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EDITORIAL

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

Strong Correlations

What do SAT scores really tell us?

Family Income	Reading	Math	Writing	Total	Diff.
Less than - \$20,000/year	434	456	430	1320	-
\$20,000 - \$40,000/year	462	473	453	1388	+68
\$40,000 - \$60,000/year	488	496	477	1461	+141
\$60,000 - \$80,000/year	502	510	490	1502	+182
\$80,000 - \$100,000/year	514	525	504	1543	+223
\$100,000 - \$120,000/year	522	534	512	1568	+248
\$120,000 - \$140,000/year	526	537	517	1580	+260
\$140,000 - \$160,000/year	533	546	525	1604	+284
\$160,000 - \$180,000/year	535	548	529	1612	+292
More than \$200,000/year	554	570	552	1676	+356
Correlation between income and SAT score (Spearman Rho):	.988**	.952**	.891**	.564*	

*= $p < .05$

**= $p < .001$

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College Board. (2008). *College bound seniors 2008: Total group profile report*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.fairtest.org/files/2008%20COLLEGE%20BOUND%20SENIORS%20AVERAGE%20SAT%20SCORES.pdf>

Superintendents As Gatekeepers in the Employment of Alternatively Licensed Principals

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Abstract

Alternative routes to the licensure of school principals are controversial. These researchers found that superintendents, as gatekeepers in the employment of principals, consider a complex set of conditions surrounding the candidate, the superintendent, and the school district in their decisions to hire principals who gained credentials through alternative routes. Superintendents are likely to hire alternatively licensed principals, regardless of the alternative route taken (*inside* or *outside* education), if they perceive candidates to be capable of leading the instructional program within a school, they have a favorable attitude toward alternative licensure of personnel generally, they have had previous experience in hiring alternatively licensed principals, and they perceive the school community as willing to accept an alternatively licensed principal.

Keywords

Alternative Licensure, Principal Certification, Superintendents

Candidates for the principalship are being licensed through alternative pathways in many parts of the country. Some view this movement as a plausible solution to the shortage of principals and the inadequacies in principal preparation programs (Hess, 2003; Southern Regional Education Board, 2006; Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003). Others are concerned over the prospect of a person from a non-traditional background leading a school (Fenwick & Pierce, 2001).

Early commentators saw this movement as having the potential for “the decertification” of the profession (Gordon & Howley, 1993). More recently, alternative licensure has been viewed as the product of “de-skilling,” “de-theorizing,” and “de-complexifying” the role and context of the principal brought on by the standards-based reform movement (English, 2003).

Regardless of the emotive or rational basis of the debate over alternative licensure of principals, the critical test of the viability of alternative pathways to solve the problems of quantity and quality of principals is whether superintendents, as gatekeepers in school districts, are willing to recommend alternative-path candidates to their school boards for employment.

This is the second part of a two-part study. The first part was a qualitative study of 18 school superintendents from across the nation. It was conducted to assess superintendents’ willingness to recommend hiring principals who become licensed through alternative paths and to identify variables associated with the variation in this willingness to recommend hiring these principals.

In this part of the study, information from the literature and the data from the qualitative study were used to construct and test

with a national population of superintendents a theory that explains the variation in the willingness of superintendents to recommend hiring principals who received their licenses (or certificates) through alternative pathways.

The results of this study have both practical and theoretical benefits. The search for variables that affect superintendents’ hiring decisions could benefit both superintendents and candidates seeking employment.

Superintendents could use the findings to assess whether they have considered relevant variables when they are making recommendations to their school boards about hiring principals who received their licenses through alternative paths. Candidates for the principalship could use the information to determine whether it is to their advantage to pursue alternative routes to licensure and, if so, to determine what other variables they must consider when they apply for positions as principals.

Theoretically, the results lay a foundation for the identification of explanatory variables in hiring decisions. Others may use this foundation to refine and test the theory with other populations or, with modifications, to explain hiring decisions in other positions in education.

Two alternative pathways were studied: One pathway is from within education (*inside*) and the other is external to education (*outside*). Alternatively licensed principal candidates from *inside* education are those who have been licensed or certified without receiving a master’s degree in educational administration.

These candidates have a master’s degree and experience in education (e.g., teachers, department chairs, or guidance counselors), but they have not completed a university-based principal preparation program.

Alternatively licensed principal candidates from *outside* education are those who have been licensed or certified without degrees or experience in education. These candidates have a master's degree in an area other than education, leadership experience outside education, no experience in education, and have not completed a university-based principal preparation program.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to assess the viability, as expressed by superintendents, of alternative routes to principal licensure as a solution to the principal shortage, regardless of whether it is a quantitative or qualitative shortage.

If superintendents are willing to recommend hiring alternatively licensed principals, then the principal applicant pool could increase in both quantity and quality. Our specific interests were in assessing and

explaining the variation in superintendents' willingness to recommend hiring alternatively licensed principals.

Research Question

The first part of this study was conducted by Kufel, Gaudreau, and Parks (2005) to identify variables that influence superintendents' willingness to recommend hiring alternatively licensed principals.

This study is an expansion to a larger sample of superintendents nationwide. In the expansion, the overall research question of interest was: What variables explain the variation in superintendents' willingness to recommend hiring alternatively licensed principals?

The variables were clustered into seven domains for analytical purposes. The domains, variables, and analytical codes are in Table 1 and Appendix A.

Table 1

Domains and Related Variables Explaining Variation in Superintendents' Willingness to Recommend Hiring Alternatively Licensed Principals

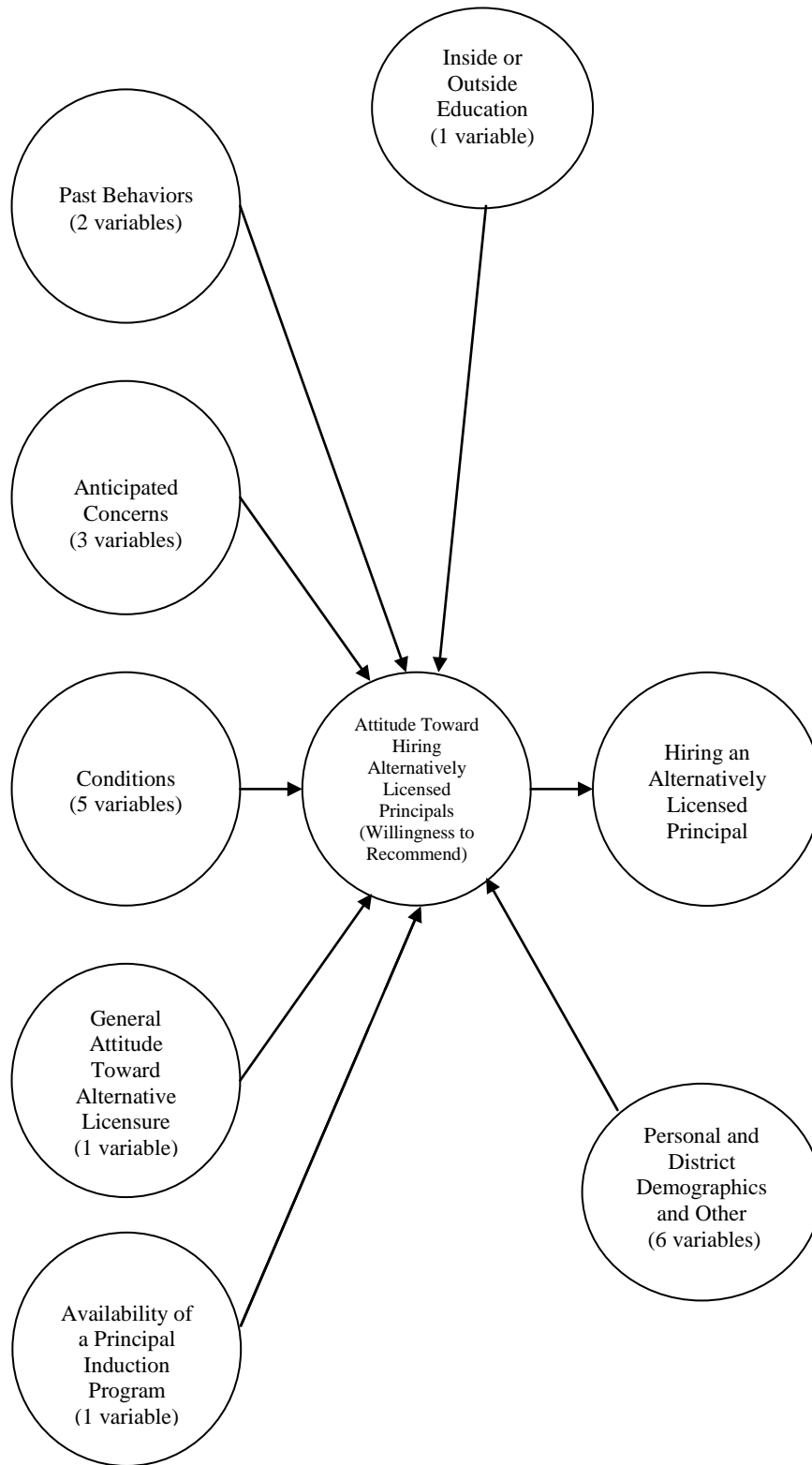
Domains	Related explanatory variables
Inside or outside education	The definition of the alternative route to licensure given to the responding superintendent (prior preparation inside or outside education)
A superintendent's past behaviors (experience) with regard to hiring alternatively licensed personnel	The superintendent's past experience hiring alternatively licensed teachers
	The superintendent's past experience hiring alternatively licensed principals
Anticipated concerns a superintendent may have about the conditions alternatively licensed principal candidates would face as principals	The superintendent's perception of the ability of alternatively licensed principals to lead instruction
	The superintendent's perception of the community acceptance of alternatively licensed principals

Domains	Related explanatory variables
	The superintendent's perception of the alternatively licensed principal's ability to understand and work within the educational context
Conditions under which a superintendent would consider hiring alternatively licensed principals	The superintendent's perception of the management capacity of alternatively licensed principals
	The superintendent's perception of the supply of principal applicants
	The superintendent's perception of the quality of traditional principal preparation programs
	The superintendent's perception of the importance placed on whether a principal fits the community
	The superintendent's perception of the specific leadership needs of the school district
A superintendent's general attitude toward alternative licensure	The superintendent's general attitude toward alternative licensure
The availability of an induction program for principals	The presence of a clearly articulated induction and training program for new principals
Personal and district demographics and other variables	The superintendent's years of experience as a superintendent
	The superintendent's willingness to hire under the definition provided (experience or training inside or outside education)
	The number of schools in the superintendent's district
	The district's location (rural, rural-suburban, suburban, suburban-urban, and urban)
	The superintendent's ability (authorization) to recommend hiring alternatively licensed principals
	Superintendent's willingness to recommend hiring alternatively licensed assistant principals

Theory Explaining Willingness of Superintendents to Recommend Hiring Alternatively Licensed Principals

The composite model of attitude-behavior consistency (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; 1998) and data from the qualitative study of 18 superintendents (Kufel, Gaudreau, & Parks, 2005) were the bases for the development of the theory (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Theory explaining superintendents' willingness to recommend hiring alternatively licensed principals. The specific variables are identified in Table 1 and Appendix A.



The criterion variable in the theory is the willingness of superintendents to recommend hiring alternatively licensed principals. The purpose of the theory is to explain the variation in this criterion variable. The criterion variable was measured with a researcher-developed and tested Thurstone equal-appearing interval scale.

The explanatory domains and variables were selected from the literature and the data of the qualitative study for their potential in accounting for the variation in the willingness of superintendents to recommend hiring alternatively licensed principals (see Table 1 for domains and related variables).

The domains were the superintendent's perception of the conditions in the school district, anticipated concerns about hiring alternatively licensed principals, general attitude toward alternative licensure of school principals, perception of the presence or absence of a clearly articulated induction program for new principals, and past behavior related to hiring alternatively licensed school personnel.

Attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, behaviors, and the interrelationships among them are central components of the theory. All have long, rich theoretical and research histories in sociology, psychology, and social psychology (Olson & Maio, 2003; Petty, Wegener, & Fabrigar, 1997; Shaw & Wright, 1967). These histories emanate from the human desire to understand behavior and its antecedents and consequences.

Theory and research throughout the last century (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Olson & Maio, 2003; Petty, Wheeler, & Tormala, 2003; Shaw & Wright, 1967; Wood, 2000) have produced both knowledge and methods that are useful in such applied fields as education, political science, economics, and social work. This knowledge and these methods were the

foundation for the construction and testing of the theory explaining the variation in the willingness of superintendents to recommend hiring alternatively licensed principals.

Research Procedures

The population was the 6,189 public school superintendents who were members of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) in 2005.

A random numbers generator (<http://www.random.org/nform.html>) was used to select two samples of 600 superintendents each. One sample was randomly assigned by a flip of a coin to the group of superintendents who would be given a definition of an alternatively licensed principal as someone who had training and experience in education (*inside group*); the other was assigned to the group of superintendents that was given a definition of an alternatively licensed principal as someone who had neither training nor experience in education (*outside group*).

A multi-part, on-line questionnaire was created and tested by the researchers. Instruments were developed to measure the explanatory variables and the criterion variable. Because Thurstone's method of equal-appearing intervals more accurately measures extreme attitudes than Likert's method of summated ratings (Aiken, 1996; Oppenheim, 1992; Roberts, Laughlin, & Wedell, 1999), it was chosen to scale superintendents' willingness to recommend hiring alternatively licensed principals.

Nineteen explanatory variables were used in the analysis. Likert's (1932) method of summated ratings was used to scale ten of the explanatory variables. Six variables were measured using dichotomous responses (*yes* or *no*, *inside* or *outside*). Two variables were the actual numbers: years of experience and number of schools in the district. And, one

variable was dummy coded: district geographical classification (rural, rural-suburban, suburban, suburban-urban, and urban). (See Appendix A.)

Items for each measure came from a variety of sources. The primary source was the data from the qualitative study conducted by (Kufel, Gaudreau, & Parks, 2005). Other sources were the literature on alternative licensure in education and principal preparation, formal and informal conversations with faculty and practitioners, and presentations on alternative licensure and principal preparation, given and attended, at national and regional conferences.

The scaled measures were subjected to rigorous content validation and reliability procedures. Content validation studies were conducted on three separate occasions. Each item in each measure was subjected to an analysis by educators to assess its congruence with the definition of the variable it was purported to represent.

The educators were asked to place each item into a domain, rate the strength of association of each item with the specified domain, and rate the clarity of each item. Items classified correctly by 80% of the raters, rated 3.5 or above on a four-point association scale, and rated 2.5 or above on a three-point clarity scale were accepted for inclusion in the questionnaire.

Items that were unclear or that were not representative of the explanatory variable they were supposed to describe were revised or omitted. Alpha coefficients were calculated for all scales and ranged from .69 to .94.

Two forms of the questionnaire were developed, one for the inside education definition of an alternatively licensed principal and one for the outside education definition of

an alternatively licensed principal. All the items were the same on both instruments; only the directions for completing the instruments were different.

The questionnaires were administered on line to the 1200 randomly selected superintendents between November 2006 and January 2007. One thousand fifty-nine questionnaires reached their intended destinations, and 380 (36%) usable responses (178 inside education and 201 outside education) were received and analyzed. Respondents were from 47 states and Alberta, Canada (1 respondent).

Rural, suburban, and urban school superintendents were represented, with the large majority from rural, rural-suburban, and suburban areas (86%) and fewer from suburban-urban and urban (14%) areas.

Analysis of Data and Findings

Multiple regression analysis was applied to the data (see Appendix A). Five of the explanatory variables were significantly related to the superintendents' willingness to recommend hiring alternatively licensed principals ($R^2=.72$).

The strongest relationship was between willingness to hire under the given definition (*inside* or *outside* education) ($\beta=.31$): On average, superintendents were willing to hire alternatively licensed candidates regardless of the definition under which they responded to the questionnaire.

The second strongest relationship was between willingness to recommend hiring alternatively licensed principals and the superintendent's perception of the instructional leadership ability of alternatively licensed principals ($\beta=.26$). Other significant variables were the superintendent's general attitude toward alternative licensure ($\beta=.20$), the

superintendent's past experiences hiring alternatively licensed principals ($\beta=.13$), and the superintendent's perception of community acceptance of alternatively licensed principals ($\beta=.13$).

Superintendents displayed a low neutral score ($M=5.31$, $SD=1.86$) on the 11-point Thurstone scale, which means they viewed the employment of alternatively licensed principals slightly unfavorably.

Conclusions

Recommending an alternatively licensed principal is not an easy decision for a superintendent of schools. It is based on a complex set of conditions surrounding the candidate, the superintendent, and the school district. As the gatekeeper, the superintendent considers the experience and training of the candidate, his or her own attitudes toward and experiences with hiring alternatively licensed personnel, and the perceptions of the school community.

Superintendents are likely to hire alternatively licensed principals, regardless of the alternative route taken (*inside* or *outside*), if: (1) the candidates are perceived by the superintendent to be able to lead the instructional program within a school, (2) the superintendent has a favorable attitude toward alternative licensure of personnel generally, (3) the superintendent has had previous experience in hiring alternatively licensed principals, and (4) the superintendent perceives that the school community would accept the alternatively licensed principal.

Reflections and Discussion

Alternative licensure for principals is a concept worth exploring. Individuals trained through an alternative route can bring diversity and, potentially, a different perspective to education. Those in education, especially those who

prepare educational administrators, may have some concern for the preparation of school leaders by an alternate route; however, we don't think they should be overly concerned.

Alternative licensure offers competition that may have an uplifting effect on the quality of all programs, thus benefiting the candidates and the children and teachers they serve.

Then, too, the marketplace, in the form of gate-keeping superintendents and school boards, in the end, determines whether those pursuing alternative routes to the principalship are competitive or not. In the marketplace, low quality alternative routes can be expected to decline, just as low quality traditional preparation programs should meet a timely demise.

The quality of the candidates entering alternative routes and the preparation they receive, especially as it is related to instructional programs, are paramount to their success on the job. Individuals who enter by these routes must be hand-selected and put through rigorous on-the-job and theoretical training. Anything less will relegate alternative routes to the principalship to that heap of good ideas that failed the test of practice.

Over time we expect the door to the principalship to slowly open, and the first alternatively licensed principals to enter bear the burden of gaining superintendents' confidence.

Superintendents who see results produced by these principals will gain confidence in them and will be more likely to hire other alternatively licensed candidates. Success by these forerunners as instructional and community leaders will further increase the confidence of colleagues and parents, thus gaining community acceptance. Gradually, the

prejudices some hold toward alternative licensure in education can be expected to wane.

Finally, we believe superintendents will always choose a principal they believe is the right fit for the school district and community, regardless of the person's route to licensure.

However, alternatively licensed principals will be under a cloud of suspicion and constant scrutiny by the community and by traditionally licensed personnel, thus these individuals must be exceptional if they and the process of alternative licensure are to survive.

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Appendix A

Regression Coefficients for the Regression of Willingness to Recommend Hiring Alternatively Licensed Principals on All Explanatory Variables ($R^2 = .72$, $N=331$)

Explanatory variable	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		<i>p</i>
	<i>b</i>	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	
(Constant)	-3.22	.83		-3.87	.00
Inside v. outside prior experience or training (1=Inside, 2=Outside)	-.04	.13	-.01	-.34	.73
Superintendent's past experience hiring alternatively licensed teachers (0= No, 1= Yes)	-.14	.13	-.04	-1.06	.29
Superintendent's past experience hiring alternatively licensed principals (0= No, 1= Yes)	1.02	.26	.13	3.99	.00
Superintendent's perception of the ability of alternatively licensed principals to lead instruction (Likert scale)	.94	.24	.26	3.90	.00
Superintendent's perception of the community acceptance of alternatively licensed principals (Likert scale)	.42	.18	.13	2.35	.02
Superintendent's perception of the alternatively licensed principal's ability to understand and work within the educational context (Likert scale)	-.05	.16	-.01	-.31	.76

(table continues)

Appendix A (cont'd)

Explanatory variable	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		<i>p</i>
	<i>b</i>	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	
Superintendent's perception of the management capacity of alternatively licensed principals (Likert scale)	-.06	.18	-.01	-.32	.75
Superintendent's perception of the supply of principal applicants (Likert scale)	.03	.12	.01	.22	.83
Superintendent's perception of the quality of traditional principal preparation programs (Likert scale)	-.06	.14	-.01	-.40	.69
Superintendent's perception of the importance placed on whether a principal candidate fits the community (Likert scale)	.15	.12	.04	1.23	.22
Superintendent's perception of the specific leadership needs of the school district (Likert scale)	-.02	.15	-.00	-.11	.91
Superintendent's general attitude toward alternative licensure (Likert scale)	.68	.19	.20	3.65	.00
The presence of an a clearly articulated induction and training program for new principals (0= No,1 = Yes)	.16	.13	.04	1.25	.21
Superintendent's years or experience as a superintendent	.01	.01	.02	.69	.49

(table continues)

Appendix A (cont'd)

Explanatory variable	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		<i>p</i>
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta	<i>t</i>	
Superintendent's willingness to hire under the given definition (inside or outside) (Likert scale)	1.16	.17	.31	6.65	.00
The number of schools in the superintendent's district	-.00	.00	-.03	-.72	.47
District location (rural, rural-suburban, suburban, suburban-urban, or urban) (dummy coded)	-.00	.05	.00	-.01	.99
Superintendent's ability (authorization) to recommend hiring alternatively licensed principals in his or her district (0= No, 1= Yes)	.14	.13	.04	1.07	.29
Superintendent's willingness to recommend hiring alternatively licensed assistant principals (0= No, 1 = Yes)	.19	.16	.05	1.20	.23

Developing Instructional Leadership Through Collaborative Learning

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Abstract

Collaborative learning teams have emerged as an effective tool for teachers to steadily and continuously improve their instruction. Evidence also suggests that a learning teams model can affect school leadership as well. We explored the impact of learning teams on leadership roles of principals and teachers in secondary schools and found that collaborative learning teams positively influenced school leadership in two ways: (1) by strengthening principals' instructional leadership, and (2) distributing leadership and instructional decision-making throughout the school. These changes in instructional and distributed leadership supported implementation of collaborative learning teams and promoted three key outcomes: (1) more accurate identification of student needs and instructional strategies, (2) greater communication across grade levels, and (3) improved job satisfaction and teacher retention.

Keywords

Professional Development, Teacher Learning, PLC

Richard Elmore (2000) has warned that unless persons in public schools change how they define and practice leadership, public schools will fail “massively and visibly” with respect to systemic school reform. “The way out of this problem,” he argued, is through “the large scale improvement of instruction,” possible only through “dramatic changes in the way schools define and practice leadership” (p. 2). Little has changed since Elmore’s warning. Research findings suggest that there is a persistent divide between administrators and teachers that limits

communication around instruction, fosters a culture of isolationism, and inhibits distributed decision-making (Elmore, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2004). Bringing administrators and teachers together around a shared goal of improving instruction has the potential to eliminate this divide and raise student achievement.

The following collaborative learning teams approach is one of few models to have documented effects on student achievement (Saunders et al., 2009). Evidence indicates that this approach also has a positive influence on

school leadership in two important ways: (1) by strengthening principals' instructional leadership while simultaneously (2) facilitating distributed leadership and instructional decision-making.

Collaborative Learning Teams

The learning-teams model described in this article proposes that instruction will steadily and continuously improve if teachers and administrators are provided with stable settings in which to collaborate, inquiry-based protocols, and trained peer facilitators.

A 5-year longitudinal study demonstrated that in nine Title I schools implementing this model, students produced gains in achievement greater than those produced by students in demographically matched Title I schools (Saunders et al., 2009).

In a parallel study, an external evaluator documented positive effects on administrative leadership and changes in teachers' beliefs and attitudes in schools implementing collaborative learning teams versus those deploying some other reform model (McDougall et al., 2007). Principals in schools with collaborative learning teams became actively involved in

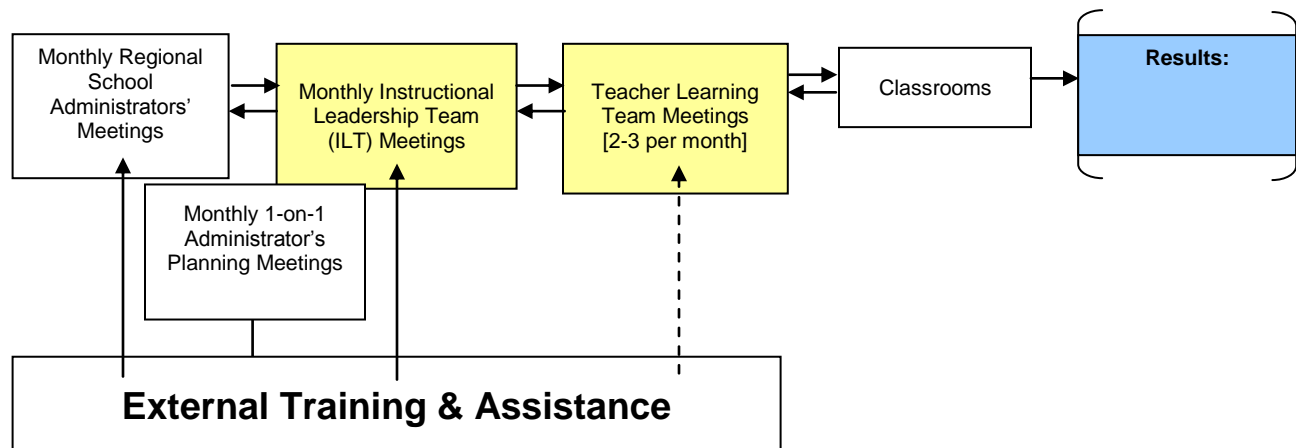
instructional practices, and teachers assumed more decision-making authority and leadership autonomy than their peers in non-learning teams schools.

Key drivers of these positive outcomes were structured, collaborative settings in which teachers and administrators came together to study, refine, and implement instructional strategies targeted at specific student needs.

The settings included (1) teacher learning teams (groups of 4-8 teachers from the same grade or content area who met twice a month to examine their own instruction); and (2) an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) (teacher leaders from each learning team and administrators who met monthly to coordinate the work of teacher teams).

Together with additional support settings (see Figure 1), these two meetings gave principals, assistant principals, and teachers the opportunity to work together toward common instructional goals within the school. These findings shaped future research and development of the model over the next ten years.

Figure 1. Collaborative settings for change.



As this model expanded to more schools, it became evident that principals played an important role in establishing and sustaining collaborative learning teams, as well as nurturing more instructional leadership among teachers.

In an effort to understand and document these changes in administrator-teacher relationships better, in 2008, the authors conducted interviews and focus groups with 44 elementary school administrators and teachers, all of whom had one to ten years experience implementing the model.

Data from these interviews and focus groups indicated that when the principal successfully implements a strong support structure for collaborative learning teams, this action leads to more distributed leadership throughout the school.

Balancing strong principal leadership with more distributed decision-making is not common practice, but it has the potential to improve the professional culture and the quality of instruction in schools.

Principal leadership is most important during the early stages of implementing collaborative learning teams, when stabilizing settings and building teacher buy-in are important to implementation success.

In fact, simply finding stable, protected times for teachers to meet and study their own instruction is often more difficult than many principals initially realize.

Securing the “nuts and bolts” of program implementation—from clearing the calendar to protecting these meetings from competing demands—requires top-down leadership in the beginning.

When principals succeed in carving out time for teachers to come together around instruction on a regular basis, they demonstrate their commitment to collaborative learning and decision-making and smooth the transition to more distributed leadership.

Building teacher buy-in for collaboration as a form of professional learning is similarly important yet challenging for principals. Traditional norms of teacher autonomy and privacy can make teachers hesitant to share instructional practices, and any distrust between teachers and administrators might initially discourage open discussions about instruction, particularly when tied to student achievement. Principals should use teacher collaboration as a form of professional learning and *not* as an evaluative tool.

The direct leadership role of the principal during program implementation eventually makes a noticeable shift. As learning teams become more embedded within the school, the *combined* leadership of principals and teachers becomes a pivotal factor in sustaining effective collaboration.

Teachers adopt more leadership roles within their learning teams and the ILT, and they take more initiative in examining and refining effective instructional strategies.

Concurrently, principals actively participate in each setting—ILTs or a learning team—as learners as well as leaders. One principal described this role shift in the following way:

... [I]t's a whole different way of looking at things. I mean we are sitting down and looking at things ... it's part of the team. The administrators are in the meetings to help get things going too, but

also to be side-by-side as a learner
... (Elementary Schools Focus
Group)

Distributed Leadership

When principals shift from top-down managers to members of a collaborative learning environment, this promotes more distributed leadership.

A distributed leadership perspective recognizes that expertise does not reside solely in one gifted principal or group of administrators, but exists throughout a school in gifted teachers, instructional coaches, support staff, and teacher leaders (Spillane & Lewis, 2002).

A collaborative model like this encourages more leadership distribution by facilitating open dialogue around targeted student needs and effective instructional strategies from *all* educators, leading to three key outcomes.

More accurate identification of student needs and instructional strategies

When teachers collaborate with one another, they can target common gaps in student learning better and identify promising instructional strategies linked directly to that student need.

This process lies in stark contrast to having pre-packaged standards or instructional strategies dictated to teachers, or expecting teachers to identify and address common student needs in isolation. In the following exchange, a principal (P) and a teacher (T) discuss the benefits of teachers working through instructional problems together:

P: They're discovering and not being told like she had mentioned, "this is it." They're delving into it, looking for themselves, coming up with the

need, and figuring out how to meet that need. It's very enriching.

T: Well, as a teacher, to go through a process where there's hopefully zero principal coming in and saying, "no you're not going to do that, you're going to do this." Being able to do it yourself, make your own mistakes, come up with your own solutions, really has legs as a learner ... It's different getting there yourself rather than having somebody, especially a principal, go "this is where," you know, "it's right here." (Elementary Schools Focus Group)

Given the ability to make instructional decisions in response to students' specific learning needs, teachers participating in learning teams are more likely than their peers to attribute changes in student learning to their own instruction rather than external factors or student traits, a cause-effect connection that has implications for long-term teacher learning and development (Gallimore et al., 2009).

Greater communication across grade levels

When teachers view collaboration as integral to their instructional efficacy, they are more likely to share needs and strategies across grade levels. This vertical articulation allows teachers to address potential learning problems before they even emerge in the classroom. One kindergarten teacher explained how she and her learning team reached out to get help in refining their student need:

We talked to first grade teachers. "Tell us what do you guys need, [and] how can we help you," and they're like, "please focus on—

teach them how to write a sentence, the structure.” So we did. At the end it was kind of quick but it did help. (Elementary Schools Focus Group)

In another school, a first-grade teacher worked with a kindergarten colleague to review her students’ progress over the past year, recognizing that he would have to shift his own lessons to accommodate their higher achievement levels. The kindergarten teacher took this exchange back to her learning team as evidence of their success. These two examples illustrate how open communication around instruction empowers teachers, not only as individual educators, but as a member of a team working together to improve instruction throughout the school.

Job satisfaction and teacher retention

Principals see the effect of collaborative learning and distributed decision-making on job satisfaction in both new and veteran teachers, with valuable implications on long-term teacher growth and retention.

Particularly in high-need urban schools, where new teachers often leave within five years, we found that collaborative learning teams provide novice teachers with an immediate support structure and a protocol for continuous improvement, helping them gain confidence in their instructional efficacy and reducing the likelihood that they’ll leave the school.

As one principal noted, “[i]t gives me a great sense of security knowing that this weekly time is part of the infrastructure of our school—the culture of our school—where I can definitively point to as a great support for a new teacher.”

Providing veteran teachers with more decision-making authority has also been shown to improve job satisfaction, with similarly important implications on their decision to stay and grow in the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008). “When you feel you’re a part of something and that you’re a valuable asset and that you are needed and your ideas are valued ... you’re not going to leave it so easily,” explained one teacher.

Conclusion

Balancing strong principal leadership with more distributed leadership is difficult but not impossible. In schools where faculties are implementing this model, instructional improvements come gradually and only through shared effort and commitment of teachers and administrators (McDougall et al., 2007; Saunders et al., 2009).

When implemented thoughtfully and purposefully, collaborative learning teams can become an important framework for distributing leadership and instructional decision-making, with potential benefits to school culture, student learning, and overall teacher quality.

The key to success, however, remains the principal, who by prioritizing *instruction* as the most important activity on campus, empowers all educators to do the same.

Strong leadership artfully combines pressure and support in a way that moves schools relentlessly toward accomplishing student achievement goals, utilizing indicators, cultivating assistance and collaboration, and building productive school settings (McDougall et al., 2007: 53).

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Should I Stay or Should I Go? How Teacher Leadership Can Improve Teacher Retention

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Abstract

Retaining teachers is a challenge for schools today. The number of teachers leaving the profession each year is costing schools in the United States billions of dollars annually. This article explores an alignment of the attributes of teacher leaders and conditions affecting teacher retention. Characteristics of teacher leaders are discussed and compared with the opportunities and conditions that reportedly have a positive influence on teacher retention. Suggestions are provided for principals to cultivate teacher leaders, thus positively impacting teacher retention and student learning.

Keywords

Teacher Retention, Attrition, Teacher Leadership

Teacher retention is an important issue for school leadership today. The crux of this retention problem is not an imbalance of supply and demand caused by large numbers of teacher retirements, high student enrollment or an insufficient number of teacher candidates (Cochran-Smith, 2004). The problem is the number of teachers per year who move from one teaching job to another or leave teaching altogether.

Each school day, nearly 1,000 teachers leave the teaching profession, costing the U.S. nearly \$7 billion annually for the recruitment, hiring and training of teachers to replace them.

Teachers leave before they master their ability to create an effective learning environment for students. Resources that should be spent on students are spent on recruiting and replacing teachers.

Consequently, changes are needed to enhance teacher leadership along with working conditions—changes that will ultimately bolster teacher retention and student learning (Shakrani, 2008).

Are the factors that influence teacher retention positively the same factors that foster a culture of teacher leader? If so, how can principals cultivate a culture of teacher leadership thereby improving retention? The purpose for this essay is to share insights, supported by research, aligning the attributes of teacher leaders and the conditions affecting teacher retention.

Five Factors that Positively Influence Teacher Retention

Research reveals five factors that teachers consistently cite as reasons for remaining in their classrooms and schools. These factors include opportunities to: (a) collaborate with colleagues to plan and to participate in professional activities; (b) professional development; (c) experience autonomy; (d) interact with supportive leaders; and (e) provide input regarding student learning (Charlton & Kritsonis, 2009).

Collaboration

Teachers consistently point to collaboration as a factor that positively impacts their decision to remain in their schools (Charlton & Kritsonis, 2009; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Johnson, 2006). Teachers seek opportunities to collaborate with grade-level colleagues, administrators and novice teachers.

These collaborative relationships spark conversations that can allow teachers to connect with one another and fortify professional and personal relationships. Collaboration allows for colleagues to learn from one another and reduces isolation, which is known to have a detrimental effect on

teacher satisfaction, effectiveness and retention (Johnson, 2006).

Professional development

Professional activity is enhanced when teachers get involved beyond their classrooms and engage in structuring of the professional development activities. Teachers should continually develop and update their skills so they are better able to reach all learners.

Principals should allow teachers to take part in the planning of both the structure and content of professional development (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, (CCSRI), 2007). Principals can collaborate with teachers on identifying instructional strategies to be included in professional activities by allowing teachers to make decisions about their preferred instructional interventions (Charlton & Kritsonis, 2009).

Teacher autonomy

Teachers report that their ability to exercise authority in their schools and contribute to decision making positively influences their decision to stay and enhances job satisfaction (CCSRI, 2007). When teachers are empowered, when their expertise is sought, and when their contributions are honored, they are more inclined to remain in their schools.

More than half of the teachers leaving the classroom reported greater control over their own work place, policies and practices in their new positions (Marvel et al. 2007).

Supportive leadership

Teachers cite positive, supportive leadership as another reason for remaining in the profession. Providing teachers with an opportunity to establish a reciprocal relationship with the principal supports retention, such as weekly meetings with the principal. These individual meetings provide the principal with the opportunity to differentiate his/her leadership

by providing leadership roles and opportunities for teacher-leaders (Morgan & Kristsonis, 2008).

Kohm and Nance (2009) reviewed instances in which principals asked the teachers to become involved in the planning of new school programs. The implementation of these programs was successful because the principal provided information such as the annual budget so that realistic goals could be accomplished.

Student-learning outcomes

The ability to influence student learning positively affects teacher retention. Teachers derive personal satisfaction in seeing their students learn, and from learning alongside their students (Charlton & Kristsonis, 2009).

Teachers need more opportunities to be a part of professional learning communities where they can “raise new questions about students, subject matter, assessments, equity and access, and to generate local knowledge through collaborative analysis and interpretation” (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 17). When teachers realize their responsibility to ask questions and work as problem solvers, they gain confidence and extend their own learning and the learning of their students.

Teachers who choose to remain in their school feel valued and that their opinions matter. Principals are in the position to let teachers know their ideas are important and that they can be a part of the school’s instructional improvement. Principals can distribute the work by allowing teachers to become partners in school improvement as teacher leaders (Danielson, 2006).

Characteristics of Teacher Leaders

How do principals and other people define teacher leaders? Beyond the structures of department chairs, grade level leaders and quasi-administrative positions, schools today

acknowledge the multitude of leadership roles that teachers assume and the positive impact these roles have on student learning.

Teacher leaders have been identified as collaborators with peers, parents and community members. They are seen as risk-takers and participants in school decision-making. They are defined as experts in instruction and they exhibit a willingness to share their knowledge with others. They are known to engage in continuous action research and consistently participate in professional development (Searby & Shaddix, 2008).

Danielson (2006) defined teacher leaders according to the skills and dispositions they possess. Their skills include using evidence and data to make decisions and inform instruction, taking initiative to solve problems, helping colleagues see the vision and engage in it, monitoring progress and changing instruction as needed, anticipating and negotiating negativity, and contributing to a learning community beyond their classroom.

Danielson stated teacher leader dispositions such as possessing the ability to maintain a focus on enhancing student learning, as well as optimism and possibility. Teacher leaders remain open-minded to the ideas of others and display courage and willingness to take risks. They display confidence and view learning as a journey or process. They are hard workers that persevere in the face of adversity.

Gabriel (2005) prompted principals to search for leadership qualities in the teachers at their schools and to “steer potential teacher leaders toward growth opportunities” (p. 14). Principals should look for teachers who are trustworthy and maintain confidentiality; are sensitive to the needs of others; can see beyond their own classroom; are resourceful and persist to find solutions; admit their mistakes; and are willing to grow and change.

Linking Teacher Leadership with Teacher Retention

The characteristics of teacher leaders are well defined and seemingly overlap with the opportunities and conditions desired to enhance teacher retention (Danielson, 2006; Gabriel, 2005). Consequently, if principals cultivate teacher leaders within their school, teacher retention may be improved with the benefits of a stable school culture. Kohm and Nance (2009) described collaborative school cultures as those in which teachers and administrators work together to help all students learn.

Teachers take part in planning programs and are provided with opportunities to observe each other and discuss their ideas. Principals can “foster a school environment that leads to collaboration and teacher leadership by sharing responsibility with teachers as often as possible and by helping them develop skills that foster collaborative problem solving” (Kohm & Nance, 2009, p. 68).

Recognize Teachers as Experts in Student Learning

Teachers derive greater satisfaction when they are viewed as experts in student learning. In order to acknowledge teacher expertise, principals must honor teachers’ multiple ways of knowing and working, and respond with multiple vehicles for professional development.

Professional development should extend beyond the school and teachers should be encouraged to seek additional endorsements and certifications (Searby & Shaddix, 2008).

Teachers who deeply understand content knowledge and are able to impart that knowledge, find personal satisfaction seeing students learn and enjoy facilitating the learning process for their students (Charlton & Kritsonis, 2009).

Create Collaborative Opportunities

Teachers are more likely to stay in schools and to be successful when mentoring programs exemplify teaching as a learning process, not as a training program to be sure teachers can follow scripted material and pacing schedules.

Teachers need to view induction as the opportunity to ask questions and seek understanding. Induction programs not only meet the needs of new teachers, they also increase the value of the knowledge and expertise of the veteran teachers who act as mentors and coaches (Shakrani, 2008).

Teachers need to meet with principals and connect with colleagues to establish both professional and personal relationships. When teachers establish congruence between personal and school goals, they are more likely to commit to the district (Fairman & McLean, 2003).

Honor Teachers as Decision-makers

In order to teach all students, teachers must be able to raise and respond to critical issues in their classrooms. They must be given opportunities to work as problem solvers. Their ability to make data-driven decisions should guide their teaching and student learning.

They should be provided with opportunities to form study and critical friends groups, to conduct action research, and to join professional learning communities. They should be open to change and see themselves as change agents (CCSRI, 2007).

Most importantly, when teachers receive acknowledgement and positive recognition, they speak directly to the sense of self-esteem and valuation it provides (Charlton & Kritsonis, 2009).

Establish Reciprocal Relationships and Responsive Leadership

Positive, responsive leadership matters to teachers. When leadership is offered on a continuum, principals acknowledge and build on the strengths of each teacher. Principals must be able to recognize both the readiness level and ability level of each teacher and respond accordingly with opportunities that nurture their learning and development (Fairman & McLean, 2003). Responding to the individual teacher's strengths advances learning and the differentiation of roles and responsibilities.

Today teachers are entering the profession from different paths and places. They are seeking differentiated job opportunities. Principals must honor all teachers' experience and provide them opportunities to contribute and grow within the school. Differentiated leadership empowers teachers, enhances participation inside and outside the classroom and allows principals to acknowledge teacher accomplishments (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Nurture Culture of Optimism, Opportunity, Promise

An environment that promotes strength and possibility is better able to deal with the inevitable challenges that occur in our schools. Teachers remain in teaching if they learn to

anticipate problems, realize that problems have solutions, and see themselves as a part of the solution. Teachers with positive outlooks believe students can learn and are more likely to remain in their teaching positions (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Even in the most difficult of circumstances and with the most marginalized students, teachers remain in their classrooms, for reasons that have more to do with loving and dreaming than with the physical conditions or the availability of the latest techniques (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Closing Thoughts

We recommend that principals devote time to the identification and cultivation of teacher leaders within schools. Teacher leaders can then represent their grade level or department, form study groups to enhance student learning, take ownership of school issues and see themselves as part of the solution.

Providing opportunities for collaboration, recognizing teachers' strengths, and honoring teachers as experts will nurture teacher leaders and secure them as integral, valued members of the teaching staff. Practices that involve maintaining substantive relationships among teachers and principals can contribute to both teacher leadership and teacher retention.

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A Team-Centered Approach to Performance Compensation

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Abstract

One of the more controversial reform efforts, concerning efficient school systems, is teacher compensation linked with student outcomes. However, absent from the public discourse and empirical research literature concerning systemic reform is the probative value of pay structures which connect the compensation of school executives and student achievement. This paper describes the state of school executive compensation, similar performance pay plans in the Pittsburgh and Houston school districts and conditions of American education in 2010 that may enhance the appeal of school administrator compensation reform: (a) the worst economic recession since the 1930s, (b) policy responses to the recession, and (c) federally incentivized compensation reform.

Keywords

Reform, Performance Pay, Race to the Top Funds

A recent examination of several research studies pertaining to teacher performance pay revealed that compensation reforms were nearly always implemented in isolation and rarely linked to broader school improvement plans or other human resource policies within districts (Jerald, C., 2010, p. 5).

Notably absent from that research and the education discourse concerning compensation reform is substantial research concerning the efficacy of administrative pay structures influenced by student outcomes (Graves, 1995). The authors analyze what is known about the compensation of school

leaders, efforts to attach incentives to their job functions, and shed some light on whether pay incentives for school leaders are an appropriate reform for the education enterprise.

The first section of the article contains an overview of career- ladder pay structures and respective opposition to its inherent departure from the uniform salary schedule commonly used to pay teachers.

The second section contains a brief summary of the current state of school district leader salaries and an outline of high-profile school leader performance pay plans within the Houston Independent and Pittsburgh City School Districts. The third section contains a synopsis of suggested research and development strategies for school administrator performance pay.

The fourth section describes three conditions in the American education enterprise which collectively might provide favorable conditions for school administrator compensation reform: (a) the worst economic recession since the 1930s, (b) policy responses to the recession, and (c) federally incentivized compensation reform.

The fifth section provides a discussion of school administrator performance pay, its suitability and longevity as a lasting fixture in school reform given the 2010 condition of United States economy and American education.

Career Ladders: Pay for Administrative Functions

When the American public school system was declared at risk in 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) suggested measures to minimize the failure of public school systems nationally.

One contentious recommendation set forth by reform advocates was the institution of career ladders, a performance-pay plan in which educator compensation is largely dependent on an established hierarchy and employee status within an organization.

Under this format, distinct levels of responsibility and degrees of autonomy would be established within a school community and teachers with higher levels of responsibility and autonomy would receive greater compensation.

For example, novice educators would work under the supervision of more experienced teachers during pre-tenure years and subsequently be elevated to professional status. Career professional educators, teachers with the highest level of authority, would be reserved for those who use their teaching skills to enhance the work of other teachers within the organization (Holmes Group, 1986), effectuating a structure in which teachers perform administrative job functions.

According to Johnson and Papay (2009) optimal career ladders should consist of four levels. Novice educators would work in the first level under the supervision of more experienced teachers until they achieved tenure status or were terminated.

Tenured teachers would work primarily at the second level. Teachers working at the third level would be expected to mentor teachers with less skill, observe them, and assume other leadership roles within the school.

The most effective teachers would occupy the fourth level “serving full or part time as coaches, data analysts, or peer evaluators” (p.34). Similar career ladders were recently endorsed by an online community of more than 300 teachers nationally (Center for Teacher Quality, 2007). Employee differential

raises, in lieu of uniform salary increases, were met with opposition and cynicism.

Opponents of the plans forecast organization conflict, little trust of employer appraisals, diminished employee morale and concerns for a large exodus of quality teachers from the classroom into administrative roles (MacPhail-Wilcox & King, 1988; Firestone & Bader, 1992; Hatry, Greiner, & Ashford, 1994).

For decades there has been little or no agreement among researchers for a suitable use of “incentives” or “rewards” to influence educator efforts (Cibulka, 1989; Boe, 1992,; King, Swanson, Sweetland, 2003).

Nonetheless, reform efforts that connect student performance and teacher pay continue to surface (Sutton, 2007) but only recently has there been an interest in similar reforms for school administrators.

State of School Administrator Compensation

Compensation packages for school district administrators and building principals reveal different labor markets and cost drivers for generating their salaries. Superintendents and district-level administrators have recently (2010) enjoyed an escalation in overall compensation while building principals have experienced a decline in average compensation, when adjusted for inflation (Shorr, 2007).

An Educational Research Service Survey (ERS) in 2007 revealed an overall increase in superintendent salaries indicating average salary of school superintendents ranging from approximately \$103,000 in districts with 2500 students or fewer; a median of \$185,000 in districts with 25,000 students or fewer; and an average of \$250,000 in larger districts with 25,000 or more students. The same survey identified stagnant principal

salaries in which high school, middle, and elementary principals were paid \$84,515, \$80,261, and \$76,456 respectively.

In his 2007 report Goldhaber revealed little change in principal compensation methods in the period from 1994-2004 as the study affirmed that principals continue to receive additional pay for “having more experience, leading a secondary school, and working in an urban school or a larger school district” (Goldhaber, p. 1).

Given the overall lack of tenure provisions for school principals nationwide (Murray & Murray, 1999) and the large-scale reform efforts focused on enhanced student performance, school district leaders must not only develop principal compensation packages which align with school improvement goals but also provide salaries indicative of the job responsibility and risk assumed by school principals. Recent (2010) salary escalation for school district executives indicates that district boards of education have accounted for the increased responsibility and risk in compensation packages for superintendents but have yet to do the same for building principals (Blumefield, 2007).

There is disagreement among scholars surrounding the virtues and vices of administrator performance contracts. Murphy and Pimentel (1997) declared that pay for performance contracts provide school districts with a clearly defined set of goals and a thorough appraisal system which rewards school administrators for their accomplishments.

Lafee (1999) asserted that performance contracts for school administrators are symbolic in that they represent the establishment of market interventions and a performance-based culture that are consistent with recent school reform measures. Gray and

Brown (1989) indicated that the education enterprise is probably the most appropriate domain for measuring the effectiveness of performance compensation.

Nonetheless, opponents of performance pay contracts for school administrators assert that such measures may cause school administrators to focus on single performance goals to the exclusion of others; placing unreasonable pressure on subordinates for their own personal gain (Goldhaber, 2007).

Just as is the case with teacher performance pay, the work of the school administrator is multifaceted and hard to assess (Murnane & Cohen, 1986). Some believe that administrator performance pay plans may usher in morale problems at schools as they may discourage teachers involved with the daily instructional activities of students (Lafee, 1999).

Others are concerned that some school administrators will not be able to acquire the resources necessary to reach goals within performance contracts (Richardson, 1994). The 1997 national survey of school boards and superintendents revealed that over 62% of school superintendents did not believe that performance contracts would enhance student achievement (Bushweller, 1997).

Pittsburgh Public Schools Plan

The establishment of special schools with extended hours strategically positioned in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the Pittsburgh Public Schools is part of a major school improvement initiative.

In one component within the Pittsburgh Urban Leadership System for School Excellence (PULSE), eight accelerated learning academies that serve nearly 13% of the districts' students with special academic needs is also under the leadership of some of the

district's most effective school principals who are compensated under a performance pay contract.

Grounded in an effort to reward principals' hard work, enhance student performance, and attract high quality principals to traditionally low-performing schools, the performance pay contract permits the school principals an opportunity to increase their annual salary by \$2000 and earn up to \$10,000 more each year thereafter.

During the 2008-09 fiscal years 50% of the additional compensation was determined by the principal's ability to improve student learning gains whereas the remaining 50% percent of the additional pay was related to meeting other school-wide objectives and taking on additional tasks. At the beginning of the 2008-09 school year all principals in the district were placed on performance pay contracts providing each an opportunity to earn up to an additional \$12,000 annually. Principals of the accelerated learning academies remained eligible for an additional \$10,000 bonus for accepting their assignments.

The district recently received \$1,472,016 from the Teacher Incentive Fund in 2008 to sustain the program (Smydo, 2007).

Houston Independent School District

The most aggressive reform to date regarding principal performance pay has been established in the Houston Independent Schools District (HISD). Part of an effort to connect several school improvement initiatives, the Accelerated Student Progress Increasing Results and Expectations Award (ASPIRE) provides performance pay opportunities for teachers, building principals, and district-level administrators in HISD.

ASPIRE closely links teacher and school administrator compensation by

measuring identical value-added data as an indicator of student academic growth to determine the total amount of additional compensation awarded to all stakeholders. A 3.6 million dollar grant sponsored by the Broad Foundation Prize for Urban Education, which recognizes significant student gains and diminished achievement gaps among minority children is the major revenue source for the program.

Under ASPIRE principals may earn up to \$6,000 in local funding based on two measures: (a) 100% of all teachers under their leadership must earn performance pay and (b) the ratio of performance pay actually earned by teachers and the total performance pay potentially earned by teachers on the school leaders' campus.

An additional \$3000 in federal funds for principal performance pay is available for school administrators and that amount is determined based on (a) the percentage of teachers earning performance pay at their respective cost centers and (b) the school's accountability rating (Mellon, 2007).

Under the plan school district officials and area superintendents can potentially earn up to an additional \$25,000 (Mellon, 2008). The ASPIRE program contains a research component designed to ensure a systematic evaluation of the program for continuous improvement and identification of cost drivers that bring valued-added to meet the overall school improvement objectives in the HISD.

Research and Development for Principal Performance Pay

Beyond what we know about salaries for school administrators and the divergent attitudes concerning performance pay for school administrators there is little research connecting school leader compensation to leader attributes

or to overall school district objectives, namely student performance.

Goldhaber (2007) made several recommendations that might contribute to our understanding of how school principals are compensated. He proposed: (a) the collection of more detailed data on principal pay and principal quality, (b) greater experimentation with principal structures to attract talented principals into public schools, (c) development of detailed principal pay reform measures financially and politically feasible for school districts, and (d) fiscal support from outside agencies to support principal pay reform efforts.

Goldhaber (2007) also noted that the acceptance of principal performance compensation by principals may encourage a sense of camaraderie and teamwork among teachers and allay the usual fears of competition and diminished collaboration frequently associated with teacher performance pay; creating an environment of unified performance in pursuit of collective high student outcomes.

A full examination of administrator compensation should include an analysis of methods for compensating school-district executives not assigned to school buildings for as little as we know about building principal compensation, we know even less about compensation practices for central office school administrators.

Emergence of an interest in performance pay for school leaders appears to be an opportunity for taxpayers to hold school executives accountable by connecting their pay with student performance.

Furthermore, Goldhaber (2007) suggested that the adoption of performance compensation for school leaders might

positively influence the willingness of teachers to abandon traditional opposition to merit pay and embrace the measure as a team or group reward as a function of team effort. Lawler (2000) asserted that group rewards in an organization dependent upon teamwork are appropriate.

More specifically, when “people feel they can benefit from others’ good performance, they are likely to encourage and help others perform well” (p. 45), for when teacher and school administrator fortunes are intertwined the ill effects of individual competition and diminished collaboration are alleviated.

Group rewards are most effective when the “rewards, compensation, promotions, and appraisals are totally dependent” (Drucker, p. 101) upon the actions of team-member efforts in their roles. Zingheim and Schuster (2000) explained that team pay attracts people who can, and want to work effectively on teams” and if organizations want “team results, a decision to implement team pay makes practical business sense” (pp. 205-206).

Goldhaber (2007) has suggested the need for further examination of principal compensation methods nationwide as prerequisite for knowing more about the influence of school leader performance compensation measures.

His recommendations should be extended to include superintendent and district-level administrators which might facilitate a team-climate among teachers and school leaders concerning their compensation and eliminate the traditional consternation and controversy concerning performance pay, especially in periods of financial uncertainty.

Such an effort is currently underway in the HISD and the Pittsburgh Public Schools

and early reviews after two years of implementation indicate positive consensus concerning the acceptability of the program.

In addition, both Republican President George W. Bush and Democratic President Barack Obama have articulated support for sweeping compensation reforms to influence the productivity of workers in both state and federal organizations; more specifically public education.

Favorable Conditions for School Leader Pay Reforms

Global recession

The current housing crisis essentially emerged from pay for performance schemes where financial sector employees compromised quality lending and blindly assumed long-term risk to secure quantity-driven pay bonuses.

Even the most seasoned mortgage bankers were convinced that risks associated with lending to large numbers of inferior home applicants would be mitigated by the generally accepted theory that housing prices would continue to escalate. Financial managers reshaped mortgages as securities for sale in the financial markets and packaged them within several other products to minimize overall investment risk.

At first sight, these securities appeared to be an attractive high quality investment with enormous earning potential but when they began to depreciate, holders of these assets could not see the elements of the collateralized debt obligation to determine if they were worth owning and trading on the securities market.

This lack of transparency prompted skepticism and little or no trust between financial institutions initiating a massive credit freeze and the eventual demise of investment giants Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers.

The cumulative effect of this performance-pay scheme was that millions of people, especially in Arizona, California, Florida, and Nevada have lost an enormous amount of value in their homes ushering in an era of unprecedented home foreclosures. Accordingly, school board members, teacher advocates, policymakers, and researchers should continue to examine the national practices on principal performance compensation designed to attract and retain high performing school principals to bolster student performance, especially in hard-to-staff schools.

However, the genesis of the 2008 global recession, more specifically, the crisis in global financial markets and its influence on the world economy may prove to be a cautionary tale that gives pause to policymakers eager to adopt pay incentives for school administrators.

Policy responses to recession

Increasingly, and especially in the current (2010) economic recession, taxpayers, through their elected officials, are requesting greater levels of transparency and accountability for positive returns on their private investment in public education.

The extended downturn in the global economy has pressed lawmakers to make unprecedented reductions in state expenditures in an effort to provide government programs and services within budgetary constraints.

For instance, 77 teachers and four administrators, including the principal at Central Falls High School in Rhode Island, were terminated for extremely poor student performance: 55% of students proficient in reading and 7% in math (Khadaroo, 2010).

As the Kansas City school board reached a decision in March 2010 to close nearly half of its cost centers in response to a 50 million dollar revenue shortfall, U.S. school districts are considering reducing the school week to four days to decrease overhead costs. Not surprisingly, the public has generally embraced a more cost-effective use of education expenditures closely tied to school improvement goals and objectives in lieu of tax increases designed to insert additional dollars into the market for public education.

Federal incentives for educator compensation reform

During the 2008 fiscal year President George W. Bush proposed reforms within the federal budget which incentivized compensation for Civil Service employees. An extreme departure from the traditional compensation schedule with fixed pay grades and step pay increases within each grade, the reforms were designed to allow federal agency managers to differentiate employee base pay and annual salary adjustments for workers according to individual performance levels (Office of Management and Budget, 2007).

Consistent with the cyclical nature of educator performance pay policy, President Bush's effort to reform employee compensation for federal workers was followed by the re-emergence of state lawmaker-interest in merit based pay for public school teachers as a policy option for improving student performance.

Consequently, the Bush Administration provided funding to support the development of performance-based teacher and principal compensation systems in high-need schools. The Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) was designed to allow local education agency

personnel to apply and compete for 100 million dollars earmarked to help districts:

1. improve student achievement by increasing teacher and principal effectiveness;
2. reform teacher and principal compensation systems so that teachers and principals are rewarded for increases in student achievement;
3. increase the number of effective teachers teaching poor, minority, and disadvantaged students in hard-to-staff subjects, and;
4. create sustainable performance based compensation systems (TIF, 2006).

In a departure from the usual political divide concerning public education, President Barack Obama has continued to support the goals and objectives of the TIF.

In addition, his administration has set aside 4.3 billion dollars to support the Race to the Top program whereby states are required to permit districts to use student test scores to make decisions about educator compensation to compete for the federal dollars.

Funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, Race to the Top funds are intended to encourage school districts to: (a) adopt standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college, the workplace, and to compete in the global economy, (b) build data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction, (c) recruit, develop, reward, and retain effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most, and (d) turn around the lowest-achieving schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Even in the wake of short-lived teacher performance pay plans (Murnane & Cohen, 1986; Sutton & King, 2007) reformers continue to consider performance compensation as possible strategy for increasing school improvement results. States facing dwindling resources and draconian budget cuts will be incentivized to embrace some measure of school leader pay reform to secure federal funding to insure the continuity of education programs for their resident parents and children.

Discussion

In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville (2003) noted that, even in its formative stages, America has attempted to be a country in which individuals could achieve an economically viable and socially productive position and receive the residual financial rewards based solely on their individual merit and work ethic.

The use of pay for performance to influence employee productivity is an important element of capitalist free-market structures in the American business community. However, adoption of similar pays plans for public school administrators to incentivize student improvement should be considered with enough forethought to mitigate potential risk and minimize unintended consequences.

Many major corporate scandals since 1990 have occurred under an organization structure that provides ownership of the company to shareholders and control to managers of the firm, creating a conflict of interest.

Managers have recently sought more money, wealth, and personal prestige while shareholders prefer a rise in stock price increases and overall value of the firm.

Even in the aftermath of major corporate scandals at Enron, Tyco, WorldCom, etc. and the enactment of Sarbanes-Oxley Act in 2002, companies seem incapable of developing performance pay plans which are not easily manipulated by CEOs and midlevel managers. The meltdown in the financial markets in 2008 is a profound example of how performance pay policies for school administrators could potentially foster a wave of self preservation and a diminished regard for students, parents, and other public education stakeholders.

Can state lawmakers trust that school administrators will not use position, power, and influence to distort the altruistic nature of public education as they pursue additional compensation for their own benefit? Although taxpayers may be generally receptive to the adoption of pay plans which connect student outcomes and school administrator

compensation, policymakers and school officials who champion performance pay for school administrators can ill afford to have a failure of imagination and precaution about the unintended consequences of implementing incentive pay structures for individual leaders of school improvement efforts.

Then again, the ill effects of the worst economic recession since the 1930s, sweeping policy responses to the recession, and bi-partisan support in the federal government to reform school administrator compensation have forcefully reshaped the sociopolitical norms of the education establishment, creating an environment friendly to pay reform. Eighty to 90% of K-12 education expenditures are earmarked for employee compensation and the residual effects of the global recession may provide the best opportunity for policymakers and school officials to implement lasting compensation reform for school administrators.

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Branding and Positioning to Satisfy the Customer's Appetite: An Educational Case Study

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Abstract

Rebranding and positioning a school district has become critical to satisfy the “customer’s” appetite, enhance public relations, and advance consumer perceptions. A service design model provides a district with the framework to advance its position by identifying attributes and prompts to satisfy customer needs and increase student enrollment. A case study of Madison School District demonstrates how applying branding and positioning ideas can be translated from a business model to an educational setting. The district positioned itself to assess customer perceived quality, customer perceived value, customer loyalty, and finally, customer experience related to the district. These assessments, coupled with focused marketing resulted in a three-year trend of steady student growth and a 9% increase in district revenue.

Keywords

Branding, Marketing, and Service Design Model

Introduction

Today’s leaders must operate within hyper-consumerism that demands understanding of the importance and value of branding and organizational positioning to satisfy “customer” appetite. Customer expectation drives the need to establish and enhance a public relations campaign that illuminates and advances consumer perceptions.

The business sector provides insight into how public school district personnel can rebrand their product and face the perception forces that exist in the education marketplace. A useful marketing strategy known as positioning is defined as the art of creating a brand that can persuade a customer to regularly choose the product (Virtual Advisor, Inc., 2009, p. 4).

Positioning models based on consumer perceptions have proven to be invaluable tools that the business sector has used to visually portray the competitive marketplace (Desarbo et al., 2002).

The importance of building a strong brand keeps increasing as firms face stiff competition (Low & Lamb, 2000; Narisette, 1998). Because consumer brand perceptions influence long-term business and customer relations (Fournier, 1998), building strong brand perceptions has been and continues to be a strategic priority in the private business sector (Morris, 1999).

This article turns to the business industry for a model that uses service design to provide a core service and reinforce a brand.

At the same time, this article explores how schools can use this framework to advance a position by identifying attributes and prompts. An attribute is a distinctive quality exemplified by the brand, while a prompt is a clue associated with an attribute or distinctive quality.

Finally, this article explores an example of a school district that successfully applied the ideas and underlying theory of branding and positioning to satisfy customer needs and increase student enrollment.

Model and Framework

Branding is the name attached to a product or service. A brand represents a collection of feelings and perceptions about quality, image, lifestyle, and status.

The brand creates a perception in the customer's mind that the branded company is unmatched in the marketplace, thereby playing into crazed consumerism. Understanding the

transformation from a service to a brand is critical in creating market advantage by promoting identification of a recognizable icon, which leads to the emotional connection(s) of customers with the brand concept.

This transformation from a service to a brand requires first understanding consumer needs and wants to determine service design. Next service design is translated into a core service.

A core service is the product you provide your customers, for example, General Motors (GM) cars. The core service is differentiated to stand out against competitors through a marketing strategy designed to build trust, affection, loyalty, and reputation. These efforts translate into a branded service.

This model assumes that service design is illuminated through key attributes reflecting consumer needs, which define the core service. Marketing through positioning prompts evokes the customer to use the specific brand.

Service Design: Position Marketing Attributes

The attributes or benefits of a business position represent the values of the service and create consumer trust in the brand (Virtual Advisor, Inc., 2009). During the service design phase of branding, two positioning attributes should be considered:

- Relevance to the customer. The customer feels connection between the brand and the customer's normal activities, creating a greater need for the service.
- Promised backed. The customer believes and trusts the service message.

Service Design Clues

Clues are designed to work in tandem with attributes to position the brand and should incorporate the following elements:

- Clear and focused message. The customer sees and reads intentionally orchestrated clues that communicate the branding message; taglines are also a useful tool in transmitting the service message.
- Name. The customer remembers a short and distinctive name.
- Logo. The customer recognizes distinctive shapes represented by the logo.
- Colors. The customer is signaled by identification with the brand through the use of a repetitious color scheme.
- Imagery. Imagery appears to have a powerful influence on branding perceptions (Hayes, Alford, & Capella, 2008). These researchers concluded that perceptions can be influenced by the association of brand with images of the product.

Service Design: Marketing through Positioning Prompts

Positioning prompts also come into play during the Service Design phase of branding. In marketing through positioning prompts, different types of prompts can be associated with a brand and that brand's attributes.

A prompt signifies a clue that is associated with an attribute or distinctive quality, and it is important to select prompt(s) to evoke the message you want to communicate to promote your service. According to Virtual

Advisor, Inc. (2009), the following prompts should be considered:

- Quality. Perception of quality—one of the most important elements for a brand. Quality can be combined with other prompts.
- Value. The value added by the service delivered. For example, when selling a car, GM delivers bumper to bumper coverage for five years.
- Relational. Generates customer interest and resonates well with future customers.
- Rivalry Position. Compares one business service with another business service, creating the element of competition between two rival services.
- Emotional. Uses a need or a desire base to connect with the customer in an emotional manner.

The intentional use of attributes and cues coupled with prompts can have powerful and lasting impressions on the customer—in terms of both memory and emotions.

Recognition, familiarity, and integrity become interwoven with the brand. Because the customer is captured, the outcome is the purchase or selection of the brand. The customer base grows, intentionally and strategically, one customer at a time.

A case study of the Madison School District demonstrates how these applied ideas and underlying theory of branding and positioning can be translated from a business to an education setting.

Case Study: Madison School District

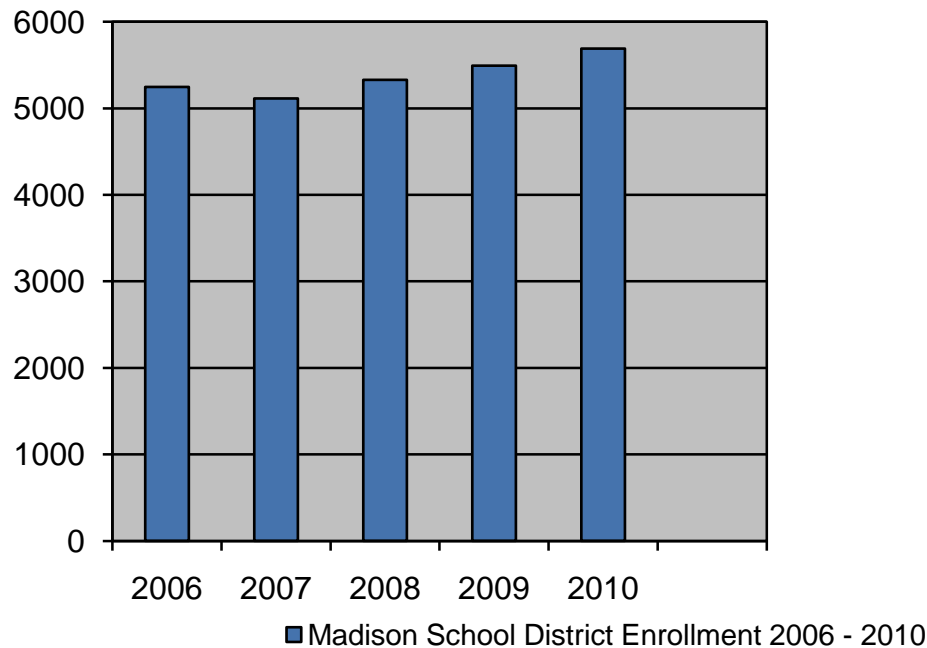
The Madison School District (www.ms38.org) is located within the urban area of Phoenix, Arizona.

Founded in 1890, the district has been renowned for its rich history of high achievement among its students in grades preschool through eight. Being a top achieving district has been Madison's core service. However, despite its rich history and high student achievement, Madison began noticing a

trend of declining student enrollment and negative media coverage in 2007.

That year the district launched a rebranding effort with the goal of reversing these negative trends. Over the three-year period after the rebranding campaign began, district enrollment increased from 5,112 students to 5,688 students—equating to \$2.8 million or a 9% increase in district revenue. This trend in district enrollment can be seen in the following figure (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Rebranding of Madison school district: 2006-2010.



These data reflected a three-year trend of steady growth in a land-locked urban area in which all other surrounding public school districts experienced sharp declines in student enrollment. Simultaneously, Madison was able to maintain its core service of being one of the

top-achieving districts in Arizona and to increase positive media exposure of its accomplishments. To achieve these goals, Madison leaders applied a service design model that used branding and positioning techniques that identified their customer needs and

delivered results that translated into increased enrollment.

Rebranding Begins: Identifying Customer Needs

District personnel implemented the rebranding strategy to build a brand commitment to “Madison School District” and to regain customer loyalty evidenced by increased student enrollment and reversed negative media coverage.

Thus, the district positioned itself to assess the customer perceived quality, customer perceived value, customer loyalty, and, finally, the customer experience related to the district.

In a review of parent survey and demographic data as well as qualitative data gathered by teachers and principals, district officials realized that when parents as customers had the opportunity to choose, they chose schools with a record for:

- Advancing student achievement.
- Employing and retaining caring teachers and staff.
- Demonstrating evidence of quality teaching.
- Providing a safe environment.
- Expanding student access to extracurricular opportunities.

Through e-mail, letters, and public statements at board meetings, the district’s parents communicated two additional factors that would influence their selection of Madison as the district of choice for their children.

The first factor was to provide the option for students to select a more traditional

education experience. The traditional experience included student uniforms, direct instruction, a parent volunteer compact, and daily homework. The district officials listened to the target group and developed a traditional school. In 2007 the traditional school began with 179 students, and by the fall of 2009, it had doubled its enrollment; as of spring of 2010, the traditional school reached its full capacity of 380 students.

The second factor parents communicated was the demand for a foreign language program for kindergarten students at one of the district’s declining enrollment schools. This program was designed to be integrated into the regular school day to increase the number of students enrolled in kindergarten at the target school. It allowed students to receive Spanish instruction three times per week.

In the first year of implementation of the program (from August 2008 to August 2009), kindergarten enrollment at the target school grew from 42 students to 100—an increase of over 100%. Both of these programs, the foreign language program and the traditional school, were initiated as a direct result of the district’s rebranding efforts and are noteworthy in outlining the rebranding process.

Logo and Tag Line

The rebranding process for the Madison School District centered on key principles including logo design and tag line, color scheme, imagery, and marketing strategies. Madison started with the development of a new logo, incorporating the following key principles of design:

- Simple shapes and strong colors work best.
- Repetitive design is crucial to building a strong brand.

Thus, district leaders selected design elements—including fonts, shapes, and colors (red and blue)—for its marketing efforts and consistently adhered to these elements in its logo, newsletter, mailers, flyers, and website.

The logo was tested among current and potential customers to determine what it communicated about Madison School District.

The statements that captured the spirit of the logo were: “bold,” “strong,” and “a presence,” which connected to the district’s tag line—“You will be amazed.” Remember that current and potential customers drive rebranding. And in the case of Madison, the district’s customers ultimately helped reshape district perception.

The rebranding needed to leverage a compelling truth (attribute) that would connect with the target group. The tag line “You will be amazed” emphasized outstanding student achievement, caring teaching staff, and extracurricular opportunities.

The core service— academic excellence—was communicated. Quality became the prompt to advance the district brand, which was expressed by the tag line (attribute). To see some samples of the district’s design elements and rebranding strategies, visit the Madison School District website at www.ms38.org.

Marketing: Material Development

The rebranding process also requires the development of materials that reinforce the tag

line and communicate with target customers. In the case of the Madison School District, the design of its marketing materials needed to communicate the district’s message of “amazing.”

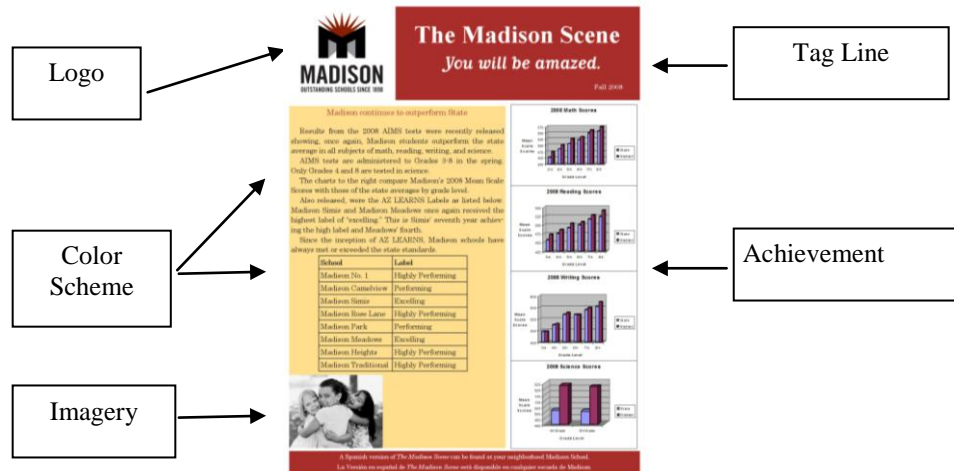
The careful selection of photographs that exhibited district customers (students) having fun and enjoying the product (school) was critical in telling the district story. Also, a consistent look and feel, for example, with the color scheme of marketing materials, was critical to provide a unified message.

The district applied some basic psychological principles to its newsletter layout. As the district explained, “We are in the business of teaching and learning.” So think about how learners read: from left to right and top to bottom. Thus, the district strategically placed key symbols, pictures, and tag lines within its marketing materials to communicate the district’s story or brand. For example:

- Middle center: district name and tag line
- Lower-left corner: picture (imagery) of students having fun
- Right column: graphs of academic achievement (quality)

The eyes move in these directions and connect the message to construct a conclusion. Readers scan quickly and draw conclusions. The following figure (Figure 2) demonstrates the layout of the Madison school newsletter.

Figure 2. The layout of the Madison school district newsletter.



Brand Experience: Orchestrating Clues and Customer Touchpoints

In addition to basic marketing strategies such as logos, tag lines, and color schemes, the customer brand experience is influenced by environmental factors, referred to as clues, and customer interactions, referred to as “touchpoints” (Marks, 2004).

Both clues and touchpoints affect the customer’s emotions, which are the most powerful connectors to branding an organization (Marks, 2004). Therefore, they must be carefully orchestrated to communicate the correct message that will satisfy customer needs.

For example, clues emitted and associated with things—sights, smells, sounds, and textures—stir the customer’s emotions. Many times a customer’s mood is influenced before he or she even arrives at the door of an office. How did the school parking lot look? A clean parking lot that is easy to enter and exit communicates that people within the

organization care and are organized; therefore, the school must have quality teaching.

When the customer enters the front office, what do they see, smell, and hear that communicates the branding message? Each of these examples provides an opportunity for organization leaders to communicate and showcase the brand.

To enhance the customer experience, the Madison School District personnel considered the curb appeal of the district offices and schools. Was the appearance clean? Did vegetation outside each office or school look healthy? First impressions built a sense of belonging and value, which communicated that the district cared about children and the environment for learning.

Another rebranding technique district personnel used was to ensure that clues emitted by employees resulted in positive experiences for customers. This can be the more difficult aspect of the rebranding process (Marks, 2004).

Employees must believe in the brand and be able to communicate it to anyone who inquires at a district, school, or classroom level. Employees need to be aware of their choice of words, tone of voice, level of enthusiasm, appearance, and body language.

In addition, employees must connect emotionally with customers to build customer loyalty to the district brand (Marks, 2005). The strongest emotional connectors include: authenticity, generosity, kindness, honesty, personal relationships, and innovations.

Rebranding a school district is a labor-intensive service that can only be as strong as the people performing the services (Marks, 2004). Therefore, in some cases, the district leaders reassigned key employees in front offices who lacked effective customer service skills.

District leadership recognized the importance of training employees to sell its brand of service through “services branding.” Leaders recognized the importance of reinforcing the branding message by orchestrating the clues the customers would encounter because customers always have ‘an experience’ when they interact with an organization (Master Sun Consulting, 2008).

If touchpoints are opportunities to interact with the customer, then designing customer touchpoints with emotion is also pivotal in rebranding campaigns (Marks, 2004). Once the Madison School District personnel created an emotional experience for customers through a brand strategy, the district continued to deliver on that promise through all relevant customer touchpoints (Marks, 2005). Following are a few ideas Madison leaders used to add touchpoints to the rebranding campaign:

- Create a sense of community, a community with common interests, language, values, and purpose.
- Bring customers together in an innovative way, for example, by using Twitter, Facebook, websites, electronic newsletters, and local events.
- Because relationships are about personal, one-on-one interactions and connections, always offer the opportunity for human contact. Avoid using voice mail and excessive e-mail.

Other Marketing Strategies

The district’s rebranding message to the target audience required ongoing monitoring, marketing, and periodic adjustments to leverage the district’s resources for greatest results.

Initially, Madison leadership tried a variety of advertising methods, from movie theaters to marquee signs and school buses. Through internal surveys that were conducted with new student enrollments, leaders determined that only 22.8% of the target audience actually received their messages through the local newspaper, which produced the best results.

The second most effective method was the district newsletter, which reached 22.7% of the target audience by being directly mailed to all the households within and outside the district boundaries.

And the third most effective method was word of mouth, through a friend or a neighbor, which reached 17.2% of the target audience. These discoveries would not have occurred if the district personnel did not continually monitor the changes through survey

marketing methods to focus on those techniques and strategies that produced the best results.

Another key to Madison's marketing and rebranding efforts was the use of one designated employee referred to as the Public Informational Officer.

The key was to communicate the district's branding message using a single point of contact. This strategic move resulted in hiring a person who was able to build relationships with news reporters and work in a cooperative manner to receive valuable news coverage that promoted the rebranding efforts at no cost to the district.

Communicating student academic success reinforced the district's core business of academic excellence. Since 2007, over 340 articles have been published about Madison in the Phoenix area newspaper.

Not only is this free publicity, but it is remarkable given the competition for coverage the district faced in the Phoenix area. Arizona is a state with over 250 school districts. Many districts avoid hiring an individual for this role. In Madison's case, the position more than paid for itself in student growth.

Avoiding Pitfalls

Consider some tips for avoiding pitfalls before initiating a branding project such as the one that the Madison School District initiated:

- Understand customers' perspectives. Create a service generating interest and energy around the organization. For example, if Madison schools did not produce high academic success among its students, its rebranding campaign would have failed. Efforts would have crumbled along with the school district.
- Assign branding as everyone's responsibility. If the district leaders did not consciously assign branding as everyone's responsibility, then all the rebranding efforts would have fallen short. Schooling is a labor-intensive business requiring each individual's complete involvement. This critical step requires adjustments in employee job descriptions and evaluations and appropriate training based upon employees' roles and responsibilities within the touchpoint schema.

Conclusion

The strength of the model and framework for the branding and positioning of a district is the provision of a structure that can guide leadership in decision-making processes to consider customer needs, type of service design, core service, and the customer experience. Rebranding is a time-consuming, labor-intensive endeavor potentially producing rewarding results.

Every district has something uniquely branding the district. The Madison School District leadership set out to illuminate "quality" using a variety of attributes to position the district.

In the final analysis, the district accomplished its branding campaign to increase positive publicity and student enrollment. Since 2007 student enrollment has increased for three consecutive years.

As the Madison School District learned and this case study demonstrates, the "key link in the social sector is brand reputation—built upon tangible results and emotional share of heart—so that potential supporters believe not only in your mission, but in your capacity to deliver on that mission" (Collins, 2005).

Author Biography

Tim Ham is currently the superintendent of an urban school district in Phoenix, AZ. He has been in the education field for the past 25 years and earned his doctorate in educational leadership from Nova Southeastern University in 1999. Email: tham@msd38.org

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Toward Excellence With Equity: An Emerging Vision for Closing the Achievement Gap

by Ronald Ferguson

Reviewed by
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One of the most critical and perplexing educational issues of the last forty plus years has been the achievement of excellence with equity. Reaching excellence in educational outcomes has nearly been the exclusive property of suburban homogeneous high socioeconomic communities, although many schools strive for such goals and periodically demonstrate some degree of attainment. Reaching full equity in closing achievement gaps has also eluded nearly every community including those with a long standing aim to eliminate such gaps.

This book examines the importance, the urgency and how success can be realized for excellence and equity.

Ronald Ferguson has been studying the factors which contribute to racial disparities in academic performance for more than a decade. He is the faculty co-chair and director of the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University, as well as directing school improvement projects. He has reviewed and distilled the research and pulled insights from scholars and practitioners.

At the end of the chapter entitled, “A Diagnostic Analysis of Black-White GPA Disparities in Shaker Heights, Ohio,” the author concludes:

In conclusion the present study finds no clear evidence that black students in Shaker Heights are any more opposed to achievement, any less satisfied with school, or any less interested in their studies than their white counterpart—especially those who have similar family backgrounds.

Even so, the black-white GPA gap among seventh-to-eleventh graders in Shaker Heights is roughly one letter grade and the difference among seniors on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) for college entrance is 200 points.

The conclusion most in line with the evidence is that skills and learning techniques, not oppositional culture, should be the focus of efforts to close the achievement gap. (page 191)

A survey of students by Ed Excel was part of the Shaker Heights study which has still expanded to other school districts—fifteen at the time of publication of this book. The Minority Student Achievement Network, a collaboration among school districts, convened a research advisory council which included the author to help clarify causes and effects. The results from these districts were similar to the Shaker Heights’ findings. These studies led to the author’s development of the Tripod Project

for School Improvement. The three tripod legs are: (1) teachers' content knowledge, (2) pedagogy and (3) teacher-student relationships. The actual data from school districts exposes the harsh realities of school life in addressing such complex hypotheses like "acting white."

The findings from this additional study led to four recommendations for policy and practice: (1) assume no motivational differences (in spite of observable differences); (2) address specific skill deficits; (3) supply ample encouragement routinely (according to what students regard as encouraging); and (4) provide access to resources and learning experiences (more to those who need more).

As an economist, Ron Ferguson rigorously investigated the learning gap between Blacks and Whites from the 1940's onward. World War II created new employment opportunities for young Black males which continued at a slow pace for the next twenty years as Blacks moved out of the South to higher paying jobs elsewhere. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960's accelerated the educational attainment of Blacks which had the corresponding effect of increasing wages.

However, by the middle 1970's this progress stalled and among younger Blacks the wage gap with Whites actually started to grow as did the academic skills gap. The rationale for this phenomenon can be found in the employment shift towards those with more skills and to a certain degree reduced Federal pressure on affirmative action.

The 1980's were a time of extraordinary progress for all high school students, especially black students. The author's scholarly investigations into the research findings of others reveals that positive changes in family characteristics explains the gains for white students, but

only a very small aspect of the improvements for black students. The research suggests that black students in particular benefited from smaller elementary class sizes and racial desegregation that occurred in the 1970's.

In addition, black students overall increased their achievement levels with the more-demanding coursework and accountability of the early 1980's and beyond (*Nation at Risk* and all the subsequent reports). This finding has since secured credibility with the recognition that students are not going to do well on examinations of high level content without exposure to such material.

The author's conclusions are bold, including his contention that "basic skill gaps among white, black and Hispanic children, as measured by standardized test scores, have narrowed substantially over the past 30 years" (p. 75). Acknowledging that "large gaps remain," (p. 75) he goes on to propose setting high standards and then doing what it takes to achieve them. That means among other things a "more supportive popular culture" and "a society that provides the necessary resources and incentives to keep it all on track" (p. 75).

The author believes that society will supply the necessary resources as a means to reduce racial inequality and quotes Christopher Jencks coeditor of *Black-White Test Score Gap*:

"Reducing the test-score gap is probably both necessary and sufficient for substantially reducing racial inequality in educational attainment and earnings. Changes in education and earnings would in turn help reduce racial differences in crime, health, and family structure, although we do not know how large these effects would be" (p.4).

Ferguson continues to quote Jencks is even more specifically and clearly with this statement: "If racial equality is America's goal,

reducing the black-white test-score gap would probably do more to promote this goal than any other strategy that commands broad public support” (p.3).

Author Ferguson, after studying the historical issue of racial inequality in terms of economic disparity concluded that much of that gap was caused by an educational gap. After studying the educational research and working with practitioners, he dismisses the significance of most of the common explanations for the black-white achievement gap.

Instead, the educational achievement gap can be eliminated by eliminating the basic skills gap.

Over time, eliminating this gap in basic skills mastery will wipe out racial inequality: “... efforts to improve basic skills need to become central to our strategic understanding of how to achieve racial equality in the United State” (p.3).

The historical research supports this thesis. The chain of logic is nicely articulated. The real test of this hypothesis will be the

degree to which economic racial equality narrows as the basic skills gap narrows.

Various promising educational programs and practices are presented, such as high quality preschool or the Marva Collins approach. Yet, the author does not claim to have discovered the magic elixir. He simply has identified the target—raise basic skill achievement for minorities.

This is a book with sufficient research content and practical advice for a variety of readers.

Policy makers will find a plethora of ideas for laws, regulations, board policies or programs to support.

Educational leaders can arm themselves with the knowledge to convince others to tackle the achievement gap.

When enough people understand the issues and make a legitimate effort to wipe out the basic skills gaps, we will put the theories in the volume to their real test, i.e. to what extent, does racial inequality exist.

Reviewer Biography

Art Stellar, currently the superintendent of Burke County Public Schools in North Carolina, has served as a superintendent for 22 years. He also served as assistant superintendent in Shaker Heights, Ohio when that district launched its drive to close the achievement gap. E-mail: artstellar@yahoo.com

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Mission and Scope, Upcoming Themes, Author Guidelines & Publication Timeline

The *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* is a refereed, blind-reviewed, quarterly journal with a focus on research and evidence-based practice that advance the profession of education administration.

Mission and Scope

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

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

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8. Turning Around Low-Performing Schools and Districts
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Submissions

Length of manuscripts should be as follows: Research and evidence-based practice articles between 1,800 and 3,800 words; commentaries between 1,600 and 3,800 words; book and media reviews between 400 and 800 words. Articles, commentaries, book and media reviews, citations and references are to follow the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, latest edition. Permission to use previously copyrighted materials is the responsibility of the author, not the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*.

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