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Sponsorship and Appreciation

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

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

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

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

Ken Mitchell, Editor
AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice

Federal Education Policy and the Expansion of Privatized Choice: A Call for Papers from the AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice

Secretary DeVos’ Agenda for Choice

For her January 17, 2017, confirmation hearing, Secretary of Education nominee, Betsy DeVos, in a written response to committee questions about her support for virtual charter schools, made the claim, “High quality virtual charter schools provide valuable options to families, particularly those who live in rural areas where brick-and-mortar schools might not have the capacity to provide the range of courses or other educational experiences for students” (Turner, 2017). DeVos cited several examples of cyber-charters with graduation rates that exceeded 90%; however, fact-checking by Education Week revealed that DeVos grossly overstated the success of these schools (Herold, 2017).

In a speech to educators in Austin, Texas, in 2015, DeVos stated her position on privatized choice and vouchers: “Let the education dollars follow each child, instead of forcing the child to follow the dollars. This is pretty straightforward. And it’s how you go from a closed system to an open system that encourages innovation. People deserve choices and options” (B. DeVos, speech, March 11, 2015). Again, claims were made, but the evidence about and the extent to which innovation occurred were not provided.

The Trump-DeVos alliance is advancing an agenda to expand the privatization of public school education. Secretary DeVos’ Department of Education has proposed an expanded array of options that includes vouchers, tuition tax credits or scholarships, home schooling, and religious, for-profit, and independent schools.

Speaking before the Brookings Institution in March of this year, DeVos asked that we “put aside the politics of the adults and actually focus on what best serves kids.” She then called for evidence of success: “If we find a solution that demonstrates consistent results, I want to support it.” This was followed by another claim: “… choice alone is not a panacea, but there is evidence it works. It works for millions of students, through inner district choice, public school choice, public charter schools, private school choice, and virtual and home schooling” (DeVos speech, March 29, 2017).
Where’s the Evidence?

The new education secretary has made claims about the effectiveness of privatized choice. Billions of dollars are being shifted from established programs that support our neediest students to support various privatization options. The president’s proposal will eliminate funding for teacher training, after-school and literacy programs, and class size reductions (Kamenetz, 2017).

Yet, many questions about the effects of such decisions remain unanswered. What research is being done to find evidence that school privatization or choice effectively improves the quality of student learning? What is the evidence to support claims that choice sparks innovation? What do we know or should learn about unintended consequences?

Some research is being conducted. A recent U.S Department of Education report (Dynarski, et al, 2017) revealed the following about the performance of students who accepted vouchers:

The findings indicate that students receiving and using scholarships had significantly lower mathematics test scores a year after they applied to the OSP than did students who did not receive a scholarship. The negative impact was equivalent to falling back 5.4 percentile points in the national distribution of test scores. (p.23)

These results also applied to student performance in reading: “Reading scores also were lower but not statistically significant for the overall sample, though they were statistically significant for students attending non-SINI schools at the time of application and for students entering a K–5 grade” (p.23).

In response to findings generated by her own agency, DeVos was steadfast in her resolve to support vouchers: “D.C.’s traditional public schools have not suffered as a result of being part of a system that allows choice,” she said. “Rather, they have greatly improved since the 2004 inception of the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP)” (Askarinam, 2017). Yet, Dynarski, et al, (2017) cited similar studies showing negative effects on students.

More recently, Mills and Wolf (2016) and Abdulkadiroglu, Parthak, and Walters (2015) found that students who used a private school voucher as part of The Louisiana Scholarship Program generally performed worse than students who applied for but were not offered a voucher. Waddington and Berends (2015) and Figlio and Karbownik (2016) reported that the use of vouchers had negative impacts on test scores in Indiana and Ohio (p. 2).

A Thomas B. Fordham Institute study of Ohio’s school choice program concludes with a resigned but cautionary statement:

… and while we strongly prefer the estimates from the second round of the EdChoice program because we believe those results to be the more scientifically credible—these first-round results suggest that caution is still warranted when concluding that the EdChoice program led to improvements in the schools that became voucher eligible. (Figlio, D. & Karbownik, K., 2016, p.40)

With such limited evidence policymakers, legislators, and taxpayers should be wary about funding education policy that
shifts public dollars to untested privatized learning.

**Researched-based Funding Choices**

In response to the DeVos appointment, the American Educational Research Association (2017), in a statement on its website, cited the newly appointed secretary’s response to Washington State’s Senator Patty Murray’s question about her use of research: “To be responsible with taxpayer dollars and ensure that our programs are effective, responsive and impactful, we should use reliable data, strong research, and rigorous evaluations.”

We agree with the education Secretary. Any decision to expand choice and privatization options must be done with fiscal responsibility and supported by strong research. However, the Trump-DeVos education agenda conflicts with its own call for research-backed assurances. There are currently fourteen states and the District of Columbia that have school voucher programs.

The proposed federal budget, while cutting many programs, will provide grant monies to states to incentivize the development of choice options (Brown, et al, 2017). Student growth in just public charter schools has risen from 1.2 million pupils in 2006-07 to 3.1 million in 2016-17. (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2017). Substantive evidence on the effectiveness or superiority of charter schools—public or private—does not exist, yet their expansion and funding continues to be promoted at the state and federal levels.

**AASA: Call for Research on Choice & Privatization**

Until such time that we have leadership that legislates with empiricism over ideology, it will be up to education leaders at the federal, state, and local levels to confront and pressure lawmakers with the evidence from both the research community and the data they are collecting at local and state levels.

Among a standing list of themes and topics for upcoming issues, the AASA *Journal of Scholarship & Practice* calls for submissions related to the following:

- Governance, Funding, and Control of Public Education
- Federal Education Policy and the Future of Public Education
- Federal, State, and Local Governmental Relationships
- Charter Schools and Other Alternatives to Public Schools
- School Reform Policies
- Financial Issues

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.

Articles from the *Journal* are viewed by practitioners, in many cases district leaders with access to policymakers. As efforts to expand privatized choice from the federal to the state and local levels, school leaders, especially as they work to educate their school boards, communities, and state and federal legislators, need to have the best evidence.

We are calling for papers to address such questions as the following:

- **How does charter school funding or the use of tax dollars to support vouchers affect the costs of or**
funding for public schools? What are ‘stranded costs’ and how do they affect public school funding?

• By how much do tax credit scholarships offset private tuition costs? What are the socio-economic profiles of the families of students who use the money from this option?

What are the profiles of the schools that these students attend? How do tax credit scholarships affect tax revenues?

• How do accountability systems and measures compare between public and charter schools or for for-profit independent schools funded with vouchers or tax credits?

• Who attends charter schools? How did their families make the decision to attend? How did they learn about the school? What do the data reveal about the learner profiles (e.g., special needs, ENL, behavioral)?

• In what ways are charter and for-profit schools ‘innovative’? How do their definitions of innovation compare to those defined as such by educators in a public school?

• How do charter, voucher-supported private schools, and public schools compare in the delivery of programs in the arts, sciences, and extra-curricular activities? Why is that important?

• In what ways are on-line/cyber charter schools beneficial or harmful to student learning? What have we learned about those attending or leading them?

The Journal is interested in hearing from education leaders and others about their decision-making in this rapidly changing environment.

For example, how are superintendents addressing the question of ‘stranded costs?’ Or the difference between the funding that leaves and the savings presumed by advocates that result when dollars follow students?

Is there such a savings or, due to an economy of scale within a public school system, does this lost funding imperil a district’s fiscal stability, especially when large numbers of students depart? The following is an example of how this affects one district:

The Bethlehem school district in Pennsylvania budgets $26 million of its annual budget to put in “the backpacks” of students who leave to go to brick-and-mortar and virtual charter schools. According to district superintendent Joe Roy, if those students and their funding returned, it would cost the district only $6 million to educate them. That means the “stranded cost” of charter-school choice to the taxpayers of Bethlehem is $20 million. (Strauss, 2017)

The Journal wants to go beyond such anecdotes. We want to hear from practitioners about the data they are gathering through their own evidence-driven analysis at the district level, as well as from the formal research community.
It is our plan to dedicate a section of the Journal to examine what we are learning about these profound changes to public education in the United States—not through an ideological lens but one that is research-based.

Let’s help to provide Secretary DeVos with the research that she has requested or an assessment and analysis of the studies that have been or will be conducted.

We invite you to participate.
References


A Renewed Call to Action: Update Principal Selection Methods

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Abstract

Many states have committed to adoption of Common Core State Standards, necessitating extensive preparation for both teachers and students. School districts and particularly school principals have been responsible for ensuring transition and readiness. This demand illustrates the complexity of the principalship and its relationship to student achievement. Principal selection is of paramount importance. This mixed methods study sought to determine which of 21 leadership responsibilities were important to top-level school district administrators when hiring principals and how top-level school administrators assessed these responsibilities during principal selection. Results of this study indicated all 21 leadership responsibilities are important for top-level school administrators to consider when hiring school principals. However, most of the participants indicated they do not have a methodical method to evaluate the 21 leadership responsibilities.

Key Words

principal selection, school principal, human resources, student achievement
The adoption of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by 43 States has obligated school districts to commit significant financial and personnel resources to embrace a paradigm shift in education, moving from recall and rote-memorization of information or facts to rigorous and relevant cross-curricular learning. As a result, school principals have significant responsibility for ensuring that both teachers and students at their respective school sites are prepared for the next generation of teaching and learning centered on core competencies that have primacy in learning such as Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening across core subject areas (CCSS, 2014).

The leadership demonstrated by principals during implementation of CCSS is essential to the success of staff and students at their schools. School principals have been identified throughout decades of literature as one of the key school personnel affecting student achievement (e.g., Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Gullatt & Lofton, 1986; Hallinger & Heck 1996; Heck, 1992; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Mills, McDowelle, & Rouse, 2011; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). The mechanisms used by school districts to select principals may never have been more important than today, as school principals must navigate the shifting education tides while simultaneously focusing on student achievement within their schools.

The purpose of this research study was to examine two questions. First, how important are each of the 21 leadership responsibilities developed by Waters et al. (2004) to top-level school district administrators when assessing principal candidates? Second, how are those attributes actually assessed during principal selection processes? This study is a duplication of the study conducted by Rammer (2007) in the state of Wisconsin; however, it was conducted nationally in the United States.

This study is significant because it continues the much-needed research of principal selection by investigated how principals are selected throughout the United States.

**Literature Review**

**Role of principal in student achievement**

Early interest in the relationship between school leadership and student achievement occurred during the 1970’s. During the 1980’s, Gardner’s (1983) *A Nation at Risk* was published and educational reform came to the front of the national agenda as school systems in the United States were taken to task for numerous issues (e.g., content, expectations, time, and teaching) related to student achievement.

The use of student achievement data as a means of evaluating the key players in education (e.g., teachers and administrators) for accountability purposes was accelerated. As stated by Heck (1992), “The public’s demand for educational accountability have advanced the use of achievement data to evaluate instructional efforts, because of concerns about poor educational outcomes in many schools and the perceptions that America is declining as an economic power” (p. 21). These concerns have led to numerous studies examining the principal’s effect on student achievement (e.g., Gullatt & Lofton, 1986; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Hallinger & Heck 1996; Heck, 1992; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Mills, McDowelle, & Rouse, 2011; Waters et al., 2004).

Conducting research to find a relationship between the school principal and student achievement has proven to be complex,
and often only indirect evidence of a relationship has been found (Heck, 1992). Gullat and Lofton (1986) analyzed principals’ effect on student achievement by examining principals’ school governance, collaboration, and allocation of personnel resources. Findings from their study indicated that principals should be effective in promoting student achievement if they

“a) possess a substantial knowledge base in curriculum, instruction, and evaluation; b) provide vision and direction for the school; c) promote positive teaching and learning environments; d) establish patterns of effective communication and motivation; and (e) maintain high expectations for self, staff, and students.” (p. 22)

Furthermore, as teachers are the facilitators of instruction, principals should be well versed in curriculum and instruction and current research related to instruction in order to support teachers in this endeavor (Gullat & Lofton, 1986).

Hallinger and Heck reviewed school leadership and student achievement literature from 1980 to 1995 and found that school leadership targeting internal processes had a direct impact on student achievement. Internal processes were described as “academic expectations, school mission, student opportunity to learn, instructional organization, and academic learning time” (1996, p. 38).

Waters et al. (2004) conducted a meta-analysis by reviewing “more than 5,000 studies—published since the 1970’s—purported to have examined the effect of leadership”; only 70 met their stringent scientific design criteria (p. 4-5). Findings included a quantification of general leadership effects on student achievement, a statistically significant relationship between 21 of the leadership responsibilities identified and student achievement, and a “differential impact” (i.e., positive and negative) of leadership on student achievement. The 21 leadership responsibilities developed by Waters et al. (2004), along with summarized definitions, are displayed in Table 1.
Table 1

The 21 Responsibilities of Effective Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture (develop school culture, shared beliefs, and norms)</th>
<th>Visibility (maintains presence in classrooms)</th>
<th>Change agent (challenge stagnant school practices)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Order (establish predictability through procedures)</td>
<td>Contingent rewards (promote high expectations and praise exemplary staff)</td>
<td>Optimizer (focus staff on positive aspects of school and potential future success)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline (safeguard staff from distractions that may disrupt teaching and learning)</td>
<td>Communication (develop and foster communication channels among staff)</td>
<td>Ideals/beliefs (guided by well-developed beliefs regarding education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources (ensuring teachers have necessary training, support, and materials)</td>
<td>Outreach (advocate for school stakeholders to ensure compliance with regulations)</td>
<td>Monitors/evaluates (establish evaluate practices and feedback systems to monitor learning outcomes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment (support teachers with design and implementation)</td>
<td>Input (promote staff input in decision-making through procedures)</td>
<td>Flexibility (Honor opinions from staff and adapt leadership style when necessary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus (establish and promote measureable school goals)</td>
<td>Affirmation (celebrate staff and school successes and acknowledge deficiencies)</td>
<td>Situational awareness (attentive to daily school operations and proactively address potential problems)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, assessment (maintain awareness of research on effective teaching practices)</td>
<td>Relationship (develop and maintain personal relationships with staff)</td>
<td>Intellectual stimulation (use current educational research practices in school discussions)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from *School Leadership that Works* by R. J. Marzano, T. Waters, and B. McNulty, 2005, p. 71

The review of literature revealed only one researcher who had attempted to use Waters et al.’s (2004) 21 leadership responsibilities to conduct principal selection research from the perspective of the superintendent. Rammer (2007) examined whether Wisconsin superintendents believed Waters et al.’s (2004) 21 leadership responsibilities were important and how the leadership responsibilities were assessed during principal selection. According to Rammer (2007), most of the participant (92%, n=136)
superintendents believed the 21 leadership responsibilities were an important consideration when hiring principals.

However, only 1.2% (n=19) of participant superintendents had a systematic or methodical means of assessing only 1 of the 21 leadership responsibilities in principal candidates (Rammer, 2007). This result may seem mystifying on the surface; however, principal selection methods have seldom been the subject of research or scrutinized by researchers (Blackmore, Thompson, & Barty, 2006), therefore leaving the methods used to select principals reliant on intuition.

**Principal selection processes**
The processes used to select school principals are seldom described within the principal selection literature (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). In their pioneering principal selection research, Baltzell and Dentler (1983) differentiated four processes that makeup the procedures used to select school principals: (a) a vacancy announcement, (b) forming a candidate pool, (c) screening, and (d) the employment decision. Baltzell and Dentler (1983) included the interview process within the screening step. However, Levine and Flory (1975) described screening as the ranking of candidates based on application materials submitted following the vacancy announcement. Palmer (2014) proposed a six stage model for principal selection in which screening, as was described by Levine and Flory (1975), is an initial stage with evaluation stages taking place later in the selection process.

Palmer’s (2014) six stages were (a) vacancy announcement, (b) screening, (c) pool of candidates established, (d) evaluation, (e) re-evaluation, and (f) decision. Steps (d) and (e) include processes such as interviews, performance tasks, written tests, and presentations. Although the stages are helpful to understanding principal selection, the stages may be of less importance than what actually occurs within them, especially the evaluation stages leading to a hiring decision.

The screening stage is where candidates are typically first assessed against the selection criteria; this stage is the gateway to later evaluation stages (Palmer, 2014). The evaluation stages, which also purport to assess candidates against the selection criteria include interviews, which are one of the most commonly used procedures within principal selection (Anderson, 1991; Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Kwan, 2012; Palmer, 2014; Rammer, 2007; Schmitt & Schechtman, 1990; Walker & Kwan, 2012; Wendel & Breed, 1988).

Despite their primacy in selection processes, interviews have been seen as problematic (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Hogan & Zenke, 1986; Palmer, 2014; Walker & Kwan, 2012; Wendel & Breed, 1988). Principal selectors’ reliance on interviews casts principal selection as a highly subjective process in which selectors rely on instinct or intuition (Gronn & Lacey 2006; Morgan, Hall, & McKay, 1983; Parkay & Armstrong, 1987; Rammer, 2007; Wendell & Breed, 1988).

Rammer (2007) suggested superintendents may intuitively know what they are looking for in a principal candidate and use the interview to assess those traits. Other researchers have suggested the principal selectors’ ambiguous rationale for selection to be spurious. Baltzell and Dentler (1983) questioned top-level district leadership on the operationalization of educational leadership during their study and described the response they were given as a “circular definition cycle” which heavily relied upon “fit” (p. 6). Some researchers have also suggested selectors may not actually be looking for specific criteria
within principal selection procedures but instead may be looking for “fit” (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Blackmore, Thomson, & Barty, 2006; Gronn & Lacey, 2006).

Baltzell and Dentler (1983) defined “fit” as “interpersonal perceptions of a candidate’s physical presence, projection of a certain self-confidence and assertiveness, and embodiment of community values and methods of operation” (p. 7). Blackmore et al. (2004) argued, “The selection process, the primary ‘gate-keeping’ mechanism to the principalship, a position seen as the lynchpin of educational reform and school success, is regarded widely as a biased and unpredictable event” (p. 300).

In brief, principal selection methods are important and further research is needed to support an improvement of the process.

**Objective methods**
Within principal selection literature, few procedures having psychometric validity, such as assessments and performance tasks, are mentioned. Assessments appeared to have widespread use decades ago as the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) established assessment centers to evaluate principals for a variety of traits.

While the NASSP assessment centers have been discontinued, assessments appear to be used on a limited basis within school districts (Palmer, 2014); however, the validity of those assessments are unknown. A performance task designed by Wildy, Pepper, and Guanzhong (2011) shows promise, although its actual use within principal selection is unknown. In research by Palmer (2014), school principals (n=221) indicated performance tasks and assessments were seldom used.

School district’s reliance on selectors’ intuition may result in the bias and unpredictability described by Blackmore et al. (2004) and illustrates the need for further research of selection criteria (i.e., candidate characteristics or attributes) and how those criteria are actually assessed through procedures within principal selection in order to develop new objective selection methods.

**Method**
A mixed methods research design was used to examine top-level school district administrators’ perceptions of Walters et al.’s (2004) 21 leadership responsibilities within principal selection. According to Creswell (2009), mixed methods strengthen a study by using two complimentary methods instead of a single method to obtain data.

The research questions this study sought to answer were how important are each of the 21 leadership responsibilities developed by Waters et al. (2004) to top-level school district administrators when assessing principal candidates, and how are those attributes actually assessed during principal selection processes?

**Sampling and participants**
A random purposive sampling method was used to select study participants. Superintendent emails were retrieved from States’ education school directories as well as county and school websites. A total of 12,229 emails were retrieved representing all 50 states within the United States. Participant emails were incorporated into an excel spreadsheet and assigned a unique numerical value. A random number generator was then used to select 4,296 participants. Selected superintendent email addresses were then transferred into an excel database to generate a
population list. In order to also obtain surveys from human resource managers, superintendents were asked to forward the survey to their human resource manager if they were unable to complete the survey. Participants were asked in one of the demographic questions on the survey to provide their current position, thereby enabling differentiation of responses from superintendents and human resource managers. The survey was sent to 4,296 participants with 83 surveys being returned for a 1.9% response rate. Participant demographics are located in Table 2.

Table 2

*Participant Demographics by Percentage of the Sample (n=83)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td></td>
<td>Age range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>56 years and older</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.R. Asst. Supt.</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>46-55 years</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>36-45 years</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 35 years</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>Years as top-level administrator</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race-ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>21 or more</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Highest degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>53.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>45.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelors</td>
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</table>

**Instrument**

According to Kwan and Walker (2009), principal selection research lacks a validated instrument. However, Rammer (2007) developed an instrument using the 21 leadership responsibilities and related definitions identified in the research by Waters et al., (2004). Prior to commencing the full study, Rammer (2007) piloted his instrument and obtained a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of .89, which was well above the acceptable .70. Permission to use the instrument was obtained from Rammer prior to commencement of this study. Although Rammer (2007) developed the instrument for superintendents, this study also sought the responses of human resource managers who should be able to describe the practices used to select principals within their respective districts.

The instrument contains eight demographic questions, 21 multiple choice 4-
point Likert-scale (e.g., strongly agree-strongly disagree) questions (1 for each of the 21 responsibilities) and 21 narrative response questions designed to solicit how participants assess candidates on each of the 21 leadership responsibilities.

**Data analysis**
Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Constant comparative analysis methods developed by Glaser (1965) were used for the qualitative data. Two coders conducted the qualitative analysis, and an inter-coder reliability of at least .80 was established by comparing results at multiple intervals during data analysis of the narrative responses. Analyzing data with multiple coders allows the reliability of the data to be tested (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). Furthermore, using multiple coders is critical in establishing validity (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002).

Participant responses to open-ended narrative questions were analyzed to determine if the procedure used to assess the leadership responsibility was passive or intentional. A procedure was categorized as passive if it was assessed through an interview, submitted materials (e.g., resume, cover letter, etc.), references, or some other assessment that was not intentional such as perception.

A blank response was considered as not having an assessment for that particular leadership responsibility. Responses were categorized and quantified as intentional assessments if the participant described a procedure that was not an interview, submitted materials, or from references (i.e., a specific method for evaluation had been developed).

**Results**

**Importance of the 21 responsibilities**
Responses to Likert-scale survey items asking participants how important they consider each of the 21 leadership responsibilities to be when selecting principals yielded some results with unanimity or near unanimity. The results of participant agreement of importance ranged from 100% (communication, flexibility, focus, and visibility) to 91.6% (involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment). Nearly all participants’ responses (1698/1743, 97.4%) considered all of the 21 leadership responsibilities to at least be important when selecting principals.

The leadership responsibility with the highest response rate for strongly agree was communication (91.6%). Participants considered flexibility, focus, and visibility along with communication to be important, as no participants disagreed or strongly disagreed regarding their importance. Only 2.6% (45/1743) of the total responses indicated participants disagreed or strongly disagreed regarding the 21 leadership responsibilities. Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment had the most disagreement among the 21 leadership responsibilities, as 7 participant responses indicated they disagreed regarding the importance of this responsibility when selecting principals. Affirmation and change agent were the only leadership responsibilities among the 21 where participants indicated they strongly disagreed (1 for each leadership responsibility) that those leadership responsibilities were important to consider when selecting principals. Results for the extent to which participants considered the importance of the 21 responsibilities are displayed in Table 3.
## Table 3

*Responses by All Participants to Likert-scale Questions Regarding the 21 Responsibilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change agent</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent rewards</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideals/beliefs</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual stimulation</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge in curriculum, instruction, and assessment</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring/evaluation</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimizer</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational awareness</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Assessing for the 21 responsibilities

Narrative responses were analyzed to determine how top-level school district administrators assess for each of the 21 leadership responsibilities. Just over half of all participant responses (880/1743, 50.5%) indicated participants passively assess for the
21 leadership responsibilities. Participants did not describe or note an assessment in 39.5\% (689/1743) of the total responses. Intentional assessments were described within 10.0\% (174/1743) of all responses. Results for narrative response are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Responses by All Participants to Narrative Questions Regarding the 21 Responsibilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Passive Assessment(s)</th>
<th>No Assessment</th>
<th>Intentional Assessment(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change agent</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent rewards</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideals/beliefs</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual stimulation</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge in curriculum, instruction, and assessment</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring/evaluation</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimizer</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational awareness</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>689</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Passive assessments (50.5%) included participants’ use of terms such as question(s) (342 responses), interview(s) (297 responses), reference(s) (256 responses), resume(s) (28 responses), and perception(s) (16 responses). Affirmation (61.4%), change agent (60.2%), communication (57.8%), culture (56.5%) had the highest percentages of passive assessments among the 21 leadership responsibilities. A typical narrative response indicating a passive assessment included specific questions participants asked candidates or procedures used to assess for the leadership responsibility. For example, Participant 13 assessed affirmation “through questioning during the interview process, through reference checks, and through the use of open-ended questions that are part of the application process. Similarly, Participant 55 described using an “interview, references, knowledge of candidate” as an assessment.

Participants indicated they did not have an assessment for the 21 leadership responsibilities in 39.5% (689/1743) of responses. If no response was given, it was interpreted as not having an assessment. Also, in some cases participants provided a response which made a statement regarding the leadership responsibility but did not actually describe an assessment. Participant 70 exemplified this type of response regarding the assessment of communication by stating “communication is the key to success of an administrator. He/she must be able to talk with and to all involved.” While this declaration of the importance of communication may provide an interesting commentary, it failed to describe an assessment. Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment was the most reported leadership responsibility with no assessment by participants (40/83, 48.2%). The affirmation leadership responsibility had the least amount of no assessments (17/83, 20.5) by participants.

Intentional assessments were described within 10.0% (174/1743) of the total responses for the 21 leadership responsibilities. Site visits (41 responses), assessments (60 responses), and writing (26 responses) mostly in the form of specific writing prompts were among the most common intentional assessments described by participants. Participants indicated affirmation was the most intentionally assessed trait of the 21 leadership responsibilities (15/83, 18.1%). Optimizer was noted by participants as the least intentionally assessed trait (5/83, 6.0%). Procedures which contained both passive and intentional assessments within a single answer were noted by participants at times, as they appeared to list the same response throughout all 21 of their narrative responses for each leadership responsibility (i.e., copy/paste throughout the survey). While it may be implausible a particular participant assessed for all 21 leadership responsibilities using a writing prompt for each responsibility, it was assumed the participant in fact assessed in this manner. For example, Participant 20 indicated they assess for each of the 21 leadership responsibilities using “interview questions, resume, writing prompt, references.” A response such as this was coded as an intentional assessment for this particular leadership responsibility because a writing prompt was considered intentional even though it was used in conjunction with passive assessments.

Discussion
Results of this mixed method study are encouraging when compared to previous results from the research conducted by Rammer in 2007. Participants of this study were nearly unanimous (97.4%) in agreeing that the 21 leadership responsibilities were important considerations in hiring decisions, compared to Rammer’s (2007) study where 92.0% of
participants considered the 21 leadership responsibilities important. Similarly, only 2.6% of participants of this study disagreed that some of the 21 leadership responsibilities were important to consider when selecting principals compared to 7.8% of participants from Rammer’s (2007) study. Furthermore, the lack of intentional assessments by top-level school district administrators was apparent in both Rammer’s (2007) and this study.

Communication as a leadership responsibility
Communication has long been considered an important responsibility for principals to possess throughout principal selection literature. Most participants of this study strongly agreed communication was important to consider when selecting a school principal and no participants disagreed or strongly disagreed regarding its importance as a leadership responsibility. In fact, communication had the highest percentage of strongly agree responses from participants (91.6%).

Considering the importance of communication in selecting school principals, it was surprising participants did not indicate the highest intentional or passive assessments for this trait. Also surprising was that many participants did not indicate any assessment for communication (26/83, 31.3%) and only nine participants (10.8%) had an intentional assessment for it. As the interview is widely used within principal selection (Anderson, 1991; Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Kwan, 2012; Palmer, 2014; Rammer, 2007; Schmitt & Schechtman, 1990; Walker & Kwan, 2012; Wendel & Breed, 1988) and could be considered at least a passive assessment for communication, this result was curious. During CCSS implementation and beyond, a principal’s ability to communicate will be paramount to the ultimate success or failure of teachers and students as they teach and learn respectively. Finding ways to assess communication within principal selection warrants further study.

Subjective assessments
Participants of this study reported practices similar to those found in other studies within principal selection, with the most subjective methods being common. Interviews (i.e., passive assessments) are the primary means by which principals are selected (Anderson, 1991; Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Kwan, 2012; Palmer, 2014; Rammer, 2007; Schmitt & Schechtman, 1990; Walker & Kwan, 2012; Wendel & Breed, 1988). When combining results (passive and intentional) for assessments of the 21 leadership responsibilities, only 60.5% of participants total responses (1054/1743) indicated they assessed for the 21 leadership responsibilities, even though 97.4% (1698/1743) of participants agreed or strongly agreed the 21 leadership responsibilities were important to consider when selecting school principals. With nearly 40% (689/1743) of participant responses indicating no assessment for the 21 leadership responsibilities, one has to wonder how top-level school district administrators are assessing for traits they believe are important. Either top-level school district administrators are assessing for traits other than the 21 leadership responsibilities, such as “fit,” or the administrators have limited methodical or intentional means of assessment, as has been found by other researchers (e.g., Greene, 1954, Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Blackmore et al., 2006; Gronn & Lacey, 2006; Palmer, 2014, Rammer, 2007). If top-level school district administrators have no means, or only passive means of assessing for attributes they believe are important to consider when selecting school principals, this finding leads to the question: How are school principal candidates assessed during selection?
According to the literature, use of intuition is one method top-level school district administrators use to select principals (Gronn & Lacey 2006; Morgan, Hall, & McKay, 1983; Parkay & Armstrong, 1987; Wendell & Breed, 1988). In this study, perception was specifically mentioned within 16 responses as a means of assessing principal candidates during selection. Rammer (2007) explained that superintendents can observe the traits they are looking for during selection and hire the candidate which possesses the desired traits. Objective methods are needed to help top-level school district administrators make important selection decisions, especially when considering the principals effect on student achievement.

Assessing for the 21 leadership responsibilities
Results of this study are promising in one aspect, as top-level school district administrators appear to have near-universally considered the 21 leadership responsibilities to be important for principal candidates to possess. However, results of this study confirm Rammer’s (2007) findings indicating top-level school district administrators may not be objectively assessing for principal traits related to student achievement. The lack of objectivity in selection assessments should be cause for concern among education stakeholders and the general public at large. A paradigm shift is needed for the way school principals are selected. Top-level school district administrators should develop specific intentional assessments in order to determine whether or not principal candidates actually possess the traits desired for the position. As the traits that top-level school district administrators should be looking for have already been established, objectively assessing for some or all of the 21 leadership responsibilities should be a high priority for top-level school district administrators who hope to raise or sustain student achievement within their schools.

Several researchers have discussed and developed objective means for assessing principal candidates. Rammer (2007) described the development of new methods as “critical but not difficult” (p. 75). He also discussed the development of “specifically designed simulations or measurements designed to evaluate written materials to assess the characteristics of the candidates” (p. 75). One such method was developed over 30 years ago by Broward County Public Schools (BCPS).

Baltzell and Dentler (1983) described a blind screening process used by BCPS where a screening committee assessed candidates’ submitted materials. All identification information (e.g., names, addresses, phone number) was removed from the submitted materials prior to the review. In particular, the candidate’s references were asked to complete an empirically weighted characteristics appraisal form for rating the candidate without knowing the weights of the traits listed. The empirical weights of the traits on the form were a closely guarded secret within the district. Based on scoring from the blind review of submitted materials and the reference protocol, the highest scoring candidates were then selected to proceed to the interview stage. In more recent selection literature, objective assessment processes have not been noted, with the exception of Wildy et al.’s (2011) performance task used in Australia.

Wildy et al. (2011) developed a performance task which was found to have acceptable validity and reliability for evaluating principal candidates. The performance task was developed with fairness in mind and
included a rubric, rater training in which the raters had to undergo the same performance task as principal candidates, bias training, and participation in a data validation session following the performance tasks to ensure objectivity.

Candidates undergoing the performance task had to “demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, and skill in relation to the leadership framework in general and the role of principal in particular” by completing three separate performance tasks (p. 281). Tasks included document review and presentations which addressed “real-world” school issues such as “dealing with a poor performing department head, handling a critical incident, and implementing school-wide curriculum change” (p. 280).

Candidates were required to fill a variety of roles including communication with large groups, subordinates, and superiors. The raters worked in groups for each task and were prohibited from communicating with each other or working with the same rater in subsequent tasks within an evaluation day to prevent data contamination. The performance task developed by Wildy et al. (2011) was found to have construct validity and robust reliability as indicated by Rasch analysis.

**Conclusion**

Top-level school district administrators, school human resources professionals, school administrator professional organizations, and researchers should give the development of new principal selection methods serious and immediate attention. Wildy et al.’s (2011) performance task and the blind screening review implemented 30 years ago at BCPS are only two examples of objective measures that could move principal selection from using mostly subjective processes to objective means of evaluating principal candidates.

Incorporating the 21 leadership responsibilities posited by Waters et al. (2004) into objective assessments would provide top-level school district administrators an empirically tested and reliable method for selecting school principals, and relatedly could help to raise or sustain student achievement. Given the high stakes environment of Common Core State Standards implementation and schools’ past academic performance since the inception of The No Child Left Behind legislation, the impetus for change may never be more present than it is now.

**Author Biography**

Brandon Palmer is a school administrator and writes about educational leadership. He conducts research on principal selection in affiliation with the DPEL Center for Research and Publication, which resides in the Kremen School of Education and Human Development at California State University, Fresno. E-mail: brandonp0803@gmail.com
References


Interactions between Teachers’ Attribution for Student Learning and Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices

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Abstract

This study investigated interactions between evidence-based practices implemented and attributions of factors contributing to achievement of student learning objectives. Conducted in three school districts in a mid-Atlantic state, 78 teachers completed an end-of-year survey. Internal attributions were significantly correlated with implementation of evidence-based teaching practices in general and in teaching students with disabilities. External attributions were statistically correlated to implementation of evidence-based practices in both reading and teaching students with disabilities. Perceptions of school support were significantly correlated with implementation of evidence-based teaching practices for teaching both reading and writing.

Key Words

teacher quality, evidence-based practices, teacher attribution, student learning outcomes
The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2016) stresses implementation of evidence-based teaching practices, and high expectations for students toward postsecondary studies or employment. The emphasis on implementation of evidence-based teaching practices requires that teachers implement teaching practices shown to work well through replicated studies.

An evidence-based teaching practice is defined as a teaching practice established through meta-analysis with a mean effect size greater than .20 for challenging populations or constructs, and .40 or greater for most teaching purposes, and .80 or higher for most noteworthy levels of effectiveness.

For the purposes of this study, the researchers designed a checklist of evidence-based practices directly from meta-analyses of those practices (See appendix A). The assumption of ESSA is that use of evidence-based practices will improve student learning.

Use of effective strategies is not the only possible factor in student learning gains; many factors may impact student learning. Teachers’ attributions of the causes of student learning gains may partially explain how a teacher operates within a teacher effectiveness system (Chang and Davis, 2009; Dweck, 2000; Turner, Warzon, and Christensen, 2011).

For the purposes of this study, teacher attribution is defined as conclusions teachers make about student behaviors, successes and failures, especially as these conclusions relate to their own teaching practices. Researchers measured teacher attributions through responses to researcher-created questions aiming at both external (outside teachers’ control) and internal (within teachers’ control) factors (see appendix A).

The purpose of this study was to investigate relationships between implementation of evidence-based practices and teacher attributions for student learning. This report addresses these relationships using descriptive and correlational analyses.

**Procedures**

**Participant Recruitment**

This study took place in one mid-Atlantic state. Researchers recruited teachers who had written an annual goal and related assessment of student learning as part of the state-mandated teacher evaluation system. During spring 2016, recruitment occurred through administrative communication.

**Instrumentation**

Researchers administered an online survey in late spring. Participants were asked to enter a self-created code and identify only the school and grade levels in which they taught to keep responses anonymous. Teachers rated whether an annual objective for student learning (SLO) was achieved as “yes, fully achieved”, “yes, partially achieved”, or “no, not achieved” and what data was gathered to document such achievement. Each teacher rated the importance of factors contributing to achievement or lack of achievement of the SLO including prior knowledge and skills of students and teachers, teacher actions, motivation of students and teachers, unanticipated events, and support from the school or district.

Teachers also completed a checklist of evidence-based practices used consistently during the school year. The checklist was based upon three sources: What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guides, high quality meta-analyses of experimentally designed educational studies (Institute of Education Sciences, 2014), Council for Exceptional Children’s Current
Practice Alerts, brief summaries of high quality meta-analyses specific to students with disabilities (Council for Exceptional Children, 2000), and a study of meta-analyses of teaching practices with strong evidence-based practices (Burchard, 2014). Both the What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guides and the CEC Current Practice Alerts adhere to strict quality standards, with their highest ratings reserved for teaching practices with mean effect sizes of .80 or higher (Baker, et al., 2014; Council for Exceptional Children, 2000).

For most areas of practice, the checklist included only those practices with mean effect sizes of .80 or higher or rated as strong in the What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guides or as “Go For It” in the Current Practice Alerts. The one exception was for practices to meet the needs of English Language learners, in which researchers included practices with mean effect sizes of .40 or practices rated as moderate by the What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guides. This exception is due to the relatively recent and somewhat limited research on evidence-based practices for teaching English language learners (Baker, et. al, 2014).

Results

Participants
Teachers completed the on-line questionnaire in spring 2016. All 78 participants were certified teachers in three school districts of one mid-Atlantic state.

Implementation of evidence-based teaching practices
Using the checklist, teachers identified a variety of evidence-based practices implemented consistently during the past academic year. All used more than one evidence-based practice in multiple categories.

Evidence-based general teaching practices
As illustrated in Table 1, more than half of participants used five of the evidence-based practices that apply in general to all teaching: graphic organizers (n=68, 89.47%), using materials with which students can interact (n=53, 69.74%), teaching critical thinking strategies specific to course content (n=64, 84.21%), mnemonics (n=48, 63.16%), and explicitly teaching and promoting self-regulated learning (n=47, 61.84%).
Table 1

* Evidence-Based Practices Implemented by 50% or More of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence-Based General Teaching Practices</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Organizer</td>
<td>89.47%</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking Strategies Specific to Content</td>
<td>84.21%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials with Which Students Can Interact</td>
<td>69.74%</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mnemonics</td>
<td>63.16%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Regulated Learning</td>
<td>61.84%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence-Based Reading Practices</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questioning Strategies</td>
<td>81.82%</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>77.92%</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary Instruction for Reading</td>
<td>68.83%</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Enhancement Strategies</td>
<td>62.34%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Reading Instruction</td>
<td>58.44%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Writing to Develop Reading</td>
<td>54.55%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decoding</td>
<td>51.95%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence-Based Writing Practices</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Assistance</td>
<td>58.44%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Approach</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>44</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence-Based Math Practices</th>
<th>None implemented by 50% or more of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence-Based Practices for Teaching Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formative Evaluation</td>
<td>74.03%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct instruction (explicit instruction)</td>
<td>62.34%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence-Based Practices for Teaching ELLs</th>
<th>None implemented by 50% or more of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Evidence-based reading teaching practices
Over half of the participants also reported implementing each of the highly effective practices for teaching reading. These results indicated that teachers appeared to be teaching reading across grade levels and content areas through use of evidence-based reading practices.

Evidence-based writing practices
Over half of respondents reported implementing two of the highly effective writing practices. Most teachers reported using structured peer assistance (n=45, 58.44%). Most also reported teaching writing using the Process Approach which moves through stages of brainstorming, drafting, revisions, editing, and on to some sort of publishing (n=44, 57.14%).

Evidence-based math teaching practices
In contrast to other categories of evidence-based practices, less than half of participants reported use of each of the highly effective math teaching practices. Participants represented quite a variety of content areas, some of which integrate fewer math practices. Though only practices implemented by half or more of participants were included in Table 3, over 40% reported implementation of three math teaching practices: explicitly teaching students to verbally express math reasoning (n=34, 46.58%), use of concrete math manipulatives (n=33, 45.21%), and having students create their own visual representations of math problems (n=33, 45.21%).

Evidence-based practices for teaching children with disabilities
Specific to teaching children with disabilities, over half of participants indicated consistent implementation of two strongly evidence-based practices for meeting needs of that population. Most teachers reported consistent use of formative evaluation (n=57, 74.03%) and direct or explicit instruction (n=48, 62.34%).

Evidence-based practices for teaching ELL
Implementation of evidence-based teaching practices for teaching ELLs occurred less frequently, with less than half of participants implementing any of the evidence-based practices for teaching ELLs. In fact, over 55% of participants reported using none of the listed teaching practices for teaching ELLs (n=40, 55.56%). Nearly half of participating teachers (n=33, 45.21%) reported integrating oral and written English language instruction within teaching of other content. Just over 30% reported designing structured opportunities to develop writing skills and intervening for ELLs with small group instruction in literacy and language. Importantly, each of the three participating school districts report ELL populations of less than 3% (PDE, 2016), but the survey did not ask teachers to identify if they had ELLs in their own classrooms.

Achieving student learning objectives
Teachers were asked to rate their satisfaction with their achievement of the SLOs and record data gathered to measure achievement of the SLO. Then teachers rated the importance of internal and external factors related to achievement of the SLOs.

Data gathered to assess SLOs
Though some teachers reported using more than one type of assessment, teachers most commonly assessed SLO achievement using teacher-made tests or quizzes (n=26, 34%), performance tasks that could be measured with a checklist or by completion (n=21, 27%), and national or standardized tests (n=19, 25%). Approximately one fifth of teachers reported using projects or portfolios scored by a rubric (n=15, 19%). A small number of teachers reported measuring SLO achievement using
writing \((n=7, 9\%)\) or assessment of gains through progress monitoring \((n=5, 6\%)\). Finally, almost one fifth of teachers reported using broad assessments such as grades or some otherwise unspecified evaluation of achievement \((n=14, 18\%)\).

Factors attributed to satisfaction or dissatisfaction in achievement of SLOs

After rating satisfaction or dissatisfaction with accomplishment of their SLO, teachers then rated importance of factors impacting such satisfaction or dissatisfaction. (See Table 2.)

Table 2

Importance of Factors in Satisfaction with SLO Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Minimally Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Knowledge</td>
<td>6.41% (5)</td>
<td>8.97% (7)</td>
<td>38.46% (30)</td>
<td>46.15% (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Actions</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>1.28% (1)</td>
<td>35.90% (28)</td>
<td>62.82% (49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Motivation</td>
<td>1.28% (1)</td>
<td>7.69% (6)</td>
<td>42.31% (33)</td>
<td>48.72% (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanticipated Events</td>
<td>11.54% (9)</td>
<td>43.59% (34)</td>
<td>33.33% (26)</td>
<td>11.54% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from Building or District</td>
<td>5.13% (4)</td>
<td>29.49% (23)</td>
<td>41.03% (32)</td>
<td>24.36% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Prior Knowledge</td>
<td>7.69% (6)</td>
<td>16.67% (13)</td>
<td>43.59% (34)</td>
<td>32.05% (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Motivation</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>34.62% (27)</td>
<td>65.38% (51)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers rated their own motivation as important or very important in how well they met their SLO \((n=71, 91.03\%)\), teaching actions as important or very important \((n=77, 98.72\%)\), while they indicated that their prior knowledge or skills were slightly less impactful with 84.61\% rating that as important or very important \((n=66)\). At the same time, 100\% of teachers \((n=78)\) rated students’ motivation as important or very important in accomplishment of the SLO. While teachers attributed a strong degree of internal control to outcomes of student learning, these teachers also attributed a strong degree of external control through student motivation. These results suggest that attention to motivation strategies is an important priority in progressing toward goals for student learning.
In contrast, teachers attributed greatest importance in any dissatisfaction with achievement of the SLO to two external factors (see Table 3).

### Table 3

**Importance of Factors in Dissatisfaction with SLO Achievement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Minimally Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Knowledge</td>
<td>30.99% (22)</td>
<td>28.17% (20)</td>
<td>26.76% (19)</td>
<td>14.08% (10)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Actions</td>
<td>12.68% (9)</td>
<td>28.17% (20)</td>
<td>33.80% (24)</td>
<td>25.35% (18)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Motivation</td>
<td>28.57% (20)</td>
<td>27.14% (19)</td>
<td>24.29% (17)</td>
<td>20.00% (40)</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanticipated Events</td>
<td>26.76% (19)</td>
<td>42.25% (30)</td>
<td>21.135 (15)</td>
<td>9.86% (7)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from Building or District</td>
<td>18.57% (13)</td>
<td>34.29% (24)</td>
<td>34.29% (24)</td>
<td>12.86% (9)</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Prior Knowledge</td>
<td>18.06% (13)</td>
<td>19.44% (14)</td>
<td>34.72% (25)</td>
<td>27.78% (20)</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Motivation</td>
<td>4.23% (3)</td>
<td>11.27% (8)</td>
<td>32.39% (23)</td>
<td>52.11% (37)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A significant majority of the teachers (84.5%) rated students’ lack of motivation as important or very important \((n=60)\), and 62.5% of teachers rated students’ prior knowledge and skills as important or very important \((n=45)\). In other words, when teachers were dissatisfied with how well an SLO was achieved, they attributed an important degree of influence to students’ motivation and to what students already knew and could do. These attributions provided important perspectives for school-wide professional development for interventions for students with learning gaps, or low motivation.

**Relationships between implementation of evidence-based practices and attribution factors**

Results revealed important relationships between implementation of evidence-based teaching practices and teachers’ rating of the importance of factors contributing to achievement or lack of achievement of learning outcomes, “attribution factors.”

Table 4 shows the matrix of correlations with any significance. External factors of students’ prior knowledge and skills, students’ motivation, and unanticipated events did not correlate significantly with implementation of
any evidence-based practices and so are not
correlations reached the magnitude threshold of
reported in Table 4. While several correlations
were statistically significant, twelve

Table 4

_Correlations Matrix of Evidence-Based Practices Implemented to Attributions_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribution Factors</th>
<th>General Practices</th>
<th>Reading Practices</th>
<th>Writing Practices</th>
<th>Math Practices</th>
<th>Teaching Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Teaching ELLs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Knowledge</td>
<td>.412***</td>
<td>.264*</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td>.385***</td>
<td>.300**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Actions</td>
<td>.430***</td>
<td>.234*</td>
<td>.257*</td>
<td>.200*</td>
<td>.268**</td>
<td>.294**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Motivation</td>
<td>.356***</td>
<td>.208*</td>
<td>.153</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>.228*</td>
<td>.277**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Factors</td>
<td>.443***</td>
<td>.257*</td>
<td>.209*</td>
<td>.200*</td>
<td>.329**</td>
<td>.319**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Support</td>
<td>.267**</td>
<td>.404***</td>
<td>.337**</td>
<td>.253*</td>
<td>.273**</td>
<td>.268**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Factors</td>
<td>.184</td>
<td>.310**</td>
<td>.282**</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.304**</td>
<td>.256*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p-value <.05  ** p-value <.01  *** p-value <.001

**Relationships between internal attribution and evidence-based general teaching practices**

Results revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between implementation of evidence-based general teaching practices and internal factors of attribution. A strong predictive relationship existed between teacher actions and implementation of evidence-based general teaching practices, \( r (n=77)=.430, \ p<.001 \). Results showed a strong relationship between teachers’ prior knowledge and skills and implementation of evidence-based general teaching practices \( r (n=77)=.412, \ p<.001 \). Results also showed a strong predictive relationship between teacher motivation and implementation of evidence-based general teaching practices, \( r (n=77)=.356, \ p<.001 \). Those three internal factors together correlated more strongly with implementation of evidence-based general teaching practices, \( r (n=77)=.443, \ p<.001 \).

It is important to stress that these correlations did not indicate a causal relationship. No results from this study communicated that internal attribution caused teachers to implement evidence-based general teaching practices nor conversely that implementation of evidence-based general teaching practices caused teachers to internalize control over accomplishment of student
learning. These results instead meant that there was a strong linear relationship between those factors for this population. For practical purposes, such correlations might encourage schools to explore professional development in general evidence-based practices and/or encouragement of teachers in developing their knowledge and skills, accounting for their actions, and addressing their own motivation.

**Relationships between internal attribution and implementation of evidence-based practices for teaching students with disabilities and ELLs**

Combined internal factors (those under a teacher’s control) were significantly correlated with implementation of practices that work in teaching students with disabilities, \( r (n=77)=.329, p<.01 \), or ELLs, \( r (n=77)=.319, p<.01 \). Of particular interest, teachers’ prior knowledge and skills was significantly correlated with implementation of evidence-based teaching practices in teaching both children with disabilities, \( r (n=77)=.385, p<.001 \), and children who are ELLs, \( r (n=77)=.300, p<.01 \). This means that professional development could be very important to evidence-based teaching for those two student populations.

**Relationships between school support and implementation of evidence-based practices in reading and writing**

Results showed an important predictive relationship between perceived support from schools and school districts and implementation of evidence-based practices in reading, \( r (n=77)=.404, p<.001 \), and writing, \( r (n=77)=.337, p<.01 \). While we cannot state conclusively that school support would change implementation of evidence-based practices for teaching reading and writing, these results did imply that support from schools and school districts might encourage teachers to implement practices that work for teaching reading and writing.

**Relationships between external attribution and implementation of evidence-based practices in reading and teaching children with disabilities**

Results showed a strong relationship between external attribution factors (combining students’ prior knowledge, students’ motivation, unanticipated events, and perceived support from schools and school districts) and implementation of some evidence-based practices. Specifically, results showed a strong correlation between external attribution and implementation of evidence-based reading practices, \( r (n=77)=.310, p<.01 \). In making sense of these results it is important to recall the strong positive relationship between perceived school support and implementation of evidence-based reading practices. Further results showed a strong correlation between external attribution factors and implementation of evidence-based practices for teaching children with disabilities, \( r (n=77)=.304, p<.01 \). These results indicate that educators respond to the needs of learners using practices that work best for teaching children with disabilities.

**Discussion**

The goal of all educators is to provide high quality instruction that supports student learning. This study demonstrated interactions between teachers’ perceived cause of actual achievement of SLOs and implementation of evidence-based teaching practices.

Notably, this study demonstrated that there was a strong predictive relationship between internal attributions (factors within a teacher’s control) and teachers implementing evidence-based general teaching practices. Furthermore, there was a strong predictive relationship between internal attributions and
implementation of evidence-based practices for teaching students with disabilities. This means that the more strongly teachers feel they can make a difference in how students achieve learning outcomes, and especially for students with disabilities, the more likely they are to implement methods proven effective, in this case evidence-based teaching practices.

These results may indicate either that teachers attribute strong internal control over student learning as they implement evidence-based teaching practices in general teaching and for students with disabilities, or that they seek teaching practices that work when they attribute personal control to the accomplishment of student learning outcomes.

This study also demonstrated a strong linear relationship between teachers’ attribution of external factors (school support, unanticipated events, students’ prior knowledge and skills, and student motivation) and teachers’ implementation of evidence-based practices in teaching reading and teaching students with disabilities.

One can imagine scenarios in which evidence-based practices are used, but learning is still unsuccessful, and therefore the teacher attributes failure to external factors.

On the other hand, teachers may implement evidence-based practices in response to concerning needs of students, responding with teaching practices that work, but still not overcoming the level of need in order to meet intended target outcomes. In either case, more research is needed to fully explain this resulting relationship.

Finally, results showed a strong predictive relationship between implementation of evidence-based practices for teaching reading and writing and perceptions of school support. Because this study did not investigate causation, researchers cannot conclude that school support leads to greater implementation of evidence-based reading and writing teaching practices, but this linear relationship is certainly encouraging to school districts as they provide various supports for implementation of such evidence-based teaching practices.

Limitations
Various factors limit conclusions that can be drawn from this study. First, the study participants represented three school districts of fairly similar demographic factors in one mid-Atlantic state, none of which were urban school districts and none of which had very many ELLs. The sample size was reasonable for this study design but small for broad interpretation to generalizable knowledge. Finally, school districts should limit interpretations from correlational studies to relationships, not to causation.

Implications for future research
Future research might investigate such relationships in larger sample sizes representing more diverse school districts from multiple states. Furthermore, future research might investigate causation between such factors as school support and professional development with gains in self-efficacy or implementation of evidence-based practices, or causation between implementation of evidence-based practices and improvement in student learning outcomes.

Conclusion
In this study, researchers investigated relationships between teachers’ satisfaction with achievement of student learning objectives, teachers’ attributions of factors impacting achievement, and implementation of evidence-based practices. Researchers found significant relationships between

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implementation of evidence-based practices and teachers’ attributions of factors impacting achievement of those student learning objectives. Understanding relationships between these factors may inform professional development priorities of schools and school districts.

Author Biographies

Melinda Burchard is associate professor of special education at Messiah College in Pennsylvania. Her recent research includes evidence-based practices for special educators and self-efficacy for multi-tiered instruction for both pre-service and in-service teachers.

Jennifer Fisler is professor of education and director of teacher education at Messiah College in Pennsylvania. Her professional interests include teacher leadership and educational assessment. She recently served as director of a multi-year grant implementing co-teaching with student teachers.

Jan Edwards Dormer is associate professor of TESOL at Messiah College in Pennsylvania. She has recently authored the book What School Leaders Need to Know About English Language Learning, published by TESOL International Association.
References


Appendix A

Questionnaire about Evidence-Based Practices and Attribution

General Practices

Please check all of these evidence-based practices YOU CONSISTENTLY used in general teaching practices during the 2015-2016 academic year. Please, check all that apply.

- **Graphic Organizer** (visually graphing relationships between concepts)
- **Mnemonics** (includes first letter mnemonics, peg words, key words, songs, rhyming mnemonics, visual mnemonics, and motions-- any devices to support memory for any learning outcomes including vocabulary, lists, steps in a process, comprehension, etc.)
- **Physical materials** students can manipulate (for any content other than math-- this includes anything as simple as little slips of paper or magnets)
- **Critical thinking strategy specifically connected to content** (learning a specific method of critical thinking for that specific content. For young children this includes the scientific method in science. As children mature, this grows more specific such as reasoning with primary sources in history, or using a specific problem-solving strategy for a specific data type in computer programming.)
- **Self-regulated learning** (students learning to self-monitor and regulate learning or behaviors using steps in a strategy or checklists or other means of self-regulation)
- **Virtual reality game** (specifically games that allow a student to interact in a three-dimensional environment)
- **None** from this list

Reading Practices

Please check all of these evidence-based practices YOU CONSISTENTLY used in reading practices during the 2015-2016 academic year. Please, check all that apply.

- **Decoding** (emphasizing word sounding out and identification)
- **Questioning strategies** (including questions about main ideas, details, deep questioning routines, etc.)
- **Reading comprehension** (instruction or strategies to focus on comprehension)
- **Small group reading instruction**
- **Text enhancement strategies** (strategies to focus on using text features such as illustrations or bolded terms or headings an subheadings or explicit training in how to use a glossary or other supports)
- **Using writing to develop reading** (such as journaling about reading)
- **Vocabulary instruction** for reading (explicit instruction in specific vocabulary for reading-related outcomes)
- **None** from this list
Writing Practices
Please check all of these evidence-based practices YOU CONSISTENTLY used in writing practices during the 2015-2016 academic year. Please, check all that apply.

- Creative imagery instruction (explicitly teaching students visualization or imagining strategies)
- Peer assistance (includes any structured intentional use of peers to assist peers)
- Process approach (explicit process of brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, to publishing--for older students may include outlining, etc.)
- Self-Regulated Strategy Development (explicit scripted strategy routine)
- Writing strategies (Teaching any other writing strategies other than the process approach or Self-Regulated Strategy Development)
- Product goals (having students plan outcomes for their writing)
- None from this list

Math Practices
Please check all of these evidence-based practices YOU CONSISTENTLY used in math practices during the 2015-2016 academic year. Please, check all that apply.

- Heuristic math problem-solving (requires discovery learning and following the trail of reasoning from students who reasoned differently through the challenge)
- Concrete math manipulatives (using any physical materials students can move for any kind of math content or processes)
- Sequencing word problems to highlight specific math features of word problems (explicitly teaching patterns in wording of word problems matched to specific strategies)
- Word problem solving interventions (any other specific strategies explicitly targeting how to solve word problems that is different from highlighting specific math features in the text)
- Verbalizing reasoning (communicating math reasoning aloud)
- Visual representations of math by the children (the children draw or otherwise visually represent their math reasoning, including use of hash marks)
- None from this list

Special Education Practices
Please check all of these evidence-based practices YOU CONSISTENTLY used in teaching children with disabilities during the 2015-2016 academic year. Please, check all that apply. Formative evaluation (using ongoing assessment of student learning to guide instructional practices)

- Functional Behavior Assessment (the process of examining components of behavior such as antecedents or triggers, setting demands, observable behavior, consequences, and functions of the behavior)
- Direct instruction (small d, small i, meaning explicit instruction as opposed to discovery learning)
- Direct Instruction (capital D, capital I, meaning explicit instruction that follows a script for what the teacher says and does)
- Class-wide peer tutoring (A structured system of pairs of tutors using stronger students in any specific content to tutor those needing help)
☐ Cognitive strategy instruction (emphasizing strategies to develop thinking and steps to problem-solve)
☐ Fluency instruction (focusing on reading with speed accuracy and expression)
☐ Phonics instruction (focusing on letter-sound correspondences and their use in spelling and reading)
☐ Picture Exchange Communication System (children pointing to or exchanging picture icons to express needs or wants or responding to such representations for receptive communication or visual scheduling)
☐ Video-based interventions (videos typically demonstrating how to do something or how to socialize, similar to social stories or task analysis, but on video)
☐ Explicit instruction for secondary (middle/high school) content learning outcomes (for students with disabilities or who struggle)
☐ Mnemonic strategies for secondary (middle/high school) content learning outcomes (for students with disabilities or who struggle)
☐ English interventions for secondary (middle/high school) content learning outcomes (for students with disabilities or who struggle)
☐ Interventions for students with disabilities for high school content learning outcomes
☐ Interventions for students with disabilities taught by a special educator for secondary (middle/high school) content learning outcomes
☐ Combined social studies and science interventions for secondary (middle/high school) content learning outcomes (for students with disabilities or who struggle)
☐ Classroom learning strategies for secondary (high school) content learning outcomes (for students with disabilities or who struggle)
☐ Social studies interventions for secondary (middle/high school) content learning outcomes (for students with disabilities or who struggle)
☐ Interventions for students with disabilities in the special education setting for secondary (middle/high school) content learning outcomes
☐ Interventions for students with disabilities for middle school content learning outcomes
☐ Spatial or Graphic Organizers for secondary (middle/high school) content learning outcomes (for students with disabilities or who struggle)
☐ Study aids for secondary (middle/high school) content learning outcomes (for students with disabilities or who struggle)
☐ Science interventions for secondary (middle/high school) content learning outcomes (for students with disabilities or who struggle)
☐ Peer Mediation for secondary (middle/high school) content learning outcomes (for students with disabilities or who struggle)
☐ Interventions for students with disabilities in the general education setting for secondary (middle/high school) content learning outcomes
☐ None from this list

ESL Practices
Please check all of these teaching practices YOU CONSISTENTLY used in teaching English language learners (i.e. your instruction was NOT the same as for native English speakers) during the 2015-2016 academic year. Please, check all that apply.
- **Vocabulary instruction** (focusing on one set of academic vocabulary words intensively across several days using a variety of instructional strategies).
- **Integrate oral and written English Language instruction** into content area teaching.
- Provide regular **structured opportunities to develop written language** skills
- Provide **small group instructional interventions** for ELLs struggling in literacy and English language development
- **None** from this list

What data did you gather to assess achievement of your Student Learning Objective?

**Were you satisfied with the outcome of your Student Learning Objective?**

- Yes, fully satisfied
- Yes, mostly satisfied
- No, not satisfied

Please rate the importance of each factor in achieving any satisfaction with the outcome of your Student Learning Objective:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>not important</th>
<th>minimally important</th>
<th>important</th>
<th>very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>students’ prior knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my own prior knowledge or skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my own teaching actions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students’ motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my own motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unanticipated events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support in the building or district</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please rate the importance of each factor in any dissatisfaction with the outcome of your Student Learning Objective:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>not important</th>
<th>minimally important</th>
<th>important</th>
<th>very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>students' lack of prior knowledge</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gaps in my own prior knowledge or skills</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>my own teaching actions</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>students' lack of motivation</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my own limited motivation</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unanticipated events</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limited support in the building or district</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Administrators Gaming Test- and Observation-Based Teacher Evaluation Methods: To Conform To or Confront the System

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Abstract

In this commentary, we discuss three types of data manipulations that can occur within teacher evaluation methods: artificial inflation, artificial deflation, and artificial conflation. These types of manipulation are more popularly known in the education profession as instances of Campbell’s Law (1976), which states that the higher the consequences or stakes surrounding almost any quantifiable event (e.g., one that is based on numerical scores or outcomes), the more likely the scores or outcomes are subject to pressures of corruption and distortion, as directly related to the relative importance or weight of the consequences attached. We examine each type of data manipulation and consider the greater impact of each on practice and policy.

Key Words

teacher evaluation, data manipulation
“Gaming the system,” or what can be more popularly identified as instances of Machiavellian, ends-justifying-the-means schema that help advance individuals’ careers, frequently occur in all realms of life. Popular press mentions often include accounts of this in the sports world, with international news most recently revealing that 16 professional tennis players, including eight who partook in the 2016 Australian Open—one of the sport’s biggest tournaments—were involved in “match fixing,” where players purposefully altered the outcomes of matches to make significant sums of money (Blake & Templon, 2016).

Likewise, manipulation of the stock market in terms of insider trading occurs, whereby a person who has insider knowledge makes trades on behalf of him/herself and perhaps others, after which the trades made cause stock prices to artificially inflate or deflate, without any real change to the market-value of the stocks themselves.

Recall in the 1980s when airline executives extended flights’ times of arrival to increase the percentages of on-time flight percentages for which airlines were being held accountable. Remember as well when crime rates observed during Richard Nixon’s presidency became suspiciously underreported and downgraded to less serious categories to yield the anticipated “less crime” objectives and goals set by the Nixon legislation.

Gaming the System in Education

These occurrences of manipulation are more popularly known in the education profession as instances of Campbell’s Law (1976). Campbell’s Law states that, in essence, the higher the consequences or stakes surrounding almost any quantifiable event (e.g., one that is based on numerical scores or outcomes), the more likely the scores or outcomes are subject to pressures of corruption and distortion, as directly related to the relative importance or weight of the consequences attached. As one might expect, the effects of Campbell’s Law have been prevalent in education for years, predominantly surrounding high-stakes standardized testing and teacher-level accountability policies as based on high-stakes tests.

Instances and reports of teachers helping students with questions on standardized tests, teachers replacing students’ incorrect answers with correct answers, teachers excluding or exempting certain low-scoring subgroups from testing, and the like, have been present throughout research and popular press sources (see, for example, Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

These occurrences have been most notable since the passage of former president George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) Act, but also noted in the research prior (e.g., since the state of Florida first introduced in 1979 what we now know as a high-stakes test). Educators have felt similar pressures to game the system in response to other increased accountability policies and initiatives (e.g., the Race to the Top Act of 2011).

In fact, primarily these two federal education policies (i.e., NCLB and Race to the Top), the latter of which incentivized states with $4.35 billion in federal funds to adopt and implement new and improved teacher evaluation and accountability systems (i.e., as largely reliant upon numerically measuring the extent to which teachers “grow” or “add value” to their students’ academic achievement over time using advanced statistical growth or value-added models (VAMs)) mandated and incentivized states, respectively, to theoretically realize educational reform. VAMs
are designed to isolate and measure teachers’ alleged contributions to student achievement on large-scale standardized achievement tests as groups of students move from one grade level to the next.

VAMs are, accordingly, used to help objectively compute the differences between students’ composite test scores from year-to-year, with value-added being calculated as the deviations between predicted and actual growth (including random and systematic error). Differences in growth are to be compared to “similar” coefficients of “similar” teachers in “similar” districts at “similar” times, after which teachers are positioned into their respective and descriptive categories of effectiveness (e.g., highly effective, effective, ineffective, highly ineffective).

Simultaneously, however, Campbell’s Law has also since had its way as per the distortion of the very numerical indicators at play, whereby states and many state leaders continue to do whatever it takes to reap or avoid the high-stakes awards and penalties also attached (e.g., significant monetary bonuses paid to superintendents adopting and promoting such policies; see, for example, Amrein-Beardsley, Collins, Holloway-Libell, & Paufler, 2016).

In fact, school administrators in some states and districts have faced incredible pressures to artificially manipulate high-stakes test data for multiple reasons, and they have engaged as a result, all the while evidencing additional instances of Campbell’s Law.

Namely, since Race to the Top (2011), and states’ and school districts’ subsequent foci on teacher level accountability as measured by teachers’ levels of growth or value-added, school administrators have taken it upon themselves (or been advised or forcefully persuaded) to:

(1) artificially inflate teachers’ observational scores (i.e., rubric-based measures of teachers’ in-classroom instructional practice(s)) to protect their teachers against what school administrators often view as the extreme consequences (e.g., teacher termination, the revocation of tenure) attached to what they also often view as unreliable, invalid, or unfair teacher accountability systems;

(2) artificially deflate teachers’ observational scores to consciously guard against their own (sub)conscious and “subjective” biases and prejudices, as often charged or accused; and

(3) artificially conflate both teachers’ observational scores and growth/VAM scores to guarantee that the two adequately align and correlate as theoretically expected, and also pragmatically required should either or both indicators be used in consequential ways.

Evidence of validity increases as measurement indicators point in the same direction and support the same inferences and conclusions to be drawn (i.e., convergent-related evidence of validity). In this case, if both measures (i.e., the growth or value-added and observational measure) line up, they validate one another, and yield the required evidence needed to support increased confidence in both measures as independent measures of the same construct.

These gaming instances are emphasized herein because school administrators are the educators who are often either encouraging or engaging in these gaming behaviors, again, for a variety of reasons; hence, this is the exact audience that needs to better understand what engaging in primarily these gaming behaviors
means in terms of validity, or the validity of the inferences to be derived via either or both the growth/VAM and observational estimates at play.

**Artificial Inflation, Deflation, and Conflation**

**Artificial inflation**

Artificial inflation occurs when school administrators artificially increase, without merit, the ratings of their teachers’ in-classroom practices (i.e., via observational rubrics), either covertly or overtly, and most often when administrators want to protect teachers who they deem as “effective” or good-to-great teachers, but whose growth/VAM scores evidence them as significantly less. In these cases, school administrators will often rate these teachers higher than they might rate other teachers of the same quality, simply to offset the typically lower growth/VAM scores.

As Campbell’s Law would have it, this is much more likely when there are serious consequences at play, and school administrators aim to protect teachers from what they, again, view as a potential set of inappropriate consequences (e.g., termination after one or two years of poor ratings) to be attached to low composite (i.e., growth/VAM plus observational estimates) scores. Engaging in this practice, while perhaps humanitarian and justified as appropriate or rational, ultimately distorts the validity of the inferences to be drawn by the mere manipulation of one indicator to offset the other.

**Artificial deflation**

Artificial deflation occurs when school administrators decrease, again without merit, the ratings of their teachers’ observational scores. This type of manipulation has been documented much less frequently than artificial inflation; however, it still occurs. Again, in the cases of artificial deflation, school administrators might deliberately rate teachers of equal caliber lower than their comparable peers, to deliberately (and oft-forcedly) guard against their own (sub)conscious and (too) often favorable biases and prejudices when “subjectively” observing and scoring their teachers in practice.

For example, in the now famous *Widget Report* (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009), researchers reported that only 1% of teachers were rated as “unsatisfactory,” which they deemed as nonsensical given the US as a whole is still merely performing around average as compared to other comparable industrialized nations. Indeed, “subjective” school administrators were to blame; hence, this became one of the key policy reports that convinced federal policymakers to move forward with the Race to the Top (2011) competition to entirely reform states’ “subjective” teacher evaluation systems.

Accordingly, school administrators have since been asked or forced to artificially deflate teachers’ observational scores to essentially ensure that all scores, when taken together, fit a normal bell curve, which will illustrate to others that there is indeed a normal distribution of teachers as per their effectiveness, versus a skewed distribution demonstrating “too many” effective teachers.

While an entirely arbitrary venture, this is being perpetually encouraged to counter critics’ aforementioned claims. For example, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) that sponsors and promotes state and district use of their TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement, evidently encourages TAP evaluators to generously distribute average scores (i.e., 3 = at expectations) and to use high scores...
“sparingly” (i.e., 5 = significantly above expectations). Teachers are to start at “a rock solid 3—4s are to be given out sparingly and [teachers] are not to or rarely receive a 5.” Likewise, teachers being evaluated “should strive to score a 3 on the TAP rubric as scoring a 5 should be nearly impossible” (anonymous teachers, personal communications, 2016). This is to help guarantee that those who adopt (and pay for) the TAP system realize what TAP markets: that TAP users’ observational scores will improve states’ prior Widget Effect results and reduce state’s prior Widget Effect tendencies (see Figure 1).

![Graph: Observational Ratings in TAP Schools versus Urban Districts with Traditional Evaluation Systems](image)

**Figure 1.** Observational ratings in TAP schools versus urban districts with traditional evaluation systems [as titled in the original, Jerald & Van Hook, 2011, p. 1].

In this case, it is not that the actual qualities of teachers have changed, likely whatsoever; rather, what has changed is the scale and the scale scores that are emphasized, which means nothing more than a scale-and-switch scheme of sorts, as a method of artificial deflation.

Related, Charlotte Danielson—architect of the Danielson’s Framework for Teaching—was recently quoted as saying that “teachers should live in the ‘effective’ and only [occasionally] visit [the] ‘highly effective’ zones within her teacher observational system (Ramaswamy, 2014).

See also the recent claim made by the president of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), that “If I were a superintendent and I didn’t see a fairly good...
distribution curve within my district [as per teachers’ effectiveness ratings], I’d be suspicious about what was going on” (Amar, 2016).

Accordingly, it is oftentimes superintendents who on their own accord or are often (ill)advised by naive edu-philanthropists like this, who are forcing their school administrators to artificially suppress their observational ratings of teachers, again, to force such socially-Darwinian illusions of normality, via more symmetrically distributed teacher effectiveness curves.

This too, of course, has serious implications for the validity of the inferences to be drawn, upon which high-stakes decisions are to be made, in that what is “true” is being forcibly distorted by socially constructed definitions of what “truth” is supposed to look like.

**Artificial conflation**

Lastly, artificial conflation occurs when school administrators guarantee or ensure that teachers’ growth/VAM estimates are adequately aligned or correlated with their observational scores and ratings. Reports of artificial conflation have been reported, more specifically, in Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee, and most recently, Texas. In Tennessee, the state’s Board of Education (2012) actually made it state policy that teachers’ observational scores be forcibly aligned with their growth/VAM scores, regardless of what it took to reach the increased levels of alignment externally mandated and desired.

State leaders even provided guidelines to help school administrators check their own levels of “subjectivity,” and consequently artificially manipulate teachers’ observational scores (typically downwards) when the alignment between teachers’ observational and growth/VAM scores fell outside of an (arbitrarily defined) “acceptable” range. Similarly, state level policies in both Alabama and Georgia assert that the multiple measures (i.e., observational and growth/VAM scores) used to evaluate teachers should also be positively correlated, with similar emphases on charging those with the authority to manipulate teachers’ observational scores (i.e., school administrators) to match teachers’ more “objective” growth/VAM counterparts.

In the Houston Independent School District (HISD), one of the nation’s largest urban public school districts in the nation, many school principals have also reported that they were under significant pressure from district administrators to ensure that their teachers’ observational and growth/VAM scores were also satisfactorily “aligned.”

Further, these school principals reported actually manipulating teachers’ observational scores to match their growth/VAM scores, to not be officially identified as “at risk for misalignment” and in need of intervention and improvement themselves as school administrators with supervisory/observational roles. Teachers also reported being aware that their school principals were doing this, noting also that they knew their principals were being forced to do so by, in this case, the district’s superintendent (Collins, 2014; Paufler, under review; see also Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2016).

Apparently, it is around these more “objective” indicators that all other more “subjective” indicators are to revolve, although current research suggests that neither or these two indicators should be so privileged, or trusted (see, for example, American Statistical Association, 2014; American Educational Research Association, 2015). This also has
serious implications for the validity of the inferences to be drawn and used for decision-making purposes. But perhaps more importantly, doing this or engaging in and encouraging such behaviors negates the entire enterprise, as well as the entire purpose for doing and financing all of this in the first place.

**Conclusions**

What school administrators need to know is that they are unequivocally remiss if they believe artificially manipulating teachers’ observational scores is a beneficial or warranted practice.

Worse would be if school administrators continue to engage in such practices, without fighting back (and often upwards in education’s oft-hierarchial systems) in that this is, simply put, very bad educational measurement and professional practice.

While it might seem like an easy ace or safe play in the game to avoid being deemed as “too subjective,” to dodge any sort of “misalignment” issues, or rather engage in a perceptibly necessary act to protect one’s teachers, engaging in any of the three behaviors detailed prior can be incredibly dangerous as any of these practices ultimately distort the validity of both measures of teacher effectiveness, as well as the validity of the inferences to be drawn as based on both measures combined, in all cases and regardless of the degree, to levels that results and outcomes can no longer be trusted, used, or supported with evidence.

This, accordingly, must be stopped.

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**Book Review**

*Excellence vs Equality: Can Society Achieve Both Goals*

Written by Allan Ornstein  
Reviewed by Art Stellar

Art Stellar, PhD  
Vice President  
National Education Foundation  
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With so much that has been written about the tension between achieving *excellence* while ensuring *equality*, Allan Ornstein’s treatise makes a significant contribution in explaining the origins and continuing conditions for the differences of opinion about these aspirational concepts. Scholars and practitioners alike have been having weighty conversations about excellence and equity for years, and it is likely that the debate will continue well into the future, even as this piece adds some clarity.

As a reviewer, my hope is that in such works, the author will answer the inherent obvious or hidden dilemma or questions posed to the readers or, at a minimum, provide some solace with a first step towards a solution that comes next. With some exceptions, this author leaves those tasks to the reader.

Ornstein, a noted professor at St. John’s University, takes his readers on a guided history through education and sociology, starting with the ancient Greeks through about 2015. Much of his lens for both education and excellence is related to economic outcomes. He reminds his readers that there has been a “top two percent” in every society, whose status appears to be uninfluenced by additional dollars for education. Furthermore, the research he quotes does not support the general improvement of excellence or equality with increased education funding.

The book’s subject is timely with a national conversation focused on the income divide as described by such current contrasts as “Wall Street” vs “Main Street”, “1 percent” vs “99 percent”, “Tax Payers” vs “Takers”. Ornstein writes:

In a high-passion debate we often hear from all kinds of professionals, pundits, and self-styled experts, arguing (1) whether safety nets and social programs are necessary, (2) whether “job creators” should be taxed (and how much), (3) what steps are needed to stabilize the financial system, (4) whether banks and corporations need to be regulated (and to what extent), (5) why we cannot end poverty in America (and in other parts of the world), (6) whether opportunity and mobility still exist for ordinary people in America or elsewhere, (7) how to improve schools, employment, and income and other economic
conditions over the long-term, and (8) who should attend college, how do we make colleges more affordable, and how can private colleges provide more need-based assistance, while balancing the competitive advantages of awarding merit-based assistance without exhausting their resources. (p. 1)

In the main, changing the aforementioned conditions may make little difference if one believes as the author does that, “The problem is, we are becoming a society of inherited wealth, not self-made people, just when we thought we had put behind the idea of heredity privilege and old patterns of aristocracies, family caste and class” (p. 9). This is an example of the kinds of topics, along with race and gender differences, the author claims Americans prefer not to discuss. Ornstein presents a litany of evidence and examination of the influence of inherited wealth.

The author shows how growing talent gaps between countries demonstrate that the United States is losing ground to the rest of the world in the preparation of qualified professionals with little hope of turning the situation around. This trend exacerbates family background playing a more significant role in one’s achieving excellence than that of self-determination. As U.S. corporations hire high quality employees from other parts of the world, fewer aspirational jobs are available here, making family connections more prominent.

A brief historical note with some scholarly quotations suggests that in the last few centuries the West has dominated most professional fields and has led in the production of “excellence.”

The West has peaked according to many economists as new countries are emerging as leaders. The West has no monopoly on innovation or entrepreneurship. Those at the top of the American dream have the resources to remain there as “excellence” expands globally.

However, the middle class and the poverty class in this country do not have the tools or the will to compete in this new reality. As it seems to be playing out, global gaps are being reduced while gaps within Western societies are widening. The author proposes that students who come to study at U.S. universities should be encouraged to stay as foreign-born residents and are three times more likely to secure a graduate degree than those who are native-born.

Americans have other means of reaching excellence, at least financial excellence, by exhibiting unusual talent in the arts, athletics, or other endeavors. Luck is also a factor. Experience, social skills, and judgment can be helpful as well. Obtaining educational credentials was once more important than it is today.

Ornstein summarizes the history of education in the United States from the point of view of excellence and equality. Education was a means for the masses to learn basic skills for employment and a way for the more privileged to advance and contribute to society.

Relying mainly upon the massive Coleman study and the equally comprehensive Jencks research, Inequality, the author suggests that additional education funding makes no difference on educational outcomes for students.

Schools do almost nothing to impact equity among student subgroups or to what
extent they become successful, according to these studies. This reviewer was somewhat alarmed that other more recent educational research was not cited.

While it may be true that most schools do not make a profound difference on student learning, Ron Edmonds and others in the “Effective Schools Movement” discovered high poverty schools that enhanced students’ opportunities for excellence and equality. Many more such schools have been validated in the last decade.

If one accepts the premise that school expenditures do not make a difference on excellence or equality, then what does?

Enabling more high quality productive immigrants to enter the United States is implied; however, there is the potential political backlash from current residents.

With the current national ideological split, that is not a feasible solution. Family background has some potential; however, that takes generations to upgrade to the point of fostering excellence and reducing inequality.

Eliminating poverty may take wholesale redistribution of wealth which the public would likely not find acceptable. The alternative to excellence and equality may be a “just and fair society” (p.74).

Everyone would have opportunities for mobility within a narrower range between the bottom and the top. This would require some agreement on compensation limits at both the top and the bottom of the economic scale. Ornstein describes the liberal and conservative arguments against imposing economic floors and ceilings for citizens.

The answer to the question in the book’s title—Excellence vs Equality: Can Society Achieve Both Goals?—can only be answered by society itself and through a democracy.

The current divide in this country is partially fueled by this dilemma; therefore, it may take decades until people can reflect and compromise upon viable solutions.

Reviewer Biography

Art Stellar is vice-president of the National Education Foundation. He has served as a superintendent for 25 years becoming a life member of AASA in 1972. He has received three national awards from AASA: Distinguished Service Award, the Dr. Effie Jones Humanitarian Award and Leadership for Learning award. He has served as president of ASCD, the Horace Mann League and the North American Chapter of the World Council for Curriculum and Instruction, as well as vice-president of the New York State PTA. He has authored over 500 publications and consulted with many educational organizations. He can be reached at artstellar@yahoo.com.

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