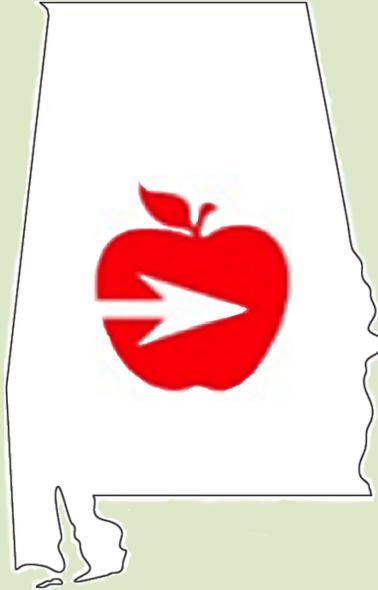# THE ALABAMA JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Alabama Association of Professors of Educational Leadership

The Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership

Editor
Tonya Conner

Troy University Dothan Campus

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The **Alabama Association of Professors of Educational Leadership (AAPEL)** is a non-profit professional society organized for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a collegial and collaborative organization in the State of Alabama. In addition, this organization exists for the purpose of:

1. Promoting continuous dialog among Educational Leadership Professors;

2. Exploring and promoting research, thus making distinctive contributions to the field;

3. Recognizing and examining strengths and weaknesses in Educational Leadership Programs,

4. Establishing informational and professional linkages with the State Department of Education and the Alabama Commission on Higher Education; and

5. Perpetuating a positive vision for Alabama Schools and other educational institutions

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https://sites.google.com/site/aapelorg/home

Note from the Editor

Tonya Conner, Ed. D.
Troy University, Dothan

Welcome to Volume III of the *Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership* (AJEL). AJEL uses a peer reviewed, triple-blind process upheld by the Alabama Association of Professors of Educational Leadership (AAPEL). AAPEL is celebrating the continued growth of AJEL with enthusiasm and is now indexed with Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) at https://eric.ed.gov/ and has acquired the ISSN 2473-8115. Volume III includes a variation of manuscripts stemming from a broad theme: Leadership Matters.

The first article of AJEL begins with Gurley and Mendiola regarding the structure of the Instructional Leadership program including expectations, strengths, and challenges within Alabama. As you continue to read, you will learn how Larkin shares her ideas on how to move Alabama into progressive funding of students, not units. Next, Cobia, Smith, and Wood share their Leadership Development Model for Shelby County Schools. Young, Allen, and Warfield discuss online/hybrid models to possibly increase student enrollment for higher education. Finally, Lewis, Asberry, DeJarnett, and King provide insight on shaping school culture.

As we move forward, the continuation of various manuscripts for publication consideration is requested. We encourage submissions from novice and experienced faculty as well as students. The Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership is a refereed journal using a triple-blind review process.

I would like to acknowledge the many people supporting the continuation of AJEL. First, thank you to all of the authors for submitting manuscripts. I encourage you to continue presenting your work for consideration. In addition, an enormous thanks to the manuscript reviewers. Many reviewers took on the task to evaluate several manuscripts and provide insightful feedback to the authors. Furthermore, thank you to the AAPEL Editorial Board and AAPEL Advisory Board. I look forward to gaining momentum as AJEL and AAPEL provide continued opportunity for researchers to share their work and provide another avenue to bridge theory to practice. Finally, to Jim Berry, Ted Creighton, and Brad Bizzell with NCPEA Publications, AJEL would literally not be possible without your direction, support, and publication platform. To the readers, I hope the content will provide you with a deeper awareness of the many features of Instructional Leadership, Teacher Leadership, and best practices within the field of education through AAPEL's continuous dedication to offer insightful and reflective research. Enjoy!

The Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership

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Instructional Leadership Programs in Alabama:
Results of a Survey of Alabama Association of Professors of Educational Leadership

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Abstract

During a collegial conversation between faculty members who attended the annual fall conference of the Alabama Association of Professors of Educational Leadership, faculty members posed many questions about how the Instructional Leadership programs for which they worked compared across the state. In the winter of 2015, researchers surveyed faculty members from each of the 13 universities in Alabama that offer certification programs (Class A, Class AA) in Instructional Leadership. Survey results provide an overview of program structures across institutions and served to compile the answers to many of the questions posed during the faculty discussion. Faculty respondents provided feedback regarding program structure and expectations as well as perception data relative to program strengths and challenges. While many features of Instructional Leadership programs are similar, notably, structure and expectations of the residency required for the Class A certificate vary widely across institutions. Faculty perception data point to various program strengths, especially whichever delivery model (online v. face-to-face) their particular program has adopted. Implications for repeated survey administration are presented, as well as potential topics for future inquiry.

Key words: educational leadership programming, preparation of educational leaders, leadership program comparison, leadership program survey, university-school partnerships

During the 2007-2008 academic year, all 13 university-based educational leadership programs in Alabama redesigned their degree programs in compliance with a directive from the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) in order to align programming to the eight, newly adopted *Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders* (ALSDE, 2016). This mandate to redesign all principal preparation programs across the state, issued by the ALSDE, was consistent with many states across the United States during the time (Browne-Ferrigno, 2011). Such mandated program redesigns frequently required institutions of higher education to establish and engage in active partnerships with school districts in their service areas in terms of program design, development of field-based experiences for candidates, and other critical program components, in the interest of making principal preparation programs more relevant and responsive to actual conditions in the field (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Kamler, Szpara, Dornisch, Goubeaud, Levine, & Brechtel, 2009; Martin, Ford, Murphy, & Muth, 1998; Martin & Papa, 2008; Smith, 2003; Whitaker, King, & Vogel, 2004).

Prior to the mandated redesign, many universities in Alabama offered an option for educational leadership students to gain building-level instructional leadership (Class A) certification in Alabama either through completing a traditional master's degree program, or by completing a reduced-hour (typically 18 credits) certification-only program, often referred to colloquially as the administrative "add-on" program. These add-on programs were open to educators who already held a master's degree in an educational area, but who wanted to add the instructional leadership credential to their certification.

With the redesign directive, however, add-on certification programs in instructional leadership across Alabama were discontinued. All Alabama students who sought Class A certification in instructional leadership were required to earn a master's degree. For many students, this resulted in earning a second master's degree in education.

On July 1, 2014, ALSDE notified universities that they again had the option of developing and offering reduced-hour programs (18-credit minimum), which would result in building-level certification (Class A) in instructional leadership. Like the redesigned master's programs, however, these new, reduced-hour option (RHO) programs, were still required to address all eight of the *Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders* (ALSDE, 2016) in terms of course content and assessment of candidate proficiency. While a few universities developed such reduced-hour certification options nearly over night, others worked over the 2014-2015 timeframe to redesign and rearrange courses and program assessments in order to address this new option and to gain ALSDE approval.

Naturally, many changes have come about in educational leadership programming throughout the state in response to this new, reduced-hour option for certification. Alabama Association of Professors of Educational Leadership (AAPEL) faculty members and their colleagues in their respective universities have performed program-wide redesign in an effort to offer this new reduced-hour certification option to potential students. Courses were realigned and rearranged, syllabi rewritten, assessments reworked; educational leadership programs throughout the state changed substantially for virtually all member institutions.

Purpose of the Study

During the Fall 2015 Conference of AAPEL, faculty from nearly all 13 educational leadership programs was present in a leadership/planning meeting. Naturally, conversation ensued wherein members began asking one another about the features and aspects of their new and existing

programs. At first, the group discussed and compared various features of the new reduced-hour program options being developed and offered, but soon the focus broadened to include degree programs, as well. Consequently, questions such as, "What programs are you offering?" and "How many credits does your program require to complete the various degrees?" emerged. It was out of a desire to gather the answers to these questions, and to compile them in one place, that the authors of this report developed and distributed a survey in the months following this meeting. This survey was administered to educational leadership a faculty member representative(s) from each of the 13 universities in Alabama that offer educational leadership programs. To our knowledge, no information regarding the status of educational leadership programs in Alabama has been compiled since the June 2010 report *School Leadership Change Emerging in Alabama: Results of the Governor's Congress on School Leadership* conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board.

   Surveys were distributed during the fall 2015 term, and were completed by January 2016. The results from this survey are reported in this document and offer a sort of "State of the State" report regarding what is happening in instructional leadership programs across Alabama. In this report, survey results are presented in sections per program (e.g., master's, RHO certification, educational specialist). Themes resulting from the analysis of open-ended question responses from faculty respondents are included in a later section of the report. We begin by presenting the names of all participating institutions.

Participating Institutions

During the fall of 2015, Alabama had 13 university-based, graduate programs offering masters and educational specialist degree programs, as well as the reduced-hour certification-only program. (Six of these 13 institutions also offer advanced, doctoral degree programs, but the focus of the survey, and of this report, is on educational leadership certification programs only.) Faculty from the 13 institutions are all represented in AAPEL and at least one faculty representative from each of the institutions participated by completing the survey. Institution names are listed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Alabama Association of Professors of Educational Leadership Member Institutions

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  Alabama Agricultural & Mechanical University[a]

  Alabama State University[ac]

  Auburn University[c]

  Auburn University of Montgomery

  Jacksonville State University

  Samford University[bc]

  Troy University (Dothan and Phenix City campuses)

University of Alabama[c]

University of Alabama at Birmingham[c]

University of Montevallo

University of North Alabama

University of South Alabama[c]

University of West Alabama

Note. [a]Institution also member of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. [b]Private institution. [c]Doctoral degree granting institution.

Methodology

The authors developed the survey to include 71 questions. Survey questions consisted of a mixture of formats including short-answer, multiple choice, and matrix type questions inquiring about program such features as number and type of faculty, credit hour requirements, length of time to completion, structure of the program residency. The final six survey items were open-ended questions designed to explore respondent perceptions of strengths and challenges of their specific educational leadership programs. Survey questions were entered into Qualtrics® survey software website (see www.qualtrics.com) which provided a link to a dedicated survey website.

Approximately 10 days prior to survey distribution, the authors sent an email to all individual AAPEL faculty members, announcing the upcoming distribution of the survey and requesting their participation. The email explained that only a single response was required from each participating institution, and that the survey might be completed either by a single designated faculty member representative, or by a group of faculty members in collaboration.

The survey link was distributed in mid-November, 2015. After three weeks, authors sent reminder emails to institutions that had not completed. This reminder email was repeated during the first week of January to the remaining few institutions who had not yet responded. All institutions (100%) completed the survey by mid-January, 2016. Of the 13 responding institutions, nine surveys were completed by a program chair or coordinator, three were completed by an individual faculty member, and one survey was completed collaboratively. The Institutional Review Board at both authors' institutions approved the survey, as well as the process of survey distribution.

Results

Results of the survey are summarized below. The survey results are reported by degree/program type (i.e., master's, reduced-hour option, and educational specialist). Faculty perceptions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the identified programs follow. It is important to note that, in some cases, the total number of programs appears to be reported as 14, rather than 13. This is due to the fact that one institution hosts programs on two separate campuses. In general, we tried to report this as a single program. In some cases, however, it will be reported as a 14th program.

Faculty Number and Type

Programs and institutions vary in size, and thus, retain various numbers and types of educational leadership faculty. Table 2 presents information across institutions regarding the number and types of educational leadership faculty employed.

Master's Degree Programs

There are 13 institutions that host educational leadership programs that award a master's degree upon program completion. Of these 13, seven programs are delivered face-to-face, five programs are offered in a blended format where some classes are face-to-face, and some meet online. Three educational leadership master's programs in

Table 2.

Institutions Reporting Number and Type of Faculty Members

Type of Faculty Member	Number of Faculty Members per Institution							
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	>6
Full-Time Tenure Track			2	5	3		1	2
Full-Time Non-Tenure Track		5	1	1				
Part-Time/Adjunct Faculty[a]	3	4	3	1	0	1	1	1

Note. [a]Total of 14 institutions reported as one university hosts educational leadership programs on two separate campuses.

Alabama are offered 100% online. In the fall of 2015, approximately 500 students in Alabama were enrolled in master's degree programs in educational leadership, with programs ranging in size from 8 to 85. Students in master's degree programs are required to complete an average of 33 credit hours, and are admitted on a rolling basis (i.e., each semester) at nine of the 13 universities, with the remaining four admitting annually, following the cohort model. In order to demonstrate competency in the eight *Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders* (ALSDE, 2016), 11 universities require a comprehensive exam upon program completion, with the remaining two requiring a capstone project. Students typically complete the master's degree programs in four to five semesters, though at two universities, six semesters are required.

The greatest discrepancies in the data emerged when we examined what faculty members reported regarding their master's students completing the required 10-day residency. According to the Alabama Administrative Code (Alabama State Board of Education, 2015), the completion of a 10-day residency in educational leadership is required by the ALSDE for any student who

applies for Class A (building-level) certification in instructional leadership. When first written, the administrative code required that all certification candidates complete these 10 days consecutively. Over the years, however, this requirement has been relaxed somewhat through the ASLDE, and specifically through the state superintendent's office. In 2010, then State Superintendent of Education Joseph B. Morton distributed a memo relaxing the consecutive aspects of the 10-day residency, stating specifically that universities and students' school districts may work cooperatively to create residency experiences which are non-consecutive, and in fact, may be completed during the summer months when the costs of such a residency experience would be much less (J. Morton, personal communication, September 17, 2010). The residency requirements were further relaxed in September of 2015 with changes to the Alabama Administrative Code that allows for "uninterrupted service in an active school with students present for the equivalent of ten full days" (p. 3-3-202).

Results of the AAPEL survey indicated that the 10-day residency in instructional leadership across 13 institutions represents, today, several approaches. Three institutions have retained the 10-consecutive-days model within either the fall or spring semester. Similarly, three institutions require the residency be completed during either the fall or spring semester, but do not require the days be consecutive. Three institutions require that the 10 days be completed at some time during the summer term. And three institutions allow the 10 days to be completed in any combination, during any school term, so that all 10 days are completed by the end of the program. One institution reported that their model was different or "other" than those models described above. Due to constraints in survey structure and administration, however, a fuller explanation of this "other" model was not provided. Figure 1 illustrates how the various
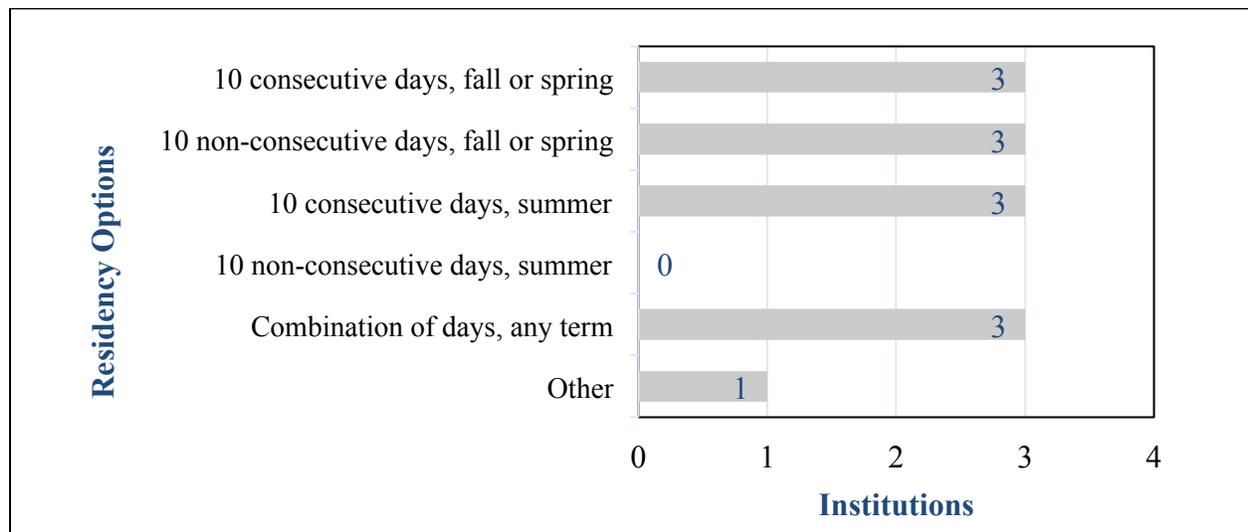

Figure 1. Ten-day residency requirements for master's students are represented by a minimum of five different models.

university programs reported their 10-day residency requirements for master's degree programs in instructional leadership.

Reduced-Hour Option (RHO) Programs

The AAPEL survey also asked respondents to respond to questions about the RHO (minimum 18 credit hours), certification-only programs leading to Class A certification in instructional leadership offered at their institutions. As mentioned above, the option for institutions to provide a RHO certification program was reauthorized as of July 1, 2014. At the discretion of the individual institutions, but only with the approval of ALSDE personnel, the RHO was to be offered to students who already held a master's degree in an instructional or instructional support area, who already held a Class A certificate in that instructional or support area, and who had a minimum of three years' professional teaching experience.

Results from the survey regarding the RHO programs indicated that, by fall 2015, all 13 institutions have exercised this option and provide the certification program. Five institutions deliver an RHO program in a face-to-face format, four deliver instruction in a blended fashion, and four in an entirely online format. There were 243 students enrolled in RHO programs across the state during the fall of 2015. RHO program size ranged up to 44 students, with a mean across institutions of 22 students per program. With the minimum required course credits for the RHO set by the ALSDE at 18 credits, RHO programs across the state range from 18-24 hours of required coursework. Ten institutions admit students on a rolling basis, while three institutions retain a cohort model, admitting only one time per year. Ten universities require either a written or oral (or both) comprehensive examination of their students at the end of the RHO program. Seven require a capstone project to demonstrate proficiency in the *Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders* (ALSDE, 2016). Students at seven schools typically complete the RHO program in three semesters. Four schools reported that their RHO programs took four semesters to complete, while a single institution reported that their RHO program typically took five semesters to complete.

Information reported regarding the 10-day residency requirements present in the RHO programs was even more discrepant than in the master's degree programs. Three universities require 10 consecutive days during the fall or spring term, two require 10 non-consecutive days during the fall or spring. Two institutions require that 10 consecutive days be completed during the summer term, while three others allow any combination of 10 days of residency be completed across any term. Similar to the master's degree programs, other models that were not described by the survey are in operation in three of the institutions. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of these data.
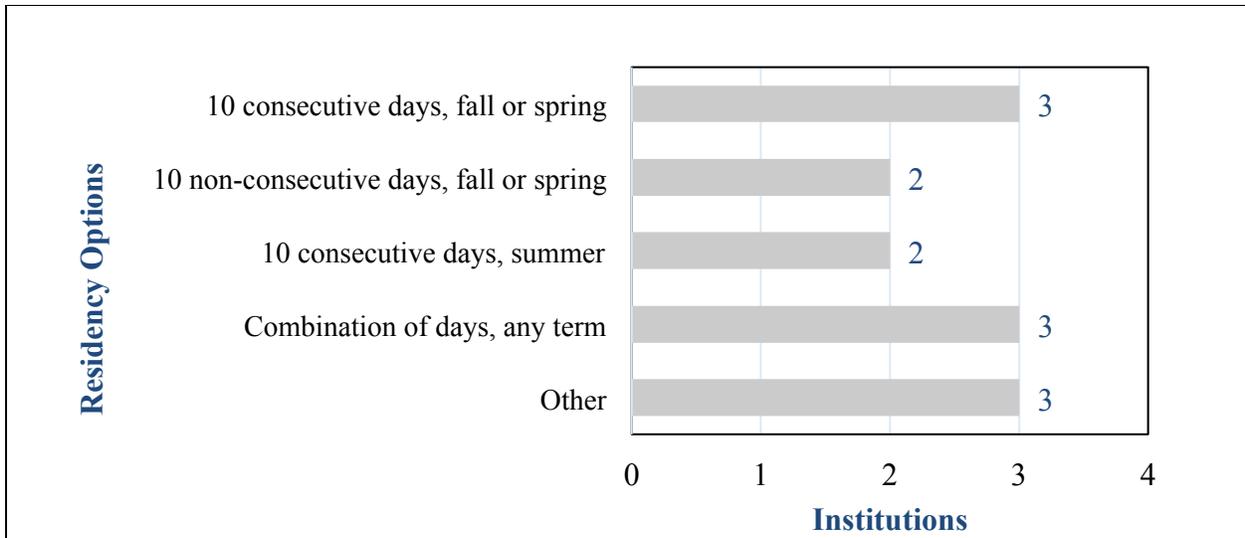
Figure 2. Ten-day residency requirements for Reduced Hour Option students are represented by a minimum of five different models.

Educational Specialist Programs

All 13 institutions in Alabama that offer Class A (building-level) certification programs (i.e., master's degree and RHO programs) also offer Class AA (district-level) certification programs. Typically, these programs are advanced degree programs that culminate in the conferring of an Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) degree upon completion. Despite the fact that guidelines for Ed.S. programs in Alabama have not changed recently, nor has a reduced-hour program option been presented from the ALSDE for Class AA certification, questions about Ed.S. programs were included in the AAPEL survey in an effort to collect and compile program information about all instructional leadership certification programs currently available.

Ed.S. programs across the state enroll a total of approximately 192 students. Course delivery is most commonly provided in an online format, with six institutions reporting 100% online instruction. Two programs provide a face-to-face format, while one institution delivers instruction in a blend between face-to-face and online. (Only nine of 13 institutions responded to this survey question.)

Ed.S. Programs are small, ranging in size from 2 to 33 students, with 15 students on average. These programs, culminating in Class AA certification, typically require 30 hours of course work, though Ed.S. programs in five of the institutions require 33-36 hours to complete. Eleven institutions admit students either two or three times per year, or on a rolling basis, while two institutions retain the annual cohort admission process. Nine institutions require completion of a comprehensive examination at program exit, and nine require a capstone project. Four schools offer a typical completion timeline of four semesters, five offer completion in a minimum of five semesters, and four institutions require six semesters to achieve the degree. No residency experience in required for the Class AA certification programs.

Next, before we turn to reporting faculty perceptions about program strengths and challenges, it is noted in the survey data that educational leadership faculty members and programs utilize local school district personnel/leaders in a multitude of ways in program delivery. One survey question specifically asked, "How do your programs utilize Local

Educational Association (LEA) representatives?" Nearly all programs (10 to13 per possible response) reported using LEA representatives as supervisors of course-embedded field experiences, residency mentors, residency supervisors/evaluators, advisory council members, adjunct course instructors, and as guest speakers for select courses.

AAPEL Faculty Perceptions

Educational leadership faculty were surveyed regarding their perceptions of the strengths and challenges of their Master's degree (Class A) program in Instructional Leadership, Reduced-Hour Certification Only (Class A) program in Instructional Leadership, and Educational Specialist degree (Class AA) program in Instructional Leadership. Nine of the 13 respondents provided comments regarding the Instructional Leadership programs.

Master's degree and RHO Program Strengths

When asked about the strengths and challenges of the Master's degree (Class A) program in Instructional Leadership, four themes emerged as strengths: *course delivery*, *field experiences*, *LEA involvement*, and *curriculum*.

Course delivery. Respondents mentioned the strengths of various course delivery models ranging from online, to blended, and face-to-face. Convenience, diverse cohorts, consistency of content from one professor to another, and quality of resources and materials were noted as strengths of online programs. One respondent stated, "Our program services 23 school districts so not having to drive two hours to take a class can be very beneficial for hard working teachers or school leaders." In relation to the benefits of the online environment, another respondent wrote, "Students in the program really build strong professional relationships because they have to communicate with each other more in the online environment." The benefit of a one-night-a-week course allowing students to focus on one class at a time was also noted as a strength. Another faculty member wrote, "Cohort-based, face-to-face instruction - students love!"

Field experiences. The value of various forms of field experiences emerged as a second area of program strength. Course-embedded field experiences, internship activities, and the semester residency were all listed as favored methods for students to gain field-based experiences. One faculty respondent wrote, "These experiences are designed to assess a significant number of the ability statements included in the ASIL [*Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders*]." A third area of identified strength highlighted "strong LEA partnerships" and practitioner involvement in the programs. Specifically notable was the help from practitioners in designing relevant field experiences and course assignments.

Noted curriculum strengths included: (a) the focus on instructional leadership, (b) relevance of assignments, and (c) faculty sharing "on the ground, real life stories about schools". To insure relevancy, one program offers projects based on each student's current employment location and circumstance. Another wrote, "We want our students to know how to do the work of the school leader when they leave us so the OJT [On the Job Training] will be minimal."

Many of the same strengths were noted for the RHO with program expediency emerging as a theme. A participant stated, "Students participate in the same courses as the candidates receiving a Master's degree, except [for] two courses." The reduced amount of time required for program completion was also noted as helping "with recruitment efforts."

Master's Degree and RHO Program Challenges

In response to perceived challenges in relation to the master's program, three themes emerged: *enrollment issues*, *faculty hiring*, and issues related to the *internship* including mentors. These themes are described and illustrated here.

   Enrollment issues. The majority of the challenges are centered on enrollment issues, some in relation to the effects of the newly re-authorized RHO. One person shared, "The greatest challenge is getting students to take the master's program now that the RHO is an option. Our numbers [in the Master's program] have decreased significantly." Others mentioned such issues as: (a) rising tuition costs, (b) location of campus for face-to-face students, (c) competition between face-to-face and online programs, (d) competition with National Board Certification initiatives, and (e) the time required for faculty members to recruit, conduct admission interviews, and meet portfolio requirements. An added challenge is that some programs require more courses than others, particularly with the RHO.

   Faculty hiring. An additional challenge identified was "hiring high quality faculty members with both K-12 leadership experience and a strong research record." Filling openings is time-consuming for faculty members. One wrote of the challenge of "having a current IL [instructional leadership position] open and others [faculty members] having to cover while seeking the new faculty member."

   Internship. A third theme centered on two notable issues related to the internship, namely, mentoring and residency requirements. One faculty responded, "It is sometimes difficult to identify, monitor, and track mentors due to [frequent] changes in K-12 personnel." Further, there is "limited mentor training," and a "lack of stipends" or any remuneration available to offer to mentors who are willing to work with instructional leadership candidates. Respondents also mentioned that instructional leadership candidates express the desire the opportunity to complete more than the required 10 residency days, but that residency days are difficult for candidates to schedule, and that there are varied levels of support from school districts in providing for residency days for candidates.

   In addition to many of the challenges associated with the master's degree, the brevity of the RHO (i.e., minimum 18 course credits required) added to faculty concerns regarding the residency. One responded, "The biggest challenge that we have is the residency. The program [RHO] is only three semesters long so there is hardly enough time with the student [instructional leadership candidate] to teach them what they need to know and have time for them to complete a valuable residency program." This challenge, and others, emerged often from faculty members surveyed who expressed concern for maintaining high standards in the RHO program with so few course credits required. AAPEL faculty members expressed further concern that some RHO candidates "are just getting a certificate in case they need it," rather than gaining the requisite skill and knowledge base to effectively lead schools. Another worry anticipated was that candidates who have taken only the few required courses will have difficulty passing the qualifying exam, or the Praxis, having taken only the few courses required by RHO programs.

Ed.S. Programs Strengths and Challenges

Respondents had less to say about the strengths and challenges of their Ed.S. programs. Comments regarding strengths were focused on course delivery and curriculum emphases. Program delivery strengths included the blended format and online instruction. Small classes,

allowing for discussion and sharing among candidates, along with active administrators serving as adjuncts and guest speakers, enhance the delivery methods. The curriculum strengths of the Ed.S. included capstone projects, emphasis on data-based decision making and strategic planning, and programs focused around guiding candidates toward more deeply understanding effective and best practices of superintendents. One faculty respondent remarked that the question guiding their program is, "How can we increase the capacity of the teachers to be more effective…?"

The challenges faced by Ed.S. programs were similar to those named relative to other programs. Noted challenges included: (a) course delivery issues, including competition with online programs; (b) determining the appropriate mix of online and face-to-face offerings; and (c) sequencing the courses so that the curriculum builds itself in a beneficial way, while still offering a rolling admissions structure. The conflicts inherent in course delivery method is evident in the following statement made by one respondent, "Strength includes online instruction, which also is a weakness in that student networking and collaboration are mainly online." Such a comment illustrates the challenge that AAPEL faculty members face in meeting the needs of working professionals.

As with the master's program, maintaining adequate program enrollment was also mentioned as a problem. The Ed.S. competes with other programs within and between universities. Some universities offer doctoral programs that allow Ed.S. courses to count toward the doctoral degree while other universities limit the transferability of Ed.S. hours toward the doctoral degree. Other universities experience internal conflicts due to the fact that they offer programs centered on educational policy and law, which tend to compete for students with programs in educational leadership. An added issue is the reality that many potential students carry debt from previous degrees and they do not want to take on more debt, so will discontinue their formal education and not seek advanced degrees.

Discussion

The data reported here are intended to serve as a type of compilation or clearinghouse of answers to the questions posed during the annual Fall 2015 Conference of the AAPEL. These data were also reported, in person, during a breakout session of the annual Spring AAPEL Conference in February, 2016, held in Montgomery, AL. During the breakout session, audience participants, all of who were AAPEL faculty members, discussed the results, and began to explore the possibility of administering this survey on an annual basis, in an effort to track the evolution of educational leadership programs across the state. The authors of this report are currently considering this possibility.

Reflecting on the data, however, the authors noticed that there are many features in common across the various institutions that offer degree and certification programs in instructional/educational leadership across the state. All 13 universities offer all three program options, including master's degree, RHO certification, and Ed.S. degree programs. Programs are substantially similar in terms of credit hour requirements, though the delivery models, i.e., whether the programs are offered in face-to-face, blended, or online formats, vary. Such variability, especially in offering online program options, may tend to blur the lines across the state regarding traditional territoriality and the location of client bases. In other words, when programs are offered online, as opposed to blended or in face-to-face delivery models, the traditional rules and practices relative to target client bases are challenged. The authors predict

that more discussion and thinking around this issue will ensue among AAPEL faculty as more institutions begin to offer educational leadership preparation and certification programs online in an effort to tap into these potential client bases.

It is interesting to note, however, from the perception data, is that faculty members tended to identify their own delivery models as strengths of their programs. This is true regardless of the particular format. Those offering face-to-face programs touted this delivery model as a strength, just as did those faculty members engaged in online program delivery. In a related observation, it seems that program strength, as perceived by the participants, is not dependent on delivery format but rather on the rigor and relevancy of program content.

One of the primary and largest discrepancies noted, however, is the manner in which the required 10-day residencies are completed across the state. Some institutions retain the 10-consecutive-days model to be completed during a single semester, while others have interpreted the residency much more liberally to include any combination of 10 days, completed across any or all semesters that students are enrolled.

While the authors offer no judgment or opinion as to the advisability or defensibility of such a wide array of residency experience requirements, the presence of such disparity raises important questions that may well be explored further. For example, what does current empirical literature propose as best practice in leadership internships? And, what is the original intent of the residency requirement as adopted by the Alabama State Board of Education, and do all of these multiple responses and interpretations meet this intent? The implications for further research in this area are clear.

A common theme running through the perceptual data was the enrollment concern. With 13 universities pulling from the same pool of potential applicants, recruitment is a major responsibility for each program and one that in some ways works in opposition to the idea of a rigorous selection process. The rebirth of the RHO further compounds the push for recruitment since participants can enter and exit the program in as few as three semesters. It takes almost twice as many RHO participants to generate the same credit hour production as the full master's program due to the reduced course requirements. An examination of the effects of the RHO on master's degree programs further confirms a need for continued study.

This study did not include information about doctoral programs and there has been some indication that participants would be interested in that information in a future study. Other issues not addressed that warrant further study include a comparison of program costs, more clarification on the definitions of program delivery models, and completion rates.

Limitations

The researchers acknowledge that the information provided, particularly the perceptual information, was self-reported and therefore may or may not represent the views of all faculty members at the represented universities since, for the most part, only one AAPEL faculty member from each university responded to the survey. With wider participation, perhaps of all or most of the faculty members from each institution, perceptual data may have been quite different. Further, without clear definitions for program delivery models, the researchers further recognize that program reporting the same delivery models may actually look different between institutions. Since doctoral programs are not included in the study, the number and types of faculty members reported might not clearly reflect the number of faculty members assigned to the targeted programs. Finally, the research team acknowledges, since we did not survey any

instructional leadership candidates (i.e., students in the programs); the perceptual data gathered is clearly one-sided regarding strengths and challenges.

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Funding Students, Not Units: Moving Alabama from a Regressive Public School Funding State to a Progressive Public School Funding State

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Abstract

Two independent studies conducted by Baker, Sciarra, and Farrie (2015) and Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (2015) reveal Alabama's public school funding mechanism to be regressive and inequitable. The recommendation from both of these studies is to develop a funding formula including per pupil-based allocation and supplemental categorical weights. This study has developed such a formula. This funding formula will guarantee greater transparency and efficiency of public funds and a better public school system for all students. In order to receive the categorical funding, a school system must document a need for each individual that requires that service or program. This required data collection will allow the school systems to monitor progress and trends as well as allow for oversight by stakeholders for the use of public funds. The funding formula will also provide school systems with the mechanism to collect funds to meet the needs of their specific students, and the autonomy to expend those funds on the programs that their students need (which realistically changes from year to year). Implementing this funding formula will be the first big step in moving Alabama from a regressive funding state to a progressive funding state.

Keywords: Alabama school funding, school funding formula, equitable funding, funding distribution

In the world of education finance, Alabama has been the target of jokes such as "At least we're not Alabama." The reason for the "joke" is that it has been common knowledge among the education finance experts that until recently Alabama (AL) has been ranked the worst state when it comes to funding public education. Now, the response to the "joke" from Alabamians has been "At least we're not Mississippi." While this "joke" is a light-hearted attempt at poking fun of AL, in reality it's a sad truth with real implications for the students of AL.

Using the data and recommendations reported from several recent studies conducted on the Alabama school finance system, this study proposes moving AL from their current regressive funding mechanism to a more equitable student weighted funding formula. After highlighting the results of the previous studies, a categorical funding formula including student base costs and supplemental weighted services is proposed. Using the proposed formula and data from AL's 2014-2015 school year, examples of what the formula would produce at the state level and the local school system level was explored. Finally, the action needed to implement the proposed funding formula was discussed.

The Regressive Education Funding State

The Baker, Sciarra, and Farrie Study

In the 2015 national report card "Is School Funding Fair?," Baker, Sciarra, and Farrie (Baker) examine school funding fairness nationwide using four principles: effort, funding level, coverage, and funding distribution. "Effort- measures the difference in state spending for education relative to state fiscal capacity. 'Effort' is defined as the ratio of state spending to state gross domestic product (GDP)" (p. 4). This report indicated AL's per capita GDP was $37,186 and the effort index was 0.033. This means that AL contributes roughly 3.3% effort toward education, which classifies them as medium on the effort index.

Baker defined the fairness of funding level as measuring "the overall level of state and local revenue provided to school districts, and compares each state's average per-pupil revenue with that of other states [in order to make comparisons between states, the researchers controlled for] differences in regional wages, poverty, economies of scale, and population density" (p. 4). In this ranking of per-pupil funding level, Alabama was ranked 38th among the other states with a funding level of $8,701 per student. This means after controlling for the differences in regional wages, poverty, economies of scale, and population density, AL funds 53% less per student than the highest funded state (NY at $18,507 per student) and 27% more per student than the lowest funded state (ID at $6,369 per student).

The next measure of fairness according to the Baker study is

"Coverage- This measures the proportion of school-age children attending the state's public schools, as compared to those not attending the state's public schools (primarily parochial and private schools, but also home schooling). The share of the state's students in public schools, and the median household income of those students, is an important indicator of the distribution of funding relative to student poverty (especially where more affluent household simply opt out of public schooling), and the overall effort to provide fair school funding" (p. 4).

In AL, 88% of all school age children attend a public school. Yet the 12% of students who attend private schools have a household income of 171% compared to the household income of those that attend public schools. This has two implications according to the study. First, it

indicates there is a high concentration of student in poverty in the public schools. Second, because the 12% are contributing to public education through their taxes, yet not participating in the public school system, they are less likely to vote for increases in funding for public schools, which possibly creates even further disparity in public school funding.

The final measure of fairness in the Baker study and the focus of this paper is "Funding Distribution- This measures the distribution of funding across local districts within a state, relative to student poverty. The measure shows whether a state provides more or less funding to schools based on their poverty concentration" (p. 4). The report indicated that AL funds its students in high-poverty school districts at 90% of what it funds students in low-poverty districts. This is possible because some local school districts are capable of generating a greater local contribution than other districts with lower wealth and lower property values. Because AL's per pupil expenditure for students in poverty is less than the per pupil expenditure for students not in poverty, AL is a regressive funding state.

To summarize the findings in this study, AL may not be the target of the education finance experts "jokes" any longer. The results of this study certainly do not paint a pretty picture of AL but it also reveals AL may not be the worst anymore either. On the positive side (or at least, the not the worst side) AL falls into the medium category of the amount of effort they put forth toward education and is ranked 38th among the other states in per pupil funding levels. But on the not so good side, AL has a huge gap in the household incomes of those attending private schools and those attending public schools, and they are inequitably under funding the students in poverty.

Augenblick, Palaich and Associates Study

In 2015, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) hired Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) to conduct a series of studies on the states' education funding system. The studies conducted included a review of the current state funding system, an equity study, a study using the successful school approach to adequacy, and a study using the professional judgment approach to adequacy.

The Current State Funding System. The APA's review of the current state funding system compared AL to 15 other Southern Region Education Board States (SREBS) which included AR, DE, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV. AL, like most of the comparison states, uses a foundation program. A foundation program is the use of a formula to determine how much money a school district will need to operate, then it determines what percentage of that need will be funded by the state and what will be required of the local systems to contribute to the need. The foundation program is used as a means to allow the state to equalize the school systems revenue by allowing the wealthier local systems to pay for a larger portion of their need hence freeing up some state money to aid the poorer local systems in meeting their need. This is done by first determining the amount of money a local system can contribute based on their property value, and then the state will "make up" the difference to bring each system to their funding level of need. In order to participate in the foundation program in AL the school systems are required to contribute 10 mil or that equivalent, accordingly then the state is to contribute the remaining amount needed to operate the schools in that system (AL Code 16-13-231). Outside of the foundation program, AL does provide funding for other services not covered by the foundation program such as transportation, an at-risk student fund, capital outlay, etc. AL uses the foundation program to fund units (personnel) and school leaders

based on the number of students enrolled in the previous year. The number of units is determined by the grade level divisor the AL legislatures sets. The number of school leaders including principal, assistant principal, counselors, and career tech directors are determined by a number of students to school leader ratio, also determined by the AL legislators. The AL legislators also decide the salary (according to a salary matrix) and benefits they deem necessary and the other expenditures they feel the schools will need (such as maintenance, operations, classroom materials, textbooks, etc.). This method of using the foundation program differs from the comparison states because the other states fund students based on the previous year's enrollment and provides weights to a base student cost in a formula for determining a per pupil allocation.

Next, this study compared AL with the other SREB states on spending per student, variation in spending across school systems, and statewide average staffing levels for different types of employees. What they found was nine of the 15 states personal income per capita were within $2500 of AL, which indicates those states have similar populations in relation to personal income thus making a comparison more equitable. For spending per student, AL was 6.8% lower than the average of all the other SREB states. The variation in spending from one school system to another is low in AL compared the other states variation between school districts meaning AL is spending roughly the same in each district. The relationship between per-student spending and district wealth is near average of the other states. For the staffing data, AL falls below the average of all other SREB states for the number of teachers, administrative staff, and guidance counselors employed. The teacher salaries in AL are 4.1% below the average of other SREB states, yet their benefit rate is very high compared to the others.

Another big difference between AL and the other states is how students' needs are determined and funded. In AL, each school system receives an added 2.5 weight for 5% of their total population, even though every system has more than 5% of the population identified as special needs (ALSDE, 2015). The added weight will be used to earn additional units for that system. The other states use a student weight, in addition to the base student cost, to provide additional funding for that student's special education services. Because AL does not use student weights for determining funding of services, this study imposed a student weight formula onto AL data in order to examine the ratio of weighted to unweighted students among the SREB students. The imposed formula added to the 1.0 base student Alabama location 1.10 for special education, .40 for at-risk students, and .75 for ELL students. With these imposed weights, AL is spending 37% more money on students who receive special education, at-risk, or ELL services than students who do not receive these services. This percentage is below the SREB state average (42%) and below the national average (45%). This study also found AL has a low proportion of students receiving special education services (11.1%) compared to other SREB states with similar levels of personal income per capita (20 percentage points), and is well below the national average (13.2%). So, in AL they are serving fewer students with special needs and funding the special programs at a lower rate than the average of SREB states and the national average.

The last piece of this study reveals that AL's spending on education including elementary, secondary and postsecondary is 20% higher than the SREB states and 40% higher than the national average. But this high percentage can be attributed to the proportion of education spending in postsecondary, which is higher than any of the other SREB states and 50% higher than the national average. In fact, 61.1% of the education spending in AL is for postsecondary education.

To summarize the APA's analysis of how AL is currently funding schools compared to how the 15 SREB states are, highlights AL is funding units not students. When converting the AL funding method to funding students, the researchers found AL is below the average of the other states in spending per pupil, number of school leaders, salaries, and number of students receiving special education, and spending on special education. The one area in which AL was above the average of the other states was the percentage of the state budget spent on education. Although, that finding must be approached with the understanding that the percentage reported included funding for both higher education and PK-12 education.

The Equity Study. In the Equity Analysis study, APA examined the fiscal equity of Alabama's school finance system from the 2006-07 school year to the 2012-13 school year. The researchers identify equity in terms of student fiscal equity (uniform per-pupil spending statewide), taxpayer equity (tax rates supporting education are similar across the state), and fiscal neutrality (there is no relationship between the wealth of the school system and the per-pupil spending) (APA, 2015). The results of the student fiscal equity in terms of vertical equity revealed that while an increase of $458 per pupil occurred over the seven-year period, after accounting for inflation, the per-pupil expenditure decreased by $513 per pupil. Furthermore, the student equity measure indicates the gap in per pupil spending between the highest and lowest spending districts grew over the seven-year study causing greater inequity (went from a $5,039 per pupil gap to $6,025 per pupil). Regarding the student horizontal equity, the level of need was calculated by the count of students identified as needing special education, at-risk, and English Language Learner or Limited English Proficiency. The need for these services remained relatively the same over the seven-year study period, but the level of spending per student decreased by 3.3%.

In terms of fiscal neutrality, the study measured by the relationship between the local property values and per pupil spending. The researchers stated "a generally accepted standard is that a system is reasonably fiscal neutral if this correlation is less than 0.50." (p. 31) The findings indicate AL, while still in the acceptable standard, is trending toward the unacceptable (0.38 in 2011-12 to 0.43 in 2012-13). Altogether, this equity study found that AL is not only inequitable in terms of the wealth of the school district and the per pupil spending, but they are coming closer and closer to becoming inequitable in fiscal neutrality as time goes on.

The Successful School Approach to Adequacy. The APA's next study used the successful school district approach to determine the base student cost needed to meet an adequate public education. This figure is calculated by examining the current district spending in successful districts. For this study, districts that met both criteria set by APA, would be examined as successful school districts. Those criteria included: 1) the districts that met the 2011-2012 proficiency level for at least five of the six grades 3rd through 8th, on both Math and Reading on the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Tests and 2) the districts whose proficiency percentage was at least 0.25 standard deviations above the state mean on all five 11th grade Alabama High School Graduation Exams. Thirteen of the 137 systems met both these criteria. The analysis revealed that the base cost of educating a student in a successful district in 2012-2013 was $7,170 (includes $5,386 for instruction, $977 for administration, and $807 for building maintenance and operations). This base funding level does not include the cost of special education, at-risk, or ELL services.

Professional Judgment Approach to Adequacy. APA then used the Professional Judgment Approach to Adequacy to determine the cost in the successful districts of providing resources such as school-level personnel, additional supports and services, technology, and district-level

resources. According to the researchers, the Professional Judgment Approach relies on the assumptions that experienced educators can specify the resources schools and school districts need in order to meet state standards, and that the cost of such resources can be determined based on a set of prices specific to those resources (APA, 2015).

Because each system in AL varies greatly in number of resources and the cost of those resources, APA created mock schools and districts using state average data. APA then constructed multiple judgment panels through a nomination by district staff process to determine the resources needed for the mock schools and districts. In total there were 80 panelists in 15 panels including school-level panels, special needs panels, district panels, additional topics area panels, and statewide panels. Each panel included a combination of classroom teachers, principals, personnel who work with students with special needs, superintendents, technology specialists and school business officials.

The results of the panelist's effort to identify the resources necessary for an adequate education found several key recommendations that were similar across the panels. The first necessity was small class sizes; in fact, they recommend the student-to-teacher ratios of 15:1 in K-1st grade, 18:1 in 2nd-3rd grade, and 25:1 in 4th-12th grade. As of the 1998 Pupil to Teacher Ratio reported on the ALSDE website, the state requirements include 18:1 in classrooms K-3 that include students with disabilities, 26:1 in 4th -6th grade classrooms that include students with disabilities, and 29:1 in 7th -12th grade classrooms that include students with disabilities (ALSDE, 2015). The next resource identified by the panelists was adequate funding for professional development, instructional coaches, and teacher planning time. Regarding student support, the panelists identified these resources as being necessary for an adequate education counselors, social workers, interventionist, before-and after-school programs, school-level summer school for struggling students, and alternative and CTE settings. The panelist also identified technology-rich learning environments, including 1:1 student devices in 3rd grade and up and the associated IT support as necessary. Finally, the panelists identified resources for sufficient staff to serve Special Education, ELL and gifted students, and Preschool for all four-year-olds as all being necessary for an adequate education in AL.

The results of the Successful School District Approach indicated a base student cost of $7,170 would be needed, but the Professional Judgment Approach yielded an $8,072 per student base cost as needed. The researchers combined the results of the two approaches for determining the weights needed to provide equitable funding. The suggested weights include English Language Learners earning 0.50, At-Risk students earning 0.30, Special Education earning 1.10, Gifted earning 0.20, Preschool earning 0.24, and Career Technical Education (CTE) earning 0.07. In Table 1, the APA applied these weights to the base costs generated by the two approaches for comparison. Without including a weight for the size of the school the Successful School District Approach finds the weighted student allocation needs to be $9,388 to adequately education a child in AL public schools. In the same circumstance the Professional Judgement Approach found the weighted student allocation needs to be $10,590 per student to adequately education the students of AL.

Table 1

APA's comparision of the applied weights to the two approaches.

2012-13 Adequacy Estimates, Compared to Actual Spending

	Current Expenditures	Successful School District		Professional Judgment	
		Without Size Adjustment	**With Size Adjustment**	**Without Size Adjustment**	**With Size Adjustment**
Adequacy Estimate (totals in millions)					
Base	-	$5,274.3	$5,365.2	$5,937.8	$6,040.1
Special Education	-	$562.5	$562.5	$633.2	$633.2
ELL	-	$49.9	$49.9	$70.2	$70.2
At-Risk	-	$929.8	$929.8	$1,046.8	$1,046.8
CTE	-	$76.9	$76.9	$86.6	$86.6
Total	$5,681.2	$6,905.8	$6,984.3	$7,774.6	$7,790.3
-Per Student	*$7,723*	*$9,388*	*$9,495*	*$10,569*	*$10,590*
Difference between Adequacy Estimate and Comparable Spending (total in millions)					
Difference		-$1,224.6	-$1,303.1	-$2,093.4	-$2,109.1
-Per Student	-	*-$1,665*	*-$1,772*	*-$2,846*	*-$2,867*
-Percentage	-	*21.6%*	*22.9%*	*36.9%*	*37.1%*

Note: Table from Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates (2015), Equity and Adequacy in Alabama Schools and Districts: Prepared for Alabama State Department of Education, p. 71. Retrieved November 1, 2015 from http://www.alsde.edu/sec/comm/Related%20Documents/Alabama%20Final%20Report%209.8.15.pdf#search=Augenblick

To synthesize all of the aforementioned research, AL is not the worst state nationally when it comes to funding public schools, but they are below average on most indicators compared to other SREB states. Furthermore, while a comparison that shows they are not the worst, it does nothing to improve the education of AL students. The reality is AL is sliding down the hill of adequately and equitably funding public education. Action must be taken to halt the downward slide. Both the Baker and the APA studies suggest that AL move from a funding of units to a weighted formula for funding students as a necessary step for moving AL from a regressive education funding state to a progressive education funding state. The next section of this study proposes what the weighted formula would look like including categories of weights and actual weight amounts suggested from the previous studies.

A Weighted Per Pupil Funding Distribution Formula for Alabama

Obviously, in a weighted formula, there must be a base cost to apply the weights. The base cost for this formula would be the cost associated with educating an average student. The base cost would include the personnel, the instructional support (i.e. student materials, technology, library, textbooks, professional development, etc.), transportation, and operating costs needed per student. The base cost and categorical weights will be set annually by the legislators based on the results of required adequate funding studies (such as the Successful School District Approach and the Professional Judgment Approach) conducted every 3 years.

Categorical Weights

The categorical weights to be added to the base cost will require annual data from the school system to document the need for the weights. The first categories are to decrease the inequity related to student poverty and small school sizes, and these include a poverty supplement and a small school system supplement. These categories are based on student demographic data, specifically a measurement of identifying the number of students living in poverty and the total number of students within a school system. The remaining categories are based on services provided to a particular student beyond the basic student education that is required for an adequate education. These service categories include a special education matrix supplement, and English Language Learner supplement, a vocational education supplement, and a preschool supplement. A visual model of this categorical funding formula can be seen in Chart 1.

The APA study made a suggested weight for the poverty supplement, although they called it an at-risk weight. The APA suggests a 0.30 weight for a poverty supplement. This would mean a student identified as living in poverty would receive $1.30 for every $1.00 a student not living in poverty would receive for education. To identify which students are living in poverty, two methods should be used. First, the Federal School Lunch program is already collecting student data related to poverty levels as a qualification for participation in the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program (FRLP). It makes sense to use their identification data. Therefore, if the FRLP identified a student eligible to participate, that student would be identified as living in poverty and also qualify for the poverty supplement. Because the FRLP is voluntary and requires the students' guardian to apply annually for the program, a second method of identifying the students living in poverty is necessary. There is overwhelming evidence indicating as students' progress through the education system they are less likely to apply for the lunch program in middle and high school years. So to mediate the decline in participation of the federal lunch program, which falsely under identifies students living in poverty, a cohort trend analysis will be used, in conjunction with the FRLP, to identify those students who may stop applying to the FRLP. Because the FRLP qualifies students to receive either free lunches or reduced price lunches, this funding formula will also distribute the categorical weight on a two-tiered level. Students who are identified as qualifying for a free lunch in the FRLP will receive a 0.30 weight. Students who are identified as qualifying for a reduced price lunch in the FRLP will receive a 0.20 weight. A small school system size is another category that inherently attributes to inequality. Typically, these smaller systems are located in rural areas resulting in fewer children attending the public schools than the urban areas. Fewer students means less money, yet the overhead and operational costs of keeping a school open does not vary much with the number of students in the building. Therefore, these smaller systems are required to spend more on overhead and operations leaving less money for instructional programs and services, creating a disadvantage to those students. For this formula, students attending a school system with less than 1000 students will receive a .10 weight to offset the fixed costs of operating the schools.

The remaining four categories of support are services a student must be eligible to receive and the school system must provide annual documentation of qualified students. The English Language Learner supplement would include the APA's recommended .50 weight for students who qualify for ELL services. The Vocational Education Supplement will include a weight of .10 due to the AL college and career readiness campaign and the need to support the career ready pathways. The Preschool supplement will be offered for all 4-year olds in the state to attend a

half-day of schooling. Because 4-year olds do not receive a base student allocation, a school system that offers this service will receive the equivalent of a .24 weight per student to fund the program. To receive these service supplements a school system must provide documentation of program success and actual student participation numbers.

The final service category is the special education category. Because there is such an enormous spectrum of services needed by students with disabilities, a matrix of required services will determine the level of weight a particular student will receive. It makes more sense to fund a service rather than simply a disability label because the label does not reflect the level of need a student requires. Using a matrix to identify the level of additional support and services a student with a disability requires in order guaranteeing access to a Free Appropriate Public Education allows for a tiered service level that can be tied to a tiered funding system. In this matrix modeled after Florida's matrix (FLDOE, 2015), the school system must submit to the state annual documentation that indicates a level of need as indicated on the service page of the students' Individualized Education Plan ranging from Level 1: No Extra Services Are Needed to a Level 5: Continuous Intense One On One Support Is Needed in five different domains (Curriculum and Learning Environment, Social or Emotional Behavior, Independent Functioning, Health Care, and Communication). The score of the matrix will determine the level of tiered special education weight.   In this tiered matrix, a level 1 would represent all students who have and Individualized Education Plan identifying them as qualifying to receive special education services but has no or little need for services or programs beyond what the basic student receives and would receive a .10 weight. Although, no additional services are required, there are costs associated with monitoring, evaluating, and consulting so a small weight is needed. A level 2 would receive a .20 weight because the level of service needed for these students increases to receiving assistance on a periodic basis. A level 3 would receive a .75 weight. There is a more significant increase in weight here because these students will require complex accommodations that require a joint effort and receive services on a regular schedule. A level 4 would receive a 1.00 weight to provide specialized approaches to the majority of learning activities, assistance or equipment or extensive modifications to the learning environment. The last level, level 5 will receive the APA recommended weight of 1.10 to provide intense one on one continuous intervention or assistance. Obviously, it is expected that the number of students will decrease as the level of service increases.

Based on the SSD and PJ Studies

Plus High Poverty Supplement 30%

students who qualify for free lunch x (.3 x Base Allocation)

Plus Poverty Supplement 20%

students who qualify for reduced lunch x (.2 x Base Allocation)

Plus Small School System Supplement 10%

Systems with less than 1000 students.

students in small system x (.1 x Base Allocation)

Plus Special Education Matrix Level 1 10%

No Extra Services

students who qualify for Level 1 x (.1 x Base Allocation)

Plus Special Education Matrix Level 2 20%

Periodic Assistance/ Accomodations

students who qualify for Level 2 x (.2 x Base Allocation)

Plus Special Education Matrix Level 3 75%

More Complex or frequent assistnace

students who qualify for Level 3 x (.75 x Base Allocation)

Plus Special Education Matrix Level 4 100%

Majority of learning activities require assistance

students who qualify for Level 4 x (1 x Base Allocation)

Plus Special Education Matrix Level 5 110%

Continuous Intense 1 on 1

(# students who qualify for Level 5 x (1.1 x Base Allocation)

Plus English Language Learner Supplement 50%

students who qualify for ELL x (.5 x Base Allocation)

Plus Vocational Education 10%

students high school students x (.1 x Base Allocation)

Preschool Supplement 24%

students who participate in the public preschool program x (.24 x Base Allocation)
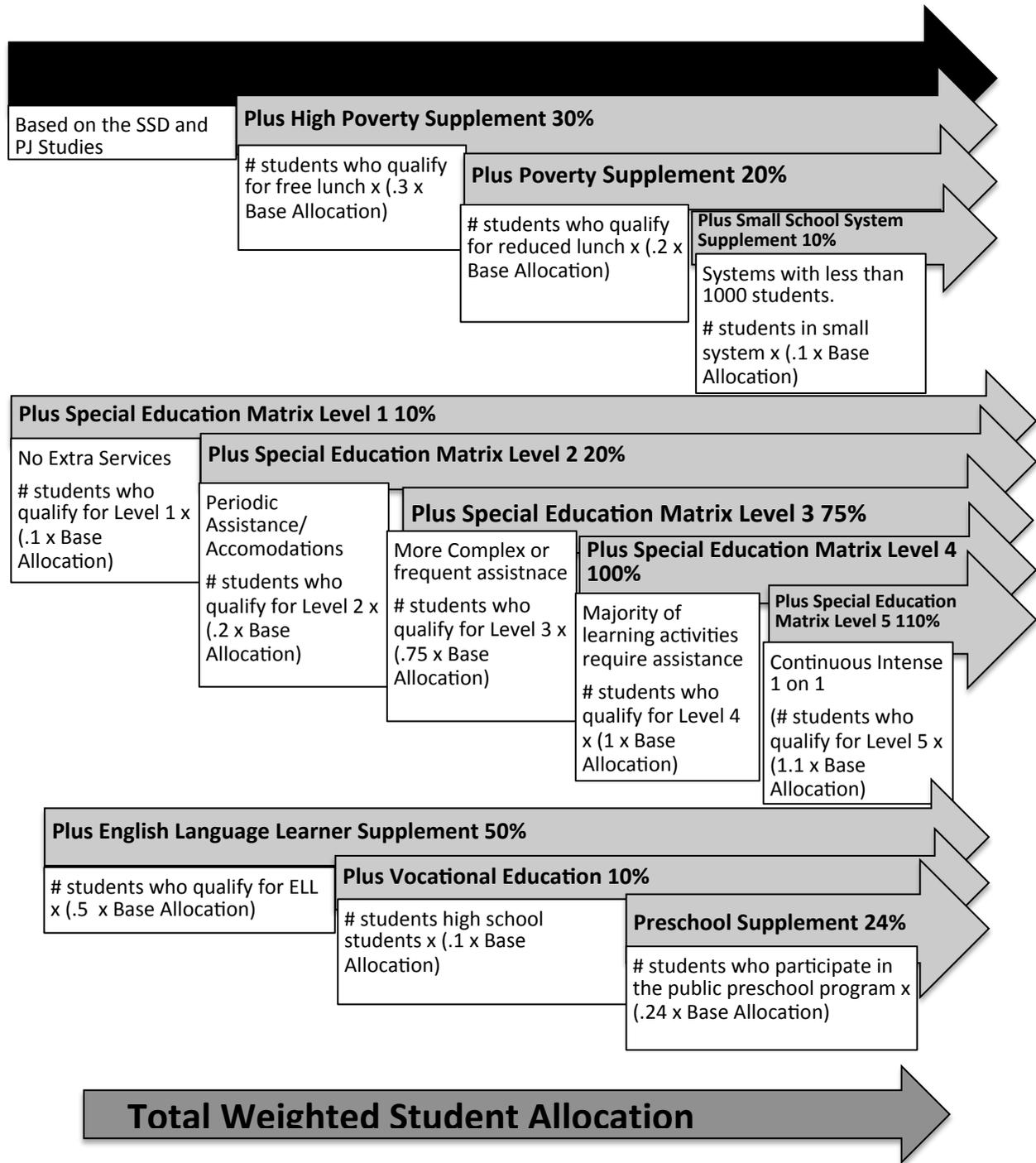
Total Weighted Student Allocation

Figure 1. Visual Representation of the Funding Formula

What Should We Expect?

Before we jump into the formula, we should get the context of how these weights are represented in each system. Just looking at the numbers without the context can mislead one into misinterpreting and advocating for inappropriate policy. Appendix A provides the percentage of students in each system that will receive a supplement. The percentages represented in the Appendix were coded to represent four quartiles with white being systems in the lowest quartile, light grey in the second quartile, dark grey in the third quartile, and black in the highest quartile. The quartiles were determined by using the highest percentage in each category and dividing that number by 4 to determine the quartile ranges. For example, for the category of Free Lunch, the system with the highest reported percentage of Free Lunch students was Greene County at 88%. So, one-fourth of 88 is 22, therefore the systems that had a percentage of students receiving free lunch in the range of 0% to 22% were coded white, systems with 23% to 44% were light grey, systems with 45% to 66% were coded dark grey, and systems with 67% to 88% were coded black. This is important to understand, because if funding is based on student need, knowing who has the highest need will give preview to who will receive more funding. A summary of the number of systems in each quartile by category is represented in Chart 2. Back to the Free Lunch example, looking at Figure 2 you will see that more than 80 of the school systems fall into quartile 3 meaning more than 80 of the 137 school systems have between 45% and 66% of their students in high poverty and participating in the FRLP thus will receive an additional 30% of the per pupil allocation.
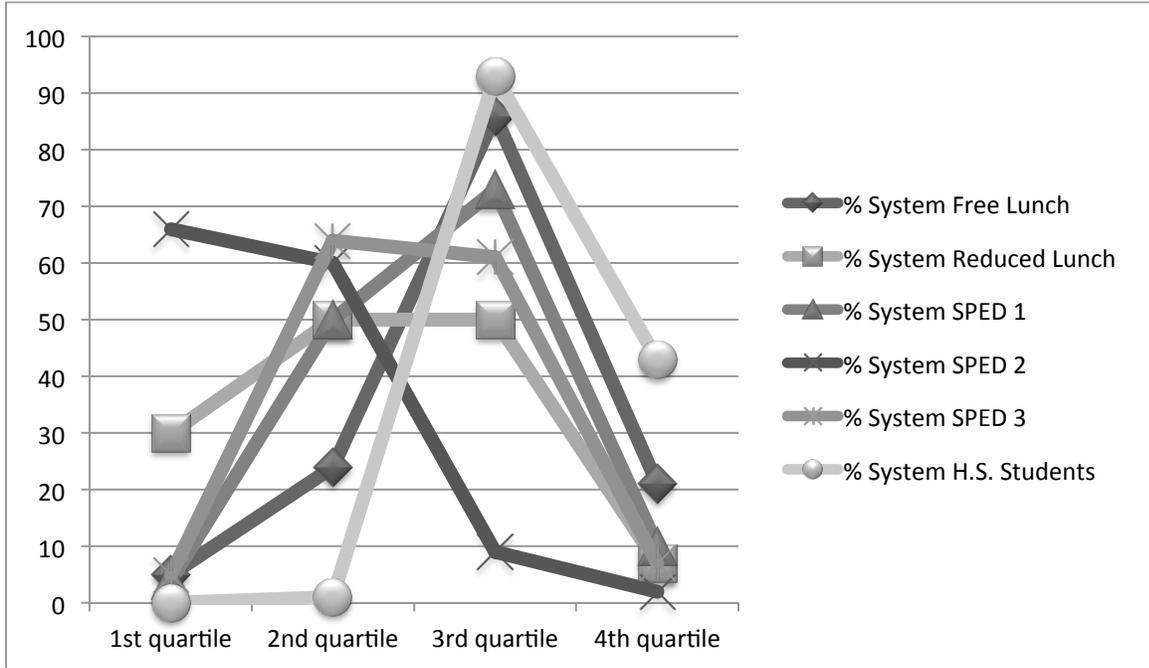
	Quartile 1	Quartile 2	Quartile 3	Quartile 4
Free Lunch Range	0-22	23-44	45-66	67-88
Reduced Lunch Range	0-3.6	3.7-7.2	7.3-10.8	10.9-14.3
SPED Level 1 Range	0-7.4	7.5-14.8	14.9-22.3	22.4-29.4
SPED Level 2 Range	0-.13	.14-.26	.27-39	.40-.53
SPED Level 3 Range	0-1.0	1.1-2.0	2.1-3.0	3.1-4.0
H.S. Students Range	0-10.5	10.6-21.0	21.1-31.5	31.6-42.0

Note: The data used to create this chart was gathered from the Alabama State Department of Education's FY 2015.

Figure 2. Number of school systems in each quartile of each category

Applying the Formula

A funding formula is just a mathematical equation with no value until real numbers are plugged into it and the results are used to positively impact a situation. To increase understanding of the proposed formula and to positively impact the regressive, nearing inequitable funding of AL schools, this section of the research will use data from the ALSDE to insert real numbers. Data reported to the ALSDE for the FY2015 was used for these examples. To begin with the goal in mind, the formula will be used with the suggested base student allocation of $7621 suggested in the APA study (difference between the Successful School District Approach and the Leadership Judgment Approach) and recommended student weights. This will yield a picture of what the funding system should look like in a fully funded budget required for an adequate education. Next, the actual funding from 2015 school year will be used to back into the formula to determine what the system would look like using the actual money allocated. This will give a "where we are now" and "where we should be" scenario. This scenario will be created first at the state level and then at the district level.

It is worth noting these scenarios are just estimates of what the systems would resemble when applying the funding formula. This is noted because some of the numbers are the best numbers attainable at the time of the study. In particular, for the number of students receiving the poverty supplement, only the FRLP data was used, not including the cohort trend analysis for determining unidentified students. For the special education supplement, students were assigned to a funding level based solely on their identified disability because the matrix has yet to be created and implemented. So, students identified as speech, developmentally delayed, gifted, orthopedically impaired, other health impairments, and specific learning disability were grouped into level 1; students identified as hearing or visually impaired were grouped into level 2; students identified as emotion disability, intellectual disability, mental disability, and traumatic brain injury were grouped into level 3; and no students were grouped into level 4 or 5. The ELL supplement was not calculable due to insufficient data on the number of students in each system for this category. Also, it is of utmost importance to understand this example is based on reported data and may not represent actual data, which is another implication of implementing this model: if a system does not report correctly, they will not receive the correct amount of funding.

At the State Level

Starting with the end in mind, using the 733,089 average daily membership reported in 2015 and the suggested base student allocation of $7621 the base student allocation needed would be $5.6 billion. Then using the number of students reported in each category multiplied by the recommended weights for each category an additional $1.2 billion would be needed resulting in a total weighed student allocation of $6.8 billion. As seen in Table 2, the actual amount spent in 2015 on the base student allocations including salaries, classroom supports, transportation, capital purchase and debt services was deducted from the total weighted student allocation leaving $2.3 billion to help cover the weights and the increase in the base allocation. The amount of local funds contributed does not change and the total amount the state would need to contribute would be $6.2 billion. In the adequate model, there is enough funds generated to cover the base student allocations and all the weighted allocations with $1.1 billion left for increasing salaries, updating buildings, improving technology, etc. that has been underfunded in AL for so long.

Table 2
Where we should be

STATE TOTALS	FY 2015	
Student ADM 733,089	Total	Per student
Base Student Allocation	**$5,586,871,269**	**$7621**
Weighted Categorical Supplements		
High Poverty Supplement	$794,427,519.90	347,473 students
Poverty Supplement	$56,902,958.60	37,333 students
Small System Supplement	$2,979,811.00	3,910 students
SPED Level 1-5 Supplement	$184,577,190.55	143,121 students
ELL Supplement		
Vocational Ed. Supplement	$168,475,922.80	221,068 students
PreK Supplement		
Total Weighted Student Allocation	$1,207,363,402.85	752,905
Total Weighted Student Allocation	**$6,794,234,671.85**	**$9,267.95**
Salaries	$2,277,011,466	$3,106.05
Fringe Benefits	$904,567,593	$1233.91

Other Current Expense	$752,446,808	$1026.41
Classroom Support		
Student Materials	$14,609,118	$19.93
Technology		
Library Enhancement		
Professional Development		
Common Purchase		
Textbooks	$25,920,013	$35.36
School Nurse Program	$29,985,470	$40.90
Salaries-1% per ACT 97-238	0	
Technology Coordinator	$3,664,778	$5.00
Transportation Operations	$278,860,179	$380.39
Fleet Renewal	$36,954,000	$50.41
Capital Purchase	$170,000,008	$231.90
Debt Service	$532,864	.73
Total Current Allocations	$4,494,552,297.00	
**Supplemental Funds Remaining*	$2,299,682,374.85	
Total State Funds	$6,198,819,984.85	
Local Funds		
Foundation Program	539,347,750	10 Mills
Capital Purchase	56,066,937	1.02282 mills
Total Local Funds	595,414,687	

Note: * Actual dollar amounts reported in the ALSDE 2015 budget.

** Represents the supplemental money generated by the weights above what is currently being allocated. This money will be used to cover the supplements earned by the systems.

Next looking at the "where we are now scenario" at the state level, the total money allocated for education was used to back into the formula to determine the base student allocation using the recommended categorical weights. As seen in Table 3, the actual base student allocation using reported funds from the 2015 budget would be $5100 per student. This base is what was left from the state total after deducting the $807 million needed to cover the weights needed and divided by the number of ADM. Adding the base student allocation total to the weighted categorical total gives the total weighted allocation of $4.5 billion. Again, deducting the actual spending on salaries, classroom supports, transportation, capital purchase, and debt services which is the base student costs, only $51 million would be left for covering the cost of the weights. Now the difference for what was generated for weights and what is left to spend on the weights is a $756 million difference. This is because the $756 million was needed to cover the base allocations. Clearly, the $51 million is not enough money to cover the cost of the weights. This example highlights the underfunding of the Alabama public schools, and illustrates the necessity in re-evaluating the funding system. But even with the limited funds, using the categorical funding distribution, the $51 million can be used to fund the weights just at a much lower percentage than what is needed. This still moves AL into more equitably distributing the limited funds they do have available. With this as a starting point and the "where we should be" scenario as a goal, AL can develop a plan.

Table 3

Where we Are

STATE TOTALS	FY 2015	
Student ADM 733,089	Total	Per student
Base Student Allocation	**$3,738,753,900.00**	**$5100**
Weighted Categorical Supplements		
High Poverty Supplement	$531,633,690.00	347,473 students
Poverty Supplement	$38,079,660.00	37,333 students
Small System Supplement	$1,387,200.00	3,910 students
SPED Level 1-5 Supplement	$123,519,705.00	143,121 students
ELL Supplement		
Vocational Ed. Supplement	$112,744,680.00	221,068 students
PreK Supplement		
Total Weighted Student Allocation	$807,364,935.00	752,905
Total Weighted Student Allocation	$4,546,118,835.00	**$6,201.32**
Salaries	$2,277,011,466	$3,106.05
Fringe Benefits	$904,567,593	$1233.91
Other Current Expense	$752,446,808	$1026.41
Classroom Support		
Student Materials	$14,609,118	$19.93
Technology		
Library Enhancement		
Professional Development		
Common Purchase		
Textbooks	$25,920,013	$35.36
School Nurse Program	$29,985,470	$40.90
Salaries-1% per ACT 97-238	0	
Technology Coordinator	$3,664,778	$5.00
Transportation Operations	$278,860,179	$380.39
Fleet Renewal	$36,954,000	$50.41
Capital Purchase	$170,000,008	$231.90
Debt Service	$532,864	.73
***Total Current Allocations**	$4,494,552,297.00	
***Supplemental Funds Remaining*	$51,566,538.00	
Total State Funds	$3,950,704,148	
Local Funds		
Foundation Program	539,347,750	10 Mills
Capital Purchase	56,066,937	1.02282 mills
Total Local Funds	595,414,687	

Note: * Actual dollar amounts reported in the ALSDE 2015 budget.

** Represents the supplemental money generated by the weights above what is currently being allocated. This money will be used to cover the supplements earned by the systems.

At the System Level

When looking at the system level, first each systems' categorical data was run through the funding formula using the suggested base student allocation of $7621 and the suggested categorical weights on the data the systems reported to the ALSDE. Then for comparison purposes the new weighted total that a system needed was divided by the number of ADM the system reported to get an average weighted per pupil allocation. To be able to compare per pupil

allocation of "the where we should be" to "the where we actual are," the actual per pupil allocation was calculated using reports from the ALSDE on the revenue each system received and their ADM in 2015. Figure 3 shows what the actual state per pupil allocation is for each system then shows how much would be added to each system to get to the adequate funding levels recommended in the previous studies.
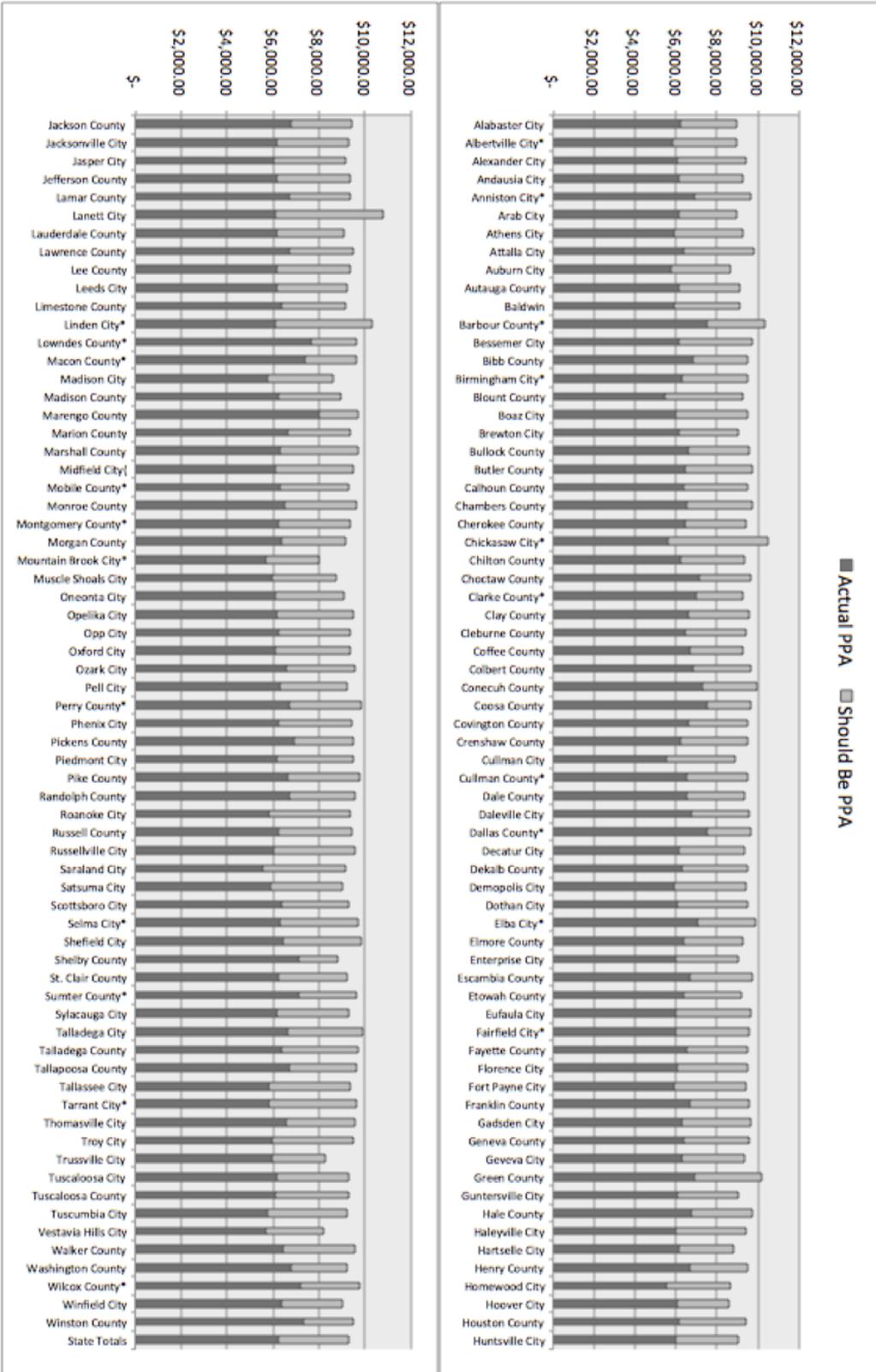
Figure 3. Actual Per Pupil Allocation (PPA) From 2015 with Should Be PPA Ad

Next, the intention was to use the actual system revenues to back into the formula to compare what funding the systems actually received and the funding they would receive with the formula. But in the preliminary runs with the existing data, questionable data was found. Examples of these questionable data can be found in the Appendix when noticing several of the county schools appear to be under reporting the number of students receiving reduced lunch and special education in particular. Typically, the county systems are the more rural and high poverty systems, so when the data reported indicated 0% of a system qualifying for reduced lunch suspicions were raised. Due to the accuracy of the reporting being questionable, the researcher thought it best to not continue comparing the systems until another level of this study can be completed to verify the systems reported data. One hypothesis for the under reporting is due to funds not being tied to the numbers, so in an overworked, underfunded system, this error may have gone unchecked. Another hypothesis is in the county schools often with the lack of additional units funded by the local taxes, often many of the system level personnel have to cover the responsibilities of several jobs leaving room for error. Therefore, as a follow up to this study, the researcher will take a more qualitative approach to learning about the possible under reporting in these categories and then a quantitative approach to securing more accurate counts before making any further comparisons.

Conclusion

It is very clear from previous research and the results of this study that AL public schools are underfunded and funded inequitably. The recommendations from the Baker study and the APA study indicate a weighted categorical funding distribution be created to curve the regressive distribution that is currently used in AL. By combining the research and methods used in other states, the funding formula created in this study would clearly move AL from inequitably funding units into far more equitably funding of students. It makes sense to pay for the services that a student requires to make an adequate education possible for all the students in AL.

In order for this change from funding units to funding students to take place in AL several things need to take place. First, an investigation into the underestimated reports produced by the ALSDE on the number of students being served in various categories must be addressed. The follow up study to this one will investigate this potential problem and gather the most accurate data in order to run this distribution formula as a ghost behind the actual budget for a few years in order to gather reliable data for comparisons. Also, the paperwork and training must be completed for the systems to easily report accurate data pertaining to the Special Education matrix of services. Finally, in order to change the funding of units to the funding of students, a legislative change would be required.

For the sake of the future of AL, something must be done to move AL from a regressive funding state to a progressive funding state. Clearly, there are numerous obstacles to making this a reality, but none the less, it is beyond time for the effort to be made. Even while AL works towards fully funding the education system, the distribution of the funds available must be done with the student and their needs in mind first. FUNDING STUDENTS, NOT UNITS.

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Appendix

Percentage of Students in Each System that Would Receive the Supplement

	% of students receiving free lunch	% of students receiving reduced lunch	% of students in SPED level 1	% of students in SPED level 2	% of students in SPED level 3	% of high school students
Autauga County	41%	7.7%	18%	0.17%	1.7%	30.9%
Baldwin County	38%	5.2%	26.5%	0.14%	1.9%	30.2%
Barbour County*	68%	0.0%	12.3%	0.23%	2.2%	28.3%
Bibb County	54%	9.1%	16.6%	0.27%	2.5%	30.9%
Blount County	46%	8.2%	15.5%	0.17%	2.3%	31.2%
Bullock County	65%	0.0%	13.2%	0.13%	2.0%	30.6%
Butler County	68%	5.5%	13.4%	0.10%	1.7%	30.8%
Calhoun County	52%	9.1%	18.4%	0.23%	2.3%	31.9%
Chambers County	63%	8.2%	24.0%	0.22%	2.2%	29.9%
Cherokee County	52%	11.0%	15.7%	0.28%	1.4%	31.0%
Chilton County	50%	7.2%	14.5%	0.15%	1.7%	29.2%
Choctaw County	65%	3.9%	16.8%	0.00%	2.0%	32.0%
Clarke County*	51%	0.0%	15.4%	0.17%	1.7%	35.2%
Clay County	55%	10.5%	19.4%	0.15%	3.0%	33.1%
Cleburne County	49%	12.6%	18.4%	0.08%	2.3%	31.1%
Coffee County	46%	9.8%	19.3%	0.15%	0.8%	33.9%
Colbert County	59%	8.1%	22.9%	0.04%	1.8%	32.0%
Conecuh County	84%	4.1%	12.7%	0.07%	0.8%	27.9%
Coosa County	63%	6.6%	11.2%	0.19%	2.3%	32.1%
Covington County	54%	10.1%	15.3%	0.29%	2.0%	29.3%
Crenshaw County	56%	8.6%	16.9%	0.14%	1.5%	30.7%
Cullman County*	59%	0.0%	17.1%	0.35%	2.3%	30.1%
Dale County	53%	6.7%	12.4%	0.13%	2.0%	29.1%
Dallas County*	65%	0.0%	18.8%	0.21%	2.7%	35.2%
Dekalb County	60%	6.4%	14.6%	0.34%	1.4%	29.6%
Elmore County	45%	7.5%	19.5%	0.24%	2.0%	29.0%
Escambia County	68%	6.0%	16.5%	0.07%	2.2%	27.5%
Etowah County	43%	10.8%	14.4%	0.20%	1.4%	30.7%
Fayette County	51%	9.3%	13.3%	0.13%	4.0%	31.4%
Franklin County	57%	13.1%	19.9%	0.25%	1.6%	28.7%
Geneva County	60%	6.7%	18.0%	0.11%	1.5%	30.3%
Green County	88%	4.2%	4.9%	0.41%	3.8%	32.4%
Hale County	68%	7.7%	8.4%	0.15%	2.0%	33.3%
Henry County	57%	5.2%	18.7%	0.08%	1.2%	31.6%
Houston County	51%	7.7%	17.3%	0.21%	1.7%	31.3%

Jackson County	56%	8.9%	12.7%	0.16%	1.2%	31.5%
Jefferson County	48%	7.6%	20.6%	0.17%	2.3%	32.1%
Lamar County	48%	11.3%	20.1%	0.17%	1.5%	29.2%
Lauderdale County	39%	6.2%	19.2%	0.18%	1.3%	31.3%
Lawrence County	54%	10.2%	16.0%	0.06%	2.0%	29.0%
Lee County	48%	7.9%	16.0%	0.17%	1.8%	32.4%
Limestone County	42%	6.7%	14.7%	0.10%	2.0%	31.1%
Lowndes County*	69%	0.0%	13.1%	0.00%	1.6%	32.2%
Macon County*	68%	0.0%	10.8%	0.14%	1.2%	35.2%
Madison County	29%	7.6%	23.2%	0.18%	2.0%	32.3%
Marengo County	68%	5.8%	10.3%	0.00%	1.3%	33.0%
Marion County	49%	7.7%	15.6%	0.09%	2.7%	30.5%
Marshall County	65%	7.7%	15.5%	0.14%	1.9%	31.2%
Mobile County*	49%	0.0%	20.7%	0.29%	2.1%	30.1%
Monroe County	63%	5.4%	11.4%	0.08%	2.6%	32.6%
Montgomery County*	54%	0.0%	14.9%	0.09%	2.8%	27.4%
Morgan County	40%	7.6%	23.9%	0.05%	1.6%	31.5%
Perry County*	73%	0.0%	11.8%	0.19%	3.5%	29.4%
Pickens County	59%	5.3%	12.9%	0.23%	2.4%	31.3%
Pike County	69%	6.7%	18.4%	0.00%	1.3%	30.6%
Randolph County	59%	6.3%	18.2%	0.05%	1.5%	32.5%
Russell County	50%	9.0%	14.2%	0.14%	2.8%	30.3%
St. Clair County	44%	7.9%	19.1%	0.25%	2.2%	28.5%
Shelby County	25%	5.4%	22.8%	0.19%	2.6%	29.3%
Sumter County*	66%	0.0%	10.8%	0.06%	1.9%	35.3%
Talladega County	62%	10.2%	16.5%	0.10%	2.3%	30.7%
Tallapoosa County	60%	8.7%	19.2%	0.21%	2.0%	33.0%
Tuscaloosa County	46%	7.1%	20.4%	0.18%	1.9%	29.0%
Walker County	58%	7.3%	12.8%	0.21%	2.4%	31.0%
Washington County	46%	7.7%	14.5%	0.07%	1.6%	32.3%
Wilcox County*	73%	0.0%	10.0%	0.12%	3.0%	31.3%
Winston County	46%	14.3%	25.6%	0.53%	1.9%	33.3%
Albertville City*	44%	0.0%	10.8%	0.12%	1.3%	24.2%
Alexander City	52%	5.3%	20.9%	0.19%	2.5%	31.6%
Alabaster City	32%	4.9%	21.0%	0.15%	2.8%	29.9%
Andalusia City	48%	4.1%	18.9%	0.12%	2.1%	30.1%
Anniston City*	72%	0.0%	9.6%	0.05%	2.5%	25.1%
Arab City	31%	8.1%	18.9%	0.24%	1.9%	32.8%
Athens City	49%	5.2%	18.7%	0.21%	1.7%	28.5%
Attalla City	64%	10.3%	15.4%	0.06%	2.1%	42.0%
Auburn City	26%	3.0%	8.0%	0.22%	1.8%	28.8%

Bessemer City	**71%**	1.1%	12.6%	0.08%	2.4%	25.8%
Birmingham City*	64%	0.0%	13.5%	0.18%	2.1%	26.8%
Boaz City	58%	7.7%	15.4%	0.05%	1.5%	28.5%
Brewton City	46%	3.6%	5.5%	0.00%	0.9%	30.8%
Chickasaw City*	**71%**	0.0%	20.5%	0.11%	**3.1%**	20.7%
Cullman City	30%	6.9%	15.4%	0.32%	2.1%	29.4%
Daleville City	61%	7.9%	16.0%	0.09%	1.2%	**34.0%**
Decatur City	52%	3.4%	15.9%	0.27%	2.5%	29.0%
Demopolis City	55%	8.9%	9.0%	0.14%	1.3%	30.3%
Dothan City	59%	6.3%	10.5%	0.26%	2.1%	26.6%
Elba City*	47%	0.0%	14.8%	0.15%	1.4%	**34.2%**
Enterprise City	37%	5.8%	16.9%	0.01%	1.2%	**32.3%**
Eufaula City	**67%**	4.8%	19.0%	0.18%	1.6%	27.6%
Fairfield City*	63%	0.0%	12.7%	0.11%	2.9%	30.3%
Florence City	56%	5.1%	16.1%	0.11%	2.4%	31.0%
Fort Payne City	59%	4.5%	9.4%	0.10%	1.4%	28.3%
Gadsden City	65%	6.2%	12.0%	0.06%	1.6%	29.8%
Geneva City	52%	5.8%	17.8%	0.16%	1.7%	26.9%
Guntersville City	42%	5.0%	12.7%	0.10%	1.5%	29.8%
Haleyville City	50%	9.8%	22.0%	0.00%	1.8%	30.4%
Hartselle City	25%	4.7%	**29.4%**	0.07%	1.2%	**31.9%**
Homewood City	22%	3.9%	21.5%	0.15%	2.1%	28.0%
Hoover City	20%	4.8%	7.3%	0.13%	1.7%	**32.2%**
Huntsville City	37%	1.0%	18.9%	0.20%	2.9%	29.7%
Jacksonville City	46%	8.3%	15.0%	0.13%	2.5%	30.6%
Jasper City	43%	5.3%	14.6%	0.33%	2.0%	30.9%
Lanett City	**85%**	4.8%	18.6%	0.00%	1.3%	26.6%
Leeds City	45%	7.7%	20.5%	0.16%	1.9%	25.8%
Linden City*	63%	0.0%	7.7%	0.00%	2.9%	**32.4%**
Madison City	18%	3.9%	16.5%	0.22%	1.8%	**34.5%**
Midfield City(	61%	0.0%	13.9%	0.09%	1.9%	31.0%
Mountain Brook City*	**0%**	0.0%	6.9%	0.07%	1.7%	**32.0%**
Muscle Shoals City	25%	7.1%	17.3%	0.14%	1.3%	31.4%
Pelham City	33%	5.3%	17.2%	0.06%	2.0%	29.8%
Oneonta City	38%	7.6%	17.0%	0.20%	1.9%	28.4%
Opelika City	61%	5.8%	7.9%	0.12%	1.9%	29.6%
Opp City	52%	6.8%	18.6%	0.08%	1.6%	28.4%
Oxford City	51%	7.0%	14.7%	0.05%	1.7%	29.7%
Ozark City	58%	4.9%	18.9%	0.36%	2.4%	**31.5%**
Pell City	47%	6.7%	14.3%	0.05%	2.3%	29.2%
Phenix City	59%	6.2%	11.6%	0.04%	2.0%	25.6%

Piedmont City	58%	4.8%	18.2%	0.08%	1.9%	29.7%
Saraland City	40%	8.5%	16.5%	0.11%	1.3%	34.5%
Roanoke City	53%	7.5%	21.3%	0.14%	0.5%	30.5%
Russellville City	63%	8.7%	15.3%	0.08%	0.8%	27.2%
Scottsboro City	43%	8.1%	21.9%	0.04%	2.6%	30.2%
Selma City*	73%	0.0%	10.0%	0.20%	2.4%	25.4%
Sheffield City	71%	6.3%	16.7%	0.09%	2.1%	29.3%
Sylacauga City	48%	7.4%	20.2%	0.22%	1.5%	30.8%
Talladega City	76%	8.2%	14.0%	0.05%	1.9%	27.3%
Tallassee City	47%	5.6%	26.6%	0.05%	2.1%	29.2%
Satsuma City	33%	10.1%	17.8%	0.08%	1.5%	34.2%
Tarrant City*	65%	0.0%	12.7%	0.17%	3.4%	28.3%
Thomasville City	56%	10.0%	18.0%	0.22%	2.0%	35.1%
Troy City	59%	3.7%	18.5%	0.10%	2.3%	29.6%
Tuscaloosa City	48%	1.7%	23.9%	0.17%	2.9%	29.0%
Tuscumbia City	44%	7.8%	17.9%	0.00%	1.5%	31.1%
Vestavia Hills City	7%	1.9%	14.4%	0.09%	1.3%	28.1%
Winfield City	36%	8.1%	5.6%	0.08%	2.8%	31.5%
Trussville City	8%	2.8%	13.7%	0.26%	1.4%	31.8%
State Totals	47%	5.0%	17.0%	0.17%	2.1%	30.9%

Note: Appendix was coded to represent four quartiles with white being systems in the lowest quartile, light grey in the second quartile, dark grey in the third quartile, and black in the highest quartile.

Leadership Development Model for Shelby County Schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine factors impacting program quality in leadership development programs as a means to inform the Shelby County School System of effective practices in leadership development. The qualitative research design method was used to explore two school systems identified through a comprehensive review of research as having exemplary leadership development programs. Telephone interviews were conducted with personnel responsible for the implementation of their school system's leadership development program. A set of predetermined questions were utilized in the interviews. Respondents were asked to elaborate on the unique qualities of their leadership development program, as well as, offer recommendations on how to begin the process of developing a quality program. As a result of this study, school systems should develop programs based on research and revealed implications providing a robust program easily adapted for aspiring leaders, as well as those currently in leadership positions.

Key Words: Leadership Development; Leadership Training; School Administration; Leadership Effectiveness; Leadership Development Models.

Perhaps United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, said it best when he stated, "There are no good schools without good principals" (2009). The vision of the Shelby County School System is to be the model for excellence in education. As stated in his letter of request to become a client of Samford University (March 6, 2015), current Superintendent Randy Fuller wanted this vision to be fulfilled and thereby requested a study of best practices in leadership development. The purpose of this study was to engage in a reflective critique of exemplary leadership development programs and to offer recommendations to the Shelby County School Superintendent concerning exemplary practices of a leadership development program. Superintendent Fuller wants to continuously develop leaders who will carry on the vision of being a model of excellence in education. As a means to that end, the authors researched exemplary leadership development programs in a review of the literature and by interviewing leaders from two programs. The research was designed to provide valuable data, insight, and direction to the Shelby County School System as it attempts to create and implement a leadership development program. The focus of this study was on content, delivery methods, and other factors that impact program quality from school systems that are nationally recognized to provide exemplary, purposeful leadership development programs.

Significance of Leadership

Gene Bottoms, Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) senior vice-president iterated the need to have to have skilled principals who know a lot more about curriculum and instruction and how to work with faculty in creating the conditions for improved student achievement (Olson, 2007). In addition to improving student achievement, research showed evidence that a principal can affect variables such as parents' perceptions of the school, teachers' decisions about where to work and teachers' satisfaction (Rice, 2010). Rice (2010) also found low-achieving, high-poverty schools tend not to have effective principals.

Robert Eaker noted it is virtually impossible to re-culture school or school districts into high-performing professional learning communities without widely dispersed, high-quality leadership (Buffum, 2008 p. vii). The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) also reported "On day one, principals should be able to blend their energy, knowledge and professional skills to collaborate with, and motivate others to transform school learning environments in ways that ensure all students will graduate college and career ready" (CCSSO, 2012, p. 3).

Leadership and Student Achievement

Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) described leadership as providing direction and exercising influence. In a six-year study of the effects of state, district, and school leadership on student learning, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from 43 school districts in nine states. This study noted among school-related factors influencing student learning, leadership is second to teaching. The study further showed, "To date we have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership" (Wahlstrom et al., 2010, p. 9). In the report, *How Leadership Influences Student Learning: Review of Research*, the authors found "There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around in the absence of intervention by talented

leaders. While other factors within the school also contribute to such turnarounds, leadership is the catalyst" (Wahlstrom, Leithwood, Louis, & Anderson, 2010, p. 35).

Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, and Cravens (2007) built on this concept stating high standards and rigorous learning goals must be in place for student learning. Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, and Portin (2010) defined leadership as "the shared work and commitments that shape the direction of a school or district and their learning improvement agendas, and that engage effort and energy in pursuit of those agendas" (p. 4).

A principal must engage all stakeholders so learning is the focus of both adults and students. Goldring et al., (2007) described a healthy school environment as one that is not only safe and orderly, but one in which the central focus is student learning. Teachers are an integral part of the equation and must be engaged in professional learning communities whose focus is improving instruction.

District Role in Leadership Development

The importance of district support has also been reported in *The District Leadership Challenge* (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). In this study 22 high school principals were interviewed. In the most-improved schools, principals felt there was a collaborative relationship established with the district. In contrast, principals in the least-improved high schools felt that reform initiatives were implemented from the district level. Principals in the most-improved schools also report that districts allowed principals to make most decisions concerning school improvement, while the principals in the least-improved schools indicated districts held tight control over decision making. The authors further held "even the most talented and best-trained principals will fail if their working conditions do not support their improvement efforts" (Bottoms & Fry, 2009, p. iii).

In 2007, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, and Cohen researched exemplary leadership development programs. They found exemplary in-service programs were organized in curriculum and instruction to continually develop leaders in processes such as developing school-wide direction and goals, observing and providing feedback to teachers, providing quality professional development and learning experiences for teachers, guiding school improvement efforts through the use of data, and establishing learning communities. Further, exemplary programs typically provided mentoring, collaborative networks, peer coaching, and school visits by colleagues.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) conducted a survey of principals in 2008 and found its members spend approximately two percent of their time on improving their skills through professional learning. A Public Agenda Report released in 2003 stated 96% of principals surveyed felt their colleagues were more helpful in their preparation for administration than graduate courses (NEA Policy Brief, 2008). Leadership training and development is often overlooked or pushed aside to focus on other issues. Vanderbilt's Joseph F. Murphy stated, "Most (professional development) for principals is not consistent with our best understanding of how learning occurs" (Prothero, 2015, p.10). Most school leaders attend a university for administrative training, but as Mitgang and Gill (2012) stated "equally important is the training and support school leaders receive after they're hired" (p. 24).

New Leaders (2013) identified through case studies three key roles of effective principals beyond that of building manager. These are instructional leader, human capital manager and culture builder. To provide an atmosphere which enables principals to be successful, districts

should focus on four key strands: (1) Alignment among goals, strategies, structures and resources, (2) culture of collective responsibility, balanced autonomy, and continuous learning and improvement, (3) effective management and support for principals and (4) system and policies to effectively manage talent at the school level (Ikemoto, Taliaferro & Davis, 2014). In a survey of almost 1,000 principals, Whitmire (2012) found that over half feel they would be more effective with continuous development.

In an article submitted to Education Leadership, Fullan (2009) reasons that although instructional leadership has come to the forefront of the leadership role; few are prepared to implement this practice. He asserts that leaders will need job-embedded learning, system-embedded leadership and learning, and organizationally-embedded leadership to carry out these duties. While many programs provide job-embedded leadership, these develop the individual leader. To improve the structure of the organization, there must be "shared learning in the setting in which you work" (Fullan, 2009). System-embedded leadership features a collective responsibility throughout the district.

Summary

Districts have a responsibility to create conditions where leaders can learn and practice effective skills. Bottoms and Schmidt-Davis (2010) reported, "The vision and actions of system leaders and school board members frequently determine whether principals can be effective in leading school improvement. Districts cannot necessarily make weak principals succeed, but we have seen too many districts create conditions in which even good principals are likely to fail" (p. i).

States and districts must define what skills and competencies leaders should have and plan training and development based on these standards. While many states use ISLLC standards, Alabama developed its own set of standards (Schmidt-Davis, 2011). There are numerous models of essential skills that a district may use in conjunction with Alabama standards.

When standards and essential skills are present, districts may begin to support their leaders by providing professional development. The Wallace Foundation initiative "reflects the belief that districts can do much to develop and support principals as effective instructional leaders if they reshape traditional, often haphazard preparation and hiring processes for aspiring principals and if they restructure evaluation and support for new principals" (Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2015, p. 2).

Method

Research Design and Questions

The researchers examined factors impacting program quality in leadership development programs as a means to inform the Shelby County School System of effective practices in leadership development. The study explored two exemplary leadership development programs in the southeast United States. Specifically, the researchers: (a) examined the literature on leadership development programs, (b) included interviews from experts in exemplary leadership development programs across the country, (c) reviewed the structure of content and delivery methods, and (d) noted components related to strong leadership development programs. The researchers then offered recommendations related to the development of a leadership development model for the Shelby County School System. Research was conducted to provide

insight into best practices and recommendations for a strong, positive, relevant experience for Shelby County aspiring, novice and veteran leaders. The research questions that were addressed in this study included:
- What K-12 school systems are consistently recognized for best practices for leadership development programs?
- What is distinctive in the delivery, content, and practices of the nation's best programs?
- What steps can K-12 school systems take to ensure an outstanding leadership development program for aspiring, novice and veteran leaders?

Methodology & Interview Questions

After IRB approval was granted, expert interviews were conducted with leaders in Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia and Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida. Notes were coded to determine common themes and a qualitative, grounded theory research design was used.

Interview questions were developed to address the characteristics making their program distinct from other leadership development programs. The specific interview questions were:
- Your leadership development program has been recognized as one of the top in the nation throughout the literature. To what do you attribute your success?
- What makes your program different from other leadership development programs?
- How do you impact the content and delivery in your program? How do you assess for participant understanding?
- Explain how your leadership development program equips your school leaders for success.
- What components of your leadership development program do you consider to be most beneficial to your participants? How did you arrive at these components?
- How has your leadership development program changed in recent years?
- How do you evaluate your leadership development program?
- How did you develop your curriculum? Who developed it?
- Do you have mentors? Who trains those mentors?
- How do you fund your program?
- Do you have a succession plan of training?

Results

Implications for Practice

The following are implications and recommendations for creating an effective leadership development program that resulted from this study:
- When creating a program, it is important for everyone to have collective responsibility for the program.
- Leadership competencies or standards should be developed. These standards should be the basis of all leadership training and development.
- Program curriculum should be developed by district personnel. This allows leaders to understand expectations from the district.
- Training should be provided by district personnel.

- A cohort model allows the opportunity to create relationships that may stimulate professional collaboration.
- Training cohorts should be based on vacancy forecasting. Begin training with one cohort group and expand as needed.
- It is imperative to stay current on research in the area of leadership development. Resources used should be based on this research.
- Mentors and/or coaches are a vital part of leader support.
- Training should include problem solving scenarios, videos, and other elements to engage the learner.

These findings from two exemplary programs provide direction for a system creating a leadership development program.

Conclusions

This study led to several conclusions concerning developing a leadership development program. Based on the results of the qualitative research, there are common elements which contribute to an effective leadership development program. The initial planning stage should involve various leaders to create a unified appreciation and commitment to the program. Standards or competencies should be based on the non-negotiables the district has set. Training and development should be provided by those who know the system best. Various resources and methods should be used during the training sessions. Mentoring and/or coaching should be provided to leaders to monitor implementation of the standards and training. These individuals should be well-versed in expectations of the district. By implementing the findings of this study, leaders will be better prepared for their roles.

Although there were many similarities between the two districts studied, it should be noted that a small sample size was used. It would be beneficial for the researchers to continue to identify exemplary programs and study the effective practices of those programs. Program components could be modified based on new research, program analysis, and participant feedback.

Recommendations for Shelby County Schools

A *Framework for Leadership Development* has been created by the researchers. This framework is based on the current Instructional Framework for Shelby County Schools which utilized a variation of the four critical questions of a Professional Learning Community (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2006). Executive leadership should complete this framework as a basis for the leadership development program.

The development of competencies is another key element for the district to create before implementing a leadership development program. Initial work has begun on the competencies and can be found in the appendix. Examples of competencies/standards from the two districts studied were provided for executive leaders in Shelby County Schools to provide exemplars. After discussion and reflection, a draft list was completed. Central office personnel, principals, and assistant principals were all provided the opportunity for input on the draft competencies. Further work will require examining suggestions and amending the competencies as needed for a final product. The draft Leadership Development Framework is included in

Appendix A. Appendix B is a draft of Leader Competencies. This draft will continue to be developed by system leaders.

When the competencies and practices are finalized, the district should begin the process of developing a cohort of leaders. When the cohort is solidified, training modules should be developed that include a variety of resources and methods and are based on the competencies.

Summary

As education and leadership have become more complex in the 21st century, improving professional learning for principals, assistant principals, teachers, and superintendents must be at the forefront of our agenda" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 58). Preparation programs must recognize the importance of leadership and take the necessary steps to adequately prepare and develop school leaders. "Effective principals can do what effective teachers cannot. They can create a climate that encourages learning and achievement, not just in a single classroom but throughout a school" (Syed, 2015, p. 3). With this in mind, training and development must be provided for every level of leader. School systems would do well to develop programs based on the research and implications revealed in this study. This will provide a robust program easily adapted for aspiring leaders, as well as, those currently in a leadership position. These well trained leaders will be able to support the academic development of teachers, which will result in increased student achievement.

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Developing Online/Hybrid Learning Models for Higher Education Programs

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Abstract

Colleges and universities are looking for creative ways to increase student enrollment while providing flexible course offerings and maintaining adequate fiscal stewardship. This review of selected literature advocates for the use of online instruction in higher education in order to address, with instructional fidelity, the learning preferences and needs of the modern era student. A decade ago, student enrollment for online learning was estimated to be around 1.9 million students (Allen & Seaman, 2004). Today, online course enrollment estimations are much closer to 5.3 million (Fleming, 2014). The authors' perspective for meeting this demand is for higher education programs to embrace this evolution in instructional delivery.

Keywords: online, hybrid, higher education, instructional program, pedagogy

It is becoming readily apparent that with the cost of higher education increasing beyond what the average American can afford to pay or is willing to go in debt over, there is a growing recognition that online education is triggering a decisive change in the business model of colleges and universities (Butler, 2012). More and more, colleges and universities are looking for ways to increase enrollment, maximize their ability to provide flexible course offerings, and maintain adequate fiscal stewardship of public tax dollars and private donations. Many are finding that online and hybrid models of instruction fit the business model needed to sustain financial growth and viability. In the last decade, it was estimated that online learning would shift from 1.9 million students enrolled to around 3.9 million in 2014 (Allen & Seaman, 2004). However, the actual numbers rose higher than expected with enrollment in online courses – whole programs or stand-alone courses – much closer to 5.3 million (Fleming, 2014). Still, some stakeholders within the field worry that a certain level of academic rigor and fidelity is being sacrificed in order to achieve these ends. Even so, compelling arguments have been made that, for some students, "the online experience with social and extracurricular features of college may even be superior" (McKeown, 2012, p. 1).

Because of the proliferation of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), higher education institutions have their choice as to what digital tools and virtual platforms they wish to engage with in order to best provide instruction for their students. All of these choices have enabled the rapid expansion of online and hybrid models of instruction that stretches traditional concepts of learning pedagogy. As this growth continues, instructors must continue to develop effective teaching strategies in order to remain relevant within the field. So then critical points to consider remain: what professional investment will be required of professors for their students, and for their chosen profession? When developing such a program, what strategies, practices, and routines are necessary for instructors to employ for effective and relevant instruction? What are the ramifications to a college or university's bottom line when considering web-based instructional models and is it worth a redesign of entire academic programs? Will this transformation hinder or critically damage the academic vision and mission of the institution? These questions are fundamental to determining the worth of such a shift in higher education and it is these authors' perspective that such a shift is not only worthy, but also vital to developing the types of learning experiences that are authentic and translatable in the 21st century.

Fiscal Stewardship and the Higher Education Model

No one who has studied fiscal management of post-secondary institutions over the last half-century would consider it a stretch to say that the cost of attending college within the United States has drastically increased. In fact, since 1970, the long-term trend of tuition and fees for students in college has risen at a rate six percent faster than the standard rate of inflation (Schoen, 2015). As recently as just the last ten years, tuition and fees at American higher education institutions "have outpaced inflation and increased 28 percent" (Batkins, Miller & Gitis, 2014, Summary points, para. 1). Perspective students who are looking for creative solutions to their desire to receive an academic degree are continually seeking after alternatives. This ability to offer course content at a lower cost is becoming increasingly difficult with the continued rise of administrative costs among all levels of higher education. According to Batkins et al. (2014):

> General administrative staff, which includes business and financial operations at postsecondary institutions, grew 31.5 percent during the last decade (from 148,190 in

2003 to 195,000 in 2012), with a 10 percent gain from 2009 to 2012, despite the Great Recession…. [I]n 2003 post-secondary institutions (including trade schools, junior colleges, and universities) paid approximately $7.1 billion for administrative staff expenses. By 2012, that figure jumped to $11.5 billion. In other words, institutions added $4.4 billion in costs for administrative staff alone. ("Regulation Increase Tuition", para.1)

Bolger and Hobart (2014) found 92% of respondents agreed that college is too expensive (Summary points, para. 1). Just as disconcerting for these same institutions is the determination by the majority of those surveyed (52%) that a four-year college degree is not worth the average $26,000 of debt accrued upon graduation. Another study conducted by Bob Morse (2010) surveyed current college students to determine what factors influenced their decision to attend the institutions where they were presently enrolled. Student responses were ranked by order of importance and two of the top four reasons for attending their specific location had to do with "financial assistance offered" (44.7%) and "the cost of attending this college" (41.6%) (Morse, 2010, para. 5).

None of these statistics bode well for academic models presently in existence in higher education today. Still, even if these institutions can't fully "reduce" the cost of tuition and fees, online and hybrid models of learning offer unique and marketable areas of "savings" that traditional program models simply can't do. McKeown (2012) offered real, tangible ways in which online and hybrid programs can set themselves apart financially and appeal to potential students whose time and money are overriding factors in determining where they attend school. Online education is an increasingly attractive option for students "because it allows them to pursue their studies at a time and place convenient to them" (McKeown, 2012, p. 6). In this same vein, if less debt is incurred because of "lower tuition, lower living expenses, and/or the ability to work part-time or full- time while in college—the increased earning potential accompanying the degree may appear to be more immediate and thus more attractive" (McKeown, 2012, p. 6).

There are avenues of great potential in changing these statistical trends if colleges and universities are willing to begin shifting their mindset outside of the traditional models of learning. Respondents to Bolger and Hobart (2014) "strongly favor" online courses as viable alternatives to the traditional college classroom ("Key Findings Survey", para. 5). Still, it is not a foregone conclusion that the more fiscally sound academic route is that of online learning. There are those that push back on this idea and worry that too many assumptions regarding the cost and savings from the move to online learning could have secondary and tertiary detrimental effects. Some like, Christensen and Horn (2011) predicted that online education will be a dramatically disruptive force and that 15 years from now, provisions for cheap high-quality education, will drive half the universities in the country out of business. Wang and Torrisi-Steele (2015) outlined a number of unaccounted for costs associated with online instruction often assumed out of the cost of implementation, and incorrectly so. "While an instructor in a traditionally taught course can easily drop new material into the syllabus or even an individual class, modifying an online course usually requires reshooting video, editing existing content, modifying software, and so on" (Wang & Torrisi-Steele, 2015, p. 143). The issue, quite frankly, is that a simple addition or deletion of course content could, and often-times does, require multiple entities to make these changes and those things take time, and as a result, money. " Our point is that while online courses offer the potential for constant modification and updates, realizing this potential may in fact be expensive, leading to less-frequent updates than for traditionally taught subjects" (Wang & Torrisi-Steele, 2015, p. 143).

If developed properly and implemented in such a way that all of the strengths of online learning are utilized, with accommodations made to adequately address its weaknesses, a compelling case can be made that a shift into the world of online education is not only fiscally prudent, but academically sound. Although the financial considerations are not without its detractors, there is a critical mass of research that, at minimum, supports the idea that online and hybrid models of learning should be viewed as a worthy alternative to the traditional model of implementing content at the university level. So where to start? Programs cannot simply decide to move to online or hybrid models of learning for cost alone. Therefore, programs must look at how they can do both: implement cost-effective online/hybrid learning models while preserving the academic integrity of their programs and institutions. In order to do this in a way that is process-driven and flexible, programs must start where all classroom learning begins; with the teacher.

Shifting the Role of Instructor

Inherent in any understanding of the instruction provided within a classroom is recognizing the important role of the instructor. Redmond (2011) stated:

> The transition to online teaching and learning from a traditional face-to-face approach challenges the expectations and roles of both instructors and learners. For some instructors, when they change the place of teaching, they feel that their identities are under threat. (p. 1051)

For this reason, it is critical that instructors begin to see how their role will transition as the instructional environment changes. This process requires instructors to identify certain assumptions and challenge them, which is not something that will happen immediately. It takes a lot of self-reflection and critique on the part of the instructor. This process takes time, but it is necessary for a transformation to take place so that online teaching moves towards the use of new strategies and roles for the instructor. Instructors must become facilitators and design activities and adopt strategies where learners are more actively engaged, self-regulated, and collaborative (Clemmons, Nolen, & Hayn, 2014).

Essential with any shift regarding instructional implementation is training, both on the practical pedagogical level, as well as the theoretical level. The majority of instructors in higher education do not come from backgrounds rooted in teacher-education programs where pedagogical concepts are readily instilled and developed within them. Because of this, understanding how to develop and transform existing course design when transitioning from a traditional face-to-face model to a blended or entirely online teaching model requires training (Bonk & Dennen, 2003). As identified by Yang and Cornelious (2005), the major challenge for new instructors of online/hybrid instruction is the ability to redesign instruction using a more constructivist approach. This adjustment requires training in teaching pedagogy; not simply knowledge of the content. Some academics may perceive that designing for online learning and teaching is more time-consuming than face-to-face courses and they are often put off by the increased workload after years of working within a face-to-face model. Even so, training on course development and implementation is necessary to ensure transitional success.

Without essential training in online course and program development for instructors, many traditional professors struggle and can frequently fail, especially when their initial tendency is disapproval. Instructional implementation of online coursework has a much different feel than traditional classrooms, even when the instructional concepts aren't vastly different. Still, traditional models of instruction simply do not effectively reach students with the online/hybrid

model and that transition for instructors is difficult at times to see. Redmond (2011) stated, "The replication of traditional methods does not capitalize on the dynamic nature of the technologically enhanced teaching and learning environment" (p. 1051). The instructional approach must become one where students are "co-constructing knowledge through interactions" as opposed to having an instructor who is "simply disseminating information" (Vaughan, 2010, p. 61). In essence, instructors must receive training that teaches them how to get out of their own way and become less of a singular classroom presence that disseminates information, but rather nourishes and develops their ability to facilitate learning.

The less-is-more approach to university instruction flies in the face of traditional practice; however, in order to fully utilize the advantages that online instruction has to offer regarding content integration, student assimilation, and information retention, instructors must be willing to do more than simply attend additional training. Wang and Torrisi-Steele (2015) also discussed the deep-seeded changes that must take place within instructors in order for their shift in instructional strategy to take place. They stated that:

> Similar to cultural norms, teaching activities are driven by philosophies, theories, accepted truths, or conventional wisdom. Changing an approach to teaching, whether face-to-face or online, thus parallels changing cultural norms and may involve transformative or emancipatory learning on the part of the educator. (p.19)

Therefore, changing teaching practice is much more than retraining; it's about changing ideologies, which is a much deeper shift. Transformational teaching is impacted by "objectives and attitudes of university staff, including their beliefs and possible resistance[s]" (Clemmons, Nolen, & Hayn, 2014, p. 37). This is not to say that "teaching presence" should be reduced; on the contrary, a teacher's connection with their students in an online/hybrid model is vital to the individual success of each student, as well as the overall success of the course. Based on the study provided by McPherson and Bacow (2015), the ability to communicate this idea will assist program chairs with easing the worry many faculty members have expressed since their major concern has been developing "…[student] relationships, and fear that [instructors] would isolate themselves from students by embedding their course in a digital environment…" (p. 147). Students have addressed similar concerns and have expressed that "[they] also enjoy face-to-face interaction with their professors, at least at places where such interaction is common and expected" (p. 147).

What must change is the instructional implementation for the instructor of the course. This is highlighted by Breton et al. (2005) where it was observed that the Internet allowed for the types of interactions that were rarely found in traditional classroom settings, including small classrooms. The online classroom allowed "students to answer back to a text rather than a teacher, and thus encourage[d] students not to be excessively respectful of authority" (p. 103). Even though the initial concerns dealt with rude, antisocial, and even disruptive behavior with such parameters, the instructors of the course found that when they adjusted their roles within the course to that of facilitators, the students were "generally respectful of the perspectives of others, but not unwilling to engage fully and thoughtfully, and often provocatively, in intellectual discussion" (p. 106). For these reasons, the researchers concluded that, compared to the traditional face-to-face model, the hybrid model with instructional roles adjusted provided obvious benefits. Breton et al. (2005) also stated that "collaborative Web-based learning may be more likely to result in the pluralist, diversified kind of course we aimed for" (p. 107).

Acceptance for and an understanding of this changing role are critical to the success of the online/hybrid transition for both the instructor and the student. Unfortunately, too many higher

education professionals feel this transition is not only unnecessary, but that it ultimately dilutes the academic experience for their students. According to the Twenty-First Century Campus Report 2.0 (2010) that was commissioned by CDW Government, LLC, 88% of higher education faculty viewed technology as an essential *tool* for the collegiate classroom, but only 35% think online learning is an "important element" of higher education (p. 9). Unfortunately, several years of development and implementation has done nothing to change the perceptions of college and university professors since this last study was performed. According to Allen and Seaman (2015), their survey data indicated that the proportion of chief academic leaders reporting online learning as critical to their long-term strategy reached a new high of 70.8% while "only 27.8% of academic leaders say their faculty accepts the value and legitimacy of online learning" (p. 21).

A combination of shifting roles, adequate training, and adjusted perceptions all factor into how higher education programs model and implement redesigned or entirely new online programs of study. To dismiss any of these factors as trite or insignificant can go a long way in hampering the smooth transition instructors need to make in order for online/hybrid models to be successful in engaging and preparing students.

Modifications to Pedagogy

There are numerous things about an online or hybrid instructional model that should differ from the traditional face-to-face model. Unfortunately, too many online models simply replicate traditional modes of instruction. Wang & Torrisi-Steele (2015) maintained:

> Online teaching practices are largely embedded in traditional content delivery models with technology being used for purposes such as administrative efficiency or convenient access to lecture slides rather than for purposes of developing innovative teaching strategies to facilitate deeper learning. (p. 18)

Before an instructor can begin to shift instruction within the online environment, they must be cognizant of and willing to address certain preconceived notions regarding online instruction that they themselves may have as the process begins.

Many instructors, who are highly experienced in face-to-face teaching, when first introduced to online teaching specifically, often worry that students will expect them to be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week (Pajo & Wallace, 2001). Time availability in a traditional classroom setting is quite structured, with class times and office hours plainly delineated through scheduling. With online courses, however, those lines become much more blurred and many instructors are skeptical and resistant to including online elements in their face-to-face course(s) (Falk & Drayton, 2009). In order to combat this issue from the start, it is critical that instructors of online courses feel empowered to set boundaries within their modes of communication in order to separate personal time with professional time. By doing this, instructors can begin to feel they still maintain investment in course structure.

The concept of course ownership is the next big hurdle for programs to manage with their instructors so that new online and blended course transitions maintain rich and effective dialogue while holding to high instructional standards. No longer can "ownership" rule the day in course implementation; rather, collaboration among all invested parties within the course must be cultivated in order to learn from and with each other. As such, the instructor becomes much more of a facilitator, locking all of the disparate pieces together to achieve an interconnected learning experience. Based on the experiences of previous research (Volery & Lord, 2000; Redmond, 2011), this change from the "intellect-on-stage" to more of a "learning catalyst"

doesn't necessarily indicate a change in the instructor's underlying teaching philosophy, but rather an ability to rethink what effective online learning can look like when it has undergone academic scrutiny.

Online and hybrid models of learning also have to be intentional when it comes to developing community. On a traditional college campus, simple social interactions such as joining a fraternity or sorority, attending athletic events as a member of the collective student body, and living in close proximity with other students in a homogenous environment naturally develops the sense of community that takes place within the face-to-face classroom (McKeown, 2012). Online and hybrid models are quite different. The sense of disconnect from other members within the course can be quite real and a collaborative facilitator must work intentionally to address this disconnect consistently in order to create a thriving learning community that promotes engaged thought and interaction among its members. So then can online and hybrid programs of learning replicate these experiences in such a way that they mirror these concepts of community that form in traditional classroom settings? Research performed by the U.S. Department of Education seems to suggest they can (Radford, 2011).

Although "community" might not be formed based on similar social experiences, community within the online and hybrid model can be formed when students with similar learning desires and social demographics are found. The U.S. Department of Education produced a report analyzing online undergraduate courses, programs, and students addressing this very issue. Radford (2011) reported that online students are more likely to be older. Many older students need flexibility so that they can juggle home and work demands. He also reported that about 15 percent of students under the age of 24 were also taking one or more online courses. As shown from this study, many students have something to build on in developing community from the start: age and previous life experiences. Further research has also suggested that other socially similar desires bond online students as well (McKeown, 2012). "Students who choose to pursue their college degree online often do so because it allows them to live wherever they want. This flexibility can translate into a significant financial benefit, since they can live in a lower-cost setting than is available on campus" (McKeown, 2012, p. 8). Similarly, many students have connected bonds in the form of career advancement and financial considerations. Traditionally, online courses have been filled with students who are "…seeking to enter or advance in a specific profession that requires the degree… [or] individuals for whom a traditional campus experience was not a real option" (p. 6). The nuanced skill for the online facilitator is creating activities and projects that draw these experiences out of each student in order to develop those social bonds among fellow classmates.

The online learning community needs to be a "virtual space where people come together with others to converse, exchange information or other resources, learn, play, or just be with each other" (Kraut & Resnick, 2011, intro.). The role and methodology of the learning community is something that has evolved greatly over the last several years for online and hybrid courses and can trace its expansion in direct proportion to the wide selection of sophisticated digital tools that have the capability to facilitate collaborative learning experiences (McConnell, 2006). Still, digital tools alone cannot bridge the gap from student to student. Adjusting teaching practice is much more critical to the development of effective pedagogy within the online/hybrid classroom. The crux of the issue is to understand that while effective digital tools are vital, changing teaching practice is much more complex; the complexity existing mainly because knowledge about teaching is largely communicative or emancipatory in nature (Habermas, 1971). Ideological change demands a paradigm shift and may be considered as emancipatory learning

(Habermas, 1971). Meaningful interactions that form the bonds within any classroom must be facilitated by collaborative instructors who understand, support, and promote self-directed skill development within and among the collective course membership (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011). It is essential that multi-layered activities with opportunities for engagement, collaboration, and relationship-building are considered essential elements in the online environment and are included in every course.

Classroom design and structure that enhances the interaction and collaboration among community members goes a long way in determining investment in the course and its content (Allen, Kiser, & Montgomery, 2013). Because any online course, if not properly developed, can give off a sense of isolation for its students, an effective online course, "…is all about creating opportunities for learning to take place. By providing collaborative activities, an online course has the potential to break the bonds of isolation that surround many online courses" (Allen et al., 2013, p. 1). Instructors must work to create an environment that supports student collaboration necessary to shape learner experiences within the virtual environment, including vital class discussions between themselves as well as their professors. The quest for information from each other is the very early formation of the collaborative model that is essential with online and hybrid instruction. Collaboration within the online course, when properly developed, begins to form an online learning community where each member of the course is able to elicit engaged responses from other members based on the sense of empowerment achieved when everyone has been provided a platform from which to contribute. West and West (2009) concluded, "They [students] want learning experiences that are social and will connect them with their peers" (p. 2). These types of developments within an online or hybrid model do not just happen; they are thought out, planned, implemented, adjusted, and constantly rebranded in order to meet the changing needs of the students enrolled, as well as utilizing all of the assets of the academic medium.

Conclusions

It is quite apparent that the proliferation of the internet, as well as the supporting digital tools that are ubiquitous in today's culture, are leading a paradigm shift in the higher education. Colleges and universities can no longer be selective in how they serve their students as the level of competition for increasing enrollment numbers at every area of post-secondary education continues to escalate. Online and hybrid models of instruction offer colleges and universities flexible, cost-effective, and academically rich alternatives to traditional instructional models that are becoming more rigid with each new technological advancement. Still, programs, departments, and schools that consider change simply for the financial benefits neglect the most valuable and obligatory role of the institution: instructional fidelity. Academic ramifications for such a transition in instructional delivery must be well thought out and careful consideration must be given to the intentional development of program-specific courses that meet the professional and academic needs of the student, while continuing to address weaknesses in the social aspect of schooling that is critical to the integrity of the collaborative learning community. Academic institutions must also ensure that adequate planning and professional development is provided for all course instructors adjusting to this new mode of instructional delivery. Defining instructor roles and adjusting instructional focus in order to adequately utilize the technology available to them takes patience, preparation, and education; none of which are quick or easy habits to transform.

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The Best Practices for Shaping School Culture for Instructional Leaders

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Abstract

School culture is the belief and attitude influencing every aspect of how a school functions. Culture shared by all school stakeholders makes the actualization of both short-and long-term objectives easier. In this context, the best practices for shaping school culture for professional educators are personal mastery, team learning, and building a shared vision (Hall & Hord, 2015). Instructional leaders can use school culture as a tool to influence and lead by establishing coordination among employees, having a direct impact on student achievement.

Keywords: school culture, transformational leadership, personal mastery, team learning, shared vision

Organizational productivity is affected by individual staff members' productivity. Hall and Hord (2015) found most organizations are encouraged to remain open to the creative talents of their members and to the implementation of innovations and improvements best serving their clients. These expectations are assumed to be true for schools as well as the corporate sector. Those studying workplace cultures of both schools and businesses have identified important messages for school improvement (Hall & Hord, 2015). However, school culture has a major impact on instructional leaders as it relates to student achievement.

Hall and Hord (2015) identified factors describing school organizational cultures supporting the current, and likely the future, demands on schools to change. Therefore, Hall and Hord recognized the best practices for shaping school culture for instructional leaders are: personal mastery, team learning, and building a shared vision. Personal mastery is the practice of continually clarifying and making personal vision more precise-identifying what each individual wants in his or her personal participation in the organization. Team learning is the activity of coming together to discuss and to learn with and from each other. Developing team-learning skills involves each individual balancing his or her own goals and advocacy to achieve collaborative decision making serving the well-being of all (Hall & Hord, 2015). Finally, building a shared vision which is the construction of compelling images shared by the organization's members and focused on what the organization wants to create (Hall & Hord, 2015). These shared pictures of the future foster a prodigious culture.

Personal Mastery

School climate generally is defined as the collective sentiments of individuals within a school in regard to a variety of school contextual factors. Lynch, Lerner, and Leventhal (2013) found theorists have conceptualized school climate as the aggregated perceptions of individuals within a school in regard to achievement, treatment of students, student–teacher relationships, school safety, and quality of the school environment. Lynch, Lerner, and Leventhal (2013) link aspects of school climate to a variety of student outcomes, ranging from academic outcomes to engagement in bullying and delinquent behaviors. For example, Lynch et al., (2013) considered the links among collective perceptions of student violence and hostility and school engagement. Lynch et al. (2013) found collective perceptions of negative school climate (defined as perceptions of unfairness, hostility, and victimization) were associated with low school engagement among students. Schools where adolescents perceived high levels of hostility were more likely to have students who were less engaged than schools where adolescents felt students were less hostile. Therefore, school-wide perceptions of hostility also were negatively associated with students' reading achievement scores. In general, research regarding the link between school climate and academic outcomes suggests school climate may have enduring associations with student achievement and engagement.

A key component of improving schooling environments has been improving personalization, that is, tightening connections between students and their learning environments (e.g., teachers, other adults, student peers, curriculum, overall school culture). McClure, Yonezawa, and Jones (2010) found personalization matters because young people who are engaged emotionally, cognitively and behaviorally in their education are less likely to show signs of alienation and more likely to be connected to school. Students who feel connected to their school are more likely to exhibit healthy lifestyle behaviors (McClure et al., 2010). Increased school connectedness is also related to educational motivation, classroom engagement and better

attendance; all of which are linked to higher academic achievement. Therefore, the importance of personalization in today's educational reform landscape is underscored by the time and money focused on reducing school and class size. These efforts have been supported by research and shown increased academic achievement of students, particularly low- income and minority students, when student-to-teacher ratios and school populations are reduced (McClure et al., 2010).

In particular, the idea behind smaller schools has been small schools can produce what McClure, Yonezawa, and Jones (2010) refers to a more "communal school organization" and small schools can become "tighter-knit," providing higher levels of social support to students. More positive, personalized school cultures result in more caring relationships among teachers and students and in fewer students "getting lost." However, as schools shrink in size, teachers are presumed better able to discuss students' progress and to compare information. Advisories, adult-student mentoring programs, and enhanced adult-led extracurricular programs are a few ways small and large schools try to enhance adult-student relationships (McClure et al., 2010). Furthermore, there is growing evidence indicating greater personalization-improved, trusting relationships particularly among teachers and students are able to raise students' expectations for themselves and teachers' expectations for students. But we are still unsure how increasing personalization helps raise academic achievement on various measures (e.g. state examinations, weighted grade-point averages, on-track for college entrance) (McClure et al., 2010). However, significant efforts have also been made to "personalize" schools by improving the relationships and overall feelings of connectedness among students, teachers, and the curriculum.

Team Learning

Dufour and Mattos (2013) found that instructional leaders want to improve student achievement in their school, rather than focus on the individual inspection of teaching, they must focus on the collective analysis of evidence of student learning. Of course, teaching and learning are not divorced from each other. However, the key to improved student learning is to ensure more good teaching in more classrooms most of the time (Dufour & Mattos, 2013). The most powerful strategy for improving both teaching and learning, however, is not by micromanaging instruction but by creating the collaborative culture and collective responsibility of a professional learning community (PLC).

A report from the International Academy of Education (Dufour & Mattos, 2013) concluded the key to improving teaching was ensuring educators "participate in a professional learning community focused on becoming responsive to students." Research shows educators in schools embracing PLCs are more likely to:

- Take collective responsibility for student learning, help students achieve at higher levels, and express higher levels of professional satisfaction.
- Share teaching practices, make results transparent, engage in critical conversations about improving instruction, and institutionalize continual improvement.
- Improve student achievement and their professional practice at the same time that they promote shared leadership.
- Experience the most powerful and beneficial professional development.
- Remain in the profession (Dufour & Mattos, 2013, p. 36).

To foster school cultures in which PLCs flourish instructional leaders need to focus on five key steps. They can start by forming teams in which members share responsibility to help all

students learn essential content and skills, providing teams with time to collaborate, helping to clarify the work that teams need to do, and ensuring teams have access to the resources and support they need to accomplish their objectives (Dufour & Mattos, 2013). Furthermore, the PLC process also promotes shared leadership by empowering teams to make important decisions. At the same time, instructional leaders ask their teams to be accountable for results, and they publicly recognize and celebrate incremental progress (Dufour & Mattos, 2013). An instructional leader providing acknowledgement and appreciation are vital to sustaining a continual improvement effort.

Finally, effective instructional leaders are willing to confront those who fail to honor the commitments to their team and obligations to their students (Dufour & Mattos, 2013). Instructional leaders make it clear an individual teacher cannot disregard the team-developed curriculum, dismiss the sequencing of content, and refuse to administer the team's common assessments, or opt out of the collaborative team process in any way (Dufour & Mattos, 2013). Therefore, they are willing to use their authority to break down the walls of educator isolation and create new norms of collaboration and collective responsibility for student learning.

Building a Shared Vision

Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) found good character is generally described as involving the facility to consistently apply principles such as respect for others, truthfulness, fairness, and responsibility when facing behavioral and ethical choices. Payne (2008) stated: "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship." It means that instructional leaders both insist on high-quality work and offer support. Gaziel (1997) found in the past decades, organizational climate and organizational culture have been the terms used in the educational administration literature to describe members' perception of the school work environment as an organization; organizational climate and culture were therefore investigated in relation to school effectiveness.

Organizational culture is a better defined, clearer, and more powerful concept than is organizational climate (Gaziel, 1997). Assumptions and beliefs are deeply held and are largely subconscious convictions about the world and how it works. Culture, then, inform climate in the way that it helps individuals to define what is important for them and to make sense of their experiences (Gaziel, 1997). Gaziel (1997) stated the tactic assumptions, values, and beliefs commonly shared in an organization can shape members' perceptions, feelings, and behavior. However, a common hypothesis about this role suggests if an organization possesses a well-defined culture (that is, a well-integrated set of common values, beliefs, and behavior patterns about what a good school should be) it will perform at a higher level of productivity (Gaziel, 1997).

Culture is the concept helping instructional leaders perceive and understand the complex forces working beneath the surface and is in the very air of human groups and organizations (Gaziel, 1997). Organizations usually have distinguishable identities manifested in their organizational members' patterns of behavior. The concept of culture helps instructional leaders understand these patterns-what they are, how they came to be, and how they affect organizational performance (Gaziel, 1997). Gaziel (1997) found many organizations including schools have shown institutions work best when people are committed to certain commonly held values and are bonded to one another and to the organizations by means of symbols. Therefore, by articulating such values and using appropriate and effective symbols; by celebrating milestones, events, and accomplishments; and by engaging in various expressive activities, instructional

leaders can encourage strong culture that focus on improving education (Gaziel, 1997).

Leadership Matters

The school leader is considered one of the most influential factors in the development of the quality and character of a school. Transformational leadership is one style successful in the school improvement process. In addition, Sergiovanni (2007) claimed a transformational leader practices, provides a clear and concise goal, focuses on uniting the organization and encourages commitment. Hallinger and Heck (1998) stated transformational leadership has also been found to have an impact on teachers' perceptions of school conditions, their individual commitment to change, organizational learning, and student outcomes.

Leadership is a key component in the development and sustainment of school climate. Moolenaar, Daly, and Sleegers (2010) found transformational leadership was positively related to teachers' perceptions of their school's climate of innovation. Teacher perceptions of an instructional leader's leadership style can also influence school climate. Rhodes, Camic, Milburn, and Lowe (2009) found instructional leaders could improve teachers' perceptions of school climate by exhibiting collaborative decision-making and attempting to remove obstacles that prohibit teachers from focusing on instruction. As a teacher's perception of leadership improves, he or she becomes more effective in the classroom. Therefore, instructional leaders who want to positively impact school climate should focus on providing teachers with the necessary support and resources.

According to Vos, Westhuizen, Mentz, and Ellis (2012), an unhealthy school climate can lead to ineffectiveness. Discovering the climate of a school is an important component for developing strategies for management and improvement for student performance. School climate has a significant effect on the job satisfaction levels of staff members. It is especially important to evaluate organizational health to maintain positive work performance (Vos et al., 2012). Therefore, a sustainable, positive school climate encourages the development and learning necessary for students to become productive contributors to society.

Conclusions

Student achievement increases substantially in schools with collaborative work cultures fostering a professional learning community among teachers and others, focus continuously on improving instructional practice in light of student performance data, and link to standards and staff development support (Valentine, 2006). Therefore, instructional leaders, both formal and informal, help shape the nature of school culture and thus the nature of school improvement. Leadership and school culture go hand in hand, in both the development and the sustainability of school reform (Valentine, 2006). The school leader is instrumental in shaping the school's culture and leading reform and the presence and sustainability of reform is highly associated with the school's culture (Valentine, 2006).

The rituals and procedures common to most public schools also play a part in defining a school's culture (Hinde, 2015). Instructional leaders must be able to use their ideas to help others come together in a shared consensus and be able to make the lives of others more sensible and meaningful (Bell, 2012). However, an instructional leader, in particular, is the key to enacting change or frustrating it. Instructional leaders work closely with staff to clarify and support the innovation, and they work collaboratively with other change agents (i.e. vice-principal and lead

teachers) throughout the school year. They develop supportive organizational arrangements, consult, monitor, and reinforce the change process (Hinde, 2015). Therefore, schools with instructional leaders who have these qualities are amenable to change.

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