initiated clubs, likely written before the Equal Access Act (EAA), and clearly without thought of GSAs.

The conditions for the collision of values versus the law and potentially superintendent versus community (and board) are now set. The board, through adoption of the abstinence-only curriculum, has already made public its values. The policy reflects the belief in the sanctity of marriage and rejects any approach that may place a sexual relationship outside of marriage in a positive light, clearly including homosexual relationships. Recently, students made either an official request or the organizational stirrings of students who wish to form a GSA club, a condition that has not been greeted positively by the board.

The stated purpose of the national GSA is: "a school club comprised of gay, lesbian, bisexual, questioning, and straight students united to provide emotional support and education to confront discrimination and homophobia" (Gay-Straight Alliance, 2007). The board members questioned how they could endorse such a club when they have already made public their beliefs. Students and their supporters rally around the legal and the student-perceived moral imperative that this club should not be rejected when the board had allowed other groups to form.

Who is going to help resolve this question? Who is going to step into the fray? This calls for a steady hand of leadership from the superintendent who has the duty to advise the board on its policies and faithfully implement board action. The superintendent

has the credibility to speak as an educator and has access to legal advice. The superintendent is employed by the board. While recent Supreme Court holdings make clear that speech in the line of official duties does not receive first amendment protection, superintendents already know that they are always only a board meeting away from possible termination.

This controversy, with the superintendent seeking some common ground, creates the context for considering this issue beyond North Carolina. After all, controversies around GSAs are hardly the province of only one state or region in this country. To move the conversation forward, we can speak more broadly about three issues: (1) the nature of leadership in controversies; (2) the role of the law in providing the common ground; and (3) creating options that can provide resolution.

Nature of Leadership in Controversies

What is the superintendent's role? Is it to affirm community values? Be a cultural warrior? Support the board? Should the board's contemplated actions fall outside settled legal grounds, the superintendent is faced not only with a decision where philosophies differ but with personal ethical issues. Should the superintendent advise the board to stay clearly within the law or stay out of the issue and let the courts weigh in if the board's decision is challenged?

An often-quoted Warren Bennis (1989) leadership aphorism describes mangers as seeking security in following policies and procedures (doing things right) while leaders are described as visionaries who focus on the rightness of direction (doing the right things). The superintendent who chooses *not* to appease a board's wishes where there is the distinct potential for illegalities in board action, is choosing the ethics of doing the right thing, over job security of doing things the right way.

The strength of character to do the right thing in controversial situations such as this one must be built long before a person faces the assault of controversy. As a leader, the superintendent must decide philosophically and pragmatically if he or she is intrinsically proactive or reactive. In this controversy, knowledge and skills take a backseat to the disposition to act. According to Confucius, "To know what is right and not do it is the worst kind of cowardice." Even so, when faced with a community whose cultural values are juxtaposed to the law and the result is a 180 degree difference; acting in congruence with one's knowledge and skills is not easy.

When community values collide with cultural change supported by the law, there will be people vociferously adamant that standing for community values is the only right thing for the superintendent to do. Others will declare that standing for cultural justice is the only right thing. Can rightness sometimes occupy more than one place simultaneously on the ethical continuum?

To a superintendent it often seems to be so, and it might seem that the best course of action is simply to remain outside of the fray, and either let the issue dissolve as many issues ultimately do as other issues take their place, or let courts ultimately sort out the issues if no other course of action is likely. However, no action simply is not possible—the issue itself (if not the media) will force support of one side or the other.

If there is a sheltering place for the superintendent during the conflict between changing cultural values and the longstanding traditions of community values, such shelter found in the knowledge, understanding, affirmation, and application of the law. It is critically important for the superintendent to shift the focus from the rightness of varying viewpoints to the ethics of upholding the law

and to uphold the law as an important common ground for all. This is clearly neither a simple nor an easy task, and one often fraught with leadership complexity. There is a high probability of damaging relationships with community and board members—relationships upon which superintendents must rely if they are to be successful.

Role of Law In Providing Common Ground

In helping board members to understand the exceptions as actually applied to the school setting—as opposed to purely legal advice from the board attorney – the superintendent has an opportunity to provide historical, legal, and local context for board members. For example, using the facts of *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969) provides an easily understood gateway into understanding the frequently flexible nature of what appears at one time to be an undisputed and widely held community value, yet when viewed later, seems even insignificant. In *Tinker* students wore armbands in protest of the Vietnam War.

In the psyche of the school leaders of Des Moines, Iowa, that was an unconscionable act that simply could not be tolerated. Should a group of high school students today decide to wear armbands in protest of the Iraq War, school and community leaders would accept this act as a protected right, not so much because of a deep understanding of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Tinker* decision, but because socially, times and values have changed.

What is the social contract found in the law on these issues? The constitutional foundations are equal protection in the Fourteenth Amendment and free speech in the First Amendment. Further, Congress has sought to be specific about providing equal access to the use of school facilities by student groups. This creates the detail of this contract.

Congress passed the Equal Access Act (EAA) (20 U.S.C. §§ 4071-74) to ensure that a U.S. Supreme Court opinion on equal access for student religious groups in higher education also applied in schools (*Widmar v. Vincent*, 1981). As such, it codified many First Amendment principles of free speech.

The EAA applies whenever a local board chooses to allow just one or multiple non-curricular groups to meet on school premises. While this federal law does not define "non-curricular," the U.S. Supreme Court in *Board of Education of Westside Community Schools v. Mergens* (1990), defined it as "any student group that does not directly relate to the body of courses offered by the school" (p.243). In order to "directly" relate, the subject matter must be taught (or taught soon) in a regularly offered course or body of courses, or participation in the group is required for a particular course, or participation provides academic credit (*Mergens,* 1990).

This is an important threshold issue since a local board could choose to avoid the requirements of the EAA by prohibiting all non-curricular clubs—no more chess club, fishing club, PEP Club, Future Business Leaders of America, or Key Club, just to name a few. While choosing to prohibit all clubs is clearly a policy option that the board can exercise, the superintendent has an opportunity to weigh the intended value of all the non-curricular clubs against unintended consequences that will emerge if the board chooses to place importance on preventing the GSA club from meeting.

If the local board allows non-curricular clubs, then the EAA expectations apply in making a decision in regard to Alliances. The only way in which a local board could prohibit an Alliance is if one of the exceptions provided for in the EAA applies. The superintendent can

help the board understand these exceptions and how they might apply to their circumstance.

The exceptions are:
1. the meeting does not materially and substantially interfere with the orderly conduct of educational activities within the school (§ 4701(c)(4));
2. to sanction meetings that are otherwise unlawful (§ 4701(d)(5));
3. to maintain order and discipline on school premises (§ 4701(f));
4. well-being of students and faculty (§ 4701(f)).

The legal bottom line is that absent particular facts that raise one of these exceptions noted above, a local board that allows other non-curricular groups must allow a GSA to meet under the same rules and policies that apply to other non-curricular groups. Non-curricular groups cannot be compelled to follow the school's curriculum or board philosophy. This is deeply rooted in the initial reason for the EAA of ensuring student religious groups the freedom to meet without raising concerns of state endorsement of religion.

Once the legal (case law and/or statutory) foundation has been provided to the board, the superintendent's role is to advise, and hopefully, to guide the board to make legally sound decisions through connections to history and legal precedent. By such an approach, a superintendent can find a safe position especially when strongly held community values collide with misunderstood or non-understood legal obligations.

Superintendents are provided a "bright-line" opportunity (*Black's Law Dictionary* 8th ed., 2004), to establish clearly that their responsibility is first to the students of the

district while advising the board in an honest, ethical, complete, and forthright fashion sensitive to community values and mores. Since the superintendent and the board are both keepers of the law, this can become a common ground conducive to logical reasoning, discussion, and legally consistent decisions. Such opportunities, while not always enjoyable or popular are, nonetheless, the bedrock on which professional integrity is built.

Creating Options That Can Provide Resolution

The superintendent at this point has served in the role of gathering relevant information about the proposed student group and explaining the parameters of the law. This sets the stage for helping the board recognize its options.

Without argument, the most difficult decision a superintendent must make in the arena of board-superintendent relations is the decision to advise the board that the policy or administrative procedure they are contemplating will not withstand legal scrutiny.

This is made even more complicated when any of five situations are present: (1) the board is not knowledgeable of case law; (2) while the board is aware of legal constraints or principles, it disagrees with the legal precedents, is contemptuous of precedent-setting by the judiciary and is attempting to work outside the law—to craft a policy that asserts local community values and popular opinion over court opinion; (3) the board has no legal counsel or is not being well represented by its counsel; (4) the board is attempting to craft a policy that meets the letter of the law but is violative of its spirit; or (5) the board is attempting to craft a policy that is not consistent with sound educational practice. Superintendents can guide boards to revisit their policies related to student groups.

The following policy questions can help guide that process: (1) What access to facilities and resources should the board provide to groups that are not school-sponsored? (2) Should the board revise the policy to assure that *only* student-initiated clubs be permitted to meet on school premises, therefore aligning board policy closely with the parameters of the EAA? (3) Has the board made clear distinctions between curricular and non-curricular clubs?

As long as all non-curricular groups are treated the same, they can have a different level of access to school resources than curricular groups. For example, the local board can provide non-curricular groups with more limited use of the intercom system, more restricted use of flyers, and less access to materials and supplies.

The superintendent has an important role in helping board members understand this legal distinction that many groups the board might assume are curricular-related are not related unless there is a direct link such as through course credit. This would include cheerleading groups or student government.

Once the board decides on the level of services available, it must treat all non-curricular groups the same so that the GSA would have as much access as the student government or student groups organized to conduct fundraising for cancer research, or to raise funds for Red Cross disaster relief.

Student-Initiated and Student-Led Groups

The EAA only applies to student groups that are initiated by students. Further. "nonschool persons may not direct, conduct, control, or regularly attend activities of student groups." (§ 4701(c)(5)) This limitation may alleviate concerns of some board members or

community members in regard to the role of adults with an organization such as the GSA. A local board could choose to make this limitation clear in its board policy.

No Compulsion of School Agents or Employees to Attend

Because the EAA was initially developed to address issues related to student religious groups, it was important to clarify that no school employee could be required to attend a school meeting if the content of the speech at the meeting was contrary to that person's beliefs (§ 701(d)(4)). In the context of a GSA, this could mean different things.

Ideally, if local board policy requires supervision of student groups, the school district will find an employee willing to serve in this role whose beliefs include an acceptance of different sexual orientations. Or it may be sufficient that the person shares in the value of reducing harassment and isolation of students based on sexual orientation or any other stated purpose of the GSA.

Parental Notice/Permission

The EAA does not address requiring parental notice or permission for their children to join student groups. Constitutional standards would apply to a local board policy that could potentially restrict student access. Since there are no appellate court cases specifically on this issue, local boards will need to consider more generally the following constitutional principles.

First, the board should have a clearly articulated reason for requiring the parental notice and permission. A disagreement with a club and a desire to limit access would not be a permissible reason. Second, unless there is a basis for treating this group differently that would survive equal protection or other legal challenges, the notice/permission should be

applied equally to all clubs, including all non-curricular clubs and possibly curricular clubs as well, depending on the articulated reason.

Finally, the policy must be implemented in a manner consistent with the articulated reason and must be implemented equally with all groups. Since this issue has not been addressed, a superintendent should help the board to proceed cautiously with any parental notice/permission requirement. Sometimes courts will look beyond the stated reason if there is clear evidence that the motivating factor was discriminatory or otherwise in violation of the law.

Conclusion: A Superintendent's Safe Haven

In the introduction, we introduced you to "Typical County," North Carolina as a model of an emerging bedroom community. "Typical County" is a real place—Rowan County, North Carolina, and in August 2006, the members of the Rowan-Salisbury Board of Education voted to eliminate sex-based clubs after students at South Rowan High School attempted to form a GSA club at the high school. Board members took the position that the GSA club and other sex-based clubs contradicted the system's abstinence-only policy.

In April of 2007, a representative from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), along with graduates of local high schools, spoke against the Rowan-Salisbury School System's ban on sex-based clubs. Katy Parker, an American Civil Liberties Union representative, spoke to board members about a recent case in Florida that had many of the same issues. She told board members that they were denying students their constitutional rights and rights guaranteed under the Equal Access Act. Parker told board members that the ACLU was ready to sue the school system, but students were too afraid of retaliation to file a lawsuit (Lee, 2007).

While each legal-cultural issue provides a set of unique challenges to the superintend-dent, and the issues may arise singly or in multiples, the common element is this—within this gauntlet, the superintendent must weigh the importance of doing what is legally right against doing what is pragmatically convenient. How then does a superintendent of conscience navigate these treacherous seas that threaten job security, the well-being of students, the district, and the larger community?

Even in the emotion-laden environment, superintendents can find a place of safety, and it is very likely to be where they have gone before—to the spheres of research and best practice. Superintendents are comfortable working with information and data—gathering them, assembling them into meaningful key findings, and using those findings as a springboard to a decision or recommendation.

The difference here is not in practice but in place. The practice is the same one found in the comfortable spheres of leadership, finance, and curriculum, but the place is the law—statutory and case law. The online research tools, such as Findlaw.com, are easy to use and are a starting place that the superintendent may personally explore before or in conjunction with professional legal advice available to superintendents as members of professional organizations and to the board through the board attorney.

However, one principle of board-superintendent relationships must not be ignored. While a board attorney may often offer advice to the superintendent, superintendents are well served to remember that the board attorney represents the board and should the interests of the board and the superintendent be in conflict, the board attorney must rightfully advise the board, not the superintendent.

In advising the board, the board attorney does not operate in the domain of the influences of the multiple constituencies that are an everyday occurrence for superintendents. Therefore, the superintendent is in a unique position to understand the law and to offer advice consistent with that understanding, yet cognizant of the community of opinions.

Decisions and recommendations may not begin with a discussion of the law, but they must not be made without swift and thorough attention to its expectations. Establishing this common ground early in the discussion establishes the bedrock of logic on which the superintendent can best advise the board.

A Final Caveat

As superintendents are called upon to interpret and apply the law and board policy, the decision to allow or disallow a GSA or other potentially community-dividing organizations should be made in accordance with established law and board policy. Because exceptions to the EAA are of necessity fact-specific, establishing the facts—not perceptions of the facts—is vitally important. If an informed decision is to be made, everyone in the decision-making process, and with influence upon that process, must have access to the same information. Equally important, the process of acquiring that information must withstand the rigors of transparency.

It is beyond argument that the superintendent in such situations must be of firm character and conscience. "Damned if you do, damned if you don't" is a frame of mind likely to be at the forefront of the superintendent's thinking since the desire of "doing what is right" will have as many contradictory meanings as there are constituent positions on the issue. For the superintendent caught in this maelstrom of opinion and emotion, safety is found in the law.

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A Bad Idea: National Standards Based on Test Scores

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Abstract

The justification for national standards is that test scores predict a nation's future economic success. There is no evidence that supports this assumption. There is evidence that it is wrong. For more than half a century, reformers have been trying to fix our schools with little success. The obvious conclusion is that something that can't be fixed in a half a century of reforms was not broken in the first place. The critics of the public schools also err in not recognizing the role of out-of-school factors in determining test results. One factor, parental SES, suggests that academic content is learned in school, and, moreover, that disadvantaged students learn more than middle class students, but differential learning loss when not in school more than cancels out school's greater impact on the disadvantaged.

Keywords

Standards, International Tests, Reforms

The justification for national standards assessed with tests is that high test scores predict a nation's future economic success.

Two lines of faulty evidence are advanced to support this underlying proposition.

First, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) analysis of Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores reported a positive correlation between test scores and a nation's per capita wealth (OECD, 2007).

However, a closer look at the plot of the data shows that the highest scoring nations have modest wealth while the richest nations have average scores. The OECD analysts forced a straight line fit to the data, finding that indeed there is a linear component to the correlation but it is clear from the data plot that the best fit would be a curvilinear model showing that income goes up from low to average test scores and then drops as test scores move from average to high.

Indeed, the correlation between PISA 2006 science scores and per capita cost of living adjusted income for the 21 OECD nations with incomes over $25,000 a year is r= -0.33.

Tienken (2008) analyzed the predictability of economic competitiveness from a variety of international tests and also found a curvilinear relationship—a positive correlation for less successful nations that disappears among the most developed nations. Bracey (2003) also reported a negative relationship between economic competitiveness and international test scores.

The implication is that poor nations can raise test scores by spending more money on schools but once some as yet unknown level of educational quality is attained, further emphasis on test scores becomes harmful as it detracts schooling from other important educational activities that contribute to adult success.

More important, the PISA data do not address the proposition that high test scores lead to national economic success because income and test scores are from the same point in time. Adults who were in school 30 to 40 years ago are running the economy, but the test was taken by 15-year-old kids who won't be running the world's economies for another 30 to 40 years. For two reasons, then, there is no support for the proposition in the PISA scores.

The second line of research thought to support the proposition is the correlation between test scores and adult income found for individuals within a nation. This correlation exists, but its existence does not imply that the same holds for nations.

Such a belief is an example of the Ecological Correlation Fallacy which holds that patterns found in individuals cannot be generalized to collections of individuals, such as schools, or states, or nations. Robinson (1950) provided a mathematical proof of the Fallacy more than half a century ago, but the proof is mathematically complex and the result is counter intuitive, so it is not well known and even less well understood.

Here are a couple analogies that illustrate the principle of the Fallacy. Picture "The Wave" circling a football stadium. The apparent circular movement is a creation of the crowd, not of the individuals in the stadium. The circular motion seen in the crowd does not mean the individuals are moving side to side. Nor does the up and down movement of individuals mean the crowd is moving up and down.

Picture a crowded ski slope. The collective behavior of the crowd on a ski slope looks chaotic, totally unorganized. It does not follow that each skier is proceeding downhill without conscious direction determining his course. This is purposive individual action that creates essentially random action by the crowd.

The lesson is that inferences about patterns among crowds cannot be made from patterns among individuals and vice versa. Such conclusions are indeterminate– they might be true, they might not. There is no way to know if they are true or not until they are empirically proven to exist for both crowds and individuals.

The correlation between test scores and economic success exists for individuals, but that does not mean it exists for crowds (nations). The proposition has no support unless it has been shown that it exists and, as discussed, such evidence does not exist, only the hunch that it is true. Indeed, the evidence suggests that, among the advanced nations of the world, high test scores harm economic success.

Relationship Between Test Scores and National Economic Success

One way to demonstrate that test scores cause (or predict) national economic success is to look at how the adults who were tested in school perform in running the economy 30 to 40 years after they were tested. This can be done.

International achievement testing programs started with the First International Mathematics Study (FIMS), administered in 1964 to samples of 15-year-olds in 11 nations. Today's world is the world largely created and operated by the now fully mature FIMS generation. If there is a connection between high test scores and national success, it will show up in looking at how well the 1964 FIMS

scores predicted where nations are today. Among the 11 FIMS nations, the United States finished second to last (ahead of Sweden) in test scores.

To assess the connection between 1964 test performance (FIMS) and 2005 national economic success, I compared the United States to the nations scoring higher in 1964 on several measures of economic success: Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, the rate of GDP growth over the last decade, two measures of Qualify of Life, productivity (GDP per hour worked), creativity (patents per capita), and the quality of democracy in the nation (Baker, 2007).

The proposition that low scores on international tests lead to national economic disgrace, or at least to inferior performance as a nation, predicts that the nine nations scoring higher than the US on FIMS should outperform the US on these measures of national success. Altogether, there were 61 possible comparisons between the US and a higher scoring nation. According to the proposition, 100% of these comparisons—or, at the very least, an impressive majority—will show the US doing a worse job than the higher-scoring nations.

In fact, the US comes out on top in 74% of the comparisons, a statistically significant difference in the direction opposite that hypothesized by the proposition upon which the national standards movement is based.

The United States produced more than $41,000 a year for every family of four than did the nations scoring higher in 1964. Topping it off, the correlation between test scores and economic success across nations was negative on six of the measures, reaching a whopping r= -.58 for Qualify of Life and r= -.48 for rate of economic growth.

The advocates of national standards have produced no evidence that such standards, or any testing program, will improve national economic success. Indeed, the facts are to the contrary—test scores at best have no effect on economic success and most likely have negative effects among highly developed nations like the United States.

This is quite damming evidence against the proposition used to justify national standards, but it only scratches the surface of the case against the proposition. Other logical and factual flaws exist with the proposition, but before moving on to that, there is an important aside to note—what do these findings imply about the use of tests as they exist today?

An Aside on Test Quality

Good schools produce good economies, but test scores do not predict good economies. Ergo, tests fail to measure what goes on in school that trains adults who can create and run a great economy. From the standard of predicting national economic success, there is something fundamentally and seriously missing from today's tests, and national standards will not fix it (Baker, 2007).

More Problems with Proposition
No need for tests

Test scores are not needed to test the proposition. The proposition assumes that good schools lead to good economic results for a nation.

Therefore, the quality of a nation's schools can be determined simply by looking at economic evidence of national success—great economies come from great schools. If the economy is sound, so are the schools behind it, with the exception of oil rich nations. All we need do to access the quality of America's schools is to assess the quality of America's economy, which turns out to be pretty good,

arguably the best in the world.

The school systems often cited as the world's best based on test scores include Finland, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore. Look at how their economies stack up against America's. The most important measure of an economy is wealth generated per capita. The best measure of this is the PPP-GDP, cost living adjusted gross national product per person: USA, $41,640; Finland, $37,150; South Korea, $16,480; Japan, $35,390; and Singapore $27,150.[5]

Luxembourg creates more wealth per person than America, but Luxembourg is a special case, deriving great wealth from the high incomes of the members and staff of the European Union Parliament headquartered in Luxembourg. Bermuda and the Channel Islands also may have greater wealth, but if so, again, they are a special case, havens for tax dodgers and financial schemes.

The Economic Freedom Index puts America in fourth place, Singapore in second, from the 259 item Global Competitiveness Index which has America at #1, as does the Innovation Index. The United States is #2 behind Japan on the number of patents granted per capita.

The United States is #3 on how long it takes to legally start a new business. Eight of the ten largest businesses in the world are American corporations. Americans dominate the Nobel Prizes, even the Peace Prize. Again, the evidence against the proposition is overwhelming. By the criterion of national economic success, America has the best schools on planet Earth.

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[5] Unless otherwise noted, all economic data are from Pocket World in Figures 2005 and 2008. The Economist. 2004 and 2007.

Another line of evidence indicating that we have good schools is that they can't be fixed. Start the history of the modern educational reform movement wherever you like—the 1960's First Coleman Report, 1982's "A Nation at Risk," or the George W. Bush administration.

Wherever you start the history of reform, the story is the same—lots and lots of reforms that never amount to anything (Berliner, 2005). If reforms worked, the assumed school problems would have been fixed long ago.

Occam's Razor is one of the basic principles of science. It dictates that the simplest explanation that fits the facts is always correct. Reforming assumes there is a problem. When reforms don't work, the simplest explanation is that there was no problem in the first place—you cannot fix that which is not broken. We cannot fix our schools, ergo, they are not broken.

Another Faulty Assumption

Advocates of national standards assume that poor test scores denote poor schools, but schools do not take tests, students do (Baker, 1997). This simple point is widely overlooked, but it follows that if test scores are not satisfactory, then it is students that have a problem.

The unsatisfactory performance of America's students then raises the question of why don't they do better? Poor schools are the usual suspect, but where is the evidence, outside of the invalid use of tests where an illogical leap of faith concludes that a measure of student quality is measure of schools quality?

Test scores are strongly affected by factors beyond the control or influence of

school (Berliner, 2009). It may be that scores (students) are bad but schools are good if factors beyond the control of the schools are the problem behind poor student performance. If so, then school reforms, including national standards, will not make much difference in raising test scores.

Test scores used in a pre-post test design—test at the start of the school year, then again at the end of the school year, subtract the pre-test from the post-test and see what was learned—can be used to measure the influence of schools and to compare the effect of school to the effect of a student's home background on learning.

I did such an analysis comparing what is learned at school to what is learned at home. The data were from a three-year longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample of elementary schools.

In the first year, 120,000 students were tested to re-norm the CTBS standardized test and to develop the Vertical Scale Scores (VSS) used in the analysis. Tests were given twice a year, once in the fall and then in the spring for three years.

Among the 60,000 students in the three-year longitudinal study, the analysis looks at 4,000 students for whom there were at least two years of test scores (two or three sets of fall-spring tests for each student). Since there was a fall and spring test for more than one year, a system of two simultaneous equations separating the effects of home and school can be solved.

Over a calendar year, test-score change is the result of 12 months of the effects of the home environment and nine months of the effects of school. Let the first test score be T1,

a fall test. Let T2 be the test score for the following spring and T3 be the score the following fall, etc.

To find the average monthly effect on learning of home and school: T3-T1 = 12 months of home effect (H) and 9 months of school effect (S). For the school year, T2-T1 = 9 months of home and 9 months of school.

Thus:
Calendar year gain = T3-T1 = 12H+9S
School year gain T2-T1 = 9H+9S
Summer gain = T3-T2 = 3H + 0S

This set of equations shows the logic of the analysis. However, the actual gap between the pre- and post-tests was five months, so the equation was adjusted to the actual interval between tests. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Average(Mean) Math VSS Gains in a Year.

Cohort (year 1 grade)	School effect		Home effect	
	white	minority	white	minority
1	68.2	69.2	-10.7	-19.7
2	48.1	50.8	-5.2	-14.5
3	42.2	48.2	-5.3	-19.0
4	26.9	45	7.3	-13.9
average	46.35	53.3	-3.475	-16.775
net annual learning*	42.88	36.53		

* The difference between what is learned at school and what is lost at home.

The results shown in Table 1 are clear: elementary school-aged children learn academic content at school, not at home (the out-of-school environment).

The home environment has generally negative effects on learning, especially for math. I found the same pattern for poverty: low SES students learn more at school than do high SES students, but low SES students suffer greater learning loss when not in school.

Conclusions

The arguments supporting national standards based on student outcome measures do not hold up. Among advanced nations, high test scores do not lead to economic success. If anything, high test scores harm a nation's economic competitiveness. On the other hand, if good schools lead to national economic success, we can infer school quality from a nation's economic record, and the United States is at or near the top of the heap. That being so, there is

no problem to be fixed, so why waste time, money, and effort on developing national standards aimed at fixing a problem that does not exist?

The advocates of national standards also assume that poor student test scores indicate poor schools, but they present no supporting evidence for this leap of faith, and there is evidence to the contrary that our schools are pretty good. Moreover, both school and out-of-school factors affect student performance. Trying to fix schools if it is the out-of-school factors that need to be fixed is futile.

There is every reason to expect reforms based on national standards to follow the same path as has a half century of reforms based on similar faulty understanding of the problem—a lot of noise and smoke leading nowhere. National standards will not work because they address a problem that only exists in the imagination of the advocates of national standards. The education system that created

the world's most successful economy are not the threat to its economic future. The threat to America's future economic success on the world stage are the polices of Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, and the Republican Party, USA, which plunged the world into the current economic crisis. History teaches that their economic theories do not work. The way to fix the economy is to stop doing what we know doesn't work instead of blaming the schools for the failure of bad economic theory.

Moreover, even if there is some yet undiscovered grain of truth to the assumption that high test scores lead to national economic success, our relatively low test scores could be the product of out-of-school factors beyond the power of the schools to fix, not the product of bad schools. Our schools, like are children, are victims of forces beyond their control.

Establishing national standards that blame the victim while ignoring the causes of the problem is folly.

Author Biography

Keith Baker is retired from doing program evaluation and policy research at the U.S. Department of Education.

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Implementing the Synchronous Classroom

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Abstract

This commentary describes and action research project conducted by selected staff at the Northern Valley Regional High School District in New Jersey. The project focused on the idea of developing a synchronous classroom to provide world language learning opportunities to students. Relevant research is provided as are ideas regarding logistics and implementation.

Key Words

Synchronous Learning, Virtual Leaning, Instructional Technology

Introduction

Funding public education has and continues to be a national debate. The "fiscal meltdown" that occurred in 2009 has placed a microscope on public school spending at the federal, state and local levels. Due to the fiscal problems in the state of New Jersey, public school spending in this state has been consistently reduced for suburban districts since 2004. The election of a new governor in 2009 resulted in over $800 million in budget cuts in 2010, with many suburban school districts losing all of their state operating aid and the governor calling on citizens to defeat school budgets if the local teachers' association had not agreed to a wage freeze.

The Problem

With the national recession beginning in 2008 compounded by the state's fiscal restraints to public schools which began in 2004, the financial resources of New Jersey's school districts' have been dramatically reduced. The Northern Valley Regional High School District was not immune to statewide reduction in school aid. The district is an appropriate example from which to view the challenges faced by New Jersey's public school administrators as they attempt to maintain high quality programs in the face of losing most or all of their state education aid.

In March 2010, district personnel were notified that Northern Valley Regional High School District would receive none of the formula-driven state aid for the 2010-2011 school year; this amounted to an additional reduction of $1.6 million dollars. In order to preserve its rich curriculum, district personnel are examining ways to "share a course" between its two high schools. The curricular problem, driven by financial problems, is how to create a virtual classroom using the district's existing technology to allow the two high schools to share classes that one high school

alone could not offer due to low enrollments and the current fiscal constraints.

Northern Valley Regional High School District is located in wealthy northern New Jersey county of Bergen, a suburb of New York City. The school district serves as the high school system for seven towns. It is economically homogeneous with some ethnic diversity. The largest ethnic minority is Korean with 24 percent. The community has high academic aspirations for the students. Parents demand a broad curriculum that will position their children to be accepted at the most competitive colleges and universities. They expect, and the school district delivered, small class sizes that allow for high levels of teacher/student interaction. Guidance counselors spend significant amounts of their time with students and their parents in student course selection in preparation for entering highly competitive colleges and universities.

Role of Technology

Technology has played a key role at Northern Valley Regional since the passage of a $2.2 million referendum in 1993. This referendum funded the development and implementation of the infrastructure linking the two high schools. Each high school and the high school district offices have network connections to all resources. Every member of the high school faculty had dial-in access to district-wide resources. There was also dial-in access from the students' homes to library and bulletin board services.

Classrooms in the high school district are wired for computer data, two-way interactive video and voice, and color LCD panels for presentations. The superintendent, principals, guidance counselors and nurses have access to electronic student, financial and personal information through district-wide electronic communication and access to state and national networked resources. The high

school libraries have online public access catalogs, high school catalogs online, video disc and CD-Rom technology.

In addition there are "labs" wired for each content area, PC's and printers for curriculum development and management, group conferencing, electronic mail, bulletin boards and multimedia carts. From 1994 to the present (2010), the district continued to invest in technology for the classrooms as well as the operations of the schools in the district. This investment has included a strong and continued emphasis on professional development for teachers in order for them to integrate the use of technology effectively into their teaching practices. One of the district administrators' immediate goals is to create a synchronous learning environment so that the district's two high schools can share courses virtually and maintain the comprehensive curriculum that exists despite the total loss of state aid.

Synchronous Classroom

The process of developing the synchronous classroom is documented in the literature. Pinar and Campo (1998) stated that the effectiveness of any kind of virtual classroom depends on the infrastructure used in it. The Internet-based synchronous virtual classroom should include the following, according to Hobbs and Christianson (1997): Broadcast information that could include audio and video of the instructor, and/or some other sources such as animations, presentation slides, texts, stable or motion pictures. Learners as well as the instructor can ask and answer questions. These questions, answers and comments should be shared by all participants immediately.

Lehman (1999) states that the instructors should feel comfortable with the use of technology and the use of this medium for focusing on instruction. Lehman (1999) stated that the following three activities would make

the instructor feel comfortable: (a) Knowing the components of the new environment; (b) Discovering the differences between the traditional classroom and the new interactive environment; and (c) Practicing with the new tools.

To support instructors reaching this comfort level, he recommended a series of staff development sessions. These sessions should be jointly developed by an education team who are technically knowledgeable and would consider pedagogically effective strategies. The purpose for this classroom and its characteristics should also be explained to the students.

District Synthesis of the Literature: Keeping Quality Programs

The district's electronic communication system, First Class, allows for the following:

- The learner and instructor interfaces: Both of these have an active window, chat box, live screen and tool box. The instructor interface also has presentation screen tabs and a presentation screen.

- The instructor has the ability to turn off the chat box or restrict its access so students can work collaboratively in small groups or even individually without being distracted by other conversations.

- In addition, the classrooms have each been outfitted with a camera which can broadcast sound. Therefore, students and teacher can interact electronically, see and hear their classmates in the sister high school. Students will be able to raise their hands, ask questions and work in small groups with students from both classrooms.

- The instructor interface allows the teacher to see and hear students in both classes, prepare and detail lessons that will make remote students feel as if they are part of the physical classroom. The instructor and student interfaces are a "blended" approach using I-Chat, the district's First Class system and Adobe Connect.

- Recorded lesson interface: Lessons can be recorded and stored through the e-locker located on the district's electronic communication system (First Class) or through the virtual classrooms' software: Adobe Connect.

The database will include the information stored as previously mentioned in addition to student attendance and grades maintained in the teacher electronic gradebook which is part of the district's student management system, PowerSchool.

Mantyla and Gividen (1997) stated that the success of an online course is dependent on the degree of enjoyment the learners get from the content and the method of delivery rather than from the use of technology. Pitt and Clark (1997) indicated that because learners have different learning styles and preferences, educators teaching online need to address these differences by preparing a variety of activities.

In a study done in 2004, Sakar and Ercetin found that visual information, especially video and graphics, was very helpful in having students understand the text. Students expressed positive attitudes about reading from the computer. Negative effects were expressed between the overall annotation use and reading comprehension. Learners in this project had synchronous interaction. Payne (1999) defined this interaction as reading the instructions, evaluating individual personal traits, and mutual learning.

In 1993, Moore developed his theory of transactional distance where distance is considered a pedagogical phenomenon (Moore and Kearsley 1993).

The "sense of distance" a learner feels during the learning process is more a product of student engagement and interaction in the learning than it is geographical distance. Moore's theory consists of three elements: dialog, structure, and learner autonomy, all of which exist between learner-instructor, learner-learner, learner-content, amid learner interface interactions.

Based on the research reviewed, Northern Valley will begin a pilot virtual class in French IV. This course has been chosen due to its low enrollment in each building (nine and seven students respectively) and the amount of time these students have invested in their language sequence. The world language class will be held at the same time in each building.

The teacher will teach in one building for a specified period of instruction (i.e., one marking period) so each group of students has the experience with the teacher physically present as well as within the "virtual classroom." Each student in the "virtual classroom" will be provided a laptop computer equipped with various software which will allow students to interact with each other as well as with the teacher.

At Northern Valley, this will mean using First Class, the district's electronic communications system, to organize class materials and assignments. The teachers' lesson plans, class notes and homework assignments will also be posted on "First Class." Students will use this medium to conference with each other and the teacher as well as to create and access Web pages. Students will be able to e-mail audio files of their recordings and post to blogs. To ensure that the teacher is comfortable

in the new environment, members of the district's technology team and staff development team will work with the teacher in the spring and throughout the summer. In addition, the district is reaching out to other teachers to train in virtual classroom teaching techniques so a cohort of teachers could be trained and work together on virtual classroom projects.

One goal for this project is to maintain as many normal classroom interactions as possible. Students will be able to raise their hands, ask questions and work within small groups. The teacher will prepare and detail lessons that will help remote students feel as if they are part of the classroom and are interacting with all participants. Employing activities which require active student participation and cooperation among students will decrease the "sense of distance" described in Moore's research. The system will offer different types of collaboration tools: screen sharing and multi-use chat will be used more frequently for this class than in a tradition one. The teacher will be able to poll students instantaneously and simultaneously.

The class will be designed to emphasize collaborative work among students, increased interaction and continuing relationships among the students beyond the classroom. Social activities extending beyond the physical classroom will be planned for both classes to facilitate students getting to know their virtual classmates.

Evaluating Effectiveness
School district personnel will evaluate the effectiveness of this class through feedback from the teacher and students using online survey instruments, such as Survey Monkey.

In addition, coaching visits are planned by the district's staff developer, the content area supervisor, and the district's technology supervisor. Through these interactions and survey results, revisions will be made. Meeting times among these staff members and the teacher are built into the weekly schedule allowing for a minimum of three meetings per week of 55 minutes each. In addition, the teacher will maintain the daily professional preparation period. The first student survey is planned for the end of the first five weeks of school in September, 2010.

Revisions in the Future
Changes in the use of technology and other revisions will occur when needed as determined by the staff and student survey results which will coincide with the end of each school quarter. Based on the work of a number of researchers (e. g. Nunan, D., 1989; Skehan, P., 1998 a & b; Yule, G., 1997; and Klapper, J., 2003) task revision may be the focus for the teacher. The tasks will have to be closely related to the student communicative needs with some real-world relationships. These tasks will involve the students in more problem-solving activities in collaboration with their peers.

According to Meskill (1999), it is expected that the teacher will have to increase designated roles for individual learners and teams to help situate the students within this virtual community of participants. Tasks will have to be designed to be more student-centered than they may currently be.

In their roles as active learners, students will be expected to spend more time collaborating in groups, negotiating positions and discussing ideas (Hauck & Hampel, 2005).

Author Biography

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Wounded by School: Recapturing the Joy in Learning and Standing Up to Old School Culture
by Kirsten Olson

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Can you remember the excitement of heading off for your first day of kindergarten and subsequent first days of school? Do you recollect the wonder of watching as a young child learned something new about the world? If you are a teacher, recall the lessons that joyously reached your students; even the sullen, apathetic, and reluctant learner whose face actually lit up as he or she contributed to an engaging activity?

What of the opposite memories of these positive images of learning? Do you remember the first time you felt "stupid" in school? Decades later, do the caustic words of a sarcastic teacher still sting and ring in your mind? These polarities are the territory examined by Kirsten Olsen's book, *Wounded by School*.

Through a careful examination of a number of case studies, Olson examines issues and solutions associated with what she calls the "wounding" of students by our K-12 educational institutions. In addition, Olson offers suggestions for "healing" education's capacity to hurt those it is supposed to serve and nurture.

Her provocative critique challenges the reader to examine entrenched practices of our K-12 educational institutions as she

convincingly indicts some of them as engines that too often destroy children's joy for learning and their self-image as capable learners.

Subtitled, *Recapturing the Joy in Learning and Standing up to Old School Culture*, Olson provokes her readers to recall their own schooling through both its positive and negative aspects. Through vignettes of various individuals, the reader gets a detailed look at the school as a wounding institution and how some people addressed the dehumanizing effects of anachronistic institutional practices.

Acknowledging the world's accelerating pace of change powered through technological innovation, Olson explicitly contrasts this reality with the current anachronistic industrial practices of today's schooling.

Additionally, Olson explores the intellectually numbing effects of today's emphasis on a number of contemporary educational icons.

The author describes school wounding caused by NCLB requirements, the ubiquitous preoccupation with standardized test scores by policy makers, school boards and administrators, and the rat race to accumulate

courses and activities to craft a resume designed for admission to elite colleges and universities by driven students.

The author makes a convincing case for recasting the purpose of education by reforming stultifying practices and processes that kill the learners' enthusiasm, blunts their intellect, and leads to student alienation, boredom, and even dropping out of the system. In proposing how contemporary teachers, parents, and students can be healers of school wounding, Olson recounts the radical educational reform experiments of the 1960's. Building on the philosophies and methods of these experimental educational models, the author suggests a variety of learner-friendly changes by teachers, parents, and students ranging from democratic school structures to homeschooling as bandage and balm for students' lacerations.

If for no other reason than to reflect on one's own school experiences and their attending wounds whether personal or witnessed, this well-written and researched book should be on the required reading list of prospective educators. It will be for my students of educational leadership.

Reviewer Biography

Greg Geer is an assistant professor in the new masters in education program in educational leadership at Coastal Carolina University's William L. Spadoni College of Education. Before joining Coastal Carolina University, Geer enjoyed a thirty-year career as an educator in New York State as both a teacher and administrator. He spent the last eight years of his career in New York as the superintendent of the Byron-Bergen Central School District. E-mail: ggeer@coastal.edu

Mission and Scope, Upcoming Themes, Author Guidelines & 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.

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

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

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Below are themes and areas of interest for the 2010-2011 publication cycles.

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Submissions

Length of manuscripts should be as follows: Research and evidence-based practice articles between 1,800 and 3,800 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*.

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- Author
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