

# Spotlight On Research



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## Editors' Message

It is our pleasure to introduce a new issue of *Spotlight on Research* highlighting WIU doctoral students' dissertation studies. In addition, we want to share updates about our faculty. Dr. Eric Sheffield was appointed Department Chair of Educational Studies last fall. Having published over twenty peer-reviewed articles and book chapters; written or co-edited six books; and presented at regional and national conferences, he has a great interest in community service learning, educational philosophy, democratic education, and dystopian educational theory. Drs. Kilmer and Watkins have retired. Drs. Halverson, Noppe, and Webb will be retiring at the end of June. While it is sad to see our colleagues leave, we are looking forward to Drs. Denny Barr and Pamela Rockwood joining our faculty this fall.

In this issue of *Spotlight on Research*, we present six of our doctoral dissertation studies. The dissertation topics include online learning, differentiated instruction, teacher preparation, coaching, self-leadership, and agricultural education.

Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, Dr. Hellrigel explored in his dissertation superintendents' perceptions of online learning and its implementation in Illinois K-12 public schools.

Interested in differentiated instruction among high school teachers who teach core subject areas, Dr. Kendrick-Weikle examined teachers' familiarity with differentiated instruction and the extent to which they used differentiated instruction in the classroom.

Focusing on teacher preparation, Dr. Kilver studied in depth the change in the habits of mind of pre-service teachers as they were completing student teaching in a signature teacher preparation program.

Principals play a vital role in the success of schools. How do principals think of the coaching they receive from their supervisors? This topic was explored in Dr. Koenig's study using survey data from principals in Iowa.

Dr. McConnell's study identified the perceived self-leadership capacity and behaviors among K-5 principals in Illinois. In addition, the study explored the relationship between principals' self-leadership and school performance.

Are agriculture students as college and career ready as their peers? Dr. Mouser researched this question in his dissertation that evaluated high school agricultural education programs in Illinois.

We are delighted to share our doctoral dissertation studies with you, and we hope that you find them relevant and informative. Please share these publications with your colleagues. For more information, please contact us or the authors about their research.

Dr. Bridget Sheng (Editor)  
Dr. Carol Webb (Associate Editor)

# Spotlight On Research

## Illinois Public School Superintendent Perception of Online Learning and Barriers to Implementation in Illinois K-12 Public Schools

*Author: Todd A. Hellrigel, Superintendent, Midwest Central CUSD #191*

### Abstract

Online learning opportunities continue to expand in K-12 school districts around the country. Online learning appears to be a viable solution for Illinois schools to use as they struggle to overcome financial problems, teacher shortage in certain content areas, and offer a viable, challenging curriculum. Compared to other states with virtual schools and online learning opportunities in abundance, Illinois appears to be accepting online learning at a much slower rate. This study sought to understand superintendent perceptions on barriers to implementation of online learning as well as understand superintendent characteristics and district demographics that influence the barriers.

This mixed-methods study used a survey instrument and face-to-face interviews to gain superintendent perceptions on online learning. The top three barriers reported by superintendents were concerns about course quality, concerns about the need for teacher training, and concerns about course development or purchasing costs. The bottom three barriers in the ranking were bandwidth needed to support online learning, principal support, and technological infrastructure to support online learning (wiring/switches). The study also found that the perceived barriers were influenced by certain superintendent and district characteristics. Superintendents also reported strategies and items to consider when implementing online learning. This study's findings may help Illinois public school superintendents better understand the barriers to implementing online learning, which superintendent or district characteristics influence these barriers, and strategies to overcome certain barriers.

### Practical Implication

In order for online learning use to increase, there must be a need for school districts in Illinois to change. Currently that environment does not seem to exist. Illinois districts have utilized online learning only when it is absolutely necessary to remedy an immediate problem, but they are not yet using it to *enhance* student experience. With online learning, students would not necessarily be required to attend brick and mortar schools during traditional school hours and could access their education anywhere anytime. Students would also be in control of their own educational pacing and could advance through courses and grade levels as fast or as slow as necessary. This, however, would require significant policy and funding changes. It would also require self-motivated students, engaged parents, and available support services, such as counseling to help guide students and parents.

Another factor that affects the use of online courses is teacher availability. While school districts are feeling the teacher shortage, it has not yet reached a tipping point. As long as districts are able to find adequate teachers they will likely continue with this traditional practice. There is currently no monetary advantage for schools to use online learning either. Students must still be in a physical building in order to receive full funding. Finally, reporting superintendents have not come to respect the rigor of online courses. As one Superintendent stated, "I'm a true believer that online, computer, Internet will never replace good teachers."

### Citation

Hellrigel, T. A. (2016). *Illinois public school superintendent perceptions of online learning and barriers to implementation in Illinois K-12 public schools* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database (Publication No. AAT 10243477).

# Spotlight On Research

## Illinois High School Teachers' Understanding and Use of Differentiated Instruction

*Author: Kristen Kendrick-Weikle, Superintendent,  
Warrensburg-Latham CUSD #11*

### **Abstract**

This study was an examination of Illinois high school English, math, science, and social studies (core) teachers' familiarity and use of differentiated instruction. Data for the study were collected using an online survey instrument developed by the researcher. A stratified random sample of thirty public school districts, ten districts with fewer than 1,200 students, ten districts with 1,201-3,000 students, and ten districts with more than 3,000 students were surveyed. The survey was completed by 578 teachers from thirty public school districts across Illinois.

Findings show that Illinois core teachers are more familiar with traditional teaching strategies as compared to differentiated instructional strategies. Traditional teaching strategies of lecture and lecture with question and answer were the strategies teachers were most familiar with. Modeling, student-led discussion, small group work, independent projects, and rubrics were the top five differentiated instructional strategies that teachers reported being most familiar with. Small group work was the differentiated instructional strategy that teachers were most familiar with.

Illinois high school core teachers also reported using traditional instructional strategies more often than differentiated instructional strategies. Findings show that Illinois high school core teachers use the following traditional instructional strategies: whole class instruction, teacher led discussion, and lecture with question and answer more than any differentiated instructional strategies. Small group work and rubrics were the top two differentiated instructional strategies used by teachers in the study.

Female teachers reported being more familiar with and using all six differentiated instructional strategies than male teachers. Teachers in districts with more than 3,000 students reported being more familiar with and using each of the six differentiated instructional strategies than teachers in districts with fewer than 1,200 students and in districts with 1,201-3,000 students.

### **Practical Implication**

Research on high school teachers' familiarity and use of differentiated instructional strategies has been lacking. The data in this study can be used for schools to plan and provide professional development for their high school teachers. There were many differentiated instructional strategies that Illinois core teachers reported they were not familiar with and therefore they do not use them frequently in their classrooms. Further training and support of high school teachers in differentiation will better help teachers meet the needs of their students. Additionally, this information can provide useful information to colleges and universities preparing future teachers.

### **Citation**

Kendrick-Weikle, K. (2015). *Illinois high school teachers' understanding and use of differentiated instruction* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database (Publication No. AAT 3713728)

# Spotlight On Research

## The Impact of Student Teaching on the Preservice Teacher

*Author: Carol L. Kilver, Superintendent, West Prairie CUSD #103*

### Abstract

This case study was an examination of the thoughts and perceptions held by preservice teachers during student teaching. The sample for this study came from a small, private college in midwest Illinois. Data regarding the thoughts and perceptions of the participants were collected through surveys and interviews prior to and at the conclusion of student teaching. Preservice teachers and members of the college faculty also participated in focus groups. All data collection instruments were structured around the States of Mind as defined through Cognitive Coaching®.

This study had several purposes: (1) to better understand the States of Mind within the preservice teacher as he or she completed student teaching, (2) to determine shifts in States of Mind (*efficacy, craftsmanship, flexibility, interdependence, and consciousness*), (3) to determine the extent student teaching impacted the preservice teacher, and (4) to determine the extent the teacher preparation program impacted the preservice teacher.

Data were organized through the construct of *efficacy, craftsmanship, flexibility, interdependence, and consciousness*. In a holistic review of the study data, the story of each preservice teacher unfolded into themes providing insights about student teaching as well as the teacher preparation program. The study provided several lessons: (1) the development of cooperating teachers is essential, (2) the intentionality applied to the placement of preservice teachers is critical to the success of student teaching experience, (3) the structure of the teacher preparation program supported the preservice teacher in the field, (4) the preservice teachers discovered a sense of identity during student teaching, (5) the outcome of the student

teaching experience hinges on a safe and secure learning environment, (6) the preservice teachers acknowledged both the academic and affective structure of the teacher preparation program, and (7) the structured aspects of the teacher preparation program and the student teaching experience clearly supported the *craftsmanship, interdependence, and efficacy* of the preservice teacher while *consciousness* and *flexibility* seemed to be uniquely internalized by each individual.

### Practical Implication

Predictable and convincing connections can be made between social constructivism, social learning theory, adult learning theory and the findings of this study. The design of the teacher preparation program is intended to support the student teaching experience. The undeniable connection between teacher preparation and high-stakes accountability has spurred additional debates focusing on the preparation of teachers. These debates have caused a deeper analysis of educational systems and the teacher preparation programs that support them. The contributions of this study support the growing need to ensure the mental complexity of educators parallels the complexity of the world they serve. The findings of this study spur additional attention to the development of cognitive complexity within preservice teachers. Continued research should look to the examination of student teaching and teacher preparation from the perspective of the socialized mindset.

### Citation

Kilver, C. L. (2017). *The impact of student teaching on the preservice teacher* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database (Publication No. AAT 10249793).



# Spotlight On Research

## Coaching Principals to Improve Teaching and Learning through the IOWA Administrator Evaluation Process

*Author: Georgianna L. Koenig, District Assistant Team Coach, Illinois Center for School Improvement at American Institute for Research*

### Abstract

This quantitative study examined the Iowa evaluation system for principals specifically focusing on the coaching aspect. Primarily, this study examined the extent to which the principals received coaching from their superintendents, the content of the coaching sessions, and the perceived value and impact of those coaching sessions from the superintendent and principal perspectives. Additionally, the study compared the perceptions of these two groups.

Two-mirrored surveys, one for superintendents and one for principals, were used to collect the data. All Iowa public school district superintendents and principals were eligible to participate in the survey. A total of 88 superintendents and 145 principals responded to the survey. The study analyzed and compared survey responses from the two groups: principals and superintendents. Statistical tests were run to determine if there were significant differences regarding superintendent and principal perceptions.

The results of this study found superintendents and principals are implementing the components of the Iowa administrator evaluation process for the most part. Across the State of Iowa, inconsistencies were found in the implementation of the Iowa administrator evaluation process. Furthermore, the superintendents' and principals' perceptions were found to be significantly different on the value and impact of the coaching component of the Iowa administrator evaluation process. Based on the results from the study recommendations were made for educational practitioners and for further research.

### Practical Implication

The overall results from this study support the reasons for and purpose of coaching principals. Since principals play a vital role in the school improvement process. It is critical to a school's success to examine the coaching principals are receiving. The data from this study found that 90.3% of the principals responding to the survey received some type of coaching from their evaluators. However, the frequency and quality varied significantly. Principals expressed a desire for frequent, consistent and higher quality of coaching that is meaningful from their superintendents. Principals wanted their superintendents to be highly trained as supervisors and in the practice of coaching.

Superintendent respondents from this study reported that they valued the coaching they did with principals they coached to improve teaching and learning at the building level. However, there appear to be inconsistencies in the implementation and fidelity of the process based on perceived differences between the superintendents and principals about the value and impact of coaching. Some superintendents did recognize the need for additional training on coaching. If coaching principals is a vehicle for improving student achievement, knowing the content and consistency of what principals receive in the form of coaching would be relevant to inform professional development, and support principals receive.

### Citation

Koenig, G.L. (2016). *Coaching principals to improve teaching and learning through the Iowa evaluation process: Perceptions of superintendents and principals* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertation Database. (Publication No. AAT 10249913).

# Spotlight On Research

## The Perceived Self-Leadership Capacity of K-5 Principals in Illinois and Its Correlation to Student Achievement

*Author: Anthony McConnell, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching, Learning, and Innovation, Deerfield Public School District 109*

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to identify the perceived self-leadership capacity and behaviors of K-5 principals in the state of Illinois and to establish whether or not there was a correlation between principal self-leadership and student achievement. K-5 Illinois principals were invited to participate in an online survey that included the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire developed by Jeffrey Houghton and Christopher Neck. Student achievement data was collected from principals from the 2015-2016 PARCC assessment.

This study concluded that the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire is an acceptable instrument for measuring self-leadership with this population of K-5 Illinois principals. The study also revealed that K-5 Illinois principals demonstrate a moderate to high level of overall self-leadership with strengths in the subscales of self-goal setting and self-cueing. K-5 Illinois principals demonstrated weakness in the subscale of self-reward. In addition to the findings on the self-leadership capacity of principals, it was found that there was no correlation between principal self-leadership and student achievement. However, when controlling for a school's socio-economic status there was a weak, yet significant correlation between the self-leadership capacity of the principal and student achievement.

For future research, the study recommends examining the self-leadership capacity of teachers and district level education leaders. In addition, future research is recommended to explore the behaviors and conditions of principals that demonstrate both high and low levels of self-leadership.

### **Practical Implication**

Respondents overall demonstrated high levels of self-leadership skills according to the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire developed by Jeffrey Houghton and Christopher Neck. However, an important finding of the study was how poor principals self-report in the category of self-reward. This area was significantly below the mean for all other areas of the survey suggesting that principals tend to neglect themselves at times and do not take opportunities to celebrate their work. This in turn can lead to burnout and decreased productivity over time. The study recommends training for principals in self-leadership strategies as a way to enhance personal and professional effectiveness, particularly on the subscale of self-reward. Another implication of this research was the establishment of the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire as a valid and reliable measure of self-leadership for this population of principals.

### **Citation**

McConnell, A. (2017). *The perceived self-leadership capacity of K-5 principals in Illinois and its correlation to student achievement* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertation Database. (Publication No. AAT 10633811).

# Spotlight On Research

## A Comparative Analysis of College and Career Readiness Assessment Results of Illinois Agriculture Students

*Author: David M. Mouser, Superintendent, Tri-Valley  
CUSD #3*

### **Abstract**

Agricultural education is defined by a best practice three-component model of instruction that includes a classroom experience, FFA (Future Farmers of America) organization involvement, and a Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE). The Illinois Association FFA conducts a program of activities awards criteria each year that identifies top chapters through gold or silver designations. This quantitative study provides a comparison of eleventh grade Illinois agriculture students from Gold and Silver Emblem FFA chapters to that of their peers on college and career readiness assessments. Student identification numbers were securely collected from agriculture instructors and principals at qualifying schools and data were compiled by the Illinois State Board of Education.

The assessment results were analyzed and compared to determine if there were statistically significant differences that emerged between qualifying Illinois agriculture students and their peers using the ACT and ACT WorkKeys assessments designed to measure college and career readiness. Results indicated that agriculture students are as college ready as their peers, yet more career ready, especially in the area of math. Further analysis indicated that female agriculture students perform at a high level on both college and career readiness assessments.

### **Practical Implication**

This study added to the body of research on the academic validity of agricultural education programs. To date, no studies have examined the overall effectiveness of agricultural education programs to produce college- and career-ready students as measured by performance on the ACT examination and the ACT WorkKeys reading and math assessments on such a large scale. This study provides a quantitative set of data that agriculture teachers, FFA Advisors, school boards, principals, and district superintendents can use to justify the inclusion and support of local agricultural education programs in communities in Illinois and throughout the United States. Research provides evidence that agriculture students are as college ready as their peers. In addition, research quantitatively demonstrated that agriculture students were more prepared in the areas of math and science. Finally, it was concluded that female agriculture students outperformed their peers in all areas of the ACT examinations.

### **Citation**

Mouser, D. M. (2014). *A comparative analysis of college and career readiness assessment results of Illinois agriculture students* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertation Database. (Publication No. AAT 3634284).