

# Spotlight On Research



Educational Leadership Program  
Department of Educational Studies, Western Illinois University

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## Editors' Message

We hope your summer is going well. In the last year, we welcomed Dr. Denny Barr and Dr. Pamela Rockwood to our faculty. Their experiences and expertise provide important contributions to our program. We are delighted to share with you the current issue of *Spotlight on Research* that features our doctoral students' dissertation studies.

The dissertations highlighted in this issue include research on professional development, first year principal experience, generational diversity, school psychologists' roles, superintendent stress, and small school teacher recruitment and retention.

The first featured study was written by Dr. Kelly Bunch. As a member of the first cohort who experienced the professional development training provided by the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL), Dr. Bunch studied the impact of the training on leadership behavior.

In the second featured study, Dr. PJ Caposey surveyed and interviewed second- and third-year principals to find out how they led first- and second-order changes during their first year of the principalship. His study sheds insights on principals' first-year experiences on the job.

Dr. Matthew DeBaene's dissertation explored generational diversity. Using survey data, focus group feedback, and individual interview responses, his study examined the perceptions

of workplace values by educators of different generations.

How do principals view the roles of school psychologists with the implementation of response to intervention in K-12 education? This is the topic examined by Dr. Christy Hopper who found a discrepancy between the principals' perceived school psychologist role and actual practice.

Superintendency is hardly a position without stress. Dr. Curt Simonson's dissertation study focused on the stress level among Illinois superintendents, the stressors that caused the stress, and the relationship between superintendent stress and physical wellness.

The last study presented in this issue is from Dr. John Ulferts' dissertation on teacher recruitment and retention in the smallest school districts in Illinois. His study is meaningful for leaders of small, rural schools in their recruitment and retention efforts.

We hope you will enjoy reading this summer issue of *Spotlight on Research*, as well as previous issues. Please share these publications with your colleagues or contact us or the authors about their research. We look forward to hearing from you.

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

# Spotlight On Research

## Impact of Nationally Recognized Professional Development Program for Leadership on Leadership Behavior

*Author: Kelle S. Bunch, Superintendent, Liberty CUSD2*

### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the professional development training provided by the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) on leadership behavior in schools. This study utilized an explanatory sequential design, where the quantitative data were collected first, then qualitative data were collected to gain additional information to strengthen the study. The online Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) was utilized before and after the NISL training to provide the quantitative data. Demographic information was analyzed to see if any variables influenced the change in scores on the LPI in the five areas of leadership practice. Those areas include: *Model the Way, Inspire A Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart*. Then qualitative data were collected through focus groups to determine if there were common themes or patterns regarding the five leadership practices of the LPI.

The findings indicated that four of the five leadership practices increased, with three practices having a statistically significant difference in the changes on the LPI after the NISL training was completed. They are: *Model the Way, Inspire A Shared Vision, and Challenge the Process*. Demographic variables had no influence on the changes of the LPI regarding position and experience of the school leader or the size and poverty rate of the school or school district. From the qualitative data, five prevalent themes emerged, which were *Challenge the Process, Networking/ Support System, Learning, Model the Way,*

and *Enable Others to Act*. These turned out to be the same prevalent themes revealed in the written responses of participants reflecting on the NISL training. Only one leadership practice, *Encourage the Heart*, did not stand out in any of the findings.

### Practical Implication

This research study may help schools and school districts predict the potential success a school leaders' behavior can have on the success of the school or school district. The review of literature indicated leadership behavior influences student achievement, climate, culture, teacher efficacy, and instruction. This study evaluated the impact NISL training of the Executive Development Program had on leadership practices of school leaders of west-central Illinois, which could possibly be a model for other areas in Illinois and the United States. This study was based on the leadership framework of Marzano, Collins, Kotter, and Posner and Kouzes, all of whom have done extensive work on examining leadership behavior. The recommendations for practice include investing in school leaders; providing opportunities for networking and learning; expecting change to occur; using programs with verified results, such as NISL trainings; and providing state funding for these proven programs.

### Citation

Bunch, K.S. (2017). *Impact of Nationally Recognized Professional Development Program for School Leadership on Leadership Behavior* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertation Database. (Publication No. AAT 10641662).

# Spotlight On Research

## Realities First-Year Principals Face: Understanding Perceived Areas of Common Struggle Associated with the 21 Responsibilities of Effective School Leaders

*Author: PJ Caposey, Superintendent of Schools, Meridian CUSD 223*

### **Abstract**

The study examined self-perceptions of second and third-year principals asked to reflect upon their first year as an administrator. Principals were surveyed to evaluate their performance based on criteria aligned with the 21 responsibilities of effective school leadership identified in a 2005 McREL study. Additionally, the study examined differences in perceptions of ability to lead first- versus second-order change during the first year of the principalship. Data for the study were collected using a survey instrument previously used in the original McREL study and through the use of focus group interviews. The survey was administered online and completed by 100 Illinois principals. An additional 15 principals participated in the focus group interviews.

Findings showed a statistically significant difference in perception existed when comparing the ability to lead first- versus second-order change. Additionally, when asked to consider their first-year as principals, the most significant areas of struggle garnered both similar and dissimilar responses from the qualitative and quantitative portions of the study. The one area of overlap was in the area of involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Another finding indicated that having a formal mentor mattered. This finding was confirmed in both the qualitative and quantitative portions of study. When demographic characteristics were considered, findings occurred on a limited basis

and demonstrated differences in perceptions based on gender, school size, and type of school served. No significant differences in perceptions existed based on age or previous experience.

Three other findings arose specifically from the qualitative portion of study. The findings were as follows: new principals were overwhelmed with the enormity of the job; the transition process into the principalship was weak and did not support first-year success; and despite all of the struggles associated with the first-year of the principalship, job satisfaction of first-year principals was extremely high.

### **Practical Implication**

Today's schools need high quality leadership to meet the demands for quality education for each and every student. The stress and pressure felt by first-year principals has a demonstrable impact on their performance and retention. This study explored areas in which principals perceive their struggle juxtaposed to research identified best practices for school leaders. Additionally, the study provides suggestions for principal supervisors and coaches to increase the probability of success during the incredibly difficult first-year of on the job.

### **Citation**

Caposey, P.J. (2016). *Realities first-year principals face: Understanding perceived areas of common struggle associated with the 21 responsibilities of effective school leaders* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database (Publication No. AAT 10075461)

# Spotlight On Research

## Hidden Diversity: Generational Perceptions of Workplace Values in the Profession of Education

*Author: Matthew D. DeBaene, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, Moline – Coal Valley Community School District #40*

### Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a better understanding of generational diversity and associated values among professional educators. In order to achieve this overall objective, this study examined the perceptions of workplace values by educators in the generational cohorts of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. An open-ended survey, focus group questions, and individual interview responses provided the data for this study. The results provide stakeholders in the field of public education (teachers, students, administrators, parents, and lawmakers) with insight into the perceptions of workplace values through confirming and conflicting perceptions of members from the generations examined in the study.

Through a survey, focus groups, and individual interviews, it was determined that age bias, technology, work ethic, relationships and communication, and adolescent experiences contributed to differences between generations. Furthermore, through the themes that emerged and associated recommendations to educators and future researchers, this study contributed to the research regarding different generations in the field of education.

### Practical Implication

As a result of the data collected and analyzed

from this study, five conclusions were extracted based upon the interpretations of the findings along with connections to the literature on values and generations. Most notably, age bias impacts the members from different generations in a variety of ways. Also, experiences in youth greatly shaped perceptions and characteristics of a generation. This is supported by the literature and generational theory. Furthermore, work ethic was perceived in a variety of ways. This perception of work ethic also aligned with another conclusion regarding differences in technology and generations. Each generation felt they worked hard and often questioned the work ethic of another generation. Many participants in this study utilized technology as a way to increase efficiency, but there was a gap in how various generations were able to deploy technology. Finally, communication was universally considered an important workplace value, yet members of different generations identified good communication in a variety of ways. Technology again showed an impact as younger generations appreciated more electronic communication while older generations preferred less electronic communication.

### Citation

DeBaene, M.D. (2017). *Hidden Diversity: Generational Perceptions of Workplace Values in the Profession of Education* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database (Publication No. AAT 10637589).

# Spotlight On Research

## Methods of Identification of Students with Learning Disabilities in Reading: Perceptions of Administrators in Illinois and Implications for School Psychologists

*Author: Christy L. Hopper, Director, Northwest Special Education Cooperative in Elizabeth, IL*

### **Abstract**

School psychologists' training provides many skills from which its practitioners may draw, including consultation, intervention, counseling, staff development, and assessment. Despite this, school psychologists' primary roles involve assessment and assessment-related tasks, generally as related to eligibility determination for a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). This narrow focus over time provided a limited view of school psychologists' roles by administrators. With the introduction of Response to Intervention (RtI) as related to eligibility for SLD, districts now must focus on interventions, which may be implemented by any staff member; the traditional identification method of ability discrepancies and IQ tests (which only school psychologists could administer) is no longer required. Given that building administrators tended to determine staffing patterns within their buildings, this research used a survey to explore Illinois principals' preferences between the traditional discrepancy model for SLD versus the now-required RtI, their perceptions of school psychologists' skills, and future retention rates for school psychologists within the school setting.

Results suggested that principals, regardless of model preference, supported RtI components. However, only those principals in favor of the discrepancy model supported its related constructs. Regardless of model preference, principals desired school psychologists to participate in RtI-related tasks; however, they did not support their own psychologists actually

participating across all aspects of RtI. Further study is needed to discern why there was a discrepancy between principals' desire and actual practice. Regardless of model preference, principals predicted neither significant increases nor decreases in psychologists' positions over the next five years. Future study recommendations included using a matched subjects design to allow comparison between principals' and school psychologists' perceptions. More information regarding degree of RtI adoption would offer a better understanding of the setting about which the principal was commenting. Comparison with other states not in the same financial straits as Illinois may also be informative.

### **Practical Implication**

This study suggested that principals have conceptually embraced the school psychologist's role beyond the intelligence test kit, an important finding given the field's myopic history. However, it also drew attention to administrators' general lack of comfort in using their own school psychologists for their in-house RtI. This suggests the need for additional research to understand these building leaders' hesitation to utilize school psychologists in the RtI process, an important issue in a time of limited funding and scarce resources.

### **Citation**

Hopper, C.L. (2014). *Methods of Identification of Students with Learning Disabilities in Reading: Perceptions of Administrators in Illinois and Implications for School Psychologists* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertation Database. (Publication No. AAT 3622576).



# Spotlight On Research

## The Relationship of Stress and the Physical Wellness of Illinois Superintendents

*Author: Curtis R. Simonson, Retired Superintendent, Tri-Valley Community Unit School District #3*

### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between stress and the physical wellness of Illinois superintendents. A researcher-developed survey was sent to the 865 Illinois superintendents of school districts. The survey contained twenty-one questions that investigated factors that caused stress, methods used to manage stress, and the relationship between stress and the physical wellness of Illinois superintendents. A majority of superintendents (63%) responded to the survey. The statistical analyses of the superintendents' responses to the survey instrument were performed to answer the six research questions that guided the study.

The study provided statistics that illustrated superintendent demographics, stress levels, factors causing stress, potential health issues, and ways in which superintendents managed stress. Though many characteristics about superintendents remain unchanged from the 2006 AASA study, superintendents who participated in the study were younger and at risk of being overweight and having other health issues. A majority of the superintendents regarded working conditions and professional relations as stressful. The top three stressors are related to working conditions and constantly changing state and federal regulations, inadequate school finance, and time required by the job. The superintendents reported that they were in good health but also reported great concerns over various health issues. Superintendents who agreed with the identified stressors were more likely to agree with the health concerns. In addition, the study found that active methods of managing stress were negatively related to health concerns while passive methods were

positively related to health concerns, and that superintendents used active methods of stress management on a greater frequency than passive methods.

### **Practical Implication**

The study has direct impact on superintendents, Boards of Education, and educational programs. Superintendents must acknowledge that stress exists in the occupation and must understand the impact of stress. This understanding has to include the effects upon health, if left unchecked. Once stress is acknowledged and understood, a superintendent must decide to take action to offset the negative impacts of stress in their professional and personal lives. A plan to address stress must then be developed and implemented. Boards of Education have the difficult job of looking out for the welfare of the superintendent. To do this Boards must understand the specifics of the job of the superintendent and the stressors that are impacting the superintendent. This allows Boards to provide the support necessary for the superintendent's success and wellbeing. Educational programs have no curriculums that address stress, its impact or ways to manage stress. Change has to occur in programing to fully prepare superintendent candidates for the position and for them to be successful in the position. Educational programs need to instruct students on stress, areas that will cause stress, and how to manage stress. The skills of stress management will determine future success in the profession and potential impact on physical wellness.

### **Citation**

Simonson, C.R. (2012). *The Relationship of Stress and the Physical Wellness of Illinois Superintendents* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertation Database. (Publication No. AAT 3564136).

# Spotlight On Research

## An Evaluation of Staff Recruitment and Retention in the Smallest Illinois School Districts: What are the Implications?

*Author: John D. Ulferts, Superintendent-Principal,  
Shirland School District #134*

### **Abstract**

This quantitative study identified teacher recruitment and retention factors in the smallest public school districts in Illinois. This study replicated the Davis (2002) study of rural teacher recruitment and retention in Montana. The Davis survey instrument was administered with author's permission to teachers employed in the 24 smallest Illinois school districts having enrollments of less than 100 students. The survey consisted of Likert-type items measuring recruitment, retention, and job satisfaction factors and was based on the Boylan (1993) four spheres of influence for teacher recruitment and retention: 1) within classroom activities, 2) whole school level activities, 3) community level activities, and 4) family/personal factors. The Boylan model was used to categorize the influence factors to determine which spheres were most influential to teacher recruitment and retention.

The most influential recruitment factors were "best or only job offer," "enjoy the rural lifestyle," "family and or home close by," and "small class size." The most important spheres of influence for teacher recruitment were the family/personal sphere (also most influential in the Davis study) and the whole school sphere. The most influential teacher retention factors were "relationships with students," "safe environment," "small class size," and "support from administrator." As in the Davis study, the most influential spheres of influence for teacher retention were the community and within classroom spheres.

Respondents were also asked to identify the teacher recruitment and retention strategies they perceived as being most important for rural school districts. Four strategies were identified by

over 50% of respondents: "provide competitive insurance packages," "salaries competitive with other states," "more flexibility with scheduling, including flexible personal days," and "state funded \$1000 rural school salary increase." Results from the survey's three teacher satisfaction questions found Illinois rural teachers to be largely content with their profession at slightly higher percentages than the Davis study or previous national studies.

### **Practical Implication**

The study's critical finding was the influence spheres determining whether a teacher accepts a rural teaching assignment are different than the spheres which influence whether a teacher will remain in a rural teaching assignment. Most teachers accepted rural teaching assignments because it was their only job offer and rural living appealed to them. However, these same teachers were most influenced to remain in their teaching assignments because of the community and within classroom factors. Rural leaders, tired of dealing with high teacher turnover, will want to include teachers in the social fabric of the community lessening the isolation rural teachers often experience. While the study's findings questioned the importance of whether a teacher was "home grown" or not, teacher applicants who had a rural background were more apt to be attracted to rural schools and to remain teaching in them.

### **Citation**

Ulferts, J.D. (2015). *An Evaluation of Staff Recruitment and Retention in the Smallest Illinois School Districts: What are the Implications?* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertation Database. (Publication No. AAT 3700515).