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Illinois Education Research Council

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**Compendium
of
Abstracts**

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The Impact of Student-faculty Interaction and Structured and Unstructured Extracurricular Activities on Student Academic Achievement at Postsecondary Institutions

John K. Rugutt, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Educational Administration and Foundations
Guy Banicki, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Educational Administration and Foundations
Caroline C. Chemosit, Doctoral Student, Educational Administration
Illinois State University

This study investigated the influence of participation in both structured and unstructured in-and-out of class student activities on students' academic achievement when the influence of student-faculty interaction is controlled. The study used data collected from 1184 second year college students at a doctoral public state university in the State of Illinois. Participation in-and-out of class activities was based on the number of college-related activities in which the students reported taking part while academic achievement was measured by the students' cumulative grade point averages at the end of the freshman year. Student-faculty interaction was measured by the contact between the faculty and the student. The results show significant predictors for academic achievement at $p < 0.05$ in their order of magnitude as studying/homework (beta = 0.282); partying (beta = -0.198); student-faculty interaction (beta = 0.145); using the library (beta = -0.114); watching TV (beta = -0.078); and working (for pay) (beta = -0.065).

Student Persistence and Bachelor's Degree Completion Within and Across Postsecondary Institutions

Eric Lichtenberger, Ph.D., Assistant Research Professor
Illinois Education Research Council

This past year the Illinois Education Research Council (IERC) began to follow the members of the Illinois high school class of 2003 (2003 Cohort) on their journeys through postsecondary education. Now that seven years have passed since high school graduation for the 2003 Cohort, there is a wealth of information on these students related to both postsecondary enrollment and degree completion.

There is constant discussion across the County and in the State of Illinois regarding what can be gained from a longitudinal data system. This is occurring at the same time numerous educational agencies and non-profit organizations are developing strategies to increase the proportion of postsecondary degree and certificate holders. The 2003 Cohort analysis illustrates how traditional patterns of enrollment and degree completion—such as starting, persisting, and finishing at the same four-year institution without enrolling anywhere else—are changing, demonstrating the need for longitudinal databases that can track students across postsecondary institutions. The study will explore how the students who initially enrolled at four-year institutions in the fall semester of 2003 utilize non-traditional enrollment patterns—such as reverse transferring to a community college— to persist and ultimately complete bachelor's degrees. The study also explores the different enrollment patterns and outcomes as they relate to several student characteristics in addition to select characteristics of their respective high schools and the postsecondary institutions in which they enrolled.

Effective Practices in Building a Learning Continuum: Lessons Learned for Illinois

Erika Hunt, Ph.D., Research Associate
Lisa Hood, Project Director
Center for the Study of Education Policy, Illinois State University

Purpose of the Research

Recent research on early brain development has shown that from birth to five years, children’s brains build the foundation for academic, emotional, and social functioning for the rest of their lives (National Research Council, Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, 2000; Shore, 1997). The research also found that cognitive gains may ‘fade out’ if not followed through aligned and integrated experiences in the early elementary years (Kauerz, 2006). Some of the loss in learning or ‘fade out’ can be attributed to low quality classrooms in elementary schools, of which a larger proportion of low quality classrooms are in schools in more impoverished areas with the least qualified teachers and fewer resources (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2002, 2004; Stuhlman & Pianta, 2009).

Recognizing the “fade out” problem, the McCormick Foundation granted funding to researchers at Illinois State University to conduct a study on birth-12 learning collaborations to identify effective practices in aligning systems and the role that early learning and school leaders play in facilitating and sustaining these collaborative partnerships. Included in this study were two states (Hawaii and Pennsylvania, one province (Ontario, Canada) and local partnership sites in Illinois. The purpose of this study was to identify and describe effective practices in P-12 alignment that could be shared with policymakers, practitioners, and funders in Illinois.

Methodology Used

Case study methods were used to study the current policies and practices of early learning programs and schools that create an effective P-12 continuum, as well as study the role of early learning and school leaders in facilitating this collaboration. The research drew on data from a variety of sources including interviews, focus groups, observations, walkthroughs, document/artifact reviews, and student outcome data. This mixed method approach allowed us to see the collaborative partnership in action as well as the tangible results of the partnership (e.g., documents that show aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessments; alignment of developmentally appropriate practices; school and classroom facilities that share common instructional and learning environment practices).

Summary of the Findings

Results from the study found many promising strategies used by districts/areas with aligning the early learning and K-12 sectors. The results from the Hawaii site visit revealed a tight interplay between local innovations and state policies to support and scale P-12 collaborations. The research in Pennsylvania revealed a systems change approach to merging human services and early learning to create a coordinated state agency support to consolidate and simplify services to local areas. Similarly, Ontario, Canada also approached this through a systems lens with a birth to age 12 focus to tightly align and coordinate state welfare and educational services.

Implications for Illinois Education:

Within the past few years, Illinois has been at the forefront of two national movements to improve Illinois’ educational system: one in creating a statewide system of early learning, and the other in improving school leadership (Note: Illinois is the first state in the nation to have a P-12 principal certificate). The results of this study can provide guidance to Illinois policymakers and practitioners to find ways to capitalize on the critical progress made in these two areas to create more effective and aligned P-12 education systems in Illinois and to train school leaders on proven strategies to bridge the gap between early learning and K-12 programs.

Preferences in Professional Development

Sallee Beneke, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Teacher Education, St. Ambrose University
Susan Fowler, Ph.D., Professor, Special Education, University of Illinois
Rhonda Clark, Illinois State Board of Education

Evaluation Purpose and Audience

ISBE:ECE commissioned this evaluation as a way to develop an in-depth understanding of school-based and center-based teachers' and administrators' preferences for topics for professional development and preferred mode(s) of delivery. The evaluation focused on data gathering, analysis, and reporting in ways that can provide optimal insight into teachers' and administrators' experiences with professional development.

Key Evaluation Questions

1. What is the nature and quality of Illinois Preschool for All teachers' experience with professional development?
2. What topics do teachers and administrators in Preschool for All programs perceive as priorities for professional development?
3. What way of delivering professional development do teachers and administrators in Illinois Preschool for All programs perceive as most convenient?
4. Do Preschool for All teachers in community-based settings have the same professional development needs as Preschool for All teachers in public school settings?
5. What variables impact the topics for professional development that interest Preschool for All teachers (e.g., experience, setting, population)?

Evaluation Design and Methods

This study used qualitative data for purposes of triangulation. The first facet studied was teachers' and administrators' views on desirable topics, logistics, and types of professional development. The second facet studied was teachers' and administrators' views on topics most urgently needed for professional development.

Participants. The participants were volunteers from four groups (school-based teachers, school-based administrators, center-based teachers, and center-based administrators) in 13 locations spread across six STARnet Regions. The number of participants who attended each focus group varied widely. In total, forty-seven focus groups were conducted.

Demographic Information. Center-based teachers were the most diverse of the four groups, and school-based teachers were the least diverse, with 91% being White, non-Hispanic. Center-based teachers were the least experienced teachers in the group, with an average of 1-3 years of total experience as opposed to their school-based counterparts' average experience of 3-5 years. The experience of center-based and school-based administrators was comparable, with one exception. Forty-seven percent of school-based administrators had been in their current position for 10+ years, compared to 30% of school-based administrators.

Procedures

The 183 center-based and school-based teachers and administrators who attended the 52 focus groups made up the pool of potential subjects. Participants contacted the Illinois Resource Center to sign up for a focus group location.

Focus groups. Participants attended a one and one-half hour focus group with counterparts who held similar positions. Four focus groups were held per day in each location. Data were transcribed and analyzed from the first focus group, and findings from this analysis were used to revise questions and develop probes for the remaining focus groups.

Topics. Data on most urgent topics was collected through participants taking turns suggesting topics of interest for professional development. When all suggestions were exhausted, each participant was asked to suggest a most urgent and next most urgent topic. These suggestions were recorded on chart paper by the researcher conducting the focus groups. The responses were combined and analyzed to determine priorities in topics for professional development.

Analysis of Focus Group Data

The focus group data was analyzed using content analysis. The evaluators read each of ten transcribed transcripts three times to become familiar with the data and establish preliminary themes. The researchers independently coded the transcripts, meeting regularly to compare findings and reach consensus on disagreements. The data from all transcripts was then categorized by these preliminary themes using *XSight* research software.

Defining tentative categories for coding the responses. The evaluators then read through the sorted data and looked for patterns. The evaluators discussed and agreed on the emerging themes. An outline of themes was developed, and interpretations of the coded data were inserted into the outline for each transcript. The interpretations from each outline was then merged and summarized

Summary and Implications

Overall, Illinois center-based and school-based teachers are interested in many of the same topics, although interests in subtopics vary. Major topics of interest are assessment, challenging behaviors, special needs, teambuilding, parent involvement, and curriculum. School-based teachers are also interested in professional development that will help them prioritize their activities and responsibilities. Distance is a factor that limits Illinois educators' ability to attend professional development due to cost and conflicts with family responsibilities. Increasing the frequency and repetition of workshops at more locations would be helpful. Cancellations and relocation of workshops is problematic. This problem may be countered by reducing the minimum number of participants required to attend a workshop and by considering alternative types of delivery (e.g., onsite or online). Alternative types of delivery may also reduce problems with access to workshops that fill too quickly. Attending professional development as a classroom team is a priority, but shortage of substitute teachers and limited funds are a barrier to this. Designating some days as non-child attendance days for professional development may be helpful. Educators are particularly interested in three non-traditional forms of professional development: networking, classroom visits, and coaches or mentors.

Presenter Bios

Dr. Sallee Beneke is a faculty member of the Teacher Education Program at St. Ambrose University. Her teaching and research is focused on supporting the professional growth of teachers and on the potential of the Project Approach and documentation practices to improve the inclusion of young children with special needs in prekindergarten classrooms. Dr. Beneke has authored research articles, books, and reports including *Who's Caring for the Kids: The Status of the Early Childhood Workforce in Illinois* (2008).

Dr. Susan Fowler is a faculty member in, and former dean of, the College of Education at the University of Illinois. She has focused her research and teaching on issues relevant to early childhood education and to the inclusion of children with disabilities and their families in community programs. Dr. Fowler has authored many research articles and book chapters, including co-authoring the report titled *Who's Caring for the Kids? The status of the early childhood workforce in Illinois* (2008).

The Causes and Consequences of Illinois School Closures

Sherrilyn Billger, Ph.D., Interim Chair and Associate Professor,
Department of Economics, Illinois State University

Purpose of the Research

School district and community leaders pursue consolidation and school closure for a variety of fiscal and educational reasons, such as declining enrolments, curricular weakness, lack of tax revenue, rising administrative costs, or any combination of these and other factors. In the face of such forces, a decision to close a school may seem the best choice to some. However, others voice concern for the health of the local economy and a loss of cultural identity precipitated by a closure or consolidation. The battles within and between communities over these decisions can be fierce.

This project is the first to propose a longitudinal view of reorganization using more factors than seen in previous studies. I account for the relationship between school fiscal resources, economic conditions, and demographic characteristics with school closures. I also document the significant causes of closures at different levels, as well as the effects of closures on schools and their communities. Our focus for this is a state that has seen and continues to experience numerous school closures, perhaps because it offers incentives for consolidation and closure.

Summary of Findings

Enrolments and fiscal resources are indeed the most important determinants of high school closures. Neither math and reading test scores nor the sociodemographics of the students have a significant impact on high school closure decisions and the enrolment and resource effects remain despite holding those factors constant. I also find a significant temporal impact for a state policy that provides incentives for closure and consolidation.

Though administrators claim that enrolment and expenditures drive elementary school closures, I find that rising tax revenues, tax caps, and poor economic conditions are also important predictors. On the other hand, high education fund allocations to districts and strong test scores appear to keep schools open. The role of local economies, property taxes, and school quality should not be ignored.

Furthermore, I find that districts that close a high school do have higher expenditures, though that does not persist over time. A figure revealing expenditures and tax rates surrounding high school closures appears below. A potential cost to closures arises in lower graduation rates for some districts and towns and lower math test scores. Furthermore, closures coincide with lower housing values and higher vacancy rates. On the other hand, these effects appear coincident with unobserved heterogeneity. That is, towns that struggled before a high school closure continue to struggle afterward, but the closure is not likely to exacerbate existing problems.

Implications for Illinois education

We are well aware of consistent fiscal pressures that school administrators face. State legislation provides a clear incentive for consolidations (and closures that often accompany them), and Gov. Quinn has stated a clear preference for further consolidations and closures. It is absolutely necessary that we more clearly understand the causes and consequences of these decisions.

How Much Does Money Matter? Mapping Where the Per-Pupil Instructional Dollars in Illinois Schools Are Most Effective

Yerik Kaslow, Research Associate
The Center for Tax and Budget Accountability

The research being presented at the 2011 IERC conference builds upon earlier CTBA research, published in September 2008 as “*Money Matters: How the Illinois School Funding System Creates Significant Educational Inequities that Impact Most Students in the State.*” The 2008 paper focused on the inequities within the Illinois education funding system that are a product of the system’s design. Specifically, Illinois is over-reliant on property taxes as the primary method of funding local school districts. This over-reliance creates massive disparity, from student achievement, per-pupil expenditures, and teacher quality, between communities with high property wealth and those with lower property wealth.

CTBA’s current research represents a step forward from the 2008 analysis. Our current analysis uses updated ISBE report card data to show the combination of environmental factors and classroom spending where additional dollars begin to have a positive and statistically significant impact, the point at which they have the most impact, and the point at which additional dollars cease to have a positive or statistically significant impact. This research takes our 2008 research a step farther and in part answers the question “at which point does money start to matter, where does money matter most, and at which point, in the current spending range of Illinois schools (our data), doesn’t it matter anymore?”

The analysis makes use of ISBE report card data at the school level. Our larger and more comprehensive dataset contains a richer set of expenditure, community, and achievement data. The analysis makes use of data from the 2006-2007 and 2009-2010 school years, thus providing a short time-series analysis. Using a series of statistical analyses, we identify the variables of greatest importance to achievement, and identify the levels at which these variables have the largest impact on achievement, controlling for estimation and statistical errors as best as possible.

The findings are similar to those in the 2008 analysis, as well new findings not included in the original work. As with the original findings, there is a clear and consistent pattern of disparity in achievement based upon local property wealth. Disparities in both quality of teachers and academic performance between primarily Caucasian and primarily minority school districts in Illinois are material, and correlate to instructional expense per child, local property wealth, and inadequate state funding. With each test score metric analyzed, there is a clear picture of disparity: students in flat-grant and alternative funding formula districts (approximately 25% of the total state enrollment) out-perform their peers in foundation formula districts on all tests, often by more than ten percentage points. The total impact of these differentials in academic outcomes is especially stark when one considers the majority of African American and Latino students are students in foundation formula districts.

The results illustrate a disparity in educational attainment and overall quality, and show a correlation between community property wealth and educational outcomes, as measured by test scores. The results of CTBA’s research strongly supports the need for education funding reform, especially considering that the majority of minority students attend schools in lower performing districts. CTBA’s findings have been used statewide as evidence of the disparities caused by the current education funding methodology of Illinois, and have been met with bi-partisan support.

The current education funding system in Illinois, which relies heavily on local property tax wealth, is unable to remedy the disparities revealed in CTBA’s analysis. This leaves the vast majority of Illinois students, particularly low and middle income children, children of color, and children who live downstate, forced to attend schools which rely upon an inadequate level of state-based funding. Illinois’ status quo funding system is not sufficient to deliver a quality education, as evidenced by disparate instructional expenditures, teacher quality, and test scores. The CTBA analysis displays a clear need to reform the current system of education funding in Illinois. Employers, both today and in the near future, are increasingly looking for workers with high levels of educational attainment. Illinois needs to reform its education funding systems to prepare all students for the demands of the current and future labor market. This new and updated analysis strengthens the overall CTBA argument through time series comparison, indicating that unless the serious flaws in the design of and investment into our education funding system are remedied, the majority of Illinois children will continue to receive less of an education than they deserve.

The Effects of Teacher Preparation Model on Persistence in Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle Level, and Bilingual Education Employment in Illinois: Evidence from a Fifteen Year Longitudinal Study of Over Sixty-Eight Hundred Graduates

Nancy I. Latham, Ed.D., Assistant Professor, Early Childhood Education
Steven B. Mertens, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Curriculum & Instruction
Illinois State University

Purpose of the Research

This study examined the effects of teacher preparation experiences on persistence in elementary education employment in public schools in Illinois between 1994 and 2009. The study included a review of approximately 200 relevant articles, books, presentations, and reports on teacher attrition and professional development school research and involved the mining and analysis of ex post facto data to determine the impact, if any, of preparation method on teacher attrition rates while controlling for various individual characteristics. Four research questions guided this study. First, what are the general attrition and employment trends for Illinois State University elementary education graduates employed in Illinois public schools between 1996 and 2009? Second, what are the effects of a PDS preparation experience on persistence in employment in Illinois public schools? Third, what is the relationship between PDS preparation and persistence in education when controlling for individual characteristics? And lastly, are there interaction effects between pairs of the control variables and PDS preparation?

Study Methodology

Population

The population for this study currently consists of over 6,649 early childhood, elementary, middle level, and bilingual education graduates from Illinois State University between 1996 and 2009. Of the total number of participants, 1,159 were prepared in a PDS. Males made up 8.7% of the total population, females 91.3%. In regard to ethnicity, 6,117 participants were White (92%), 197 African American (3%), 176 Hispanic (2.6%), and 2.4% other. Participants in the study entered the Teacher Education Program from several avenues. Fifty three percent were students native to Illinois State, 37% transferred from a community college, seven percent transferred from a four-year institution, and three percent were college graduates.

Methodology

This study utilizes descriptive statistics including mean, median, mode, and standard deviation; and associational statistics including correlation and both binary and logistic regression to determine attrition trends and teacher preparation model impact on attrition of ISU graduates. The data mined for the purposes of answering the research questions was ex post facto data in multiple databases. The data for the study were previously collected and housed in multiple databases including the ISU Teacher Education Center and the Illinois Teach Data Warehouse. Data collected included gender; ethnicity; program entry status; academic indicators (ACT score, GPA, PPST scores); year of initial certification; and years employed in Illinois schools. The dependent variable for this study was the number of years persisting in teaching. This variable was thoroughly examined from two perspectives: Did graduates become employed in an Illinois public school? And how long were they employed compared to how many years they could have been employed?

Findings

Three substantive findings resulted from this study. First, PDS preparation versus traditional preparation significantly and positively impacted teachers' persistence in the field even when controlling for individual characteristics. PDS prepared teachers were significantly more likely to become employed in Illinois Public Schools than their traditionally-prepared counterparts. Moreover, PDS-prepared teachers had significantly fewer years out of the field. In short, a PDS prepared teacher was more likely to get a job and more likely to stick with it. Second, an analysis of academic indicators found no significant correlation between any of the achievement indicators and elementary education graduates becoming employed in Illinois Public Schools. Logistic regression revealed that, in fact, higher GPA significantly correlated with persistence in education, even slightly more than PDS versus traditional preparation. The final substantial finding from this study concerned participants' program entry status and persistence in education. These data indicated that native students to Illinois State persisted significantly in education employment as compared to community college transfer students.

Implications for Illinois Education

The findings from this study reveal multiple areas of interest in regard to teacher attrition and teacher preparation in Illinois. PDS prepared teachers were significantly more likely to become employed in Illinois Public Schools than their traditionally-prepared counterparts. Moreover, PDS-prepared teachers had significantly fewer years out of the field. In short, a PDS-prepared teacher is more likely to get a job and more likely to stick with it. Second, an analysis of academic indicators found no significant correlation between any of the achievement indicators and elementary education graduates becoming employed in Illinois Public Schools. Logistic regression revealed that, in fact, higher GPA did significantly correlate with persistence in education, even slightly more than PDS versus traditional preparation, lastly, the final substantial finding from this study concerned participants' program entry status and persistence in education. These data indicated a significant difference between native students' and community college transfer students' persistence in the field in Illinois.

Current & Future PDS Research

- **High Need Schools** – Adding the schools and districts participants taught in and examining high-need school persistence.
- **Continuation of the PDS/ Teacher Attrition Study** to allow for more longitudinal research. The study of these participants at the 15- and 20-year marks will help to even better identify persistence in the field as well as moves within the field, moves to administration, and moves out of the field and back in again.
- **Teacher Intern Academic Achievement and Teacher Persistence** to include teacher certification scores to better examine the academic achievement level of teachers who persist and to identify teacher education program models which produce high-achieving, highly-qualified teachers who persist in the field and to assist schools in recruitment of highly qualified teachers who stay in the field.

The Organized Contradictions of Professional Development and School Improvement

Neil E. Sappington, Assistant Professor, Educational Administration and Foundations
Paul J. Baker, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor Emeritus
Illinois State University

Purpose of the Research:

“One of the most persistent findings from research on school improvement is, in fact, the symbiotic relationship between professional development and school improvement efforts” (Hawley & Valli, 1999, p. 129). These researchers, and others in the field, argue that there must be a direct relationship between the professional development of educators and efforts to improve learning for students. As public schools receive increasing pressure to show improvement in student achievement it is appropriate to examine the current status of this “symbiotic relationship”. Given this repeated claim of a direct correlation the obvious question is, “what is the status of the relationship between professional development and school improvement as efforts to improve the American public education system continue?” This study, which was part of a graduate principal-preparation program attempts to analyze the level of school development in local schools and districts. The principal-preparation program is offered at a research-intensive university that serves a regional network of school districts and schools in a highly diverse area of rural communities, suburbs and cities. Faculty members and numerous graduate students have dedicated the past several years to conducting a systematic study of the relationship between professional development and school improvement. We report our findings and conclusions in this article.

The data were gathered by aspiring principals as a class assignment in a Seminar on School Development. These graduate students collected data, analyzed the school improvement planning documents and the professional development activities offered to educators in local schools. They studied the connection between the two components in the school improvement process. This article will focus on the data gathered in 78 local schools about the status of professional development and its connection to the school improvement process.

To date, 106 principal candidates enrolled in the Seminar on School Development have conducted field work in their respective schools. Using a field-tested model to describe and analyze school improvement planning and professional development practices, the principal candidates constructed 78 comprehensive profiles of schools in various stages of development. The larger number of graduate students is based on the fact that in some schools two or more students participated in the study. The set of profiles describe the school improvement planning and professional learning in schools that university professors and principal candidates share to begin to address longstanding, intractable challenges if schools are to do more with less and serve as responsive constituents in communities.

Data Sources and Methods:

Principal candidates conduct an action research project on the schools where they are employed or in a few cases a school with which they have a professional connection if they are not currently employed in a school. They critically examine the school’s School Improvement Plan and conduct a field study of professional development activities. The STPI (Structures of Training and Processes of Implementation, which is explained in the paper) Model is used in semi-structured interviews with a district administrator, the principal, and two teachers. Documents and archival information is also collected and analyzed. Seminar sessions center on readings from scholarly literature and the implications of findings from fieldwork. Students write a 15 to 20 page profile of the professional development and its connection to school improvement in their school. In addition to the paper, each student submits a file that contains critical data including interview notes and documents.

Two faculty members have analyzed the field studies of these 78 schools. Each faculty member independently analyzed the school profile and coded the level of school development in the following categories:

- The connection between school improvement and professional development
- The types of professional development according to the STPI framework
- The focus of school improvement and professional development on student and teacher learning.

The codes developed for this study follow guidelines developed by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Using this coding schema, each of the two faculty members independently designated each school according to four levels of school development: Stuck, Limited Connections, Transitional, or Systemic. If there was disagreement on the level of school development a third faculty served as a “tie breaker”. Using this process an inter-rater reliability of .954 was established. Once coded, the data were entered into SPSS for further analysis. Cross tabulations were used to analyze the data from a variety of perspectives.

Findings:

The 78 schools represent 27 elementary schools, 18 middle/junior high schools, and 33 high schools. The majority of these schools (n = 64 or 82%) are in the two “bottom” categories of school development: Stuck or Limited Connections. Twenty of the schools (26%) remain Stuck while 44 of the schools (56%) have developed only Limited Connections to meaningful school development. Eleven schools (14%) appear to be Transitional and moving toward systemic development. But only three schools (4%) were identified as Systemic in four years of field work studies. All of the Systemic schools were elementary schools.

Table 1: Level of School Development and Type of School

	Elementary	Middle/Jr. High	High School	Total
Stuck	5	1	14	20
Limited connections	12	14	18	44
Transitional	7	3	1	11
Systemic	3	0	0	3
Total	27	18	33	78

Principal Turnover in Illinois Public Schools, 2001-2008

Brad White, Senior Researcher
Illinois Education Research Council

This report is the second in an IERC series on public school principals in Illinois. This study focuses on principals' movements during the 2001 to 2008 time period using principal- and school-level data from state administrative records and other state and national sources. We track each Illinois principal from one year to the next throughout and use descriptive, inferential, and multivariate analyses to determine the extent of principals' movements, as well as the personal and school-based factors that are associated with those movements. Our key findings are as follows:

- Principal turnover has increased since the 1990s.
- Chicago principals exhibited both greater retention and greater attrition than principals in other locales.
- The vast majority of principals who left IPS did not return.
- Few Illinois principals left to pursue work outside of education.
- Illinois principals who moved across districts tended to move to more advantaged schools, but those who moved within district did not.
- The majority of principals who changed to non-principal positions transitioned to other administrative jobs.
- Accountability pressures appear to have had a negative impact on principal stability in Illinois between 2001 and 2008.

Ready to Lead? Results of the Illinois Educational Administration Graduate Assessment

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Illinois Association of Deans of Public Colleges of Education

Purpose of the Research

The Illinois Educational Administration Graduate Assessment was piloted during the Spring of 2007, and has been conducted state-wide in 2008, 2009, and 2011. This report presents the findings from the 2008 and 2009 survey administrations. This project surveys graduates of Illinois public university educational administration (Type 75) programs in the year immediately following completion of the program. The purpose of this research is to:

- Provide a standardized assessment of educational administration graduates of all public colleges in Illinois.
- Provide a specific examination of administrative skills related to the Illinois Professional School Leader Standards for the purpose of identifying areas of improvement for educational administration preparation programs and for ongoing new administrator professional development needs.
- Provide institutions with institution-specific data on student learning in educational administration preparation programs that will assist with program improvement efforts.
- Proactively respond to calls for accountability related to educational administration preparation by gathering information that can inform policy makers and the public about educational administration preparation programs in Illinois and new administrator practice in the first year following program completion.

Methodology

Design: The study was conducted through the use of an online survey instrument completed by certificated school personnel (and their immediate supervisors) employed in Illinois public schools who completed their educational administration (Type 75) certification programs during the 2006-07 and 2007-08 academic years in any one of the twelve Illinois public university colleges of education. Each participant was invited through an invitation mailed to the participant's place of employment.

Sample Size: 1,278 graduates and their supervisors were invited to participate in the survey (2,556 total surveys).

Response Rate: 1,206 (47.2%) surveys were completed.

Site/Participant Selection Criteria: University program completer records and Illinois State Board of Education Teacher Service Record data were matched to produce the list of participants for the study. Participants had to have completed an educational administration (Type 75) preparation program at any one of the twelve Illinois public university colleges of education during the 2006-07 or 2007-08 academic years and have been employed in a certificated position in an Illinois public school district during the academic year immediately following program completion. In addition, the immediate supervisor of the graduate (typically, either a building principal or district superintendent) was identified through Teacher Service Record data and invited to participate.

Data Collection Method: Data were collected through an online interface on a website developed and hosted by the Illinois Teacher Data Warehouse at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Potential participants received a "pre-reminder" post card, a survey invitation letter with survey website log-on directions, and up to two reminder post cards and two reminder phone calls over a six-week period during April and May of 2008 or 2009. Upon the completion of data collection, data were transformed into Excel and SPSS files for analysis.

Data Analysis: All data were analyzed descriptively for this study, and at two levels: (1) a state aggregate level; (2) the individual institutional level, for each of the twelve participating public universities. The state aggregate results will be reported in this presentation.

Summary of Findings

- **Demographics:** 60% of educational administration program completers were female, and 85-90% were white; 44% were less than 30 years old when beginning their program; 45% had five or fewer years of teaching

experience at the beginning of their program; and 85% completed a master's degree as part of their preparation program;

- *Motivation:* The four most prevalent reasons motivating graduates' desire to pursue administration certification were: to qualify for an administrative position; to increase personal income; to increase leadership skills; and to increase impact on student learning.
- *Selection of Program:* Geographic proximity and a convenient course schedule were the two most important factors in choosing a university for educational administration coursework.
- *Program Satisfaction:* 90% of graduates were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their program's effectiveness in preparing them for administrative roles.
- *Administrative Employment:* 37% of program completers were in a position requiring administrative certification in the academic year immediately following program completion; only 6% reported that they were not in an administrative position and had no intention of seeking such a position.

Implications for Illinois Education

This study's results indicate a generally high level of satisfaction with the educational administration preparation programs provided by the state's twelve public colleges of education. Some results run counter to the generally-accepted claims that most students pursuing educational administration certification do so primarily for the higher pay associated with administrative positions or for step and lane advancement on the teacher pay scale. Other results highlight some potential "pipeline" issues regarding school leader supply, e.g., the tendency of program completers to stay in their current geographic location when seeking administrative positions.

Are Growth Scores Related to Course Grades?

Mark Pomplun, Ph.D., Director of Assessment and Accountability
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In the past several years, interest in using student growth scores for high stakes decisions has grown significantly. However, several researchers have commented on the lack of validity evidence for growth scores (Rothstein, 2009; Audrey-Beardsley, 2009). The present paper investigated the relationship of growth scores for individual students and averaged for groups of students with one possible type of validity evidence, teacher course grades. The two uses of growth scores are important because their accuracy is measured differently. When growth scores are used to evaluate teachers, the scores are averaged across students and the accuracy is primarily determined by the number of students used to calculate the average. For example, student growth scores are averaged to evaluate teachers as recommended by the Race to the Top Program (U. S. Department of Education, 2009). When growth scores are used to evaluate individual students, their accuracy is primarily determined by the error or reliability associated with the individual growth score. States have used growth scores for individual students to determine student Proficiency for NCLB (Hoff, January, 2009).

In two separate studies, growth scores were analyzed from a computer adaptive test, the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) (NWEA, 2003), and two paper and pencil assessments, the Illinois Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT), and the Explore and PLAN scores from the ACT Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS). Teacher grades were end of year from mathematics and language arts courses at three levels: Developmental, Standard, and Advanced, ranged from F to A+ (0 to 4.3 scale) and were adjusted for course level. The data was from students in grades 6 through 9 during the school years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 in a suburban Illinois K-12 school district. MAP growth scores for students in grades 6 to 9 were from fall and spring of the same school year while ISAT scores for students in grades 6 to 8 and EPAS growth scores for 9th grade students were from two successive years of attendance. Results were combined into across two cohorts resulting in about 2,000 students per grade level.

Group Level. Test Scores by Course Level and Grade

For students in mathematics and English courses, student average test scores generally increased as the level of course increased from developmental to advanced and as course grades increased from 'F's and 'D's to 'B's and 'A's. For students with the same grades, average test scores generally increased as course level went from Developmental to Advanced.

Growth Scores by Math Course Grade and Level

There were 16 comparisons for growth scores and math course grades and levels. Ten were statistically significant at the .01 level for the math growth scores and math course grades and level. These math results all consistently showed higher growth for 'A' students and students in Advanced courses. Eight of these were for the MAP computer test growth scores and math course grades and level. Four of these MAP results consistently showed higher growth scores for students with 'A' grades versus those with lower grades and the other four showed students in Special Needs courses had lower growth than students in Advanced and Regular courses. The other two math significant results were for EPAS math growth scores and math course grades and levels. As a result, these results provide support for the validity of math growth scores at the group level.

Growth Scores by Language Arts Course Grade and Level

There were 18 comparisons for reading growth scores and language arts course grades and levels. Six were statistically significant at the .01 level but the results were inconsistent. Two findings showed higher growth for students in Advanced courses than those in Special Needs and two had lower growth for students in Advanced courses. One finding showed higher growth for 'A' students than 'C' students and one showed the opposite trend.

Student Level

At the student level, the correlations between test scores, computer or paper and pencil, were mostly consistent with past research (Willingham, Rock & Pollack, 1990). However, the correlations between growth scores and course grades ranged from -.06 to .17. While several of these correlations were significant at the .01 level, the highest correlation accounted for only three percent of the variance.

Students by Deciles Analysis

Because a primary concern about student growth scores is their accuracy (Thompson, 2008) and their accuracy differs by score level for the ISAT, student level results were broken into ten groups (deciles) to allow separate analyses for high and low scoring groups. The measurement error for the ISAT growth scores increased as deciles (and test scores) increased with the average error for the highest scoring group more than triple the error for the lowest scoring group. For MAP scores, the measurement error and the growth scores were very consistent in size across the deciles. For both the ISAT and MAP tests, the average measurement error for the growth scores was larger than the average growth scores for five of the deciles. In addition, when a 95% confidence interval measurement error band was used, the average measurement error was larger than the average growth for nine of the ten deciles.

Lastly, for each ISAT and MAP middle school growth score, correlations between the growth scores and course grades were calculated for the students in each decile at each grade level. Then for each type of test, those correlations were averaged separately by content area across the three grade levels. When deciles were created with the average of the pretest and posttest, the correlations were mostly around zero with a range of $-.02$ to $.09$. These results provide little evidence for the validity of growth scores at the student level.

Summary

The results of these studies indicate that math growth scores from two tests were related to course grades and course level with 'A' students in advanced courses demonstrating more score growth than students with other grades and in other courses. Few consistent significant results were found for reading growth scores across all three tests, and both math or reading growth scores from the state assessment.

At the student level, correlations of growth scores with course grades and levels were not statistically and/or practically significant. When a 95% confidence interval was used, the average measurement errors were larger than the average growth for nine of ten deciles of students. The size of the measurement errors relative to the size of the growth scores would distort the relationship of growth scores with most validity criteria. As a result, while these results provide some validity evidence for the use of mathematics growth scores at the group level, for example as part of teacher evaluations, the results do not provide validity evidence for the use of growth scores at the student level, for example, to determine if individual students meet NCLB Proficient requirements.

Treadmill at the Top: The Real Problem of Growing College and Career Readiness for All

Paul Zavitkovsky, Urban Education Leadership Program
University of Illinois–Chicago

Conventional wisdom about achievement gaps is that students underachieve mostly because their schools have been unsuccessful at shoring up large deficits in fundamental knowledge and skills. This failure makes it impossible for students to engage in more complex and demanding challenges and virtually ensures that they will fall farther and farther behind as they proceed through school.

Research summarized in this session uses value-added analysis across a wide range of settings and instruments to test how well conventional wisdom matches up with empirical evidence about who is and isn't making progress from one year to the next. Findings indicate that the theory-of-the-problem that is embodied in conventional wisdom misses important pieces of what's actually going on and is itself a likely contributor to the gaps in achievement and instructional effectiveness that it purports to be addressing.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

After close to a decade, scaled assessment of student achievement has yet to fulfill its promise as a powerful tool for improving instructional effectiveness. In Chicago and throughout Illinois, achievement on the NAEP and ACT has remained flat. Chronic achievement gaps at virtually all levels of public schooling remain as wide now as they were in 2001.

For the most part, efforts to increase the impact of scaled assessment on instructional effectiveness have focused on upgrading the depth, quality and speed of interim assessment systems. The premise of these systems is that they can enhance instructional effectiveness by:

- Breaking down standards into highly specific skills sequences
- Assessing skills mastery on a more regular basis
- Speeding up turn-around times and reporting results in more user-friendly ways.

Some systems (NWEA/MAP; Scantron) also attempt to increase the precision and speed of assessment practice by using automated systems that progressively adjust assessment prompts to match existing levels of student mastery.

The purpose of this study has been to test the premise that breaking down standards into discretely teachable sequences of skills and sub-skills provides a strong foundation for improving instructional effectiveness at scale.

The results of the study strongly suggest that this premise:

- Is deeply flawed as a core strategy for instructional improvement
- Reflects a fundamental misidentification of the tools, competencies and instructional strategies that are most essential for:
 - Closing chronic achievement gaps; and,
 - Helping all students achieve substantially higher levels of academic capacity that are reflected in higher standardized test scores

METHODS OF INQUIRY

The study's core method of inquiry has been to:

- Group and sort student value-added based on students' level of achievement immediately prior to the instructional interval being assessed.
- Assess the percentage of students in each group that make or exceed expected gains during the instructional interval being assessed

- Apply the approach described above to a wide range of scaled assessment instruments, student age levels and testing intervals.

The study defines “making expected gains” as:

- Preserving percentile rank from achievement level at-entry to achievement level at-exit
- Making or exceeding gains identified as “average” or “expected” by ACT, Scantron or NWEA based on national and/or local norms developed by those organizations

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Findings show a consistent inverse relationship across all units of analysis between achievement level at-entry and the likelihood of making or exceeding expected gains during the intervening period of instruction. The higher the achievement level at-entry, the lower the chance of making or exceeding expected gains. The net effect of this pattern is that groups with higher achievement at-entry lose ground against prior levels of achievement and re-cycle back to a lower achievement baseline by the end of the instructional interval being measured.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ILLINOIS EDUCATION

Contrary to popular mythology, standardized tests are not exclusively or even primarily populated with items that require mastery of discretely teachable skills. Questions and problems that students everywhere find more difficult to answer are typically characterized by additional elements of density, complexity, and/or ambiguity. For the most part, it is the capacity to size up and work through these sorts of questions that allows students to reach higher scale scores and exhibit other elements of knowledge and skill that put them on track for college and career readiness.

Recent state and national interest in common core standards has sharpened the focus on college and career readiness at all levels of policy and practice. Findings from this study suggest that more explicit identification, instruction and distributive practice of higher order cognitive strategies for all students has a far greater likelihood producing that readiness than continuing over-reliance on shored up mastery of discretely teachable skills.

Mapping Head Start and PFA Service: Working Together for the Children of Illinois

Dr. Susan Fowler, Ph.D., Professor, Special Education
Dawn V. Thomas, Ph.D., Project Coordinator
Bernard Cesarone, Technology Coordinator
Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map [IECAM], University of Illinois

The Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), based at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is intended (1) to assist policy makers in allocating resources for early care and education programs to areas where they are most needed, (2) to make public resource allocation transparent by showing the changes in funding of services from year to year, and (3) to provide a one-stop source for early care and education data gathered from multiple sources in Illinois. The data presented on the IECAM Web site are acquired from multiple sources across the state and presented on the Web site in several different ways. The sources for the data found on IECAM are the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA), and Head Start.

Purpose of the Analysis

Using data from IECAM, a White Paper was developed based on FY2010 data, providing an overview of the impact of state and federal dollars in providing access to early care and education to preschoolers across Illinois. The paper examined in depth a sample of municipalities and townships to evaluate the relationship of the services to areas in which concentrations of children live in poverty. The focus of the report was on Preschool for All (PFA) and Head Start and their singular and combined impact on young children in the state. This session will summarize the findings from the White Paper and allow participants the opportunity to discuss implications of these findings in light of the growing state deficit and continued importance of early care and education in the lives of Illinois' young children. It is the hope that the information presented will be used to advance local and state conversations about the funding and distribution of preschool sites in communities that most needs them.

Rationale for the Analysis

Continuing research efforts by prominent economists document the importance of providing early childhood programs for young children: (a) as an acknowledged strategy for reducing the negative effects of poverty on young children's social, emotional, and physical development, and (b) as being advantageous for the community at large (see Heckman, 2005; Rolnick & Grunewald, 2007). Educational researchers have similarly documented the importance of young children attending high quality preschool programs to support optimal child outcomes (Early et al., 2007; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2007; Saracho & Spodek, 2007). With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and subsequent legislative reauthorizations of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and Head Start (2007), a strong emphasis has been put on student outcomes, better program accountability, common learning standards, and a better-prepared workforce. This focus has placed increased pressure on families, communities, and states to prepare all preschool-age children for formal school entry at kindergarten. Lisbeth Schorr, of Harvard University, asserts that "state policy makers play a critical role in allocating resources to support the school readiness of young children" (See <http://www.gettingready.org> for the National Press Release of the "National School Readiness Indicators Initiative Report, February 2005). What does this mean for Illinois policy makers and planners? Clearly, with accurate and timely early care and education information, policy makers in the state will be able to make funding and programming decisions for young children based on quantitative data.

Methodology of the Analysis

Head Start and the state-funded initiative PFA represent the two largest funding sources for addressing the needs of young children and families in Illinois who are affected by poverty. Head Start provides services directed at school readiness, including comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and social services for children and families at or below the federal poverty level (FPL). PFA serves children at two priority levels; the first level encompasses children living at or below 185% FPL; the second priority will expand to children living at or below 400% FPL. Both Head Start and PFA are intended to help children meet early learning standards (federal or state, respectively).

In addition to Head Start and PFA, child care programs—private and public, profit and not-for-profit—serve thousands of Illinois children; many of these programs endeavor to address school readiness and help young children meet early learning standards. Clearly, child care, whether through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) or partnerships with

publicly funded preschool, plays an essential part in preparing young children with the skills and opportunities valuable for school readiness. Although the effects of child care and its emerging system across the state are important, the objective of the analysis was to describe the combined impact of the two publicly funded preschool programs in Illinois—Head Start and PFA—particularly in terms of kindergarten readiness. Given the essential nature of publicly-funded preschool in providing enrollment opportunities to at-risk preschoolers, the researchers developed a series of maps to highlight the levels of service in various regions and at various combinations of programs and poverty levels, based on data available on IECAM. Those data are based on the locations of PFA and Head Start sites, which were geocoded (i.e., assigned a specific latitude-longitude point on the map). The capacities to serve children at these locations were then aggregated to regions, such as counties, townships, and municipalities. Estimates were prepared by IECAM demographers for the number of children living in families at various poverty levels (a major risk factor) in various regions, based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The capacity of PFA and Head Start to serve children was then related to the number of children in poverty to produce maps that show ranges of percent of service by county, as described in more detail below. Some additional maps were produced for townships and municipalities.

Findings of the Analysis

Interestingly, neither Head Start nor PFA, when considered alone, can cover the needs of Illinois' 102 counties; it is the combined resources of the two programs that make it potentially possible to serve all the eligible children in a majority of Illinois counties. This session will present a series of maps that take into consideration the number and percentage of eligible 3- and 4-year-olds that are able to be served by PFA alone (with an income eligibility of 185% FPL), Head Start alone (with an income eligibility of 100% FPL), and, finally, a combination of PFA and Head Start. Tables and charts that summarize the capacity of publicly funded preschool in Illinois counties through PFA and Head Start funds to serve all eligible children (at both PFA priority levels) will be discussed.

The session will include a deeper look at some of the counties and municipalities that are not serving a significant portion of eligible children. Questions to be considered include: “What stands out in these counties?” “Are there similarities and differences between these areas that may deepen our understanding regarding publicly funded preschool accessibility?” Presenters will discuss briefly the demographics of these geographic regions and provide a look at the disparity between the numbers of eligible children and the slots available to serve them (i.e., slot gap).

Finally, the stakes for PFA programs in these counties are high—many of these children at the first priority level will have to be served with state funding, not federal Head Start funding, which is limited to funding only those preschoolers in families living at or below the 100% poverty level. Acknowledging the enrollment gap that exists at the first priority level is crucial before expanding PFA to the second priority level in these counties. Presenters will also include a discussion on several areas where income-eligible children are able to be served, and what those areas might look like if children at the second priority level (living at 400% FPL) are targeted for service by PFA.

Presenters

Susan Fowler, Principal Investigator

Dr. Susan Fowler is a faculty member in, and former dean of, the College of Education. She has focused her research and teaching on issues relevant to early childhood education and to the inclusion of children with disabilities and their families in community programs. Dr. Fowler has authored many research articles and book chapters, including co-authoring the report titled “Who’s Caring for the Kids? The status of the early childhood workforce in Illinois—2008.”

Dawn V. Thomas, Project Coordinator

Dr. Dawn V. Thomas has extensive experience coordinating and managing federal grants, partnering with universities and research centers, and providing training and technical assistance. She currently serves on several Early Learning Council committees, including the Home Visiting Task Force, Data Workgroup, and the Public Awareness Committee. She brings her training and early childhood expertise to the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), ensuring that tabular and geographic information system data are put in the context of early care and education in Illinois.

Bernard Cesarone, Technology Coordinator

Bernard Cesarone has served in editorial, Web design, and database and technology management capacities. He currently serves on the Data Workgroup for the Early Learning Council. Mr. Cesarone serves as technology coordinator for the IECAM project, managing the project’s database development and working as data liaison with state agencies and other data sources.

Online Tools for Researches Interested in Illinois Community Colleges

Scott J. Parke, Ph.D., Senior Director for Research and Policy Studies
Nathan R. Wilson, Director for Research and Policy Studies
Jo E. Barnard, Assistant Director for Research and Policy Studies
Michelle Dufour, Assistant Director for Research and Policy Studies
Illinois Community College Board

This session will provide brief demonstrations of a variety of new web portals that have been developed collaboratively within the last year by community college system representatives and Illinois Community College Board staff. Featured portals include the Illinois Community College System's: Interactive Databook, Annual Administrator and Faculty Salary and Benefits Portal, Postsecondary Perkins Online Data System (PODS), and the emerging Complete College America Portal (CCA). These new tools provide researchers interested in community colleges with ready access to additional comparative data and information to lead and support program improvement initiatives through benchmarking, identifying best in class performers, and undertaking peer analysis.

Mathematics Achievement Patterns across Three Groups of Learners: A Hierarchical Linear Modeling Approach

John K. Rugutt, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Educational Administration and Foundations
Caroline C. Chemosit, Doctoral Student, Educational Administration
Guy Banicki, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Educational Administration and Foundations
Illinois State University

This study used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) approach to investigate relationships between mathematics achievement and social economic status, family income, gender, school mathematics ladder, school size, and individualized education program with a sample of 73,370 White American students, 12,434 African American students, and 9,247 Hispanic American students from a total of 860 public high schools in the State of Illinois. The HLM results indicate significant differences among schools in mathematics achievement ($\chi^2 = 3064.84$, $df = 163$, $p < 0.000$) for African American sample, ($\chi^2 = 2209.89$, $df = 137$, $p < 0.000$) for Hispanic American sample, and ($\chi^2 = 13567.20$, $df = 557$, $p < 0.000$) for White American sample. The grand means of mathematics scores for African American, Hispanic American, and White American students were 16.43, 17.53, and 20.22 respectively. Further, the variance components were $\chi^2 = 9.65$, 11.64, and 26.00 for African American, Hispanic American, and White American students respectively. The Intra-class correlations, computed for the three samples were: 0.19 (19%), 0.18 (18%), and 0.10 (10%) for the African American, Hispanic American and White American students respectively.

Pathways to Success for African American Males at UIC

Celina Sima, Ph.D., Visiting Associate Professor, Educational Policy Studies
Patricia Inman, Ph.D., Associate Director, Office of Degree Progress
University of Illinois at Chicago

The magnitude of the college completion gap for African American males relative to any other racial/ethnic and gender group is well documented nationally. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, across all racial/ethnic groups, more women than men received degrees. This difference is especially pronounced among African American students. African American females received about twice as many associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees as their male counterparts (NCES, 2010). In Illinois four-year colleges and universities, African American students represent only eleven percent of undergraduate degrees awarded; and males are just over one-third of the African American degree recipients (IBHE, 2009).

This study was designed to better understand the paths traveled by African American male students who were making good progress toward degree completion at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). Through this research, we examined the strategies used, obstacles faced, and facilitators, both on and off campus, for these students. A mixed-methods approach allowed us to look at the quantifiable characteristics and, through personal interviews, to uncover the answers to the "why" and "how" questions regarding the success of these students. Guiffrida's cultural advancement of Tinto's theory provided a framework that allowed us to explore the recommended modifications and to discover one new variable domain, 'student support services' as we studied the experiences of these particular students.

In this study, we defined success as "advanced undergraduates who entered the institution as a freshman (not transfer students) and were making timely progress toward degree completion." Our data collection included analysis of student record data, a survey of student experiences and individual student interviews.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study findings reveal that there are numerous factors that influenced the success of each student. The most critical factors include financial aid and all forms of academic advising. Each actor in the life of a student may find the recommendations of this study useful, but we would propose that a broader awareness of the full complement of factors that contribute to the path to success may be most effective in improving student success. The study provides detailed recommendations for four key audiences – institutional leaders; faculty; the students; and parents. As an institutional study, these recommendations have been carried forward to institutional program and policy decision-makers for future action. The findings from this study point to factors important to closing the completion gap for African American males at UIC and may be useful to institutional researchers and practitioners in other similar university settings.

Computers and other Technology in Chicago Public Schools: Are We Preparing Students for a Technology-Dependent Future?

Stacy Ehrlich, Ph.D., Senior Research Analyst
James Sebastian, Ph.D., Senior Research Analyst
Sue Sporte, Ed.D., Associate Director for Evaluation and Data Resources
Consortium on Chicago School Research at The University of Chicago

Purpose

Youth across the nation are heavily engaged with various forms of technology and digital media. Currently, the learning that takes place around the use of such devices appears to be largely organic, arising serendipitously between friends and online. With the ample learning opportunities presented by the use of digital media, it is becoming more important that we teach youth not only how to use digital media tools, but also how to be literate consumers of media products.

While some may argue that these interactions provide distractions from school and traditional learning outcomes, others believe that these digital literacies must be developed to prepare students for a future that promises to be ever more dominated by digital technologies and formats. In fact, recognizing this need, the National Assessment of Educational Progress will begin administering an assessment of technological literacy to fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-graders in 2012. This and other initiatives around digital literacy are part of a larger call to equip young people with 21st century skills, including learning and innovation skills; information, media, and technology skills; life and career skills; and content around core subjects (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2002). Furthermore, in recent speeches, President Obama has called particular attention to the need to provide opportunities to develop these life-long skills in additional settings beyond the classroom walls (Change.gov, 2010). Given the increasing importance of computers and an expanding array of digital media for functioning in any kind of job, as well as for communicating, obtaining information and critiquing its veracity, and for creating new products, what is the role of schools in ensuring students' technology skills and in expecting that they use digital media as a form of self-expression?

Schools, especially those in resource-poor districts, have struggled with technology issues in the past. For example, previous work from the Consortium on Chicago School Research indicated a lack of hardware, software, and technological knowledge among educators as key barriers to growth (Hart, Allensworth, Lauren, & Gladden, 2002). Some of those issues had been addressed by 2005, but students were still using computers "infrequently," teachers still reported little professional development around integrating technology into their coursework, and they were not incorporating technology assignments into students' everyday work (Coca & Allensworth, 2007). Our work in schools over the past several years would indicate that while the landscape has changed, schools still face significant challenges in both expecting that students become computer literate and in expanding that literacy to include alternative forms of creative expression. The purpose of this paper is to explore the degree to which Chicago's middle and high school students report computer and media usage and the degree to which this usage takes place in or because of schools; how much school culture encourages the use of technology in schools; the degree to which teachers have expectations for computer literacy skills from their students and use technology themselves; and the implications for professional development and curriculum.

Research Questions

This study is part of a larger body of work which seeks to understand the relationships between digital media usage and student learning in both in-school and out-of-school settings. In this part of our work, we explore the degree to which similar learning opportunities may or may not be available in schools. Our particular research questions are:

Teacher Use of Technology

1. To what extent are teachers using technology to prepare for their lessons (for example, get lesson ideas) and deliver lessons?
2. To what extent do teachers expect their students to use computers or other technologies in completing their course work?
3. To what extent does school culture encourage teachers' use of technology for instruction and communication with students and families?

4. How often do teachers participate in professional development around using technology in their teaching? Student Use of Technology
5. What kinds of technology usage do students report doing in their schools or for school-related projects?
6. Are students using technology to make something creative—for example a movie, podcast, or graphic design? Is this more likely to occur in or out of school?
7. In what ways has students' use of technology changed in schools since 2005?

REL Midwest Research Update: State Policies and Procedures Related to Response to Intervention in the Midwest Region

Sara Wraight, J.D., Senior Policy Analyst, American Institutes for Research
Sheila Rodriguez, Research Associate, REL Midwest

Project Overview and Purpose

This session will discuss a recently completed study on response to intervention (RTI) in the Midwest region and provide updates on other Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest research presented at previous Illinois Education Research Council Research Symposia.

RTI has garnered much interest among policymakers, researchers, and educators, both as a promising approach to improving student academic achievement outcomes and as an alternative means of identifying students for special education services. Because the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) required states to permit the use of RTI in special education evaluation procedures, states have become increasingly interested in supporting, and in some cases mandating, RTI. Few studies, however, have been conducted on state-level RTI policy, planning, and support. REL Midwest conducted a study on the status of RTI in six Midwest region states, including Illinois.

The study describes the RTI approaches and strategies that the six participating Midwest region states use in policy and practice. The study team reviewed state documents and conducted interviews with state and local officials in the six Midwest region states to investigate state education agency (SEA) interest in, policy development for, and planning for RTI as well as the support provided by the SEA to districts and schools to implement RTI. The study offers a current mapping of the states' orientation to RTI and steps that each state has taken to establish and/or support RTI practice in the Midwest. Local examples, which provide perspectives on RTI support and guidance received from the states, are included.

Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted between September 2009 and March 2010, collecting data in six of the seven REL Midwest region states. Researchers drew upon literature that discussed state and local RTI policies (e.g., Harr-Robins, Shambaugh, & Parrish, 2009; National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2005; Sawyer, Holland, & Detgen, 2008; Stepanek & Peixotto, 2009) to design the data-collection instruments and analysis. The study team then conducted a review of publicly available documents and undertook interviews with state informants and local school district officials.

A background literature search provided an analytical framework for the study, on which the research questions, document review categories, interview questions, and report sections are based. By drawing upon RTI literature and existing studies of RTI related to state policy and implementation (e.g., Harr-Robins et al., 2009; National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2005, Sawyer et al., 2008; Stepanek & Peixotto, 2009), the study team identified topic categories that are of importance in understanding state RTI policy development and RTI practices, such as the content of RTI models and the nature of SEA support to school districts. Researchers then collected data from each of the six REL Midwest region states for each category and compared results across states, identifying similarities and differences.

Summary of Findings

This study describes the RTI approaches and strategies that these six states use in policy and practice. Because the states in this study emphasized framing RTI as a general education initiative, state planning for RTI was reported to have been a collaborative effort between general and special educators. The majority of states support district implementation of RTI through providing general guidance instead of state-mandated policies. State informants generally acknowledge the importance of maintaining district flexibility and local control.

State and district interviewees indicated that state RTI models serve as a resource for districts and schools rather than a prescribed approach to RTI. Professional development, technical assistance, and funding are other means of state support to districts implementing RTI. This study serves to add to the limited research on state-level RTI policy and practice. The report findings provide a better understanding of RTI policy development and implementation supports within the REL Midwest states and offer examples of RTI practices to states nationwide.

Potential Implications for Illinois Education

The purpose of this study is to provide detailed information on how six Midwestern states, including Illinois, are approaching RTI. Audiences who would benefit from this study include SEA leaders, policymakers, and regional and district personnel seeking information on RTI policy and practice in Illinois and the Midwest region.

The Bridge between Researchers and Teachers: Exploring the Pathway of Educational Research to the Classroom

Ellen Behrstock Sherratt, Ph.D., Karen Drill, and Shazia Rafiullah Miller
American Institutes for Research

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to explore the pathway of educational research to the classroom. To better understand how research is disseminated to teachers, we conducted a case study in a single setting in fall 2010. Specifically, we studied an Educational Research and Dissemination (ER&D) professional development course on Managing Anti-Social Behavior conducted in a southwest suburb of Chicago. This course, designed by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) aims to improve instruction by increasing teachers' understanding and use of educational research. We collected qualitative data on the process by which research is disseminated to teachers to determine whether or not barriers to teachers' research use can be overcome through targeted teacher professional development. We also were interested in whether teachers' practice and perceptions of research improved as a result of their participation in the course.

The study was informed by a prior exploratory study that we conducted on teachers' use of research. In the initial study, we found that there are certain conditions under which teachers are more likely to use research to improve their instruction (e.g., when it comes from a peer, in their own school context) (see Miller, Drill, & Behrstock, 2010). The current study seeks to extend the broader existing knowledge base to understand the influence of a course specifically designed to link research and practitioners. To do this, we addressed the following two research questions:

- 1) Does participation in an ER&D program influence teachers' use of research in the classroom?
- 2) What conditions facilitate teachers' incorporation of research into their instructional practice?

Summary of Findings

Preliminary findings suggest that as a result of their participation in the course, teachers reported increasing their use of research-based strategies in their classrooms, and that the course also increased their knowledge about student behavior, particularly with regard to classroom management issues. In addition, participation in the course gave some teachers an opportunity to reflect more on how their own actions may influence student behavior. Still, some teachers did report that participation in the course had no influence on whether or not they use research.

When asked about ways that the course could facilitate their use of research, participants indicated that they would like to have been provided with resources that direct them to research, and that the facilitator could have made more explicit references to research in the course. For example, one teacher suggested that the course could "provide places to find research on topics discussed." In addition, the course also helped participants brainstorm and collaborate around ideas for improved practice. While some of these shared practices may not have been research-based, the course provided a forum for teachers to exchange ideas about classroom practices that have worked for them.

Implications for Illinois Education

Multiple foundations and institutions of higher education in Illinois fund a variety of educational research initiatives, including the sponsor of this study, and one of the nation's largest investors in educational research, the Spencer Foundation. These organizations want their initiatives to have an impact on children in schools. There is some evidence that practitioners, however, do not look at research as much as one might hope. This study looks closely at a program designed to deliver research to teachers in this manner. Our study allows the Illinois educational research community to gain insights about how well such a pathway for research to reach the classroom facilitates its intended outcomes and whether it should be promoted or modified at scale in the state. The findings have implications both for the education research community, who wishes for its work to be relevant, and for practitioners and those who support practitioners, as they seek to identify pedagogical strategies that will help each and every student succeed.

Teacher Questioning as an Indicator of Change

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Aims of the Research

Our research group is investigating how participation in a Master's degree program influences teachers' instructional practice. More specifically, we are focusing on teacher questioning as one indicator of change.

Methods

Participants

Our work is situated within the context of a mathematics-science partnership project, Institutes for Integrating Content-Knowledge with Classroom-Instruction: A Partnership for Improving Middle School Mathematics and Science (IICC). The institutes are conducted as coursework for a 3-year Master's degree program in two tracks, mathematics and science. Teachers completing the science track will earn a Master of Science in Curriculum and Instruction degree and be eligible for state endorsement in middle-level science. Teachers completing the mathematics track will earn a Master of Science in Mathematics degree and be eligible for state endorsement in middle-level mathematics. The 22 teachers participating in the IICC program are from a public school district in a mid-sized city in the Midwest.

Data Sources

Although we are collecting data from a variety of sources to document changes in teachers' content knowledge and instructional practice, the most robust source of teaching data we have collected comes from a set of two video-recorded lessons. These lessons are part of the first two phases of a three-phase video reflection cycle. At the beginning of the program, each teacher planned, taught, and video recorded a lesson that became the basis for reflection and revision throughout the program. About halfway through the program, teachers reviewed their initial lesson plan, viewed the recorded lesson, and reflected (in writing) on their teaching in light of the coursework, readings, and program activities in which they had subsequently been engaged. They modified the lesson plan, wrote a rationale for the modifications, re-taught and recorded the modified lesson, and reflected on the differences between the two lessons as taught. This process will be repeated again near the end of the program.

Data for our research are drawn from transcripts of 44 lessons, two lessons for each teacher. We have conducted comprehensive video analyses to document and characterize overall changes in teachers' instructional practice; however, to focus specifically on teacher questioning we constructed verbatim transcriptions of the questions that teachers posed during these lessons. We also developed a system for recording student responses. Although it was not possible to transcribe verbatim student responses due to the quality of recordings, we could usually identify whether a question was responded to by a single student or multiple students and if this reply was in the form of a short response, an extended response, or a discussion. Transcripts also include time stamps and notations about events in the classroom (e.g., student disruption, transition to group work).

Data Analysis

Our analysis is guided by Chin's (2007) framework for teacher questioning that stimulates productive thinking. The framework is comprised of four overarching categories, each with subcategories detailing more descriptive features (see Figure 1). We are using Chin's categories and subcategories as a priori codes for our analysis.

	Purpose	Subcategories
Socratic Questioning	Prompt and guide students' thinking	Pumping Reflective toss Constructive challenge
Verbal Jigsaw	Relate keywords, terminology and notations to integrate understanding among different concepts	Association of key words and phrases Verbal cloze
Semantic Tapestry	Combine ideas into a meaningful structure or conceptual framework	Multipronged questioning Stimulate multimodal thinking Focusing and zooming
Framing	Preface or summarize a problem or issue to structure class discussion	Question-based prelude Question-based outline Question-based summary

Figure 1. Chin's (2007) questioning framework.

In our first pass at reviewing transcripts it became evident that individual questions were not necessarily meaningful units of analysis. Although we had transcribed only the questions posed during a lesson, we found that the sequence of questions (along with our student response codes and notes) sufficiently captured the overall flow of discourse and allowed us to recognize shifts in focus or content. Individual questions were typically related to the development of a key concept or process and we realized they were best interpreted within the context of a group or sequence of questions, what we refer to as a cluster.

Our analysis involves coding clusters and individual questions for each transcript as follows: four members of the research team independently code each transcript and then meet to share their coding decisions; a record is kept of all coding decisions and intercoder reliabilities are computed; differences in interpretations of the data are discussed and agreement of assigned codes is negotiated. We then analyze coded transcripts to characterize the nature of each teacher's questioning, noting differences between lessons and identifying patterns of changes across teachers.

Summary of Findings

Our analysis of data is currently in progress and will be completed by mid May. Thus, our findings are preliminary. Nevertheless, our analyses are pointing to some distinct changes in teachers' questioning practices. Individual teachers have exhibited change in the type of questions they ask as measured by the subcategories of Chin's framework. These changes reflect a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered questions. We have also identified subtle changes in teachers' questioning strategies. For example, we have observed more attention by the teachers to student responses and activating student prior knowledge. This has, in turn, impacted the flow of teacher questions.

Implications for Illinois Education

Current research on the impact of graduate degrees is limited and has focused almost exclusively on student test scores (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1996; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). We believe it is important to understand whether and how graduate study influences teacher development since teachers' instructional practice is directly related to the nature and quality of student learning. Given the prevalence of graduate coursework as a form of professional development, identifying viable avenues for improvement is a critical issue for teacher educators within Illinois.

Integrating College Readiness and Academic Assistance to Prepare High School Students for Postsecondary Success: A Preliminary Study of Illinois Steps AHEAD GEAR UP Program

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This paper presents results from a study of disadvantaged high school youth enrolled in the Illinois Steps AHEAD GEAR UP program. The research focuses on the benefits of integrating college readiness and academic assistance program activities to create a more cohesive understanding in each youth regarding the interconnectedness of these two approaches as necessary steps for admission and success in their postsecondary education, thereby creating a program culture of “learning with purpose” to encourage student success.

The Illinois Steps AHEAD (Attaining Higher Education through Academic Development) GEAR UP program provides after-school educational enrichment and college readiness services, as well as post-secondary scholarships for disadvantaged students in Illinois. The six-year program began in 2006 and is implemented across the state of Illinois in an after-school program setting in 21 community-based organizations. The fundamental purpose of the Illinois Steps AHEAD (ISA) program is to increase the number of first generation, low-income students that attend and succeed in college. The program is funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) initiative and is administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). The main components of the program include: academic support and tutoring, college readiness services for youth and their families, and scholarships.

CPRD serves as the research and evaluation partner for the ISA program. The primary purposes of the research are to assess the ways in which program services impact youth academic outcomes, youth expectations for future educational attainment, and the likelihood of a successful transition to post-secondary education. The research incorporates a mixed-method approach of quantitative and qualitative data elements. The quantitative data includes surveys collected from program staff, youth, and parents. The qualitative element includes interviews, focus groups and program observations conducted during site visits. Student academic records, including grades and achievement scores, are gathered on an annual basis and linked with other data elements to assess program impact. Attendance records at the program sites are gathered on an ongoing basis from the IDHS eCornerstone database, a web-based client information system.

The results for this paper will focus primarily on site visit data during 2008 and 2010, with survey data from 2009 and 2011 providing a context for college readiness and future academic expectations. The ISA program is on an alternating cycle of surveys and site visits. The surveys provide a comprehensive look at the overall program through frequencies and levels of agreement. The site visits provide answers to questions from the preceding year’s surveys and an assessment of the overall quality of the program.

In 2008, we visited six of our 21 sites to collect interview data (Executive Director, Program Coordinator, Tutors, and Certified Teachers), youth focus group data, program observations, and document reviews. Evaluators developed a coding taxonomy from reoccurring themes in the transcripts. To ensure inter-rater reliability, each interview and focus group was coded by two evaluators, and each program observation was scored by two evaluators prior to the analyses. Analyses looked at co-occurring codes and the affect of different variables such as ethnicity, location, roles, etc. to determine universal themes across program sites, and themes that were relative to specific sites.

In 2008, the analysis found that most sites were focusing predominantly on the academic assistance component. When the college readiness component was addressed, it was done in isolation from academic assistance and by a different staff member. This was due to an emphasis on addressing the “immediate” academic needs of youth for homework assistance, as well as a division of labor (tutors and program coordinators) that paralleled the instruction of these two components. This presented a challenge to students, who missed the interconnectedness between these two areas of separate focus, such as having good grades, but in the right classes to meet the college entrance requirements for a program that was right for their career choice.

CPRD’s recommendations after the first round of site visits emphasized: increasing the frequency of college readiness programming to weekly; utilizing all staff to “formally” teach college readiness; including all staff in all phases of the Individual Learning Plans (ILP) process; identifying motivational levers to encourage student progress in the program; and promoting supportive relationships. To facilitate the ILP process, CPRD identified youth data that the sites should

be collecting to increase college readiness. In addition to the recommendations, we included examples from the few sites that were integrating and demonstrating that these twin goals of the ISA program were complementary and equally important in preparing youth to be successful in college thereby creating a more cohesive ISA program.

In 2010, CPRD selected a different sample of 6 program sites and collected the same types of data, however the interview questions investigated our recommendations, particularly regarding the integration of the college readiness component with the academic component. Preliminary findings show higher levels of integration that included using backward planning and career exploration that motivated students to set their own goals and hold themselves accountable for their own progress. When youth failed to make grades or meet their goals, staff did not admonish them, but asked how this would affect their postsecondary goals, and how they would adjust their plans.

Additional data showed that aside from a higher level of integration, there had been a change in the program culture where staff and students defined college readiness as a mindset, rather than the sum of all of the available college readiness components. One student equated college with a lifelong career (not a temporary job), leading to unlimited future possibilities and continued growth. The concept of “learning with purpose” incited a new, positive perspective toward their goals, one that the students embraced as they prepared for their lives after high school. Lastly, 2011 survey results will provide a context for current academic expectations, knowledge and readiness for college, supportive relationships and will be integrated into this study.

Given the pervasive drop-out rate across the nation, efforts to intervene with educational support programs that keep youth on a pathway to postsecondary education are critical. These findings from data collected as part of a statewide program in Illinois that is focused on improving the academic success of low-income youth are important for planning future educational intervention programs. The results have implications for improving the way that programs like Illinois Steps AHEAD design services, hire and train staff, and engage youth in academic assistance and college readiness activities.

Senior Year: Gearing up for College or Coasting to Graduation

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Since the late 1990s, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has been a leader in the national effort to reform high school. Beginning in 1997, CPS eliminated remedial courses and raised graduation requirements to align with the New Basics curriculum. The cornerstone of this effort has been curricular reform, and in particular, providing students with the rigorous coursework that has been recognized as essential for access to and preparation for college. Given the increased focus on college attainment, senior year represents a key transition between high school and college. Students have an opportunity to invest in skills and content knowledge as a capstone to their high school career; the opportunity to take elective courses in subjects they are interested in offers the chance for a student to direct her own educational pathway. Conversely, if senior year is seen as a blow off year, a chance to take it easy after three years of fulfilling graduation requirements, then this opportunity could be squandered, and college outcomes could be negatively affected. We examine student's course-taking on three dimensions: (1) the total number of core classes the student takes, (2) whether or not the student takes an advanced math course, and 3) the number of AP classes a student enrolls in. We begin our analysis by looking at course-taking patterns in CPS and find that seniors take fewer core academic classes than they did earlier in high school. We then look at what impact advanced course-taking has on college outcomes. However, students who are more likely to take a more rigorous senior might also be the same students who are more likely to go to college and do well in college. Thus, in our analysis, propensity scoring methods are used to eliminate selection bias. Finally, we use qualitative data to look at what students themselves have to say about how they experience senior year.

Theoretical Framework

Previous research on college access has consistently found that students who take more advanced coursework in high school are more likely to perform well on the twelfth grade NAEP; more likely to attend college, particularly to more selective colleges; less likely to be placed in remedial courses in college; and more likely to be successful in the colleges they attend in terms of persistence and degree attainment. For the most part, many agree that a 'rigorous' curriculum includes taking a fourth year English and math. Research from NCES examined college persistence rates of first year college students by the types of curriculum taken in their senior year. They found that students who took a 'rigorous' curriculum were more likely to be continuously enrolled in their initial institution, less likely to transfer from their first institution, and more likely to be on-track to a bachelor's degree. Similarly, NAEP High School Transcript Study linked 'rigorous' course-taking – four years of English, three years of social studies, four years of math (including pre-calculus or higher), three years of science (including biology, chemistry, and physics) and three years of foreign language – with higher twelfth grade NAEP scores. While CPS and Illinois graduation requirements are aligned with these standards, a common theme for them is that most of the requirements can be completed by junior year, leaving little indication what should be done senior year beyond a fourth year of English.

Data Sources and Methods

This paper draws on an extensive quantitative data archive. This study was conducted using high school transcript, test score, and data from surveys of CPS students, as well as college enrollment and persistence data from the National Student Clearinghouse.

The sample in this study includes the cohort of spring 2003-2007 CPS graduates, but who were not in special education programs and did not attend alternative or charter high schools. The final sample includes 35,965 graduates in 73 high schools. Of these graduates 57 percent were female. Also, 51 percent students were African-American, 336 percent were Latino, 4 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 9 percent were white.

Using data from students' high school transcripts, we can track the classes students take in their senior year. We using Latent Class Analysis to quantify these patterns and group students into five basic course taking patterns. While descriptively, there appears to be a relationship between senior course-taking and college outcomes, we suspect that there is selection bias. As such, we want to control for as much selection bias as possible when estimating the effects of senior year course-taking. We leverage the fact that there is such wide variation across schools to create an effective comparison group: we take students in schools with low levels of course-taking and simulate their probability of taking a rigorous senior

year if they had gone to a school with high levels of rigorous senior year course work. Propensity scores are estimated individually for our three dimensions (taking four or more core classes, taking an advanced math course, and taking AP courses) using student academic and demographic background characteristics such as: students' gender, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, incoming 8th grade achievement test scores, ACT test scores, weighted junior GPA, and previous course-work completion. We then create a sample of students who have the same propensity score to take, for instance, a fourth year of math, but half of whom did not have an opportunity to. This method should provide unbiased estimates of the effects of course-taking during senior year on immediate four-year college enrollment; the selectivity of the college in which he/she enrolls; and two-year persistence rates.

Our qualitative analysis provides vivid context for the quantitative findings. To further investigate the nature of senior year in the Chicago Public Schools, we returned to our Qualitative Longitudinal Sample (used throughout the From High School to the Future series) to examine what students had to say about the level of challenge students encountered in their academic experiences in senior year. We coded and analyzed students' responses to questions about how hard they were working, whether work was easier or harder than previous years, and how much they felt they were learning – both within individual classes in senior year and also assessing senior year as a whole across all of their classes.

Results

When we look at the students who make up these groups, we see that they are distributed by race and SES across these groups with African Americans being over represented in the ETC group, while students with a higher SES tend to be enrolled in more rigorous senior year course taking patterns. Moreover, we find that many of these differences override other factors such that even two students who have the same achievement levels are likely to take vastly different courses their senior year depending on which high school they attend. Given this wild difference in course-taking patterns then, it is even more important to determine what impact these courses have on college outcomes.

After controlling for selection bias, we find only marginal effects of course work for college outcomes. All students seem to receive a boost to four-year college enrollment from taking AP courses (especially if they took two or more AP courses). But only students who have higher initial qualifications receive the same benefit towards enrolling in a more selective college. Moreover, we find that none of the course-work options affect students' likelihood of being enrolled in a four-year college two years after graduating high school. While this is troubling, our qualitative findings can provide some explanation.

Qualitatively, we found that outside of the extremely challenging International Baccalaureate program, we found that very few students described senior year as being a challenging academic experience. Surprisingly, we also found that this experience of a low-challenge senior year did not appear to be any less common among students taking higher-than-average levels of advanced coursework (e.g., AP courses, advanced math, and a greater number of courses in core subjects.) Deeper investigation into this issue revealed that much of this low-challenge phenomenon was driven by courses in specific subject areas – especially in non-core and/or elective subjects that dominate students' schedules in senior year. Whereas AP courses and English IV courses (the required English course in senior year) were consistently rated as highly or moderately challenging, students very rarely experienced challenging courses in English or social studies electives, and courses in vocational programming, physical education, and fine arts were consistently rated as low-challenge.

Significance of Work

While our initial findings seem to indicate that raising graduation requirements is called for, our subsequent analyses firmly refute this idea. While AP classes improve access to four-year college, especially more selective colleges, they do not improve persistence within those colleges. This leads us to believe that AP is acting as a signal to colleges when they look at high school transcripts. At the same time, our qualitative analysis indicates that not only are students not challenged their senior year, but they are unsatisfied with these low levels of rigorous course work. Although the CPS graduation requirements are aligned with college minimum requirements of most colleges in Illinois, CPS seniors are still underwhelmed their senior year. Significant thought needs to be put into what skills seniors should be developing to prepare for postsecondary trajectories.

Embedding Fairness Throughout the Teacher Evaluation Process

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Over the past ten years, since No Child Left Behind started pressuring school districts to focus on student test scores, more and more states have begun to consider student performance data when evaluating teachers. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, "...not including student achievement in a teacher's evaluation is illogical and indefensible." (Gratz, 2009, p.76) The presentation will focus on preventive measures that anticipate a teacher's potential objections by providing a climate of fairness and substantive due process. Implementing these measures will avoid putting all the decision-making power in the hands of one individual, the evaluator, thereby ensuring a fairer process.

Research Methodology

The presenter's research is based on a survey of superintendents and teacher union presidents from 40 different school districts in Illinois. Questions focused on whether the teacher evaluation process had multiple sources of input.

Multiple Data Sources

Multiple data sources are needed in evaluations because teaching is so complex that no one source sufficiently captures its responsibilities (Peterson, 2006).

Student Attendance/Student Mobility

Student attendance is a double-edged problem. On the one hand, you can't hold a teacher accountable for someone who is not there, yet you can't ignore the needs of absent students.

Multiple Teachers

Holding teachers solely accountable for academic progress without recognition of the roles of other teachers would be very misleading (Tucker & Stronge, 2006).

Student Motivation

Student motivation is an issue that impacts the reliability of using any type of student assessments. Students are not dependable machines that can be counted on to perform consistently day after day.

Factors Beyond the Teacher's Control

There needs to be an opportunity for teachers to identify conditions that are beyond their control through an extenuating circumstances report, for example (Tucker & DeSander, 2006).

Appeal Process

The procedural part of an evaluation is subject to a grievance since procedures are often a bargained part of a contract. The actual rating is not. It is easy for ego and other human frailties to affect the evaluator's objectivity. This makes an appeal process critical.

Written Standards/Performance Criteria

Teachers should know what standards they need to meet to be rated as "excellent" or "satisfactory," for example. A documentation guideline is, "If it isn't written down, it didn't happen."

Student Growth v. Value-Added Measures (VAM)

Student growth is defined as the change in student learning which may include attainment and/or gain between two points in time. Measuring student growth is an attempt to isolate a teacher's impact on student learning. VAM include statistical adjustments which can make the process more complex.

State Tests v. Published Tests v. Home-Made Tests

Some states only use student performance data from its own mandated tests, usually in reading and math. What about teachers of physical education, art, music, etc? Published assessments add objectivity and consistency to the process, while home-made tests are closest to the “taught-curriculum.”

Classroom Observations

The current observation-only approach is what is prompting much of the dissatisfaction with the current inflation of teacher ratings. It’s understandable because a principal cannot rate a teacher anything but satisfactory when the principal knows he/she does not have the evidence to rate the teacher lower. However, classroom observations are still needed to assess a teacher’s effectiveness.

Artifacts

Artifacts such as quizzes, assignments, lesson plans, and student work provide not only an abundance of evidence but real insight into the thought process of the teacher (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

Trained Evaluators

Any measure of a teacher’s performance is only as good as the training of the evaluator making the judgment. Training and inter-rater reliability must be part of any model.

Multiple Observers

The judgment of two observers is a critical aspect that can make the system more credible. The second observer can be a supplementary expert, i.e., someone skilled in the teacher’s specific teaching area.

Evaluations Over Time

The reliability of student data improves when data are analyzed across multiple years (Harris, 2010). This works well for tenured teachers but not non-tenured teachers, due to pending rehiring decisions.

Remediation Process

Most states specifically require teacher assistance and courts typically expect it as a component of due process (Tucker & DeSander, 2006). It’s only fair to give teachers a chance to improve a deficiency.

Conclusion & Teachers’ Support

A survey of teachers showed “involvement of teachers in the development of the process” was the single most important component in a merit pay survey (Matula, 2010). Involving teachers in the creation of any evaluation model, whether high stakes or low, will build support for the change.

Biography

Joseph J. Matula is in his fifth year as an assistant professor at Governors State University, teaching school law, school finance, and the administration of school personnel. He retired as a district superintendent during which he served for 26 years in three suburban school districts in Illinois; 14 years in Broadview, 8 years in Worth, and 4 years in Clarendon Hills. He is currently serving on the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC) in Illinois.

Teacher and Principal Performance Evaluations and Other ISBE Initiatives

Linda L. Tomlinson, Ph.D., Assistant Superintendent
Illinois State Board of Education

The Illinois State Board of Education continues to work on a number of initiatives to develop policies that support standards for teachers and leaders that will help to ensure that the Agency will work towards meeting their goal that: “Every student will be supported by highly prepared and effective teachers and school leaders.” This work involves a number of initiatives that have been driven by legislation and rules.

One of the actions taken to support teacher and leader effectiveness was the passage of the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) in 2010. This legislation (Public Act 096-0861) directs that teachers and principals performance evaluations must incorporate student growth as a “significant” factor. The State is required to develop a model evaluation for teachers and principals as well as training for all evaluators. The legislation further requires that all teachers and principals be evaluated using the following four ratings: excellent, proficient, needs improvement, or unsatisfactory. A Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC) required by law has been meeting for over a year to develop the state default systems and training. The timelines established for implementing the new system of evaluation require that:

- Principals be evaluated in 2012
- 300 CPS teachers be evaluated in 2012
- Remaining CPS teachers be evaluated in 2013
- Lowest performing 20% remaining districts teachers be evaluated in 2015
- All teachers be evaluated in 2016

ISBE surveyed all districts across the state to gather information on what is currently happening in Illinois for evaluation of teachers and principals. Data received to date supports that districts use a variety of different tools to perform evaluations. Some districts developed their own instruments and others used such models as: Danielson’s Framework, Robert Marzano’s Model, National Board Professional Teaching Standards, Madeline Hunter’s Model, the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards, or any combination as developed by the district. Most evaluations included formal observations, walk through, and/or pre and post conferences. A few do videotaping of teaching, parent surveys, or peer reviews. 5% of the responding districts indicated that they used a measure of student growth as a significant factor in teacher evaluations. Only .3% of districts publicly report summative performance ratings. Principals were also evaluated using a number of different tools. Most reported using the 2008 ISLCC standards for principal evaluations. A few reported using Val-Ed and others used district/board developed tools. Approximately 95% indicated principals were evaluated using formal observations, 78% included an evaluator narrative, and 29% used school climate surveys. Approximately 65% of the districts indicated that they do not use student growth as a measure for principal evaluations.

The survey supports that there is no consistent form of evaluations being performed currently. Few include student growth as a factor. PEAC needs to not only define what is considered “significant” student growth but also how that will be measured. Growth must include not only core subjects, but all areas which complicates the work of this group.

ISBE is involved in a number of additional initiatives to promote quality teachers and school leaders. Principal preparation was redefined with a focus on developing instructional leadership skills. Programs will include selection requirements, intense internships which require competencies to be met at high levels, and partnerships with PK-12 schools. The new principal endorsement will cover PK-12 and must include course work on bullying, special education, English Language Learners, and early childhood. All preparation programs will need to be approved under new requirements.

ISBE has also worked with stakeholders to rewrite the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards. These standards focus on literacy needs and differentiated instruction. There is an emphasis on reading at all grade levels, special education, gifted, and English Language Learners. This will drive preparation programs to rethink how they will design professional education courses and meet these new standards for those completing programs in 2013.

ISBE is currently working with stakeholders to redefine elementary and middle level endorsements. The current K-9 elementary program does not have the depth of content needed to meet requirements of the new common core standards

approved for students. Therefore, additional reading and mathematics is being considered along with a possible new structure for endorsements. Concurrently a group is looking at developing requirements for separate programs for middle level endorsements. These programs also will focus on literacy but will require additional course work in content areas. Focus will be on strengthening content for middle grades while addressing the learning needs of this age group of children.

Additionally, ISBE is proposing legislation this spring for a new certification structure which will, if passed, result in a new licensing system. The current system of certification has over 60 different certificates. If the new system is approved, Illinois would have three licenses: Professional Educator License, Educator License with Stipulations, and a Substitute License. Article 21 is being redrafted to streamline the systems, strengthen alternative certification requirements, support National Board Certification as professional development, and remove the tiered system of certification that Illinois currently has in place.

All of the above initiatives are a part of a total systems change. This change focuses on strengthening preparation of teachers and principals, evaluations to support professional development needs of teachers and principals and to ensure that every student has effective teachers and principals in their schools.

Teacher Evaluation: Results From the IERC Illinois Principals' Survey

Brad White, Senior Researchers
Illinois Education Research Council

This report summarizes some of the results of the Illinois Education Research Council's (IERC) survey with Illinois principals conducted in November 2010. We received responses from 877 participants who were serving as public school principals in Illinois schools during the 2010–11 school year. While not generalizable to the state as a whole, the findings presented in this report are representative of approximately one fifth of the state's public school principals, and provide a glimpse into their work and preferences. Our key findings are as follows:

- Relationships, soft skills, and first-hand experience are more valued during the teacher hiring process than data from screening instruments or information about prospective teachers' academic backgrounds or past teaching performance.
- Most teacher evaluation systems in Illinois do not include any measures of student achievement and, where they are included, they do not count for much. Instead, classroom observations and other measures of teaching practice are viewed as considerably more useful in teacher evaluations than student achievement results or input from other stakeholders.
- Despite frequent criticisms, there are some promising features of the teacher evaluation systems currently used by Illinois principals.

Accepting the Challenge: Engaging to Create a Positive School Climate

Jennifer Burisek, Ed.D., Literacy Teacher
Amy Quattrone, Literacy Coach
Laura Riley, Science Teacher
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Background

Members of the research team represent building colleagues on the District Professional Development Teacher Leadership Team. Representing public schools in Illinois, we are a blue-collar community of approximately 20,000 people nestled between several affluent communities. Our Community Unit School District has a poverty rate of 30%; our building's poverty rate is 33%. Our research team represents teacher leaders; two sixth grade teachers and a literacy coach.

Introduction

During the 2010-2011 school year, the school district in which the research team works procured the services of an educational consultant and created professional development opportunities for the staff to be completed over the course of the school year. The opportunity presented itself for our colleagues to become active participants in the professional development leadership team.

Because of our frustration and desire to change the climate and culture of our building, we accepted the challenge. We wondered—Is it possible to create “change”? Is it possible for teacher leaders to create “change”? Is “change” sustainable? Is it possible for teacher leaders to create a positive school climate? When we realized we were questioning, we realized that we were poised to conduct research that has the potential to inform the literature, change culture and climate, and to increase student learning.

Methods

This research is a qualitative, ethnographic, mixed methods study. Data collection will include gathering narrative data from the research team and survey responses from building colleagues. Data will be analyzed and coded. Findings will be written and reported, and topics for further areas of inquiry will be shared based on findings.

Results

The study's duration is the 2010-2011 school year. Findings will be provided upon conclusion of the research project. Results will be reported at the Symposium upon completion of the research work.

Implications of Study

The implications for Illinois education include: identification of ways creating a positive school climate, identification of models of delivery for successful professional development, and identification of ways to increase student achievement.

Researcher Bios

Laura Riley has over 20 years of experience in education. She earned a B.S. in Home Economics Education from Iowa State University in 1982. In 1997, she earned a M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction from National Louis University. Laura currently teaches 6th grade Science at Westmont Junior High School in Westmont, Illinois. She is a member of ASCD, NSTA(National Science Teachers' Association), ISTA(Illinois Science Teachers' Association), IEA/NEA, and the Westmont Teachers' Association. She is delighted to be the recipient of a scholarship to attend the National Energy Conference for Educators in Denver in July 2011.

Amy Quattrone is an Adjunct Professor at Benedictine University, a Literacy Coach at Westmont Jr. High and High School in Westmont, IL, and has over 10 years of experience in education. She holds a B.A. in English from Illinois State University, an M.Ed. in Reading, an M.Ed. in Leadership and Administration. Nationally Board Certified in 2009, she is a professional member of NCTE, IRA, IRC, and ASCD. She has presented at an Educational Symposium at Illinois State University and National Middle School Association.

Jen Burisek is a sixth grade literacy teacher at Westmont Junior High School in Westmont, IL. Jen has over ten years of experience as a classroom teacher. She has earned B.A. in English from Eastern Illinois University in 1997, an M. Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction from National-Louis University in 2001, and an Ed. D. in Leadership in Curriculum and Instruction from Aurora University in 2005. She has presented within CUSD #201, IEA, and IERC. Her research interests include auto-ethnography, teacher development, and teacher leadership.

Building an Effective Doctoral Program: Conceptualization to Graduation

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Chicago State University

Introduction

A two year research project was conducted entitled, “Building an Effective Doctoral Program: Conceptualization to Graduation.” The research represents data which serves to inform the discourse related to the climate of higher education regarding doctoral programs. The project examined and analyzed institutional factors of efficacy.

The project was designed to collect, analyze and disseminate current and reliable data which would make significant contributions assisting other higher learning programs and initiatives. The project’s beneficiaries include local, state and national institutions offering doctoral programs, state agencies that approve and accredit doctoral programs and Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) planning to establish such programs. Support for this research study underscored the need for change, allowed for amending of old and outdated structures and generated findings, conclusions and recommendations that are current, research-based, practical and easily replicated in other settings.

The goal of this project was to research, investigate, and identify essential factors of doctoral programs related to the recruitment, retention, and completion rates of candidates. It has added to the existing body of knowledge and increased the success rate of doctoral programs in offering excellent preparation activities for candidates, while decreasing the numbers and percentage of “All But Dissertation” candidates (ABD).

Guiding Research

Research indicates doctoral student’s exhibit difficulty when advancing from course-taker to scholar (candidate). It is at this turning point in the program students fail to continue with the dissertation writing stage. Factors influencing degree completion include the environment and individual resources. Candidates require assistance with structure, support, and pressure during the writing stage. Retention and completion rates for doctoral students are also influenced by society and institutional requirements at the department level. The presentation of these identified key factors influencing doctoral students’ experience guided both the research and implementations to respond to the issues of recruitment, retention and completion rates of doctoral candidates.

Methodology

The study used a mixed method design in order to ensure that quantitative and qualitative data were collected for comparison and analysis, and to provide for a comprehensive review of the data from multiple viewpoints. Based upon the three factors being investigated, researchers collected and analyzed the following quantitative information: grade point average (GPA), graduate records exam (GRE), and writing sample scores. Qualitative information was gathered through an on line survey. The target population included all eligible students currently enrolled in a doctoral program. Eligibility was defined as students who have been formally admitted to the program and were considered “active” using university approved standards. A locally designed on line survey and oral interview instrument were developed and tested for validity and reliability prior to use.

Procedures

The following steps were taken to collect data: distribution of an invitation to participate with a link to the on line survey, sorting, and organization of data findings. Data collected was sorted for tabulation/ranking (ordinal) by frequency and percentage using mean, median and mode. The following questions served as guidelines for analysis and discussion:

1. What is the relationship between the development of a doctoral culture and the recruitment, retention, and completion rates of doctoral students?
2. What relationship exists between entrance criteria data and recruitment, retention and completion rates?
3. What influences do student support systems have on recruitment, retention and completion rates?

Findings

Data analysis supported a high correlation between the development of a doctoral culture and the recruitment, retention and graduation rates of doctoral students. Surveyed students associated their success in the program, in part, with the culture surrounding the doctoral program. Students noted the presence of a doctoral culture was an extremely important element in their selection of a doctoral program. Students rated the following concepts to be very important in their experience: collective goals, sense of belonging, approachability of professors, and pride.

Examination of entrance criteria did not yield significant findings in relationship to recruitment, retention and graduation rates. All candidates' GPA's clustered above 3.5 on a 4.0 scale, noting no significant correlation. The GRE scores, although varied, were inconclusive as a predictor of completion or retention rates as did the writing sample scores.

In the area of support systems, responses rated the following aspects as important to extremely important elements of the program: physical appearance of the program office and classroom, appropriate technology for class use, meeting rooms, library access, and research resources. Student in the dissertation writing portion of the program felt it was extremely important to have a positive working relationship with their chair and rated the following indicators as extremely important: availability, good communication, provides encouragement and feedback and is an advocate for candidates.

Recommendations

As a result of this research, institutional factors of efficacy were identified and analyzed in relationship to recruitment, retention and graduation rates. Entrance criteria did not yield any significant findings in these areas. Data did support the importance of a doctoral culture along with a solid support system for students as they matriculate through the program. These two areas were significant factors influencing the recruitment, retention and completion rates of doctoral students.

A Comparison of Student Academic Growth between Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools

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With the growth of charter schools being debated across the country, research examining academic achievement in charter school students has been a national focus. Much of that research attempts to determine whether charter schools have a positive impact by comparing standardized test scores of charter school students to those of students in traditional public schools. We propose that a static view of student achievement does not take into consideration two crucial factors—where the student was academically when they enrolled in charter schools, and how much growth these students experience at charter schools.

Consequently, this project asked:

- Do charter school students differ from traditional public school students?
- What is the level of growth in student academic performance in charter schools versus traditional public schools, when controlled for gender, ethnicity and the initial level of student performance?

The researchers used data from the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP) provided by the Indiana Department of Education as well as scores from the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) twice-annual Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test to gauge academic growth in reading, language use and math from fall 2006 through spring 2008. All Indiana charter schools and many traditional school systems use the test, making it well suited for such a comparison.

Among the key findings:

- ISTEP pass rates are lower among charter school students, with the scores suggesting that students enter charter schools at an academic disadvantage relative to their traditional school counterparts.
- Charter school students are more likely to be members of minority groups and are more likely to come from low-income households.
- Charter schools show the same attendance rates as traditional schools, but higher rates of student turnover.
- Charter school students who had been enrolled at least two years showed significantly greater academic growth in all three areas evaluated by the MAP measure, when compared to a controlled sample of students matching their socioeconomic and academic profile from traditional schools. Charter school students showed 22% more growth in reading, 18% more growth in math and 25% more growth in language arts.
- The growth in reading and language arts for charter students exceeded national growth averages. (Math growth was on a par with the national average.)

The study does not indicate why the charter school students showed greater growth; whether the difference in gains occurs to the same degree across grade levels; or, as noted earlier, whether the advantage for charter school students appears across all achievement and ability levels.

This work, while not the first study of the impact of charter schools, represents a different way of benchmarking academic success that is not vulnerable to the criticisms of comparisons based upon traditional achievement testing practices, such as ISTEP pass rates. These results suggest several directions for further research, including studies that evaluate the specific features of charter school students' experiences as well as those in traditional schools that are most associated with gains in students who lag behind their peers in academic achievement.

This research has implications for states such as Illinois that are struggling with the issue of evaluating the performance of charter schools, even as caps on the number of charter schools are being lifted and more charters are being established. Methodologies used in Indiana to inform the debate can easily be applied to charter schools in Illinois.

The Interpretive Operations Used by Elementary Students with Learning Disabilities in Comprehending Poetry

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Abstract

This descriptive study examined the interpretive operations used by 32 elementary students with and without LD in their oral responses to questions asked about two “heard” poems. Students with LD used as broad a range of interpretive operations as their average-achieving (AA) peers in constructing meaning, and reported enjoying the poems.

Theoretical Framework

The study is framed by the structuralist, reader-response, and intertextuality approaches to literary text comprehension, which highlight the role of the reader in constructing meaning. Previous notions of LD as caused by a deficiency in one or more of the basic psychological processes have surrendered to the current idea that inefficiency, as opposed to a deficiency, more precisely characterizes the difficulties experienced by students with LD. That is, students with LD do possess the cognitive tools necessary for effective information processing, but use them in an ineffective manner, resulting in comprehension breakdowns. Students with LD typically experience difficulties with the early reading skills of phonemic and phonological awareness (Sencibaugh, 2007), and later with comprehension related skills such as recalling specific details, associating meaning with words, predicting outcomes, drawing conclusions, and monitoring their comprehension (Gersten et al., 2001).

Participant Demographics

The research was conducted in three randomly selected elementary schools from a public school district in a large Midwestern state. The suburban district serves primarily African American (91.9%), Hispanic (3.7%) and Asian (3.4%) students coming largely from low-income households, with approximately 96% of students receiving free or reduced-cost lunch. Thirty-two students, matched by grade, gender, and ethnicity, participated in the research, 16 of whom were students with LD; 18 males, and 24 African Americans, and 8 Hispanics. The mean Star Reading GE scores for the students with LD is 2.6 (SD 1.8) and 4.8 (SD 0.8) for AA students.

Modes of Inquiry

In this study, two unfamiliar poems (“October Saturday” by Bobbi Katz, and “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” by Robert Frost) were presented to the students on separate days. Participants listened to the reading of the poem while following along on personal scripts. They were encouraged to interrupt at any time to make comments and/or ask questions. They then answered questions that targeted specific operations.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using open coding procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The students’ use of interpretive operations was captured by qualifying the important aspects of their verbal responses as categories of the poetry comprehension process. Categories were developed through a three-tiered process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The researcher transcribed verbatim the entire contents of the tapes, yielding 64 transcripts. The units of analysis were the students’ rapport with the researcher during the first poetry session, the answers to the 12 comprehension prompts, student online comprehension represented by any unsolicited questions or remarks made during the second reading of the poem, and pencil representations made on individual student copies of the poem. Reliability of the coding of the data was established according to the parallel criteria of Guba and Lincoln (1989) and included a) peer debriefing with a graduate student, b) intercoder reliability, and c) triangulation of the different kinds of data collected. A graduate student trained by the researcher to code the student transcripts independently coded 20% of randomly selected protocols.

Results

Students with LD:

- Utilized as great a range of lower and higher order interpretive operations as did their AA peers.
- Used title as cue to the poems' meaning and made inferences about the seasons and activities of the poems.
- Identified literary devices such as repetition, rhyme, personification, alliteration, and comparisons, and stated how these functioned in the poem.
- Identified theme and created visual and sensory imagery to come up with underlying meaning.
- Generated questions about the poem and poet that revealed lingering thoughts.
- Expressed enjoyment of the poems based mainly on their topics.

Scholarly Significance

- This study presents research in an area that has been neglected- elementary students with LD and their comprehension of poems.
- Students with LD made use of a wide range of lower and higher order interpretive operations that included predict and confirm, identify literary devices, formulate themes and generalizations, make intertextual connections, and synthesize. This has implications for the types of questions that teachers ask in all genres, not just poetry.
- Students expressed enjoyment of poems with topics or speakers to which they can relate, as they use their knowledge and experiences to maneuver challenging poems, so teachers need not water down the curriculum in their selection of poems for elementary students.
- Poetry seems to be as feasible a genre as any for promoting the use of higher order interpretive operations by students with LD. These results suggest that for elementary students, and particularly those with LD, poetry may not be as formidable a genre as many may imagine. Why not give it a chance?

Leadership in Turnaround Schools: Turnaround Principals Listen with Their Heart

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Governors State University

What do turnaround principals do to cause quick, dramatic and sustained change in the performance of their school in one to three years? I surveyed 500 state-identified turnaround principals from Illinois and Indiana. Fifty-two, a useable rate of 10%, responded. Seeking diversity in the level of school, gender and race of principals, I interviewed six principals. The five women and one man interviewed were from two states, four from Illinois and two from Indiana. Two represented elementary schools, three were from middle level buildings, and one was from a high school. Illinois schools were located in Chicago, large suburbs, and rural areas. One Indiana school was in a large suburb and the high school was in a rural area. Schools varied in size and levels. One school was a charter elementary school. Principals were all over 31 years of age; two were Black and four Caucasian. All participants had earned a master's degree and two had doctorates. One principal had completed all but the dissertation (ABD). One currently serves as principal/superintendent. These factors provided me with a lens through which I was able to understand their experiences and analyze data.

What leadership processes and activities did principals in turnaround schools use to create a culture that supported achievement and improved academic performance? How did the turnaround principals face and overcome major obstacles to improving student performance? As a turnaround principal and turnaround superintendent, I anticipated some challenges and leadership practices revealed in this research, but what I did not anticipate was the preponderance of, and the magnitude of, emotional statements regarding caring and listening. I did not anticipate the numerous stories of personal devastation when, after working diligently and academically turning around the school, some principals were forced to leave their schools and children for whom they cared. Most surprising was discovering the belief systems of turnaround principals and how their faith, what Fullan (2002) refers to as the "moral imperative", drove them to continue to provide children with a quality education and lift them out of poverty. My research revealed turnaround principals listen with their hearts.

Ten themes were revealed: (1) Listening, (2) Caring, (3) Making reading and writing as priorities, (4) Building relationships, (5) Making data-driven decisions (6) Providing breakfast, lunch, and a snack, (7) Providing after school programs, (8) Analyzing test scores, (9) Having moral standards, (10) Believing they are called to do the work.

What are implications of the study? Superintendents and school boards should be willing to support and sustain turnaround principals who are causing teachers to work differently; children to behave and work differently; and parents to be responsible and engaged in the education of their children. Policy makers should understand the powerful political system of a school district. Teachers should not wield their power to influence voting and support political candidates who are sympathetic to self-interests, wants and needs. Policy makers should focus on student outcomes and support those engaged in raising highly educated citizens. Colleges of education need to examine academic programs and assure they are delivering principals who have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions common to successful turnaround principals: a principal with a strong academic foundation in curricula and data analysis, a principal who cares, a principal who builds relationships, a principal who works collaboratively, a principal who is able to create a system of accountability, a principal who is a good communicator, a principal who knows how to lead from behind, a principal who is motivated not by money nor prestige but by a moral imperative to affect the lives of children, and a principal who listens from the heart.

Let's Talk Citizenship: Political Identity Development in a Service-Learning Course

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Purpose of the Research

This research explores how high school student dialogues about social problems and service shape student political identity. This research was conducted in a small, rural high school that has recently implemented a service-learning project requirement for graduation. These projects are completed during the senior year; during the junior year, all students are required to take a semester-long “Service and Community” course to introduce students to service-learning, help them connect academic learning to service-learning and participation in community causes, and enable them to conceptualize, plan, and implement their senior year service-learning projects. This research analyzes the development of the participating students’ development of political identity using the theoretical framework of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theoretical framework of dialogic construction of identity; this analysis was conducted to ascertain whether a course such as “Service and Community” can, indeed, help produce engaged high school citizens who are not only willing to listen and consider the voices of others in political matters, but also become deeply committed to act on behalf of the political issues that most affect them.

Methodology

This study used a combination of qualitative methods. “Service and Community” course artifacts were collected and reviewed, including course documentation, student assignments, and documentation from community service partners. Twelve participating students were interviewed two times each for thirty minutes each using a guided set of questions; interviews were transcribed and coded with emergent, salient themes. Weekly classroom observations of the “Service and Community” course were conducted, with events, interactions, and activities of the class recorded. Particular attention was paid to student-to-student and student-to-teacher conversations, especially in the planning of group service projects. Field notes were made after each observation and were used in conjunction with interview data to substantiate analysis of the “Service and Community” course.

Summary of Findings

Political dialogue abounded in the “Service and Community” class. Students freely discussed critical issues of power and authority in the school, community, state, nation, and world. Students made a dramatic shift from traditional citizenship education and began talking with each other and the teacher about what they could do to address political problems they discussed through active service. Students became empowered to speak and act on behalf of causes that were most significant to them. As they talked about public issues, students encountered the voices of others—some in positions of authority, some who had been previously unheard. Students began to “appropriate” and “assimilate” these other voices in underwent a process of “dialogic construction” of their own political identities—a process that is ultimately unfinalizable. Through these processes, students confronted previously unacknowledged assumptions, biases, and viewpoints in themselves and others. They engaged in honest and challenging discussions about the structures and values of their school and community, as well as the traditional authoritative discourse that has typically inhibited their engagement with the world as young citizens

Implications for Illinois Education

“Citizenship” education in public schools tends to be situated in the relatively safe types of “personal responsibility” (e.g., obeying laws, paying taxes, volunteering during times of crisis) and “participatory” (e.g., active participation in community organizations, organization of efforts through established channels). “Justice orientation” citizenship, by contrast, entails critically assessing social, political, and economic structures in an effort to address injustice and try to effect system change. The “Service and Community” course facilitated the development of this more active, challenging political identity in its students. The introduction of such courses, in conjunction with service-learning projects, has much potential to help facilitate the transformation of young people from nonparticipants in community concerns to those who not only participate but also lead activities that help challenge existing social, political, and economic conditions that promote and sustain inequitable situations.

Multi-scale Entrainment as a Medium for Education

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Why do students who sit in the front row of class tend to perform better academically? The psychological mechanisms that influence human reciprocal interaction, particularly within educational contexts, were examined to determine if entrainment led to improved educational experience and performance. Entrainment is defined as a continuous and reciprocal chain of engagement through which individuals communicate, and can occur on multiple levels. Educators, students, and school psychologists will benefit from these data by learning about the concept of multi-scale entrainment and education.

Teaching Learning Mathematics in Early Childhood Classrooms: Using Structural Equation Model (SEM) to Examine Beliefs and Perspectives about What Works Best

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Using a Structural Equation Model (SEM), this study examines children, teachers, and parents' beliefs about which teaching practice work best in teaching and learning early mathematics education. The study was conducted in kindergarten, first, second and third grade classrooms in East Central Illinois. The study utilized survey questionnaire, focus group interview, and classroom observation. Data was collected approximately ten weeks. A total of 18 teachers, eight classrooms, 21 parents and 42 children were volunteered in the study. Data from teachers, children surveys, children's interview, and classroom observations served as the endogenous variables in the analyses of regression and factor analysis, whereas exogenous variable was from the parents' survey. Data from all surveys was analyzed using AMOS statistical software. Data reported that there differences in children's beliefs in learning mathematics between kindergarten, first, second, and third grade. Kindergarten and first grade believed that using calculator and computers worked best in learning mathematic whereas second and third grade children believed that teacher should pose challenging questions. However, teachers believed that using questions and answers and using worksheets work best for students. Parents want their children to learn math in fun way and would like teachers to use more technology and spend more time worked with the students in small group to help who have difficulty in understanding math concepts.

Understanding Bridge Programs in Illinois: A Summary of Findings from the 2010 Illinois Bridge Status Survey

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Purpose of Research

Illinois' participation in the Joyce Foundation's Shifting Gears Initiative engendered a variety of efforts to better prepare low-skilled adults for postsecondary education and employment. One effort supported by Shifting Gears, the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) is the use of contextualized bridge programs associated with high-demand and high-skilled occupations to help low-skilled adults transition into college and employment. In 2009, ICCB adopted a formal definition of bridge instruction intended to encourage local entities to develop and implement bridge programs taking various forms, including bridge programs associated with adult education, developmental education, and career and technical education. Among other things, the definition requires bridge programs to include three core elements: contextualized instruction, career development, and transition services. ICCB is engaged in an ongoing grant cycle to incent the development of bridge programs in local educational entities. The purpose of this research was to better understand the extent of bridge program implementation and assess the alignment of existing bridge programs with the new definition.

Methodology

Three primary research questions were posed to address the purpose and goals of this research project:

1. How many bridge programs are under development and currently implemented in Illinois?
2. What are the characteristics, design features, eligibility requirements, program elements, and outcomes of existing bridge programs in Illinois?
3. To what extent do existing bridge programs align with ICCB's bridge definition?

To answer these research questions, a survey method was implemented using Dillman, Smyth, and Christian's (2009) tailored design method which considers three fundamental dimensions: reducing survey error, developing survey procedures, and encouraging social exchanges. The research team designed a survey instrument (Illinois Bridge Status Survey) based on the Illinois bridge definition, the Shifting Gears Phase 1.0 evaluation (Bragg, Harmon, Kirby, & Kim, 2009) and the Illinois Programs of Study Guide (Taylor, Kirby, Bragg, Oertle, Jankowski, & Khan, 2009). The online survey was piloted tested and in one case, a cognitive lab was conducted (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). Because the intention of the survey was to identify all bridge programs in the state, all Illinois community colleges and adult education providers were sampled to include all programs that self-identified as a bridge program. Implemented in two phases in spring 2010, Survey 1 was distributed to Chief Academic Officers ($n = 48$) at community colleges and adult education providers ($n = 103$) to identify the primary bridge coordinators, and Survey 2 was distributed to coordinators of the 44 existing bridge programs identified in Survey 1. Of those respondents identifying bridge programs under development and currently implemented, 37 of the 103 adult education providers and 26 community colleges were represented (22 of the community colleges were adult education providers located within a community college). Survey 1 and Survey 2 were administered online using Survey Monkey. Data collected from Survey 2 were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and responses were tabulated and analyzed using SPSS. Frequency distributions, measures of central tendency, and cross-tabulation were used to identify patterns in the data and establish baseline trends for bridge programs in Illinois.

Summary of Findings

Survey results identified 30 existing bridge programs administered by 23 different organizations including adult education, CTE, and workforce development. Most of the 30 bridge programs were associated with the Health Science; Manufacturing; or Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics career cluster (87%), and four bridge programs indicated they were not associated with any occupation. The preponderance of bridge programs are funded by an adult education grant (57%), private foundation funds (33%), organizational general revenue (23%), WIA Title I funds (23%), and other sources.

Some bridge programs were designed as single courses (50%) and varied in duration from 1 to 26 weeks with an average duration of 10.3 weeks. Of the 30 bridge programs, 77% used the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) and 50% used the Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA) assessment to determine student eligibility for bridge programs, and bridge programs used a large range of proficiency levels using these two assessments.

To determine the extent to which existing bridge programs align with the Illinois bridge definition, five criteria were used including: a) alignment with eligibility requirements; b) alignment with a career cluster; c) alignment with the core element of contextualized instruction; d) alignment with the core element of career development; and e) alignment with the core element of transition services. Twenty-one (70%) of the bridge programs met all five criteria, and an additional six bridge programs met four of the five criteria. This finding suggests a high level of alignment with the Illinois bridge definition based on self-reported survey data.

Implications for Illinois Education

Findings from the Illinois Bridge Status Survey provide a baseline for bridge program activity in Illinois and contribute to an evolving knowledge of the development and implementation efforts of bridge programs related to the Illinois bridge definition. While many bridge programs self-reported data suggest a high level of alignment with the Illinois bridge definition, detailed bridge program characteristics suggest a significant amount of variation in design features, program duration, eligibility requirements, funding mechanisms, and characteristics associated with the three core elements of the bridge definition. Results from the survey can be used to inform policymakers and practitioners about continuous bridge program developments and to improve bridge program delivery. Survey findings also raise additional questions about program effectiveness based on variation in implementation and suggest opportunities for future research and evaluation work. A second iteration of the Illinois Bridge Status Survey is planned for implementation in spring 2011.

Understanding Relaxation Training to Curb Test Anxiety in Students Preparing to Take the ACT

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The purpose of this study was to alleviate the negative effects of test anxiety on high school students when preparing to take the ACT by instructing them to utilize relaxation techniques. The researchers hypothesized that when students utilize deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation techniques, their self-perceived level of test anxiety will decrease, which may have a positive effect on their academic performance.

In the twenty-first century, the necessity of a high performance on examinations and standardized tests, by adults and children, is becoming a very prominent aspect of determining future tenure. Such a trend is not dwindling either as examinations and standardized tests are, in fact, increasingly administered. Thus, there is an increasing prevalence in utilizing high-stakes tests as an indicator of academic achievement and school performance (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005) which has produced a corresponding increase in test anxiety among children (Black, 2005). As a result, it is now known that high levels of stress can make it more difficult for students to concentrate and master information (Paul, Elam & Verhulst, 2007). Test-anxious students do not perform well on standardized achievement tests, receive lower grades and are more likely to be retained (Lowe, Lee, Witteborg, Prichard, Luhr, Cullinan, et al., 2008).

According to Zbornik (as cited in Black, 2005), students who suffer from test anxiety tend to be consumed with feelings of anxiousness, worthlessness, and/or absolute dread in regard to their academic achievement. Test anxiety can produce a physiological hyper-arousal, interfering with students' mental processes and debilitating their ability to function during at test, as well as in the days and weeks leading up to a test (Soffer, 2008). Various forms of relaxation training have been used to mitigate the deleterious effects of test anxiety. Two particular techniques, deep breathing and muscle relaxation, have been shown to effectively decrease anxiety levels in individuals who have difficulty relaxing in anxious situations (Zuercher-White, 1998). The practice of relaxation techniques allows students to become less aware of their experience of anxiety so they are then able to become more focused on the task at hand, namely, academic work.

The entire junior class from Charleston High School was invited to participate in this study. The relaxation training took place five weeks prior to their ACT test date (April 28, 2010). We suspected that test anxiety would have a greater likelihood of being present at a peak during this time.

The participants became familiarized with the concept of deep breathing and muscle relaxation and were taught to utilize these techniques. A researcher directed the relaxation training with participating students twice a week for five weeks leading up to the high stakes testing; the ACT. These sessions lasted approximately twenty minutes each. It is proposed that the relaxation techniques allowed their anxiety to decrease, and their performance ability to increase as a result. The participants were interviewed following the testing to verify these proposed results. The students involved in the experimental group were also invited to participate in a follow-up interview to obtain their personal experiences and evaluate the impact the relaxation training has had.

The study began the week of March 22, 2010 for initial anxiety assessment and relaxation instruction. The post-test was administered to students the week of April 26th, 2010. In May of 2010, the processing, analyzing, and preparation of results took place.

Testing and testing requirements have increased in U.S schools with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Schools are held accountable for their students' performance on these high stakes tests. Pressure exists on administrators, teachers, and students for students to perform well on these tests. Teaching students fundamental relaxation techniques can help decrease the increased anxiety created by high stakes testing. The goal of this study is to promote awareness and address anxiety in high school students in working with teachers and principals to implement relaxation interventions. The implications of test anxiety for parents, teachers and counselors is to take a more active role in providing training and utilization of these relaxation techniques in the academic setting to help students effectively deal with their levels of test anxiety while simultaneously learning a life skill.

Who Says It Is Effective? An Initial Examination of Student Beliefs about Effective Practices in Teacher Education

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Purpose

The purpose of this study is to survey pre-service teacher candidates at Dominican University in River Forest, IL to determine their attitudes and perceptions regarding effective practices in a teacher education program. Our premise is that pre-service teachers' understanding, knowledge and acceptance of the components deemed important in an effective teacher education program is critical in making the program an effective, relevant and meaningful one. Research has shown that attention to the beliefs and attitudes of teacher candidates are important and should be a focus of educational research in order to ascertain effective practices in teacher education programs.

Most recent research published in the Chronicle of Higher Education on April 29, 2010, recommends that after a five-year study of teacher-preparation programs, more research is needed into teacher preparation and accreditation. The study, directed by the National Research Council, sponsored by the U.S. Education Department's Institute of Education Sciences, claims that not enough data are available to draw conclusions about the characteristics of the nation's most effective teacher-preparation programs. When it began their study, in 2005, the National Research Council intended to examine students who entered teacher-preparation programs and to evaluate the instruction and experience they received. But the lack of comprehensive data made the task "exceptionally difficult," the committee of education professors and others who conducted the study wrote in their report, *Preparing Teachers: Building Evidence for Sound Policy*. "The study identified factors that seem to be important in producing good teachers, such as the selectivity of teacher-preparation programs, but the authors could not explain why those factors mattered, because the research was so scant." Research has concluded that there are effective practices in teacher education programs yet as Linda-Darling Hammond wrote in the *Journal of Teacher Education*, "Much of what teachers need to know to be successful is invisible to lay observers, leading to the view that teaching requires little formal study and to frequent disdain for teacher education programs. The weaknesses of traditional program models that are collections of largely unrelated courses reinforce this low regard." Darling Hammond argues that there are critical components to effective teacher education programs. These components include; "tight coherence and integration among courses and between course work and clinical work in schools, extensive and intensely supervised clinical work integrated with course work using pedagogies that link theory and practice, and closer, proactive relationships with schools that serve diverse learners effectively and develop and model good teaching". Darling-Hammond's research also urges schools of education to resist pressures to water down preparation, which ultimately undermines the preparation of entering teachers, the reputation of schools of education, and the strength of the profession.

Methodology

This action research focuses on pre-service undergraduate candidates in the undergraduate Teacher Education Program at Dominican University. A survey questionnaire was developed to assess pre-service candidates' beliefs and attitudes about significant components of the teacher education program. The guiding question in developing the survey questionnaire is: What practices in a teacher education program are perceived by pre-service teacher candidates as effective? The survey questionnaire was administered to freshman students in Foundations of Education classes with 83 students for the total sample size. The survey questionnaire included two main sections with 14 question items total in the format of a Likert scale choice and short answer questions.

We adopted descriptive statistics method to analyze the collected data.. For short answer questions, we coded student answers into relevant categories and the coded data was analyzed by frequency. After we established inter-rater reliability at the level of $r=0.9$, coding has been processed by researchers on the team. The frequency for each response in each item was compared to find noticeable differences. Our categorical data will be illustrated by bar graphs and pie charts.

Summary of Findings

Our research is in the formative stage and therefore, does not yet have a summary of findings.

Implications for Illinois Education

Upon interpretation and analysis of student data, the researchers will conclude what students perceive as effective practices in an undergraduate teacher education program. This information will allow the researchers to further investigate what current practices are in place and discuss implications for change. In this era of teacher education preparation reform, it is vital that undergraduate teacher education utilize effective practices. When students perceive practices as useful, they are committed, and therefore will welcome the practices set forth by teacher education programs. This study will be of interest not only to Illinois teacher educators, but to teacher educators in general to see if the common practices required in teacher education programs are seen as effective by students.

We note that this challenge is accompanied by great opportunity. We have determined that more research about the correlation between teacher candidates' attitudes and effective teacher education programs is needed. In terms of our literature review for this research, we will focus on the following questions: What is the nature of the research regarding teacher candidates' attitudes and effective teacher education programs that has been done to date? What methods have been used? Have findings been consistent across samples and over time? The goal of our review will be to organize the literature so that future research in this field will be able to replicate studies where appropriate, avoid redundancy, and move in directions that are likely to provide a more comprehensive and broader understanding of the students who enter teacher preparation programs.

Biographical Statement

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