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Abstract

This manuscript reports results from two open-ended questions from a larger descriptive study that sought to gather perceptions from practicing Illinois superintendents on coursework and other program characteristics in superintendent preparation programs. The study surveyed all Illinois superintendents (873 districts) using an online survey. We asked superintendents two open-ended questions about the knowledge and skills that should be included in superintendent preparation programs and what advice they might offer professors of educational administration to improve superintendent preparation programs. Responses to the first question essentially aligned with national standards for school leadership preparation. When asked to provide advice to superintendent preparation programs, practicing superintendents stated the importance of program relevancy to rapidly changing and challenging school district environments. Respondents provided important insights into moral leadership, political acumen, university faculty credibility, and characteristics of learning experiences. The most often mentioned learning experience was the internship. No respondent reported his or her internship experience had been too rigorous.

Key Words

superintendent preparation, internship, political skills, moral leadership
Demands for effective leadership at the superintendent level have never been greater. “Public schools are being asked to do more with less for an increasingly more needy clientele” (Lezotte, as cited in DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 5). No group of educators is more aware of this reality than superintendents. The educational reform movement in the United States has dramatically changed the roles, relationships, and responsibilities of the superintendent of schools over the past decade.

The study was designed to provide insights through the eyes of practicing Illinois school superintendents regarding their perceptions of the essential knowledge and skills superintendents need to be successful school district leaders.

The purpose of the study was to provide perspectives of practicing superintendents to Illinois education leadership professors responsible for the design and delivery of superintendent preparation programs. An earlier publication based upon this study (Hunt, Watkins, Kersten, & Tripeses, 2011) reported on the results by respondents who rated as essential to not important knowledge and skills typically included in superintendent preparation programs.

This paper reports the results of the two open-ended questions concluding the survey:

1. What knowledge and skills should be included in superintendent preparation programs to prepare candidates for success in the superintendency?
2. What advice would superintendents offer professors of educational administration to improve superintendent preparation programs?

We offer here further insight into the perceptions of superintendents who answered the two open-ended questions, providing deeper insight and direction to Illinois education leadership professors responsible for the design and delivery of superintendent preparation programs.

When reporting on the Likert responses in our study in an earlier publication, we asked whether educational administration faculty members should accept the apparent practitioner perceptions that topics such as change theory, attention to diversity, and use of technology were relatively less important than vision, communications, teamwork, financial acuity, and establishing high expectations.

These topics are consistent with ELCC and ISLLC standards upon which programs are based, and most university faculty believe in their relevance in preparing superintendents.

When provided with the opportunity to write briefly about the most relevant knowledge and skills needed by superintendents and offer advice for superintendent preparation programs, respondents offered important insights about ways that change theory, attention to diversity, and use of technology relevant to superintendent preparation.

Theoretical Framework
The role of superintendents has changed significantly through accountability focused increasingly upon student learning. More than ever before, superintendents must possess complex leadership skills to engage board members, educators, parents, and the community to meet “nonnegotiable goals for instruction and achievement” (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 21).
They must also possess the ability to create and sustain systems that support learning by all stakeholders, including students, teachers, principals, parents, and indeed entire communities. Of particular concern is educating board members, who must understand the challenges faced by school districts in order to work toward common purposes.

As leaders of central offices, superintendents must create conditions such as those described by Honig et al.:

Central offices participate productively in teaching and learning improvement, everyone in the central office orients their work in meaningful ways toward supporting the development of schools’ capacity for high-quality teaching and expanding students’ opportunities to learn. (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010, p. 132).

Specific superintendent leadership behaviors associated with increased student achievement, as reported by Marzano and Waters (2009), include the following:

- ensuring collaborative goal-setting,
- establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction,
- creating school board alignment with and support of district goals,
- monitoring achievement and instruction goals, and
- allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.

Underlying each of these leadership behaviors are requirements for knowledge and understanding of working effectively with groups; the nature of learning, instruction, and assessments; fiscal management; and planning.

In their work on global school systems, Mourshed, Chiioke, & Barber (2010) suggest six comparable interventions that occur at every performance stage of the best performing and continuing to improve school systems in the world: building instructional skills of teachers, building management skills of principals, assessing students, improving data systems, facilitating improvement through the introduction of policy documents and education laws, revising standards and curriculum, and ensuring appropriate reward and remuneration structures for teachers and principals.

While each of the aforementioned areas of expertise is essential, they are not sufficient. Superintendents must also understand the nature of the changes required by school communities to achieve a high level of coordination and focus on nonnegotiable goals of achievement.

Marzano and Waters (2009) refer to the change required as first-order and second-order change. Using different terminology to explain similar phenomena, Lindsay and Heifetz (2002) distinguished between technical and adaptive change. In most cases, U.S. school systems must undergo second-order (adaptive) change to achieve increased student achievement.

Lindsay and Heifetz (2002) add that in first-order change (also termed technical), leaders do the work. Second-order (adaptive) change requires the school community—meaning teachers, students, families, and board members—to do the work of fundamental change.

“...The work is difficult and requires constant revision. It is particularly difficult for teachers who have to ‘unlearn’ their prior practice” (Wise, as cited in Wiggins & McTighe, 2006, p. 302).
Similar resistance and misunderstanding by other district stakeholders is likely. Superintendents who expect to focus on nonnegotiable goals of student achievement have a challenging agenda to create and maintain agreement amongst teachers, who must do their work differently, and the community, including board members, who must also understand new ways of doing business.

Change, politics, and ethics are intertwined, and district leaders must understand theory and personal values if they are to lead districts on such an ambitious, but essential, path aimed at improved student learning.

According to Bolman and Deal (2008), effective political leaders clarify what they want and what they can get; assess distribution of power and interests; build linkages to key stakeholders; persuade first, negotiate second, and use coercion only if necessary.

Politics are essentially amoral. It is the political players who bring personal values into the process in ways that use political understandings resulting in positive or negative results. “We empower ourselves by discovering a positive way of being political. The line between positive and negative politics is a tightrope we have to walk” (Block, Burns, Lax, and Sebenius, as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 224).

Ultimately, effective leaders have a clear sense of values (Begley, 1999; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Fullan, 2003; Kouzes and Pozner, 2002). “Every educator confronts a moral imperative to seek the most promising strategies for helping every student achieve at high levels” (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 11).

Without a moral compass to guide behaviors and decisions, leaders are susceptible to competing demands and run grave risks on many levels that range from issues of competency to political survival. “The courage of leadership, including political leadership, is not to do what is easy or expedient, but to do what is right” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 77).

This, then, brings the practice of superintendents down to focus on the individual. Behaviors are a direct reflection of how we think (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995). In order for present and future school leaders to successfully navigate complex changes brought on by financial pressures and increasing accountability, an understanding of the kinds of thinking that will be needed is necessary.

Howard Gardner (2008) proposes five minds necessary for a fast-paced and unpredictable future that permeates every aspect of contemporary life worldwide. His five minds are the disciplined mind, the synthesizing mind, the creative mind, the respectful mind, and the ethical mind.

Gardner explains as follows:

“With these ‘minds,’ as I refer to them, a person will be well equipped to deal with what is expected, as well as what cannot be anticipated. Without these minds, a person will be at the mercy or forces that he or she can’t understand, much less control” (p. 2).

This line of inquiry into superintendents’ thoughts in terms of excellence and ethics is important in superintendent preparation because schools and the superintendents who lead them are
beset with powerful economic, political, social, and cultural forces.

This is true in education where too often American schools are admonished to be more like businesses or held accountable to business practices. Such is the case with No Child Left Behind, where bureaucratic guidelines can do more harm than good if district leadership fails to maintain clear focus on student learning.

Not all spheres of life are best run on a market model. Jim Collins, author of the much-acclaimed business leadership book *Good to Great* suggests in a subsequent monograph that leaders in the social sectors such as superintendents have relevant wisdom to share with business. “True leadership only exists if people follow when they have the freedom not to” (Collins, 2005, p. 13).

Superintendents work with many groups of individuals who have varying degrees of freedom not to follow, such as board members, building administrators, parents, and teachers to name just a few. The relevance here is that advice from business may be well-intentioned but not always appropriately applied to American school systems.

The road to create and sustain collective moral purpose is steep but clear. Fullan (2003) defines moral purpose as (a) a commitment to raising the bar and closing the gap, (b) a commitment to treating people ethically—adults and students alike—while also maintaining a culture that demands excellence and continuous improvement, and (c) a commitment to improving the whole district, not just one’s own school. Superintendents are called to be grounded in their own values and to be thoroughly knowledgeable in a wide variety of disciplines, including curriculum and instruction, law, finance, effectively working with groups towards second-order or adaptive change, and possessing exceptional political skills.

**Methodology**

Part I of the survey asked respondents to provide demographic data. Part II asked respondents to use a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from essential to not important to rate knowledge and skills typically included in superintendent preparation programs. Part III gave superintendents an opportunity to add critical knowledge or skills for future superintendents and any advice they might give to professors of educational administration programs to improve superintendent preparation programs. We report those responses here. For a more complete description of methodology, see authors (Tripses, Hunt, & Watkins).

**Data Sources**

The Illinois public school system includes 873 school districts configured as K–8 elementary, 9–12 high school, or K–12 unit districts in rural, suburban, and urban settings. The approximately 2,105,779 Illinois public school students include 47.5% minority students (Ruiz & Koch, 2008). The study, which was conducted from March through May 2011, surveyed 873 superintendents.

The response rate of 45.4% provided a reasonably representative sample of Illinois public school superintendents. Of the respondents, 40% served in elementary school districts, 13% in high school districts, 46% in unit districts, and 1% in dual, or both elementary and high school districts. Other respondent characteristics are outlined in Table 1.
Table 1

*Description of Superintendent Respondents Characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16+</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of District</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Student Enrollment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000 or less</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001-4000</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4001-10000</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10000+</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several characteristics of this group are noteworthy. Of the 369 total respondents, 58%, or over half, had six or more years in the superintendency, providing insight into their relative experience in the job and also the nature of superintendent preparation programs they experienced.

The majority of respondents (59%) served in rural districts, and 52% of these rural districts served students with a student enrollment of less than 1000 students. Next in frequency (36%) were superintendents of suburban districts; and in terms of student enrollment, 37% of the superintendents served mid-sized districts with enrollments of 1,000-4,000.

Superintendents of urban and large districts were 5% of the total number of respondents.

**Results**

The first open-ended question asked respondents what knowledge and skills they believed are important for successful superintendents to have. The responses to a large degree affirm both ELCC and ISLLC standards for district leaders as critical to the preparation of superintendents (ELCC, 2011; ISLLC, 2012).

Overwhelmingly, superintendents stated the need for strong preparation in finance. In descending order of response, superintendents
also identified law, curriculum and instruction, human resources, politics including collective bargaining, instructional and ethical leadership, and community relations and communications as critical knowledge and skills for their work as superintendents.

While not as frequent as responses on specific areas of study such as finance or law, a significant number of respondents wrote briefly about their perceived need for superintendents to intentionally care for themselves.

The superintendency is a very difficult job. Related to self-care, respondents stressed the importance of strong mentors and effective networks. Also mentioned were self-awareness, resiliency, time management, maintenance of physical and mental health, and developing the skills of personal advocacy. In the challenging role as superintendent, maintaining self requires purposeful attention.

The second open-ended question asked for advice regarding future superintendent preparation programs. Overwhelmingly, these superintendents indicated that preparation programs need to focus on the “real world” of schools and the superintendency.

Several insights emerged from the theme of relevancy. Few superintendents maintained that theory was irrelevant. The issue from the point of view of these superintendents was not theory versus practice, but rather fashioning programs in such ways that theory be applied to practical problems faced by superintendents.

One superintendent opined, “Theory is only as good as the practitioner’s ability to apply it.” Voices from the field on the realities of the role of superintendent included not only specific areas of the job, most notably finance, but also the demands on leaders to move districts, including board members, staff, and administrative teams, to respond coherently to difficult financial times coupled with increased accountability.

In other words, superintendents reported a stronger need for practical know-how related to finance, law, curriculum, etc., coupled with specific guidance on how to apply this knowledge to a particular district’s needs and characteristics.

One superintendent was particularly eloquent in expressing the following:

Successful superintendents have a sense of mission about their work. They need to be forever reminded about the importance of this work and how HARD it is. People need to be taught that if you do this job well, you will be loved and hated, often at the same time, by the same people for different reasons.

From the perspective of the many district leaders participating in the study, many days there are few, if any, easy answers to the problems faced by the districts and the schools.

Superintendents provided specific advice about ways to strengthen preparation programs. The most frequently offered advice related to the internship.

No superintendent indicated that his or her internship was too difficult. Rather every respondent who addressed internships stated the need to make internships more rigorous and meaningful.

One respondent stated, “The internships that are in place now are not rigorous enough. Many of the tasks are routine tasks and not true
leadership activities that are necessary for new superintendents.”

Internships also need to be monitored more closely by university faculty to ensure that graduate students are receiving practical hands-on leadership experiences in the internship. Others stressed the importance of opportunities during the internship for graduate students to share issues faced in the district where the internship is based and discuss how theory applies to various leadership courses of action.

Another respondent remarked, “I believe an effective and meaningful internship akin to student teaching would lead to the best prepared superintendents because much of what I learned was on the job, assisted by mentors who were colleagues.”

Superintendents advised upon other areas of preparation programs. A theme resulting from the comments involved the credibility of university faculty. Not all faculty members appear to superintendents as understanding the role, demands, and challenges of the job. Two reasons that contribute to the lack of credibility were mentioned.

Some faculty members have not been superintendents, and this gap significantly weakens professional credibility. Other faculty members may have been superintendents at one time but have not remained current with the profession through ties with local districts and/or superintendent professional organizations such as the Illinois Association of School Administrators or Illinois School Boards Association.

One respondent advised to “make sure that professors are current in their understanding of the present day public school systems.” For professors without actual superintendent experience, the advice was “don’t pretend—get out to the schools and see firsthand what goes on in the life of a superintendent.”

Another frequent comment involved the use of successful superintendent practitioners as adjuncts. As in all professions, some superintendents are more effective than others, and programs were advised to select adjuncts wisely on the basis of competency.

One respondent stated, “It is important to have a balanced program of theory and practitioner. I do not support the notion of superintendent instructors unless they understand the theory behind the application.”

Inviting practicing superintendents to speak to a class and share specific issues faced by their districts was seen by respondents as another way to use practitioner expertise and apply theory to practice.

Respondents provided specific needs of aspiring and new superintendents that programs should address. Aspiring and new superintendents require specific directions on how to analyze the curricular, financial, legal, and political realities of a particular district at various stages of the job search and early stages on the job. Inexperienced superintendents need more assistance in these areas than some programs provide.

Scholarly and Program Implications
The knowledge craft included in ISLLC and ELCC standards is critical. We didn’t ask participants in the study to rate the importance of the standards, but rather we asked them what is important. Their responses closely mirror the standards. Alignment between superintendents’ immediate responses and the standards was strong. Of particular note, a clear theme
throughout the responses to both questions posed was constituted by the importance of Standard 5: ethics as essential to navigate difficult political issues accentuated by increased accountability and financial strain.

An either/or choice between theory and practice appears to be a non-issue. The vast majority of superintendents who mentioned theory did so in relation to the need for preparation programs to provide far greater opportunities to apply theory to relevant district and school leadership aspects. Case studies, problem-based learning, and working in teams to solve real-world problems were some of the strategies mentioned to apply theory to practice.

This leads to another line of inquiry. The vast majority of superintendents recommending how “it should be” in university preparation programs described quality instruction, the kind they seek for students in their own schools.

The superintendent respondents desired university preparation that provides relevant and challenging learning experiences. They recommended programs that engaged graduate students in real world problems, providing opportunities to learn problem solving with other students with the professor as guide or coach.

Aspiring superintendents do not need, and likely will not be able to apply inert, theoretical theory. They need to graduate from superintendent programs armed with deep knowledge of the craft of district and school leadership as well as an understanding of the theories that guide best practice.

Understanding in this sense is demonstrated by graduate students who can “show their work” and explain a problem, identify a course of action, and demonstrate understanding of how to monitor progress and measure success. Students with this kind of understanding of theory as applied to current issues will have greater control than those with more limited understanding (Gardner, 2008; Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). “Teaching by mentioning it” (Wiggins & McTighe, p. 310) has no role in graduate programs that prepare future school superintendents. More rigorous and relevant internships and coursework that prepares graduate students to apply theory to real world problems are essential.

The professorate has a moral obligation that should not be ignored. Going back to the five minds for the future by Gardner (2008), those who prepare future superintendents must be experts in their field, which means remaining current in whatever that specialty might be: curriculum, instruction, assessment, law, finance, or leadership.

We also have a professional obligation to work to assure quality instruction in collaboration with other professors on the craft of teaching at the graduate level, similar to the ways that high-performing districts now require teachers to do.

Only by tackling the difficult and messy work of remaining current in the field and by checking regularly for student understanding and revising instruction accordingly will all university faculty in superintendent preparation programs gain the respect and credibility of graduate students.

We will conclude by answering our own questions posed by the quantitative analysis of the larger study. First, we do not accept what appeared to be superintendent opinions that change theory, attention to diversity, and use of technology are relatively less important than vision, communications,
teamwork, financial acuity, and establishing high expectations. Nor do we see a need to convince graduate students of the importance of these topics.

Rather we see a pressing need for university programs to intentionally guide graduate students to apply any theory presented in a graduate program to current day district and school problems.

Furthermore, we read in the brief responses of these practitioners that the work they do is extremely challenging. In order to effectively meet the demands of the role, future superintendents need first-class instruction from universities that requires them to demonstrate true understanding of what is taught.

We return to an earlier quote about second-order change and teacher resistance to it: The work is difficult and requires constant revision. It is particularly difficult for teachers who have to unlearn their prior practice (Wise as cited in Wiggins & McTighe, 2006, p. 302).

May the professorate recognize to whatever extent is appropriate the necessity of making changes in its own teaching so that future superintendents receive preparation characterized by high standards that require them to apply any and all theories presented in graduate school to “real world” problems.

In other words, university faculties have a moral imperative to aspire to “good work” characterized by excellence and ethics both in course content and classroom instruction.

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References


Influence of Student and School Variables on Grade 5 Mathematics and Language Arts Achievement in New Jersey

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Abstract

The strength and direction of relationships between NJ School Report Card Variables (NJ SRC) and 2008-2009 NJ ASK 5 Math and Language Arts Literacy (LAL) student test scores were explored in this non-experimental, quantitative, explanatory study. Variables found to have an influence on standardized test scores in the extant literature were evaluated and reported. The sample of elementary schools (n=314) was taken from the NJ School Report Card to be a proportional random sample of the state’s district composition. Analyses were conducted using a two-tiered approach. A simultaneous multiple regression of NJ SRC variables was employed first for both Math and LAL scores. Multiple regression models for School, Student, and Staff variable sets were then analyzed for Math and LAL achievement.

Key Words

standardized testing, school report card, achievement
Education researchers and policymakers have a need to define variables that influence student achievement on high-stakes tests. Federal legislation and programs such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, P.L. 107-110), Race to the Top (RTTT), and the various NCLB waivers granted to 29 states all require improvements in student achievement.

The escalating requirements have school administrators searching for variables that will yield maximum achievement results for monies spent. Additionally, new teacher and school administrator evaluation plans require the use of results from state and, eventually, national testing to determine effectiveness of school personnel.

For New Jersey, the NJ ASK (New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge), a standards-based assessment administered to all state students in Grades 3-8, is the instrument by which achievement is currently quantified. Taken by all Grade 5 New Jersey students in public education settings, the NJ ASK 5 serves 591 operating school districts and their 1,725 individual elementary schools (NJDOE, 2009).

Education bureaucrats in New Jersey monitor school personnel by NJ ASK results. If students do not score within the required ranges set almost yearly by the bureaucrats, school personnel suffer increasingly punitive measures with the final step being school closure or outsourcing to a school management company.

The NJ ASK testing program has further implications, extending outside of the education realm. Real estate values are often assessed with the school system’s ratings as a factor. Popular newspapers and magazines often report test scores for the public to rate their community schools (Michel, 2004).

Test scores have increasingly become the unit of measurement of quality by policymakers for schools. With all of the emphasis on high-stakes testing that reaches into the very morale of a community, research is warranted to aid education professionals to make advantageous, data-driven decisions regarding high-stakes testing.

**Problem**
But what do the current crop of New Jersey state tests really measure, and what do the results really tell us about teacher and administrator quality? The Technical Report (2007) for Grades 5, 6, and 7 NJ ASK states that the test scores were intended to be used as “an indication of student progress toward achieving the knowledge and skills identified in the NJCCS,” as a guide for “annual school improvement planning,” and for “student, teacher, and parent information concerning the academic levels of performance of individual students” (p. 31).

Accordingly, in a proportional random stratified sample of 74 New Jersey school districts, Tienken (2008) found that 98% of surveyed school leaders used NJ ASK results in their decision-making processes including student placement and curricula efficacy. The National Research Council’s Committee on Appropriate Test Use warned against this practice: “… an educational decision that will have a major influence on a test taker should not be made solely or automatically on the basis of a single test score” (National Research Council, 1999, p. 239).

Therefore, determining which administratively mutable factors, if any, most influence scores on the NJ ASK 5 would aid both administrators and policymakers in...
developing evidence-based policies for accountability. Little quantitative empirical literature exists that explains which administratively mutable and out-of-school variables have the greatest influence on student achievement.

Theoretical Framework
The ideology base of using the NJ School Report Card and NJ ASK 5 scores as tools is rooted in production function theory, an economic theory that focuses on input-output measurement (Hoenack & Collins, 1990). This study used this theoretical model to best mirror the New Jersey education system. The institution is the school; inputs are student, school, and teacher variables as listed on the NJ School Report Card, the output is previously addressed, and the output becomes the students' NJ ASK 5 scores.

Purpose and Question
My purpose for the study was to determine which administratively mutable variables and out-of-school factors listed on the NJ School Report Card accounted for the greatest amount of variance on the NJ ASK 5 test results for Language Arts (LA) and Mathematics (M). I used simultaneous multiple regression analyses. The guiding research question that seeks to be answered is the following: What NJ School Report Card factors account for a statistically significant amount of variance on NJ ASK 5 test scores?

New Jersey School Report Card
Organizational report cards have become increasingly “popular policy instruments” for institutions that provide client services (Gormley & Weiner, 1999, p. 4). Schools, hospitals, government departments, daycare centers, and HMOs have all been held accountable via some form of report card.

Although the use of school report cards has become more prominent, research supporting their efficacy as an evaluation tool has been scarce. In a study of the 1992 Tennessee Report Card on Schools, researchers found its variables accounted for only 25% of student outcomes (Bobbett, French, Achilles, McNamara & Trusty, 1992). Other notable report card studies found similar results (Bobbett, French, Achilles, & Bobbett, 1995; Mathews, 2001).

The NJ School Report Card has been controversial since its inception in 1988. James A. Moran, former executive director of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, stated, “It has a few isolated items. . . . We don't believe it will do good for the students of New Jersey or the school districts” (Hanley, 1989, p. 2). Dissenters feel that the NJ School Report Card lends itself to flawed comparisons between districts. Since its first publication in 1989, the NJ School Report Card has expanded its influence due to NCLB.

Independent Variables
The NJ School Report Card is inclusive of 26 variables pertaining to primary education, categorized under the following headings: staff information, student information, school environment, student performance indicators, and district financial data. Those used in the study have some support from the extant research. I did not include variables that did not have independent empirical support of improving student achievement.
Table 1

NJ School Report Card Variables by Categorization as used in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Variables</th>
<th>I. Staff Information</th>
<th>II. Student Information</th>
<th>III. School Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student-Faculty Ratio</td>
<td>Enrollment by Grade</td>
<td>Average Class-size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty Attendance Rate</td>
<td>Student Mobility</td>
<td>Length of School Day (min.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty Mobility Rate</td>
<td>Student Attendance</td>
<td>Instructional Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty and Administrator Credentials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student eligibility for free lunch and student eligibility for reduced lunch are two variables that I added to the regression. Although the NJ School Report Card does not list any variable related to poverty, the results from extant literature suggest that poverty proxies explain a large amount of the variance in student test results. This important relationship has been documented since the early 1960s (e.g., Bryant, Glazer, Hansen, & Kursch, 1974; Coleman et al., 1966; Sirin, 2005). The variables are well-documented and used extensively in education research to statistically control for poverty (Harwell & Le Beau, 2009; Kurki, Boyle, & Aladjem, 2006).

**Dependent Variables**

New Jersey commenced using the NJ ASK 3 in 2003; the Grade 4 ESPA then became the NJ ASK 4. Grades 5-7 NJ ASK testing was added in 2006 (NJDOE, 2009). To establish complete NCLB compliance, New Jersey is currently testing Language Arts and Mathematics laterally in Grades 3-8 and 11. The state’s proficiency levels, true to the term, denote more than minimal literacy.

The NJ ASK is a criterion-referenced test, measuring the student’s progress in mastering the NJ Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJ ASK Technical Report, 2008). The highest attainable score is 300. The NJ ASK 5 allows students to score within three categories: Partially Proficient (<200), representing a partial understanding of the content, Proficient (200-260), representing a solid understanding, and Advanced Proficient (260-300), representing a comprehensive understanding for both Mathematics and Language Arts.

The 2009 NJ ASK 5 LA and M results are the focus of this research. The test was administered between May 11-14, 2009. Of the 103,339 students enrolled in New Jersey public
schools, 102,076 students received valid scale scores in Language Arts Literacy, and 102,382 in Mathematics. The results are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

*Results of the NJ ASK 5 2009*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Scale Score</th>
<th>% Proficient</th>
<th>% Advanced Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>227.9</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Method**

I used a non-experimental research design, a design cited as an important one for education researchers due to the inability to conduct large-scale randomized, experimental studies (Johnson, 2007). I analyzed one point in time, the spring 2009 NJ ASK 5 test. First I conducted simultaneous multiple regressions using all variables. This enabled a reference point for research. Then I began to create models to account for the greatest amount of variance without multicollinearity.

To best represent the state, a proportional, stratified random sample was generated. The state of New Jersey has 591 operating school districts serving 1.37 million students (NJDOE, 2011). A confidence interval of the social science norm of 5% was set (Witte & Witte, 2007). The sample (n=314) was taken to best simulate the DFG makeup of the state as a proportional random sample.

**Results**

**Math**

When analyzing all included NJ School Report Card variables for relative influence on NJ ASK 5 Math scores of Proficient or higher using a simultaneous regression model, the model was found to be statistically significant (F=26.396; df= 14, 284; p< .000). The R² is .565, indicating that 56.5% of the variance in Math scores can be accounted for by the model. One variable was excluded from the model for multi-collinearity: teachers holding a bachelor’s degree (babs). Considering that New Jersey requires teachers to hold a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, it seems a redundant variable, overlapped by the higher delineation of teachers holding master’s and doctorate degrees. Therefore, the variable was not analyzed in the model, as the ill conditioning would cause a loss in statistical power and entangled interpretation (See Table 3).
Table 3

All NJ School Report Card Variables on Math Proficient or Higher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficientsa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (Constant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schday min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stmob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sfratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fattend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phdedd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g5attend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g5classsize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g5enrreg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>free %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reduce %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (Constant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schday min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insmín</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stmob</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sfratio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fattend</td>
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<td>Saratio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mams</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phdseedd</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g5attend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g5classsize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g5enrrreg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Dependent Variable: PplusMath*
Factors in this analysis found to statistically significantly affect NJ ASK 5 Math scores, from greatest to least amount of variance, are as follows:

- Students receiving free lunch: -.684
- Student-faculty ratio: .131
- Instructional Minutes .104*
- Grade 5 attendance: .098
- Teachers holding doctoral degrees: .096
- Faculty mobility: -.081

The variable most predictive of performance on NJ ASK 5 Math scores was eligibility for free lunch. Free lunch (free %) was found to have a significant moderate and negative influence on Math scores (B=-.684; t= -9.000; p<=.000), suggesting that students eligible for free lunch significantly underperformed their peers on NJ ASK 5 Math.

**Language arts**

Language Arts scores of Proficient or higher were analyzed using the same methods. The model was found to be a significant predictor of NJ ASK LAL scores (F=66.575; df=14, 284; p<= .000). The $R^2$ is .766, indicating that 76.6% of the variation in NJ ASK LAL scores could be accounted for by the model. No multicollinearity issues were detected (Table 4).
Table 4

*Coefficients: All Variables on NJ ASK 5 LAL Proficient or Higher*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>-44.671</td>
<td>53.255</td>
<td>-.839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>schday min</td>
<td>-.029</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>-.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insmin</td>
<td>.101</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stmob</td>
<td>-.107</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>-.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fattend</td>
<td>-.097</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>-.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saratio</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>-.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mams</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phdedd</td>
<td>.370</td>
<td>.272</td>
<td>.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mobility</td>
<td>-.147</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>-.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g5attend</td>
<td>1.057</td>
<td>.518</td>
<td>.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g5classsize</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g5enrreg</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>-.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>free %</td>
<td>-56.941</td>
<td>4.181</td>
<td>-.759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reduce %</td>
<td>-25.707</td>
<td>16.337</td>
<td>-.065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variable: PplusLang.

a Dependent
The statistically significant variables that affected NJ ASK 5 LAL scores from greatest to least influence are as follows:

- Eligibility for free lunch: -0.759
- Student-faculty ratio: 0.078
- Instructional minutes: 0.077
- Teachers holding master’s degrees: 0.077
- Grade 5 attendance rate: 0.068

The greatest predictive variable was the same for LAL scores as it was for Math scores: free-lunch eligibility. The variable demonstrated a significant, strong negative influence on NJ ASK 5 LAL achievement (B=-.759; t=-13.618; p<.000).

Student-faculty ratio was found to have a significant but weak positive influence on LAL scores (B=0.078; t=2.210; p≤.028). The number of instructional minutes per day was found to be a significant but weak positive predictor of LAL NJ ASK 5 performance (B=0.077; t=1.995; p≤.047).

Teachers holding master’s degrees (either M.A.’s or M.S.’s) were found to have a significant but weak positive influence on LAL scores (B=0.077; t=2.419; p≤.016). Grade 5 attendance rate was found to be a significant but weak predictor of LAL scores (B=0.068; t=2.040; p≤.042), indicating that students with higher attendance rates slightly outperformed their peers.

Conclusions/Discussion

Socioeconomic status

In accord with the research on the effects of socioeconomic status on school achievement, eligibility for free lunch accounted for the greatest amount of variance in achievement on both NJ ASK 5 Math and LAL scores. Beginning with Coleman (1966), SES was identified as the greatest predictor of student achievement. In a meta-analysis conducted with research dating from 1990-2000, Sirin (2005) found that socioeconomic status remains, at minimum, a moderate to strong predictor of achievement.

This fact should be the ultimate basis of any education reform. Policymakers who would like to believe that external mandates such as better qualified teachers, merit pay, charter schools, performance pay, smaller schools, vouchers, etc. are stronger predictors of achievement must revisit the research. The difference in test scores between SES groups is due to SES itself. Mandates targeted at poverty itself will likely have more of an influence on achievement than any other variable(s).

For administrators, SES is not a mutable factor. However, attempts to overcome this hurdle are not unprecedented. In 1896, the Supreme Court decision Plessy v. Ferguson upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation but mandated that schools be “separate but equal,” indicating that school resources played a role in education.

The New Jersey Supreme Court decision of Hedgepeth-Williams v. Board of Education, Trenton, NJ (1944) desegregated Trenton Public Schools, stating, “It is unlawful for boards of education to exclude children from any public school on the grounds that they are of the Negro race” (Cane, 2009). The United States Supreme Court’s landmark decision Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka (1954) desegregated schools, stating, “Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” In New Jersey, the 1990 Abbott v. Burke decision found school funding procedures to be unconstitutional.

Affordable housing is another program that addresses SES and its impact on education.
In short, housing policy is school policy.

The school district of Montgomery County, MD boasts impressive achievements:

- 2/3 of its high school students take AP courses
- SAT scores exceed national average
- 9 out of 10 students graduate high school

Although it is true that Montgomery County is affluent, an increasing number of students are low income (1/3 qualify for free- and/or reduced-lunch), and the majority of students are minority. The county’s impressive record and its ability to serve minority students are most likely due to its inclusionary housing policy.

Real estate developers are mandated to set aside a portion of the homes they build or rent for low-income residents below market value. Furthermore, the Housing Opportunities Commission may purchase one-third of these homes to operate as federally subsidized public housing. This enables families who live below the poverty line to send their children to school in the district.

In an intriguing study of 850 students below poverty level attending the more affluent schools, Schwartz (2010) found that the students far outperformed their peers in less advantaged schools. Additional low-income families in the more affluent schools tended to have more residential stability, increasing academic outcomes.

Student-faculty ratio
Student-faculty ratio proved to have a significant but weak relationship to NJ ASK 5 scores in both Math and Language Arts Literacy. The NJ School Report Card variable “Student-faculty Ratio” includes teachers and support staff. A stronger relationship may be found should the variable be inclusive of teachers only (Word et al., 1990).

Faculty and administrator credentials
Faculty/staff holding advanced degrees proved to have a positive influence on NJ ASK 5 scores. Teachers holding advanced degrees proved to have a positive influence on Math and LAL scores.

Therefore, it would be beneficial to look at advanced licensing options for educators to maximize the relationship. Notably, most of the literature regarding credential influence on student achievement focuses on teachers specifically. Michel (2004) sampled 888 New Jersey public schools and conducted an analysis to determine which variables were the greatest predictors of NJ ASK 4 scores. After controlling for SES, Michel found that the greatest predictor variable on NJ ASK 4 Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics was teachers holding a master’s degree or higher.

Furthermore, the influence might be greater when teachers hold advanced degrees in subject(s) taught (Goldhaber and Brewer, 1997. Blank and de las Alas (2011). found that only those educators who majored or minored in their subject area had a positive influence on student achievement.

Using NAEP data from 1998, Johnson (2000) found that in reading and math, Grade 8 students whose teachers held an advanced degree in education underperformed peers whose teachers held an advanced degree in English or a bachelor’s or advanced degree in math or science.

Grade 5 average class size
Grade 5 average class size also has a small but significant influence on NJ ASK 5 LAL and
Math scores. The NJ School Report Card uses the physical classroom space divided by the total number of students at the grade level to give a more accurate description of the number of students per classroom teacher. This number may be misleading if small instructional classes are counted. In the future, the NJDOE variable should adhere to the research standard of number of students for which each classroom teacher is accountable.

It is the contention that should New Jersey adopt the standard variable for class size, a far greater effect would be demonstrated on overall achievement, even for math scores.

The extant research is clear: class size matters, especially in the early grades and for disadvantaged students. The Tennessee Project STAR class-size research is the longest, best-controlled CSR research to date. Project STAR involved over 11,000 students in its experimental design, a marked difference from simple CSR implementation.

Project STAR demonstrated a statistically significant positive correlation between lower class size (15) and student achievement. CSR was verified to have an especially significant positive effect on achievement for disadvantaged students (Achilles et al., 1990).

Hence, states such as Wyoming and Nevada have made at-risk students the priority of their CSR initiatives. The research shows CSR to be optimally effective when there is early intervention (kindergarten or first grade) and CSR duration of at least three years (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2001).

Attendance rate
Grade 5 attendance rate is a factor affecting both NJ ASK 5 Math and LAL scores. This factor can be easily manipulated by school/state mandates. The NJ School Report Card variable is similar to the attendance rate variable in the extant literature. However, the demarcation of excused and unexcused absences in the extant literature has contributed to greater progress in understanding the effects of absenteeism. The New Jersey variable is calculated by dividing the sum of days present in each grade level by the sum of possible days present for all students in each grade. It does not make the distinction between types of absences.

The findings of this study corroborate the research on student attendance. Studies conducted by Chang & Romero (2008) and Gottfried (2010) all demonstrated that student attendance has a statistically significant relationship with student standardized test achievement. Higher student absenteeism results in lower scores.

The positive influence of school attendance on academic achievement may be even stronger than research indicates (Johnston, 2000; Lamdin, 1996). Over time, chronically absent students tend to increase the pattern of absenteeism throughout their academic career and are more likely to drop out of high school (Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992).

Student mobility
Student mobility was found to have a negative influence on NJ ASK 5 scores in both Math and Language Arts in the school variables model.

This finding is in accordance with the extant literature. The variable was not found to be significant in the simultaneous regression model, perhaps due to the impact of a suppressor variable in the full model.

Specifically, Grade 5 attendance rate and student mobility were moderately correlated at .354; p=.001. Mobility occurs when students change schools for reasons other than grade
promotion. Typically, student mobility is highly associated with lower SES status (Rumberger, 2003).

The influences of high mobility may include the following:

- Lower achievement
- Discontinuity/disconnect of curriculum between schools, affecting student performance
- Behavioral problems
- Difficulty developing peer relationships
- Greater risk for dropping out of school
- Lower achievement for non-mobile students who attend highly mobile schools

With its documented influence on achievement and host of other negative issues, student mobility is an issue that warrants administrative action. Tracking a student from school to school is imperative. A statewide longitudinal student identification program would benefit these students and allow districts to track students more readily.

For mobile students who are homeless, adherence to the McKinney-Vento Act is needed. This law entitles homeless children to a free and appropriate education. The Act also mandates that schools appoint a liaison to work with homeless students and their families and serve as a resource for educators (Duffield, 2001). This model may be worth looking into for all mobile students.

**Length of School Day**
The length of school day is defined as the amount of time a school is in session for a typical student on a normal school day. The typical American school day is 6 hours and 35 minutes (Roth et al., 2003). This NJSRC factor was found to have a weak but statistically significant influence on NJ ASK 5 scores in both Math and Language Arts. The extant literature on this variable has produced mixed results, most notably favoring instructional time as being more predictive of achievement.

However, using the results and the extant research, an increase in the school day may yield statistically significant results. In this study, school day length ranged from 360-450 minutes, with a mean of 388.22 and a standard deviation of 13.901.

Some research points to the law of diminishing returns when school day length is involved (Silva, 2007); therefore, the standard deviation is of particular importance in these findings.

**Faculty Mobility**
Faculty mobility is the turnover rate of school staff members. In this study, faculty mobility was found to have weak but significant influence on NJ ASK 5 Math scores, but not on LAL scores. Higher mobility was associated with lower Math scores.

The New Jersey variable includes teachers who left a position for a different placement and teachers who left the profession altogether. The extant research is considerably more robust on teachers leaving the profession, which has been shown to affect all achievement negatively (Planty, Hussar, William, & Snyder, 2008).

If the New Jersey variable demarcated the difference between transfer, retirement, and attrition, the results would probably better align with the literature and show statistically significant negative achievement scores across all disciplines for the latter. In addition to achievement, faculty mobility affects flow of
the school year, continuity of education experience, teacher-student relations, and curriculum delivery (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008).

Administrators should be proactive in recruiting the best education professionals to avoid the pattern of early attrition. Certified teachers should be given preferential hiring over emergency certification candidates. Typically, attrition occurs most often after the first three years of teaching (Kaiser, 2011).

Therefore, strengthening mentor programs with well-established and experienced educators would be beneficial to lessen the attrition rate of inexperienced teachers. Other support programs, including new teacher orientation classes, advisory aid, and curriculum support should be made readily available to novice teachers. Some districts have reduced attrition rates of beginning teachers by more than two-thirds simply by offering expert mentors release time to coach beginning teachers (NCTAF, 1996).

**Instructional Minutes**

Instructional time was found to influence NJ ASK 5 Math and LAL scores slightly. The New Jersey variable is the amount of time per day that a typical student is engaged in instructional activities under the supervision of a certified teacher. The extant research is increasingly focused on engaged time, not simply instructional minutes (Silva, 2007).

In the future, the variable may benefit from alignment with the extant literature on engagement, which has been documented to increase achievement learning (Aronson, Zimmerman, & Carlos, 1998). For researchers that have attempted to rank the importance of school level effects, such as Scheerens & Bosker (1997) and Marzano (2000), time is in first and second place, respectively, for influence on student achievement.

The task of educating New Jersey students in a “thorough and efficient” manner has been relegated to the NJ ASK series of tests. The information garnered from this study should aid administrators, policymakers, and other education stakeholders in focusing on factors that make a difference. To quote Meier (1987), “We are all carriers of our own stories. School by school changes, however slow, could make a powerful difference.”

**Author Biography**

Dorian Marrone Gemellaro received a doctorate of education from Seton Hall University. As an educator and researcher, areas of interest include high-stakes testing, student engagement, and the translation of research into practice. E-mail: doriangem@gmail.com
References


Educational Leaders Describe a Job Too Big for One: Stress Reduction In the Midst of Leading

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Abstract

This conceptual paper reviews research findings about the world of stress of principals and superintendents, focusing on the high levels of stress that the educational leaders report. The literature on occupational stress is also explored for its insights on the medical and psychological results of workplace stress and the relationship to stress experienced by educational leaders. The paper includes information about the variety of stress reduction techniques. Mindfulness meditation is reviewed for the potential of relief that it can yield for educational leaders. Finally, implications for administrative preparation programs and future research are shared.

Key Words

educational leadership, stress reduction, mindfulness
In Richard III, there is a famous scene in which the protagonist, King Richard, is fighting on the battlefield; with his horse slain and his end in sight, he cries out, “A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!” (Shakespeare, Richard III, Act 5, Scene IV, line 8). Modern day administrators, who are far from King Richard’s ways of murder and betrayal, might still be able relate to his hope for a quick and certain departure from the scene of battle. This hope encompasses some of the feelings of educational leaders who have shared their desire to get away from the pressures that surround and envelop them.

Job descriptions of administrators give clues to the unrelenting expectations for performance and stamina that are important considerations for anyone considering that position. Literature describing working conditions of educational administrators includes expectations for increased student achievement and improved teaching (Glass & Franceshini, 2007; Hess & Kelly, 2007). Dealing with conflict, providing and encouraging vision and forward growth for faculty, all while working with diminished resources, are part of what Grubb and Flessa (2006) refer to as a “job too big for one” (p. 518).

The educational demands of school administrators are widely reported in the literature (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cooley & Shen, 2003; Griffith, 1999; Petzko, 2008; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Wells, Maxfield, and Klocko (2011) reported the results of personal stressors that principals revealed, ranging from “insufficient time to get the job done” to a “general loss of joy in doing this work” (p. 37).

The working conditions of educational leaders result in stressors that may manifest in health-related conditions (Sorenson, 2007). Additionally, reports of shortages of principals and superintendents indicate concern for finding replacements that are able to lead complex school systems (Kelley & Peterson, 2007; Winter, Rinehart, Keely, & Bjork, 2007).

This conceptual paper examines what is known about workplace stress of educational leaders, comparing it with the occupational stress that is evident in jobs across the United States. Additionally, this paper reviews stress reduction techniques, highlighting information from scientific papers about mindfulness as a means to strengthen the immune response and mediate the effects of stress.

**Work of Administrators**

Whether the job description is one for principals or superintendents, there seems to be one overarching conclusion: the work has become increasingly stressful. Administrators are responding to new requirements for teacher and administrative evaluation, the Common Core Standards, and media coverage of published test scores and student achievement. Fink and Brayman (2006) refer to the “potential leadership crisis” with the challenges in expectations of educational leaders and the insufficient pool of candidates for these positions (p. 62).

Analysts point to the fact that the world of the building principal has become exceedingly complex with new role identities (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003) and mounting and unrelenting pressures (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Graham & Messner, 1998; Hall, Berg, & Barnett, 2003; Kafka, 2009; Louis et al., 2010; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). Principal and superintendent expectations include an intensifying expectation for increased student achievement in an era of accountability, all while they struggle with issues as diverse as
diminished revenues, changing demographics, and expectations for teacher improvement.

Conflict is endemic in the role of the administrators who must balance the expectations of myriad and competing forces. Principals and superintendents indicate that their jobs are high stress. Johnson (2004) reported, “… 98% percent of U.S. public school superintendents say that they have a high-stress job, and nearly three in four principals say that daily emergencies eat into time that they would rather spend on education issues” (p. 24).

Superintendent occupational stress, high job turnover, and vacancies in superintendency positions are widely reported in the literature (Crippen & Wallin, 2008; Kowalski, 2006; Winter, Rinehart, Keely, & Bjork, 2007). Hawk and Martin (2011) reported high levels of stress in more than half of the superintendents surveyed. Glass and Franceschini (2007) reported the results of the 2006 study of the American superintendency and indicated that 60% of superintendents reported high levels of stress.

The authors further revealed that the stress levels did not correlate with those who were concerned about being ineffective; they reported the following:

Superintendents indicating they perceive themselves to be very effective or effective have a substantial amount of stress in their positions. Over 54% of the very effective group said they suffered considerable to very great stress in their positions (p. 47).

Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) revealed the importance of the political reality of the superintendent’s world, another source of administrative stress, stress management programs for superintendents are minimal (Hawk & Martin, 2011).

The world of work for building principals carries new responsibilities and stressors as well (Louis et al., 2010; Wells, et al., 2011). Where principals’ work was often referred to for its managerial expectations, the emphasis on instructional and transformational leadership now dominates the literature (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Hallinger, 2003).

Stress in the world of principals is not new, but the pressures are changed; principals are now expected to help solve the inequities that exist in society and educational systems (Kafka, 2009). Principals report about the loneliness of their work world, with the constant pressure, stress, and cultures that are strongly embedded (Lashway, 2003).

A recent state-wide study in a Midwestern state by Wells et al. revealed that next to stress due to diminished revenues, principals were most concerned about “insufficient time to get the job done, constant interruptions, keeping up with email communications, work-life balance, loss of personal time, and job expectations of the principal” (p. 34).

Clearly, the stress factors for administrators, whether they are at the building or district office level, are significant factors in the way that they view their jobs and the possible health concerns that may result.

Because there is little in the literature about the specific health-related issues of educational leaders, the literature about workplace stress is reviewed. Not surprisingly, the stress reported concerning educational leaders has a parallel in the literature concerning occupational stress.
Workplace Stress
The effects of stress are widely reported for their serious health consequences. They may include insomnia, anxiety, depression, skin conditions, headaches, gastrointestinal upset, increased hypertension, and heart disease (Bezold, 2006; Davis, Eshelman, & McKay, 2000; Minter, 1991; Stahl & Goldstein, 2010; Stanton, Balzar, Smith, Parra, & Ironson, 2001). Sorenson (2007) reported, “… the phenomenon known as stress, with its constraints, demands, pressures, and anxieties creates symptoms that have been found to range from low productivity, to increased absenteeism, to high employee turnover rates, to serious health concerns” (p. 10).

Stress is recognized as a compensable illness by 30 states, with estimates of loss of employment or medical services in the billions of dollars (Kottage, 1992). It is workplace stress that is reviewed in this paper, for its connections to the world of work of educational leaders.

Chronic stress happens when the stressors of life are continual, or if they accumulate without opportunity for recuperation (Davis, Eshelman, & McKay, 2000). Chronic stress may result in the lowered strength of the body’s immune system, with resulting diminished ability to fight illness (Freeman, 2009). It is chronic stress that is associated with the descriptions of educational leaders who report high degrees of workplace stress.

The costs of stress are serious for the individual and for the workplace (Lambert & Lambert, 2003). Stress reports are related to burnout, which consists of “emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of lack of personal accomplishment” (Linzer, 2009, p. 927). Symptoms of burnout may manifest themselves on the job as people show a loss of joy for the job, including feelings of a diminished sense of being able to contribute (McGowen & Miller, 2010).

People with high levels of stress may choose to avoid the workplace with some regularity. Richardson and Rothstein (2008) reported, “From 1997 to 2001, the number of workers calling in sick because of stress tripled” (p. 69). Being absent from work is one way of avoiding the stress and mediating its effects, even if only providing temporary relief. A broader approach to stress reduction provides options for relief.

Costs of Administrative Stress
What are the costs of administrative stress? A review of the literature did not reveal information about the costs of the levels of stress for school administrators.

While it is impossible to precisely calculate the costs of medical leaves for educational leaders, disruption to the school and its vision, and medical and psychological consequences of chronic stress, including anxiety, depression, hypertension, or heart disease, the literature on workplace stress in general offers a dark glimpse into a world of pressures that is much like that of educational leaders.

Educational leaders report pressure filled jobs that are fraught with accountability, deadlines, conflict, and loneliness. Building principals and superintendents feel the pressures of an almost constant connectivity with a stream of endless email communication from people who need immediate resolution to their questions or concerns. Without precise studies, we are left to estimate the costs of administrative stress by a review of what happens in the business world.
In addition to the work-related absences, what are the effects of presenteeism, a term that refers to employees being present for work but emotionally disconnected? If the world of work of educational leaders follows the related consequences that other high-profile stressful jobs include, then it would be reasonable to suggest that a line of research into the specific needs of stress reduction for educational leaders is imperative.

Mindfulness techniques are reported as a way of being as opposed to a way of doing, where meditation allows people to be fully present in the moment. Educational leaders need to be in the moment as they respond to the challenges that occur daily in their schools. Being fully present is important when administrators communicate with students, parents, and teachers.

**Stress Reduction**

Stress reduction techniques offer relief from the physical and emotional symptoms of chronic overload. Glass and Franceshini (2007) reported, “Coping, understanding, and reducing superintendent stress should be a high priority for school boards and professional associations serving superintendents and boards” (p. 47).

Despite the understanding that the world of work of educational leaders is highly stressful, the literature is largely absent of descriptions of programs or options that mediate stress. Therefore, the conceptual model for stress reduction for this paper is drawn from the literature as described in psychological, health, counseling, or medical publications.

Stress management techniques vary by discipline. These methods include pharmacological interventions with prescriptions for depression and anxiety (Overholser & Fisher, 2009), and psychological interventions, which may include cognitive therapy, behavioral changes in lifestyle choices, or meditation and relaxation methods (Selhub, 2007).

Davis, Eshelman, and McKay (2000) reported various stress reduction techniques that may be adapted or adopted by individuals who are experiencing stress, indicating that some of these techniques may be more effective than others, depending on the particular type of stress.

For example, someone experiencing anxiety may consider using breathing techniques, progressive relaxation, meditation, visualization, self-hypnosis, brief combination techniques, refuting irrational thoughts, thought stopping, worry control, coping skills training, goals setting and time management, or assertiveness training (Davis et al.).

Stress reduction techniques also include applied relaxation, autogenics, subjects creating a calm state by thinking of warmth and heaviness in the extremities of their body, job stress coping practices, nutrition, and exercise (Lambert & Lambert, 2001; Sorenson, 2007; Stahl & Goldstein, 2010).

Stress reduction options include psychological interventions that work to change negative attitudes or inadequate coping strategies, biological techniques that utilize a pharmaceutical approach, or social interventions that provide agencies to work with financial hardships or unemployment (Overholser & Fisher, 2009). In a meta-analysis of 55 interventions for stress reduction, meditation and relaxation, noted for simplicity of use by the participants were the most widely used techniques, reported as being used in 69% of the studies (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008).

Research by Shapiro, Schwartz, and Bonner (1998) revealed that an eight-week
A meditation program established for premedical students resulted in decreases in distress, trait anxiety, and depression, with increases in empathy. Shapiro, Shapiro, and Schwartz (2000) conducted research studies between 1966 and 1999 and learned that participation in stress management programs “demonstrated improved immunologic functioning, decreases in depression and anxiety, increased spirituality and empathy, enhanced knowledge of the effects of stress, greater use of coping skills, and the ability to resolve role conflicts” (p. 748).

Mindfulness meditation, a topic discussed in the following paragraphs, results in a sense of well-being that endures well after the time that people spend meditating (Hölzel et al., 2010).

**Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a meditation practice that is geared to cultivate moment-to-moment awareness that is nonjudgmental in nature.

Mindfulness is based on the assumption that people are generally unaware of their moment-to-moment experiences, although this awareness can be cultivated with practice, resulting in more accurate assessment of perceptions, which may lead to a greater sense of self-control (Grossman et al., 2004).

Mindfulness meditation practice typically begins with paying attention to the natural rhythm of the breath, without trying to control or force it (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Mindfulness practice helps to reduce the automatic pilot experience that people feel where they actually miss out on what is happening in the present moment by being preoccupied with either past or future events (Smalley & Winston, 2010).

Mindfulness meditation generally refers to moment-to-moment awareness without judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Smalley & Winston, 2010). Shapiro and Carlson (2009) offered the distinction that “mindfulness is both a process (mindful practice) and an outcome (mindful awareness)” (p. 4).

Mindfulness meditation is often described as “simple but not easy,” because the practice asks people to sit and typically concentrate on their breathing, staying focused on the moment (Smalley & Winston, 2010, p. 17). Mindfulness meditation is taught in the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program and other programs throughout the world.

Mindfulness-based stress reduction programs became the first in the United States to use meditation and yoga to alleviate pain and suffering of patients from the medical world, with subsequent training for physicians, medical practitioners, and clinicians in MBSR techniques (Ryback, 2006). Participants in MBSR classes attend class for two-and-one-half hours per week for eight weeks, with an all-day class (Carmody & Baer, 2009). The MBSR techniques are taught over a period of eight weeks in a group format.

Mindfulness meditation is widely reported in medical, psychological, and health related journals. Ryback (2006) reported, “At this point there are more than 1,000 research studies on mindfulness-based stress reduction published in peer-reviewed journals” (p. 478).

Ludwig and Kabat-Zinn (2008) reported, “In the past 30 years, interest in the therapeutic uses of mindfulness has increased, with more than 70 scientific articles published in 2007” (p. 1350). Kabat-Zinn (2003)
indicated, “MBSR programs are now offered in hospitals and clinics around the world, as well as in schools, workplaces, corporate offices, law schools, adult and juvenile prisons, inner city health centers, and a range of other settings” (p. 149). MBSR is taught to help people manage their stress and pain in a supportive environment, helping people to benefit in physical and mental health (Carmody & Baer, 2007; Grossman, 2004).

While no examples of administrative participation in an MBSR program were available in the literature, a study of primary care physicians contained some interesting correlations. Krasner et al. (2009) reported the results of a study of primary care physicians who participated in a mindfulness communication program that included meditation, didactic materials, and self-awareness exercises designed to reduce the burnout that is often associated with those positions.

They concluded, “Participation in a mindful communication program was associated with short-term and sustained improvements in well-being and attitudes associated with patient-centered care” (p. 1284).

Discussion
Dane (2011) reported, “Although the concept of mindfulness has attracted scholarly attention across multiple disciplines, research on mindfulness in the field of management remains limited” (p. 997). The majority of research on mindfulness has appeared in the disciplines of clinical psychology, health-related fields, and neuroscience (Dane, 2011; Greeson, 2009). Mindfulness is seen as a viable means to dealing effectively with a variety of stressors. For educational leaders, the stressors are a daily occurrence.

School leaders live in a world of doing; they are constantly responding to requests, questions, demands, and inquiries. The lives of administrators are busy, with fragmented conversations and interruptions. An approach of mindfulness teaches a way of being, which is a radical departure from how the view of leadership is reported.

Mindfulness in leadership would include a focus on being with and being present for, with active listening, all skills that align with aspects of emotional intelligence such as empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills (Goleman, 2000). The concept of being, while not typically associated with leadership activities, is a natural response when one is able to fully attend, be present with, and respond whether or not the stress levels are high.

Leaders are able to give themselves the gift of being able to pause and be in the only moment they have—the present moment. It is the equivalent of allowing oneself to exhale long enough to do what Goleman reported: “sensing others’ feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns” (p. 27).

It is difficult to do that when the administrator feels the need to be in several places at once, a place of uncomfortable pressure and stress.

Kabat-Zinn (2003) reported that mindfulness increases the ability to pay attention to the present moment, recognize and accurately label emotions, be less reactive and more compassionate, and become more self-aware, all characteristics that are important to the success of educational leaders.
Greeson (2009) concluded as follows: Finally, research is beginning to prove what mindfulness practitioners have known for centuries—that greater attention, awareness, acceptance, and compassion can facilitate more flexible, adaptive responses to stress, which in turn, can help free us from suffering and realize greater health and well-being (p. 15).

So what would a mindfulness practice look like in an administrator’s world that does not seem to have enough hours in a day?

Kabat-Zinn (2005) has an answer: “The most important thing is to remember to practice every day. Even if you can make only five minutes to practice during your day, five minutes of mindfulness can be very restorative and healing” (p.141). The possible benefits for administrators include emotional, psychological, and medical impact. Ludwig and Kabat-Zinn (2008) reported that mindfulness meditation was associated with a reduction in anxiety, depression, and stress, with “increased motivation for lifestyle changes involving diet, physical activity, smoking cessation, or other behaviors” (p. 1351).

Since mindfulness meditation cultivates attention for the present moment, it seems likely that there is a distinct benefit for administrators who are able to attend to the issues that are present, referred to as “improved self-regulation of attention” (Moore et al., 2012, p. 1) These leaders could attend to what is in front of them without the thoughts of the parent waiting for them in the office, the 80 unanswered emails on their computer, or other pressing concerns.

Medical students in numerous training centers receive training in mindfulness to alleviate stress (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Given the stress that educational leaders face, are their needs with regard to alleviating stress different from the need to alleviate stress that medical students face?

Stress, whether acute or chronic, has a negative impact on people. In a world of work in educational settings that is constrained by too little time and a job “too big for one,” it is reasonable to consider stress reduction training in university leadership training programs or professional development seminars for practicing administrators.

Aspiring and practicing leaders could experience relief from the constant bombardment of stress by entering and practicing even brief periods of stillness. Baime (2011) reported, “The most recent research suggests that a regular meditation practice can cause beneficial structural changes in the brain in as little as eight weeks” (p. 48).

Additionally, administrators could participate in institutes or programs that teach mindfulness activities; they can give themselves permission to take five minutes of stillness in the middle of the day, for example, before responding to the phone call from an angry parent. They can also model this behavior, even by beginning a meeting with two minutes of quiet, where other colleagues can leave the world of fragmentation that they just left, behind, and settle in for the meeting at hand. There are many opportunities for administrators to practice or model mindfulness; it takes intention, with the attention on the practice.

Besides paving a way for the health and emotional well-being of educational leaders, perhaps it is the benefits of mindfulness, such as non-reactivity to events and being fully present for what occurs in the moment, that will prove to inform the practice of administrative preparation or professional development for practicing administrators. Clydesdale (2009)
reported on the limited examples of teaching skills useful for instructing interpersonal relationships in business schools, despite the recognized importance of the same. Future studies that examine the theoretical constructs of mindfulness and leadership may provide insight for curricula that will effectively serve the graduate students in university educational leadership programs.

I have been teaching concepts of mindfulness for several years to students in the educational leadership program, doctoral candidates, and administrators at professional meetings and consulting for districts, both teaching faculty and administrators.

I receive feedback from these leaders about how the practice of mindfulness allows them to find peace in the midst of chaos and how it has diminished anxiety and stress. I have also had students refer to the directions given to them by their physicians to find a method of stress reduction to be able to continue with their jobs. Mindfulness practice satisfies these requests.

Murphy (2011), former Dean of the Harvard School of Education, extols mindfulness as a means for helping administrators to become more skilled at noticing their thoughts and feelings, not as a mechanism to cause them to feel better.

Murphy lists four leadership qualities that can be cultivated through mindfulness practice: “situational awareness, task attention, poise, and resilience” (p. 40). Mindfulness practice has a place in academia, in an educational environment, and in the training and professional development of educational leaders.

While there is little in the literature from studies about the mediation of administrative stress, as educational leaders participate in programs similar to those in the business and medical worlds, there will be opportunities to observe and reflect on how mindfulness might bolster leadership skills and reduce stress.

Administrators could receive benefit from the ability to slow down their world and give themselves permission to practice mindfulness, the disciplined action that may allow for increased health benefits and leadership skills such as listening, being fully present, non-reactivity, and developing compassion.

Author Biography

Caryn Wells is an associate professor in the department of organizational leadership at Oakland University in Rochester, MI. Her research agenda includes school leadership, stress reduction, and mindfulness meditation for leaders, teacher leadership, and PLC implementation. She is a former teacher of English, counselor, assistant and principal, all at the high school level. E-mail: cmwells2@oakland.edu
References


Special education currently functions as an educational system that is parallel to general education. Service delivery occurs both within and outside of the general education classroom. In *Unifying Educational Systems: Leadership and Policy Perspectives*, a group of twenty-one educational researchers present eleven chapters that examine special education as well as general education in depth, while advocating for unifying the two parallel education systems.

Presented in five parts, the book offers a thorough argument against the current arrangement of parallel systems and offers practical strategies and models for change.

Part One serves as an introduction and consists of two chapters that present the need for a new system of special education by highlighting flaws, taking a philosophical look at providing educational services, and then proposing a new, re-conceptualized model.

The current set of special classrooms and programs would be replaced with a series of services and supports that are based in the general education classroom and are offered based on need, not a disability diagnosis. Here the common theme of approaching special education with a human capabilities agenda is introduced.

A “Legal and Financial Basis of Services for a Unified System” is presented in Part Two, which consists of three chapters. These three chapters provide the necessary information to implement the models and theories of the book.

Here the authors identify a specific flaw in the system and offer the solution. For example, currently students receive special education services in either a pull-out setting or an entirely separate classroom. The authors propose instead various models for serving all students, including a model that provides accommodations in the general education classroom, giving a student more access to the general education curriculum.

Part Two also provides a deep look at education legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and underscores a need for access to the general education curriculum for all students. The steps for practical application in Part Two follow much of the theories and arguments in Part One.

Part Three was the most exciting part of the book for me, as it presents specific examples for providing services in a new way,
including sample lesson plans and diagrams depicting models of service delivery. I saw exactly how I could implement some of these changes on a small scale, such as in my classroom; and I was also able to see what these changes could look like on a larger scale, such as a whole school site. In these chapters a specific resource delivery model is presented.

This new model provides special education services as supplementary supports rather than ongoing services; the duration of service will vary by student need and services will be available for all students.

In Part Four, “Leading Diversity in a Unified System,” the authors examine the moral imperative and perspectives involved in changing the current system to better meet student needs. A close look at the alternate assessments taken by students with significant cognitive disabilities is presented.

The authors also provide a detailed explanation of marginalization, which is important information for professionals who work with special education students. Whereas previous portions of the book have particular appeal to classroom teachers and service providers, these portraits of leadership would be of interest to administrators.

Changing an entire system is a daunting task and, for change to be successful, everyone needs to believe foremost in the need for change, and then, more importantly, in the change.

The final part of *Unifying Educational Systems: Leadership and Policy Perspectives* closes with a summary of the authors’ works. It is a short piece that essentially reviews what has been stated over the preceding eleven chapters. It also gives Burrello, Sailor, and Kleinhammer-Tramill one further opportunity to make their argument for overhauling special education.

This is a book with information for a wide audience, including classroom teachers, special education teachers and service providers, and school site and district administrators.

Given the impact that education legislation has had on service delivery and the fact that significant change could have legal ramifications, this book would also be of interest to policymakers. Educational reform is a timely topic, and the information in this book could be used to direct change.

As a special education teacher working with students with severe disabilities, I found this book to be relevant, well written, and thought provoking. Special education is a highly individualized field that has been influenced by standardization. The perspectives in this book are important to special education professionals. As someone working in the field, I highly recommend it. Aside from a clear assessment of the problems with the current system of delivery, this book provides a plausible fix with practical directions.

**Reviewer Biography**

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