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Holiday Greetings:

As we continue our efforts to promote social justice, we are very pleased that the latest issue of the CLEARvoz Journal is now published and can be accessed online via this link: http://journals.sfu.ca/cvj/index.php/cvj/issue/view/9

This issue includes yet another rich collection of contributions from authors committed to advancing social justice and equity in educational and social institutions and beyond. These articles underscore the need to continue our academic discourse, courageous conversations, intentional activism as well as seek innovative ways to enhance social justice leadership, educational equity, and empower underrepresented groups.

As an avenue for social justice leaders, the Center for Leadership, Equity, and Research (CLEAR) is proud to continue publishing the CLEARvoz Journal to disseminate current research and discuss timely issues affecting schools and society at large. The scope and foci of this unique publication provide a global reach for social justice advocates to join forces to collectively combat racism, bigotry and social ills that continue to hamper efforts that seek to achieve a more equitable and just world.

We would like to thank the Editors, Authors, and Members of the Editorial Board and Staff for their diligent efforts, commitment, and continued support. As the President and CEO of the Center for Leadership, Equity, and Research (CLEAR) I invite you again to join us and become part of our social justice leadership movement.

Dr. Ken Magdaleno
President/CEO
Center for Leadership, Equity, and Research

CLEARvoz Journal

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Examining the Role of Poverty in Teacher Grading Decisions

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Abstract
Poverty has a significant impact on the education of America's youth, causing an income achievement gap in American PreK-12 schools. A large amount of research has been done on poverty's effect on many aspects of schools, but few studies have addressed poverty's role on student grades. A century of grading research has shown that teacher grading practices are rarely an accurate representation of student academic achievement, but rather a construct of unclear meaning containing both objective and subjective factors. Because these practices are so difficult to understand, several studies have investigated teacher grading decision making to attempt a more analytic assessment of the process that produces these grades. The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' grading decisions and the relationship to school poverty level in order to better understand the effectiveness of teacher grades in high-poverty schools. Using a causal-comparative design, the study was set in an urban California school district and used a sample of 251 high school teachers from 17 different high schools. A 35-item survey questionnaire was primarily used to determine the extent to which teachers used 17 different grading practices and were influenced by 13 different grading influences when creating report card grades. Results showed that teachers in low-poverty schools assigned significantly more A's than in mid- and high-poverty schools, while most grading practices and grading influences were consistent across school poverty levels. A discussion includes an interpretation of results within the context of grading literature, including the importance of four grading influences in high-poverty schools: *student success, teacher philosophy, school administrators,* and *student absenteeism.* The study concludes with recommendations for teachers and administrators in high-poverty schools to create and utilize effective report card grades in an effort to address the income achievement gap.

Keywords
grades, grading, poverty, achievement gap, decision making, secondary school teachers

Introduction

An income achievement gap existing between students of low and high income levels has been well documented in the United States (Hattie, 2009; Reardon, 2011, 2013; Sirin, 2005). Those documenting the gap have shown that students from families of higher income levels consistently display higher levels of academic achievement as measured by standardized tests as

compared to students from families of lower income levels. Support includes Hattie's (2009) synthesis of 499 studies on the topic, which found that student socioeconomic status (SES) had a moderate effect (*d* = .57) on academic achievement. But despite this relationship, student grade distributions across schools of all SES levels are remarkably similar (Randall & Engelhard, 2010; Zwick & Green, 2007).

Although some may interpret consistency in grade distributions across student SES levels as a sign of equitable practices, the lack of a relationship between grade distributions and SES can also be seen as problematic when one considers that teachers often intend for their grades to represent the same thing as standardized test scores: student academic achievement (Frary, Cross, & Weber, 1993; Kunnath, 2017). Student report card grades may be interpreted as a largely subjective construct when one considers that their creation often consists of an imprecise combination of nonachievement factors—in this study defined as noncognitive, subjective factors that include attitude, behavior, effort, and participation—and academic factors—defined as cognitive, objective factors primarily measured by individual test scores (Kunnath, 2017; McMillan, 2003; Randall & Engelhard, 2010; Reeves, 2011). Additionally, it is important to recognize that a likely reason for the homogeneity in grade distributions across schools is teachers' common use of nonachievement factors in creating report card grades (Guskey, 2015; Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1994; Randall & Engelhard, 2009, 2010). But the question remains as to how teachers make decisions to create student grades. Further, educators must wonder how these decisions are affected by pressures that commonly exist in schools of high poverty, such as chronic student absenteeism, high student mobility, low standardized test scores, high teacher turnover, and less available learning time, among other factors (Ready, 2010; Rogers & Mirra, 2014; Rothstein, 2004; Stull, 2013).

This article examines these issues and explores the impact of poverty on teachers' grading practices. In particular, it presents the findings of the study conducted to investigate teachers' grading decisions and the relationship to school poverty level in an attempt to better understand the effectiveness of teacher grades—especially in high-poverty schools. The main research questions that underlie this investigation include: *(a) How does school poverty level affect teacher grading practices?* and *(b) How does school poverty level affect the influences on teacher grading?* Finally, implications are considered for teachers and administrators to achieve equitable grading processes while taking into account the income achievement gap.

Variation in Grading Practices

A century of grading research has shown student report card grades to be a highly variable measure of student achievement (Brookhart et al., 2016; Guskey, 2015; Schneider & Hutt, 2014). Although teachers commonly report using assessment results as a significant component of student grades, they also largely use nonachievement factors such as attitude, behavior, effort, and participation (Cross & Frary, 1999; Gusky, 2015; McMillan, Myran, & Workman, 2002; Reeves, 2008, 2011; Russell & Austin, 2010). Their methods for creating report card grades are often highly idiosyncratic, displaying high variation across schools, within schools, and even within individual classrooms (Duncan & Noonan, 2007; Guskey, 2002, 2009; McMillan, 2001).

As grading practices differ among school districts, schools, and teachers, course grades inevitably lose some of their meaning (Brookhart, 1994; Marzano, 2000). Variation in teacher grading practices were first documented more than 100 years ago (Starch & Elliott, 1912), and recent studies continue to report similar findings (Anderson, 2018; Brimi, 2011; Brookhart, 2013). In a study of 144 school districts to determine the extent to which districts have similar grading purposes and systems, Austin and McCann (1992) found great inter- and intra-district variation in

grading policies and procedures. In a literature review on 19 grading studies, Brookhart (1994) found a great amount of variation between teachers' practices with differences in the meaning of grades, purposes, and grading criteria. Randall and Engelhard (2010) found that teachers differed in their leniency and severity of grading of the same student. This finding supports the claim that grading by high school teachers is often subjective and highly erratic (Brookhart, 1994; Cross & Frary, 1999). In their study examining student sociocultural factors, grades, and SAT scores, Zwick and Green (2007) found fairly low variation of high school grade point average between schools (15.83%), while the variation between schools of SAT math (26.68%) and SAT verbal (26.06) scores was much higher. This seems to provide further evidence of grading variability, along with the use on nonachievement factors in grading. Additionally, it should be noted that variance greatly differed by ethnic group, as it was lowest for White students and highest for Asian American students (Zwick & Green, 2007).

Teacher Grading Decision Making

One way to better understand teacher grading practices is to study the way in which teachers make their decisions about student grades. McMillan (2003) and McMillan and Nash (2000) created a grading decision-making model to explain the processes involved in teacher assessment and grading practices. The articles posited that these practices were the result of a rationale that was influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. This decision-making rationale refers to the logic and reasoning that teachers utilize when making grading decisions. The teacher grading decision-making model explains that three types of factors—internal factors (teacher knowledge, beliefs, expectations, and values), classroom realities (social promotion, absenteeism, disruptive behavior, and heterogeneity), and external factors (state accountability testing, district policies, and parents)—all contribute to the rationale that teachers employ to make grading and assessment decisions (McMillan, 2003).

While McMillan and Nash (2000) found that teachers often have a difficult time explaining this rationale, the model displays a number of possible factors at work, including two consistent findings from their studies: a *wide range of criteria* and *professional experience* (McMillan, 2003). The finding *a wide range of criteria* refers to teachers' belief that they should use multiple grading factors—both achievement and nonachievement—to fairly grade students (Brookhart, 1991; Cross & Frary, 1999; McMillan, 2003; Reeves, 2011). *Professional experience* refers to teachers' description of the development of their own grading practices through experience mostly their own personal experiences and informal learning from fellow teachers that occurred within the classroom and school site (Frisbie & Waltman, 1992; McMillan, 2003; Reeves, 2011).

Grading and Poverty

Teacher use of nonachievement factors when grading can distort the relationship between the report card grade and academic achievement. Thus far, a small amount of research has found a relationship between school poverty level and the factors (achievement and nonachievement) used to create student grades. Although the evidence is far from definitive, it appears that teachers of high-poverty schools are more likely to use greater amounts of nonachievement factors than those of lower poverty levels, as teacher grading practices seem to face greater influences from internal and external pressures in high-poverty schools (Agnew, 1985; Cauley & McMillan, 2000; Howley, Kusimo, & Parrott, 2000; Kelly, 2008; McMillan et al., 2002; Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1994; Zwick & Himmelfarb, 2011). As a result, low achieving students may not be accurately identified, and unidentified students may lack opportunities to learn

deficient skills (McMillan, 2001). This is not only a matter of poor practice, but also a matter of equity (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1994).

While research on the impact of student poverty on grades has failed to illuminate the exact nature of the interaction, it seems that student grades in high-poverty schools are less valid measures of academic achievement than in schools of lower poverty levels (Agnew, 1985; Cauley & McMillan, 2000; Howley et al., 2000; Madon et al., 1998; Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1994; Zwick & Himelfarb, 2011). Brennan et al. (2001) studied test equity by examining the relationship between teacher grades and high-stakes tests, analyzing teacher assigned grades and Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores of 736 eighth-grade students from six Boston middle schools. Results showed that “MCAS hurts the average competitive position of African American students in math and of girls in math and science” (Brennan et al., 2001, p. 206) as compared to teacher assigned grades. The authors explained these differences were likely due to the highly subjective nature of teacher grades, including factors such as behavior, attitude, and effort, which teachers often used to compensate for low student achievement. Brennan et al. (2001) concluded that grades are usually more equitable than standardized tests, yet they are less accurate measures of achievement. The authors recommended using a combination of standardized test scores, student grades, and perhaps other measures of student academic and non-academic achievement to make educational decisions.

Although several studies have analyzed teacher grading decision making (Cheng & Sun, 2015; Isnawati & Saukah, 2017; McMillan, 2003; McMillan and Nash, 2000, Kunnath, 2017), none to the knowledge of the authors has attempted to do so from an equity perspective. Thus, it is the goal of the authors to determine the extent to which school poverty level plays a role in teacher grading decisions in order to better understand the value of report card grades in high-poverty schools.

Method

Study Design

This study used a causal comparative design to investigate teacher grading decisions in schools of varied poverty levels (Best & Kahn, 2006). To do so, teacher grading decisions were compared by three school poverty groups: *low-poverty schools, mid-poverty schools,* and *high-poverty schools*. School poverty level was determined by the proportion of students eligible for the National School Lunch Program’s free or reduced priced meals, often referred to as free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL), and hereafter in this article referred in this same way (see Domina et al., 2018). Low-poverty schools were defined as schools with 50% or less of students eligible for FRPL, mid-poverty schools were defined as schools with 50.1% to 75% of students eligible for FRPL, and high-poverty schools were defined as schools with more than 75% of students eligible for FRPL.

Setting and Participants

The study was set in a large, ethnically-diverse urban California school district selected through convenience sampling. Survey participants were selected through comprehensive sampling, as all high school teachers of English, foreign language, mathematics, science, and social studies were invited to participate. A total of 251 teachers from 17 high schools completed the closed-response survey items, representing a 27% response rate.

Data Collection

Prior to instrument use, the study was approved by an internal review board. Cross-sectional data was collected with a self-administered Web-based questionnaire through SurveyMonkey. The survey, consisting of 35 items, was utilized to obtain quantitative data on several aspects of teacher grading decision making. The survey was organized into three components: teacher background, grading practices, and grading influences (Appendix A). Part 1 contained three items on teacher background, including teaching experience, predominant teaching assignment, and class level (college preparatory or not). This section was developed from the first group of a survey questionnaire items utilized by Cross and Frary (1999) and Frary et al. (1993) in their studies on teacher grading practices. Part 2 contained 19 items that were primarily designed to determine the methods that teachers used to conduct their grading practices. The first two items asked teachers of the percentage of A's and F's they assigned, and it this was adapted from Cross and Frary (1999) and Frary et al. (1993). The next 17 items asked teachers to use a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not at all* to *completely* to answer the extent to which they used 17 common grading practices to create their final first semester grades. These items were modified from practices considered by the survey questionnaires of McMillan (2001), McMillan and Lawson (2001), and McMillan et al. (2002) in their studies of teachers' assessment and grading practices.

Part 3 consisted of 13 items that were used to determine the influences on teachers' grading practices. Survey items provided a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not at all* to *completely* to answer the extent to which final first quarter grades were influenced by each of the 13 influences. The concept of *grading influences* was first developed by McMillan and Nash (2000) and refined by McMillan (2003) in their articles on teacher grading and assessment decision making, while the Likert-type scale came from the recommendations of Vagias (2006). The entire survey was piloted at a high school in a neighboring school district. Piloting prompted a number of survey revisions, including rewording of three items to enhance clarity and the deletion of an item on student social promotion that was perceived as irrelevant in the high school context.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with descriptive analyses and both parametric and nonparametric tests. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were used to compare the means of assigned A's, assigned F's, and subjective grading index (SGI) scores (created from teacher self-reported use of 17 grading practices) by school poverty level. Goldwater and Nutt (1999) used the concept of an SGI in their study of the relationship between the compatibility of student and teacher backgrounds and teacher grading practices, but unlike the present study, subjectivity was measured by comparing student report card grades to final exam grades. The current study also used Kruskall-Wallis tests to compare the means of each of the 17 different teacher grading practices by school poverty level, as unequal variances and non-normal distributions prevented the use of ANOVA tests (Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner, & Barrett, 2011). A multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) test was used to compare the means of the 13 grading influences by school poverty level because unlike the 17 teacher grading practices, the 13 influences displayed a conceptual relationship between the dependent variables best tested by the MANOVA (Leech et al., 2011).

Results

Of the 915 teachers targeted in this study, 325 teachers (36%) began the survey, while 251 finished for a response rate of 27.4%. Survey responses varied by school poverty level group, as displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Survey Responses by School Poverty Level

	School Poverty Level		
	Low	Mid	High
Target Population	259	192	464
Completed Surveys	81	86	84
Response Rate (%)	31.3	44.7	18.1

Notably, despite the disproportionately high number of schools (*n* = 8) and teachers (*n* = 464) in the high-poverty group, the sample sizes of the three groups were similar. The response rate was highest in mid-poverty schools (44.7%) and lowest in high-poverty schools (18.1%). A major reason for the low response rate in the high-poverty schools group was because of the exceptionally low rate of one site in the group (6.7%) and the non-participation of another. All subsequent data will only reflect the data from the 17 participating sites.

Unlike the great range of survey completion by school site and poverty level, the types of teachers that responded to the survey were remarkably similar. Table 2 shows the teaching experience, major teaching assignment, and primary class level of teachers who responded to the survey by school poverty level.

Table 2
Demographics of Survey Participants by School Poverty Level

	School Poverty Level					
	Low		Mid		High	
Variable	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Teaching Experience						
< 3	1	1.2	2	2.3	3	3.6
3 to 6	5	6.2	13	15.1	11	13.1
7 to 10	6	7.4	6	7.0	11	13.1
> 10	69	85.2	65	75.6	59	70.2
Major Teaching Assignment						
English	30	37.0	26	30.2	36	42.9
Foreign Language	4	4.9	3	3.5	3	3.6
Mathematics	16	19.8	29	33.7	13	15.5
Science	16	19.8	23	26.7	16	19.0
Social Studies	15	18.5	14	16.3	16	19.0
Class Level						
≥ 50% CP	74	91.4	76	88.4	65	77.4
< 50% CP	7	8.6	10	11.6	19	22.6

Note. CP = College preparatory classes.

Teacher Grading Practices

Assigned A's and F's. The first aspect of teacher grading practices that was investigated was the proportion of A's and F's assigned by teachers for each school poverty level. Table 3 illustrates the mean, standard deviation, and median of teacher self-reported assigned A's and F's at each school poverty level. A self-reported score of 1 = *less than 3%*, 2 = *5 to 10%*, 3 = *11 to*

20%, and 4 = *more than 20%*. As shown in Table 3, teachers of low-poverty schools reported assigning the highest percentage of A's (M = 3.05), near the *11 to 20%* category, and the lowest percentage of F's (M = 1.59)—somewhere between the *less than 3%* and *5 to 10%* categories. Mean scores of self-reported assigned A's in mid-poverty schools (M = 2.58) were similar to the mean scores in high-poverty schools (M = 2.63), which falls somewhere between the *5 to 10%* and *11 to 20%* categories. Teachers of mid-poverty schools also displayed the highest mean for assigned F's (M = 2.01), at approximately *5 to 10%.*

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Medians Comparing Teacher Assigned Grades by School Poverty Level

	School Poverty Level								
	Low			Mid			High		
Grading Practice	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*
Teacher Assigned A's	3.05	.88	3.00	2.58	.91	3.00	2.63	.92	3.00
Teacher Assigned F's	1.59	.70	1.00	2.01	.91	2.00	1.83	.92	2.00

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test for significant differences between school poverty levels in mean scores of teacher assigned A's and F's. A statistically significant difference was found between the three school poverty levels on self-reported teacher assigned A's, F (2, 248) = 6.68, p = .001 and on self-reported teacher assigned F's, F (2, 248) = 5.06, p = .007. To determine pairwise contrasts in the ANOVA results, Post Hoc Tukey HSD tests were conducted (Morgan et al., 2011). Results of post hoc tests showed significant differences in teacher assigned A's between low- and mid-poverty schools with a medium effect size (p < .01, d = .53), according to Cohen (1988). Additionally, significant differences were found in teacher assigned A's between low- and high-poverty schools with a medium effect size (p < .01, d = .47). Significant differences were also found in teacher assigned F's between low- and mid-poverty schools with a medium effect size (p < .01, d = .52).

Use of 17 common grading practices. Next, teacher use of 17 common grading practices was analyzed by school poverty level. Descriptive results are shown in Table 4. A self-reported score of 1 = *not at all*, 2 = *slightly*, 3 = *somewhat*, 4 = *largely*, and 5 = *completely*. Across all school poverty levels (low, mid, and high), highest mean responses were found on *student academic achievement* (M = 3.84, 4.06, 4.00), *specific learning objectives mastered by students* (M = 3.78, 3.92, 3.85), and *student ability level* (M = 3.53, 3.63, 3.58). Lowest means were seen on *grade distributions of other teachers* (M = 1.20, 1.20, 1.08), *student performance compared to students from previous years* (M = 1.22, 1.31, 1.31), and *student disruptive behavior/conduct* (M = 1.23, 1.36, 1.40).

Across all school poverty levels (low, mid, and high), highest standard deviations were seen on *inclusion of zeros for incomplete assignments or assessments* (SD = 1.13, 1.29, 1.24) and *student participation and/or paying attention* (SD = 1.08, 1.09, 1.11). Lowest standard deviations were seen on *student extra credit for academic performance* (SD = .54, .66, .65) and *student extra credit for non-academic performance* (SD = .59, .40, .30). Notably, a number of the standard deviations of group item scores differed greatly from the other comparison groups, including *grade distribution of other teachers in high-poverty schools* (SD = .35) and *student disruptive behavior/conduct in low-poverty schools* (SD = .55), which were lower than their respective comparison groups, and *student extra credit for non-academic performance in low-poverty schools* (SD = .59), which was higher than comparison groups.

Table 4
Means, Standard Deviations, and Medians Comparing Teacher Grading Practices by School Poverty Group

	School Poverty Level								
	Low			Mid			High		
Grading Practices	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*
1) Student Ability Level	3.53	.81	4.00	3.63	.99	4.00	3.58	.81	4.00
2) Student Academic Achievement	3.84	.78	4.00	4.06	.76	4.00	4.00	.62	4.00
3) Student Disruptive Behavior/Conduct	1.23	.55	1.00	1.36	.68	1.00	1.40	.71	1.00
4) Student Effort	3.09	.90	3.00	3.00	1.11	3.00	3.08	1.02	3.00
5) Student Participation and/or Paying Attention	2.35	1.08	2.00	2.43	1.09	2.00	2.58	1.11	3.00
6) Student Improvement of Performance	2.60	.93	3.00	2.71	.94	3.00	2.80	.99	3.00
7) Grade Distributions of Other Teachers	1.20	.66	1.00	1.20	.65	1.00	1.08	.35	1.00
8) Student Performance of other Students in Classes	1.49	.82	1.00	1.45	.79	1.00	1.59	.91	1.00
9) Student Performance Compared to Students from Previous Years	1.22	.63	1.00	1.31	.74	1.00	1.31	.78	1.00
10) Specific Learning Objectives Mastered by Students	3.78	.88	4.00	3.92	.75	4.00	3.85	.72	4.00
11) Formal or Informal School or District Policy on Grade Distributions	1.44	1.00	1.00	1.48	1.07	1.00	1.62	1.12	1.00
12) Student Effort, Improvement, Behavior and/or Other Non-Test Indicators for Borderline Grades	2.25	.92	2.00	2.47	.95	2.00	2.58	1.02	3.00
13) Student Completion of Homework	1.93	.79	2.00	1.92	.90	2.00	2.01	1.01	2.00
14) Quality of Student Completed Homework	2.83	.96	3.00	2.33	1.05	2.00	2.76	1.10	3.00
15) Inclusion of Zeros for Incomplete Assignments or Assessments	3.20	1.13	3.00	3.26	1.29	3.00	3.05	1.24	3.00
16) Student Extra Credit for Academic Performance	1.74	.54	2.00	1.52	.66	1.00	1.57	.65	1.50
17) Student Extra Credit for Non-Academic Performance	1.22	.59	1.00	1.13	.40	1.00	1.10	.30	1.00

A Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test was conducted to test for significant differences between school poverty levels in the 17 different grading practices. This test was used instead of parametric alternatives such as the ANOVA and MANOVA because unequal variances across groups violated assumptions of the tests (Morgan et al., 2011). The Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that the three school poverty groups differed significantly on *quality of student completed homework*, X^2 (2, N = 251) = 11.03, p = .004, and *student extra credit for academic performance*, X^2 (2, N = 251) = 8.30, p = .016. Mann-Whitney post hoc tests compared the three school poverty levels on *quality of student completed homework* and *student extra credit for academic performance* with a Bonferonni corrected p value of .017 to determine statistical significance (Morgan et al., 2011). For *quality of student completed homework,* the mean rank for low-poverty

schools (137.39, n = 81) was significantly higher than in teachers in mid-poverty schools (105.72, n = 86), z = -3.11, p = .002, r = -.24. This effect size may be interpreted as small to medium, according to Cohen (1988). For the same grading practice, the mean rank for high-poverty schools (135.79, n = 84) was significantly higher than for mid-poverty schools (105.72, n = 86), z = -2.62, p = .009, r = -.20. This effect size may be interpreted as small to medium. For s*tudent extra credit for academic performance,* the mean rank for low-poverty schools (142.70, n = 81) was significantly higher than in teachers in mid-poverty schools (115.07, n = 86), z = -2.72, p = .006, r = -.17. This effect size may be interpreted as small to medium (Cohen, 1988).

A Subjective Grading Index (SGI) score was created for each survey respondent by averaging survey responses to the 17 grading practices. Two of the seventeen grading practices––*student academic achievement* and *specific learning objectives mastered by students*—the only two researcher-recommended grading practices—were reverse coded to align with the scale of the other grading practices (Cross & Frary, 1999). This produced an index in which a score of 1.0 represents minimum grading subjectivity and 5.0 represents maximum grading subjectivity. A Cronbach's alpha score was calculated to assess the internal consistency reliability of the 17 combined grading practices that produced the SGI score, and the calculated score (α = .66) was found to be slightly below the minimum desired score (α = .70). The α score (α = .66) was based on standardized items because of the large variance in grading practice means and standard deviations (Morgan et al., 2011).

Table 5 displays the complete SGI results by school poverty level. The mean SGIs of all school poverty levels were similar, although low-poverty schools displayed a somewhat low standard deviation (SD = .26), and mid-poverty schools showed a somewhat low median (Mdn = 2.03). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test for significant differences in SGI scores between school poverty levels; however, no statistical significant differences were found.

Table 5
Means, Standard Deviations, and Medians Comparing Subjective Grading Index by School Poverty Level

School Poverty Level	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*
Low	2.10	.26	2.12
Mid	2.07	.39	2.03
High	2.14	.35	2.18

Influences on Teacher Grading

Thirteen influences on teacher grading were measured and analyzed by school poverty level with the use of thirteen survey items. As described in the methods section, a teacher self-reported score of 1.0 indicates that a factor was *not at all* influential on a teacher's grading practices, while a score of 5.0 indicates a factor was *extremely* influential. Table 6 illustrates descriptive results of the influences across all school poverty levels (low, mid, and high). The highest mean responses were seen on *philosophy of teaching and learning* (M = 4.00, 3.91, 3.88) and *desire to promote student understanding* (M = 3.93, 3.99, 3.94). Lowest means were seen on *parents* (M = 1.44, 1.44, 1.40) and *student disruptive behavior* (M = 1.48, 1.56, 1.62). Across all school poverty levels (low, mid, and high), highest standard deviations were seen in *desire for student success* (SD = 1.23, 1.24, 1.30), *student motivation and engagement* (SD = 1.15, 1.16, 1.13), and *student absenteeism* (SD = 1.11, 1.10, 1.15). Lowest standard deviations were seen in *parents* (SD = .67, .75, .70) and *student disruptive behavior* (SD = .78, .76, .73). Additionally, responses to the item *formal or informal school or district policies* displayed a notably lower

standard deviation (*SD* = .89) in low-poverty schools as compared to mid- (*SD* = 1.06) and high-poverty (*SD* = 1.08) schools.

Table 6
Means, Standard Deviations, and Medians Comparing Influences of Grading by School Poverty Group

	School Poverty Level								
	Low			Mid			High		
Influences of Grading	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*
1) Desire for Student Success	3.33	1.23	3.00	3.29	1.24	3.50	3.32	1.30	3.00
2) Philosophy of Teaching and Learning	4.00	.96	4.00	3.91	.93	4.00	3.88	.95	4.00
3) Desire to Promote Student Understanding	3.93	.96	4.00	3.99	.91	4.00	3.94	1.00	4.00
4) Desire to Accommodate Student Individual Differences and Needs	3.19	1.00	3.00	3.31	.97	3.00	3.54	1.02	4.00
5) Student Motivation and Engagement	3.01	1.15	3.00	3.07	1.16	3.00	3.30	1.13	3.00
6) State Standardized Testing	1.73	.99	1.00	1.74	1.12	1.00	1.63	.99	1.00
7) Formal or Informal School or District Policies	1.95	.89	2.00	2.15	1.06	2.00	2.18	1.08	2.00
8) School Administrators	1.70	.99	1.00	1.76	.98	1.00	1.90	1.04	2.00
9) Parents	1.44	.67	1.00	1.44	.75	1.00	1.40	.70	1.00
10) Student Absenteeism	2.36	1.11	2.00	2.38	1.10	2.00	2.56	1.15	3.00
11) Student Disruptive Behavior	1.48	.78	1.00	1.56	.76	1.00	1.62	.73	1.00
12) Differing Student Ability Levels in a Class	2.30	.95	2.00	2.47	.99	3.00	2.45	1.02	2.00
13) Student Disruptive and/or Non-Supportive Home Environments	1.73	.88	1.00	1.79	.91	2.00	1.73	.87	1.00

A MANOVA parametric test was conducted to investigate significant differences between the three school poverty levels on a linear combination of the 13 assessed influences on grading. Assumptions of independence of observations, multivariate normality, and homogeneity of variance/covariance were checked and met (Leech et al., 2011). Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted to test for multicollinearity (Leech et al., 2011). A significant correlation ($r = .613$), considered a medium to high effect size (Cohen, 1988), existed between the influences *formal or informal school or district policies* and *school administrators*. To address this possible source of multicollinearity, *formal or informal school or district policies* was eliminated as a dependent variable from the MANOVA test. The MANOVA tests found no statistically significant differences between the three school poverty levels. Despite this lack of statistical significance, follow-up univariate ANOVAs were conducted to determine whether the school poverty groups differed on each individual influence on teacher grading rationale. No significant differences were found between groups. However, *desire to accommodate student individual differences and needs* displayed a low *p*-value (.076) near the .05 significance level.

Discussion

Research Question 1

The first research question addressed the effect of school poverty level on teacher grading practices. Overall, the findings demonstrated low-level effects.

Grade distributions. Results showed some grade distribution variation across school poverty levels, as teachers of low-poverty schools assigned the greatest proportion of A's and among the lowest proportion of F's. Specifically, teachers of low-poverty schools were found to assign significantly more A's than teachers of both mid-poverty and high-poverty schools, while teachers of low-poverty schools assigned significantly fewer F's than teachers of mid-poverty schools. A possible explanation for more assigned A's and fewer F's in low-poverty schools is the pressure that teachers receive from parents, administrators, and students in these schools to assign higher grades. Because most students in low-poverty schools come from homes of higher SES levels, it is more likely that they have parents who are actively involved in their education, leading to a greater likelihood of increased teacher contact and subsequent pressure on teacher grading practices. Conversely, students of high-poverty schools often come from low-SES households and are less likely to have parents who are actively involved in school, lowering the likelihood of adding pressure on teachers to alter grading practices (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Lee & Bowen, 2006). These results differ somewhat from previous studies, which show that student grade distributions are fairly uniform across school poverty levels (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1994; Randall & Engelhard, 2010; Zwick & Green, 2007). However, a report from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1994), a branch of the U.S. Department of Education, found that despite fairly equal grade distributions, eighth grade students from high-poverty schools were somewhat less likely to receive A's on report cards as compared to students from other poverty levels.

Interestingly, despite the differences in assigned A's, teacher assigned F's were not significantly higher in high-poverty schools as compared to low-poverty schools. Thus, despite the fact that the grading literature shows that students of high-poverty schools have consistently performed lower than students of low-poverty schools on standardized tests that measure academic achievement (Borg, Borg, & Stranahan, 2012; Dahl & Lochner, 2012; Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Heckman, 2006; Reardon, 2011; Sirin, 2005; Stull, 2013), the proportion of failing students in low-poverty and high-poverty schools appears to be fairly similar. This may be attributed to the great attention and significance placed on teachers assigning F's. Wiley (2011) found that teachers' varying use of nonachievement factors often depended upon student ability and achievement level, as teachers were found to use greater proportions of effort in grading for low ability or low-achieving students. Additionally, several studies, such as Bonner and Chen (2008); Cizek, Fitzgerald, and Rachor (1995); and Guskey (2002), found teachers to use whatever combination of achievement and nonachievement factors that resulted in the highest student grades. Further, in cases of borderline grades, teachers may be lenient in rounding up F's to passing grades because of the stigma put on both the student and the teacher when a student fails a class. This pressure can serve as a barrier to limit the number of F's assigned by a teacher regardless of school poverty level, student ability level, or student achievement, thus inflating lower grades (Randall & Engelhard, 2010; Sun & Cheng, 2013; Tierney, Simon, & Charland, 2011).

Objective and subjective practices. Teachers in all school poverty levels seemed to use a combination of objective, or achievement-based, and subjective, or nonachievement-based, practices. Of the 17 different grading practices included in the survey, teachers across all school poverty levels collectively reported they *largely* used the only two practices that were considered objective and recommended in the grading literature: *use of student academic achievement* and *use of specific learning objectives mastered by students* (Cross & Frary, 1999). However, teachers in all school poverty levels also displayed a significant use of subjective grading

practices. Subjective practices most used were *student ability level*, *student effort,* and *inclusion of zeros for incomplete assignments or assessments*. Teacher scores on these practices ranged from 3.00 to 3.63, indicating the practices were *somewhat* to *largely* a part of their report card grades. High survey scores for objective practices seems to indicate that teachers recognize the importance of using achievement factors in their grades; however, mid-level scores for subjective practices implies that teachers also perceive nonachievement factors to be an important part of student grades. These results were similar to recent studies reviewed by Brookhart et al. (2016), who found that teachers' grades commonly include both cognitive and noncognitive factors.

Two subjective grading practices measured by the survey were found to be significantly different in use across school poverty levels: *quality of student completed homework* and *student extra credit for academic performance.* Teachers in low-poverty schools were shown to be significantly more likely than teachers in mid-poverty schools to use both of these subjective practices. Additionally, teachers in high-poverty schools were shown to be significantly more likely than teachers of mid-poverty schools to use quality of student completed homework in grading. Although not found to be significant at the Bonferonni correction level of $p < .017$ (Morgan et al., 2011), teachers in low-poverty schools used extra credit for academic performance much more often than teachers in high-poverty schools (significant at $p < .05$). Because these differences across school poverty levels were inconsistent, it is difficult to make any conclusions about poverty's role on these practices. Despite this inconclusiveness, the existence of some impact of school poverty level on teacher subjective grading practices is apparent and deserves further study.

SGI scores constructed from the survey, which quantified the subjectivity of teacher grading practices, indicated that teachers across all poverty levels uniformly scored between 2.07 and 2.14 on the 5-point scale. However, considering the fact that grading experts recommend *no* use of subjective practices (Guskey, 2015), equivalent to an SGI score of 1.0, these results may be interpreted as contributing a relatively high level of subjectivity to grade meaning. In other words, once SGI scores rise above a level of 1, grade meaning shifts from one of student academic achievement to one of an indeterminate mixture of academic achievement and various nonachievement factors. The higher the score, the higher the subjectivity and the less clarity in grade meaning.

Teachers' reported use of the 15 subjective grading practices were consistent across poverty levels. The use of these types of practices is similar to those first described by Brookhart (1991) and later by others (e.g., Cizek et al., 1995; Cross & Frary, 1999; McMillan, 2001, 2003) as resulting in a *hodgepodge grade*. Brookhart (1991) explained, "A hodgepodge grade of attitude, effort, and achievement, created in an attempt to provide positive feedback to the student about himself or herself, is not the answer" (p. 36). In Kunnath's (2017) study of teacher grading decisions, he found that teachers often relied more heavily on subjective non-achievement factors when they felt heavy weighting of test grades would significantly lower overall report card grades. Teachers explained that they used non-achievement factors more often in lower-level classes (i.e., non-college preparatory), while they relied more heavily on achievement factors in higher-level classes (e.g., Honors, GATE, AP). It stands to reason that in schools in which fewer students are enrolled in higher-level classes, grades may be less accurate than in schools in which a greater number of students are enrolled in these higher-level classes. Because high-poverty schools often provide students with less access to these higher-level classes (Bittman, Davies, Russell, & Goussakova, 2017; Kolluri, 2018), teachers in these schools may be more likely to use hodgepodge grading practices.

Research Question 2

The second research question addressed the effect of school poverty level on influences on teacher grading. The findings demonstrated that school poverty level had little direct effect on these influences. Of the 13 different influences measured in the survey, none measured as significantly different across school poverty levels. However, four influences were interpreted as important factors across all school poverty levels: *student success, teacher philosophy, school administrators,* and *student absenteeism.*

Student success and teacher philosophy. The influences *desire for student success* and *philosophy of teaching and learning* were interpreted as significant influences on teacher grading, with teacher survey scores of 3.0 (somewhat influential) or higher across all school poverty levels. *Desire for student success* registered a mean influential score of 3.31 (between somewhat and very influential) across all poverty groups. McMillan (2003) and McMillan and Nash (2000) found similar results and termed the phenomenon "pulling for students," explaining that it referred to both grading and assessment practices "that are designed to give students the best opportunity to be successful" (McMillan & Nash, 2000, p. 12). Other studies have reported similar findings, explaining that teachers often use grading practices that result in the highest possible grades for students (Bonner & Chen, 2008; Cizek, et al., 1995; Guskey, 2002). The influence *philosophy of teaching and learning* was scored as the highest of all 13 influences on grading, with a mean score of 3.93 (just below very influential). This seems to indicate that although there are many influences on teacher grading practices, teachers feel their grades are purposefully constructed to align to their own philosophy. Interestingly, these two high-scoring influences likely produce converse effects on grades. While *philosophy of teaching and learning* is more likely to result in objective grading practices, as teachers often value the use of summative assessments when creating report card grades (Frary et al., 1993; Kunnath, 2017), *desire for student success* most likely results in subjective practices for reasons mentioned above. The high scores of these two influences seem to indicate that the relative degree of grading objectivity largely depends upon which influence is stronger for the teacher at the time of the grading decision. In high-poverty schools, the greater occurrence of high-need students may result in teachers more affected by *desire for student success* than *philosophy of teaching and learning*.

School administrators and student absenteeism. Two additional influences—*school administrators* and *student absenteeism*—were interpreted as significant despite their low survey scores. The influence *school administrators* received a mean survey score of 1.79 across all groups, indicating a response below the level of *slightly influential*. Teachers of high-poverty schools scored this influence highest (1.90) compared to mid-poverty schools (1.76) and low-poverty schools (1.70). In the case of this influence, any score above 1.0 (not at all influential) may be interpreted as a significant because of the power potential of school administrators on grading decision making. This interpretation aligns with the findings of a few studies of pressures that administrators often place on teacher grading practices to limit failing grades and produce report card grades that fall within a normal distribution (Agnew, 1985; Cross & Frary, 1999; Iacus & Poro, 2011). Because of this phenomenon, teachers with greater numbers of students who are less inclined for academic success are more likely to experience pressure from administrators. As high-poverty schools often have more of these types of students, it is likely that teachers in these schools are more likely to face pressure from administrators that influences grading as compared to teachers in schools of lower poverty levels.

The influence *student absenteeism* received a mean survey score of 2.43 across all groups, indicating a response between *slightly* and *somewhat influential*. Although *student absenteeism*

was not significantly different across groups, it was deemed a significant influence because of its likelihood of disproportionately affecting schools across poverty levels. Because student absenteeism is a larger issue in high-poverty schools (Rogers & Mirra, 2014; Rothstein, 2004), teachers in these schools must make decisions about absent students more often, and these decisions are more likely to result in subjective practices such as the assigning of zeros for missing work or missed assessments. Rogers and Mirra (2014) and Rothstein (2004) explained the negative effect of reduced learning time on achievement in students of high-poverty schools that often occurs because of excessive absences. The additive effect of these instances in high-poverty schools likely adds to the subjectivity and inaccuracy of student grades.

Notwithstanding some of the study limitations, data trends and findings have shed significant light on the place of poverty and its impact on teacher grading. This uncharted territory is worth exploring with further research and study. The research results in this area will inevitably have direct implications for narrowing the income achievement gap and help teachers and administrators provide better ways of equitably accounting for what students know and are able to do.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Educators within high-poverty schools should openly discuss the invisible pressures that can affect teacher grading practices to maximize the clarity of grade meaning. By engaging in school-wide discussions with faculty and administrators, schools can collectively make effective grading decisions entirely from their philosophy of teaching and learning—an ideal influence. When schools can create grades that truly represent student learning, all subsequent conversations about student grades also become conversations about student learning—something very different from what often occurs. Such a proactive approach can help to minimize reactive pressures coming from administrators that arise after teachers create and submit report card grades, likely occurring because administrators are unaware of a teacher's specific grading decision making process. Further, by using only measures of academic achievement to create student report card grades, teachers of these schools can eliminate subjective influences such as *desire for student success,* which obscure grade meaning. However, to address the needs and concerns that teachers often feel when "pulling for their students" in their grading, schools using these objective practices must provide extensive school-wide remediation structures. These structures should provide learning support for students who have low grades, likely D's or F's, which implies that they failed to achieve an adequate level of learning of learning targets. Crucially, these supports should provide additional learning opportunities without penalizing students for taking longer to achieve proficiency. This includes ample opportunities for absent students to learn skills and concepts and display their learning to prevent the need for the use of the zero grade. A grade of zero, after all, implies zero learning, but this meaning is rarely accurate.

Although the suggestions above are strong practices for any school, they are especially important in high-poverty schools. In these schools, report card grades that accurately represent student learning can help educators to better determine student proficiency and deficiency on essential learning targets, which can help to lead remediation efforts. Once schools can accurately determine their remediation needs, they can better create structures and allocate resources that target these needs—work that is crucial in addressing the income achievement gap.

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Appendix A

Teacher Grading Practices and Influences Questionnaire

Part 1: Teacher Background

1. How many total years have you been teaching?
Less than 3 3 to 6 7 to 10 More than 10

2. What was your major teaching assignment (class taught with the most sections) during the second semester of last school year?
English Foreign Language Mathematics Science Social Studies

3. What proportion of your classes were college preparatory (i.e., CP, GATE, Honors, or AP)?
Half or more Fewer than half

Part 2: Grading Practices

4. What percentage of students were given "A's" as a final second semester grade in your major teaching assignment last school year?
Less than 3% 5-10% 11-20% More than 20%

5. What percentage of students were given "F's" as a final second semester grade in your major teaching assignment last school year?
Less than 3% 5-10% 11-20% More than 20%

6. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on student ability level?
1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

7. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on student academic achievement?
1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

8. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on student disruptive behavior/conduct?
1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

9. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on student effort?
1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

10. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on student participation and/or paying attention?
1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

11. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on student improvement of performance?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

12. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on student grade distributions of other teachers?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

13. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on student performance compared to other students in your classes?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

14. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on student performance compared to students from previous years?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

15. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on specific learning objectives mastered by students?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

16. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on formal or informal school or district policy on the percentage of students who may receive A's, B's, C's, D's, and Fs?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

17. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on student effort, improvement, behavior, and/or other non-text indicators for borderline grades?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

18. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on student completion of homework (not graded)?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

19. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on quality of student completed homework?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

20. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on inclusion of zeros for incomplete assignments or assessments?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

21. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on student extra credit for academic performance?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

22. To what extent were your final second semester student grades in your major teaching assignment based on student extra credit for non-academic performance (e.g., bringing in classroom supplies)?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Largely (5) Completely

Part 3: Grading Influences

23. How influential is your desire for your students' success on your grading practices?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Very (5) Extremely

24. How influential is your philosophy of teaching and learning on your grading practices?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Very (5) Extremely

25. How influential is your desire to promote student understanding on your grading practices?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Very (5) Extremely

26. How influential is your desire to accommodate student individual differences and needs on your grading practices?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Very (5) Extremely

27. How influential is student motivation and engagement on your grading practices?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Very (5) Extremely

28. How influential is state standardized testing on your grading practices?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Very (5) Extremely

29. How influential are formal or informal school or district policies on your grading practices?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Very (5) Extremely

30. How influential are your administrators on your grading practices?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Very (5) Extremely

31. How influential are parents on your grading practices?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Very (5) Extremely

32. How influential is student absenteeism on your grading practices?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Very (5) Extremely

33. How influential is student disruptive behavior on your grading practices?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Very (5) Extremely

34. How influential is differing student ability level on your grading practices?
    1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Very (5) Extremely

35. How influential is student disruptive and/or non-supportive home environment on your grading practices?

1. Not at all (2) Slightly (3) Somewhat (4) Very (5) Extremely

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California Restorative Justice in Education: Stakeholders Finding Common Ground in Concepts and Practices

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Abstract
Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) is a positive alternative to zero tolerance disciplinary policies that can help reduce school suspensions and dropouts, reduce revenue losses, and improve the lives of youth and communities. This article describes work to define core practices in Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) efforts in California to enable practitioners to employ standardized concepts and develop programs whose outcomes can be evaluated. One hundred and seventy-four practitioners and stakeholders attended regional meetings to discuss and prioritize promising practices. These discussions were then analyzed, and the concepts were categorized into core and supportive practices in order to develop agreed-upon working definitions. Codification of concepts enables RJE practitioners and stakeholders to develop standardized practices and further RJE's role in advancing equity in schools.

Keywords
restorative justice in education; alternatives to zero tolerance policies; suspensions, dropouts; disproportionality; school to career pipeline

Introduction

Restorative Justice (RJ) addresses conflict prevention and resolution through the lens of relationships, where harmer and harmed come together to repair and reestablish their relationship through a healing process. It originated in indigenous cultures, such as the Maori peoples of New Zealand, who are frequently cited as practitioners in contemporary times. (Jantzi, 2001; Schmid,

2001; MacRae & Zehr, 2011; McElrea, F.W.M., 2012.) Initially employed to address issues of justice and community well-being, it is now often employed in criminal justice systems for both youth and adults. Recently, it has been introduced in schools as a counter-approach to zero-tolerance policies.

RJE provides a holistic approach to zero-tolerance school disciplinary policies and their consequences of suspensions and expulsions. Defining core concepts and supportive practices for RJE enables practitioners to work toward common goals and implement programs whose outcomes can be evaluated.

Zero-tolerance school disciplinary policies have not been effective in addressing school disciplinary issues. (American Psychological Association, 2006; Weisberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003) They have, instead, resulted in increased suspensions and expulsions, and have increased school dropout rates, which disproportionately affect youth of color, the disabled, and LGBT students. Dropouts lead to lower expectations, less achievement, and increased contact with juvenile detention facilities, which, in turn, can ultimately lead to incarceration. (Browne-Dianis, 2011; Rumberger, 2011; Rumberger, & Losen, 2017; Heitzeg, 2009)

In the US, a reexamination of the juvenile justice system and school disciplinary policies has focused on attempts to identify approaches to conflict resolution that are more equitable and lead to better long-term outcomes. Concomitantly, social determinants of health research demonstrates that health inequities and lifetime economic achievement are both tied to school achievement. (Heiman, & Artiga, 2015; Qu, S., Chattopadhyay, S.K., & Hahn, R.A., 2016.) Several alternatives to zero-tolerance disciplinary policies have developed in recent years. These include Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS), and RJE. RJE employs a multilayered approach that provides guidance and support to prevent and resolve conflicts and disputes, while building positive relationships in schools. RJE ensures accountability for all members, and some consider it a more holistic approach than the alternatives. (Gonzalez, 2012; Evans, K., Vaanderling, D., 2016.)

Recognizing the growing body of evidence against zero-tolerance policies, some of California's largest school districts, including Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Francisco (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2018; Oakland Unified School District, 2017; San Francisco Unified School District, Board of Education, 2014) have taken steps to reduce suspensions by abolishing "willful defiance" (Cal Ed Code 48900(k)) as a basis for suspending students, and have established RJE as a process to both prevent and respond to harmful conduct while avoiding suspensions. Abolishing subjective standards to reduce suspensions is necessary but not sufficient. In addition, schools must provide just and equitable learning environments by training teachers, administrators, and the school community in the ways of preventing and responding to harm-causing conduct.

Health researchers have documented factors beyond health care that are necessary to have a healthy population, known as the social determinants of health. These include economic stability, neighborhoods and physical environments, and education. (Heiman, & Artiga, 2015; Reynolds, *et al*., 2008; Qu, Chattopadhyay, & Hahn, 2016; Lewallen, T.C., Hunt, H., Potts-Datema, W., Zara, S., & Giles, W., 2015; Shankar, J., Ip, E., Khalema, E., Couture, J., Tan, S., Zulla, R., & T. Lam, G., 2013.) Educational attainment affects an individual's ability to maximize opportunities in a number of critical categories and to achieve a healthy life for oneself and one's family. Additionally, researchers cite the benefits of reducing inequities in our nation (Reich, 2014; Yin,

2017) and the stabilizing economic force of equality. (Ireland, 2016; Reich, 2015; Steiglitz, 2013) These factors provide additional emphasis on equity in education.

School Suspensions: rates, costs, disproportionality

School suspensions have multiple effects on youth and society. These include reducing grade retention (keeping students on grade-level track) (Marchbank, *et al.*, 2015); reducing success in school and careers; (Pufall Jones, *et al.*, 2018) lowering civic engagement, including participation in voting and volunteering (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2014); and high economic costs to communities and states. (Rumberger, 2017). Overall, California suspension rates have declined by 42% from the 2011-12 to 2016-17 school years. Current suspension rates by race/ethnicity are: African American, 9.8%; American Indian/Alaskan Native, 7.4%; Asian, 1.1%; Filipino, 1.4; Latino, 3.7%; Pacific Islander, 5.0; and White, 3.2%. (CDE, 2017). As school suspensions and expulsions decline, youth of color still make up a larger proportion of these disciplinary actions than their proportion in the population.

Rumberger and Losen, (2016) note that Suspensions alone are responsible for a six and half percent reduction in graduation rates. They calculate that, in California, a one percent suspension rate for a cohort of 10th graders over three years costs the State $180 million. Extrapolating from this cohort data, they projected the statewide economic burden for the dropout group over their lifetimes to be $2.7 billion:

- $809 million direct costs (criminal justice, reduced revenue generated); and
- $1.9 billion social costs (reduced economic productivity, increased health care expenditures).

In addition, each non-graduate sustains average economic losses of $579,820 over their lifetime. (Rumberger, & Losen, 2017)

The relative youth of RJE, the lack of reliable measurement tools, and the multilevel nature of restorative justice practices themselves mean the field is still in the process of defining core concepts and practices and linking their implementation to specific outcomes. In this article, we document and categorize practitioner and stakeholder views on RJE core concepts and practices in California as a step toward improving communication, implementation, and evaluation.

Practitioners and Stakeholders

Restorative Schools Vision Project (RSVP), a California RJE non-profit organization, was funded by The California Endowment Grant Number 20142280 to compile RJE best practices. (Levy, *et al.*, 2017) They convened a two-day Guidance Group (GG) of recognized RJE experts from across the State. The GG members and educational partners, in turn, invited practitioners and stakeholders from three geographic regions of the state: Southern, Central Valley, and Northern California. Attendees included RJE practitioners, educators, youth, community advocates, indigenous elders, and activists. Discussions continued at three subsequent one-day meetings across the state attended by self-selected practitioner and stakeholder invitees.

A total of 174 attendees contributed to the study. The Guidance Group (GG) consisted of 14 RJ practitioners and 16 other stakeholders. (Practitioners are individuals working on RJE in school settings in California. Stakeholders includes policymakers [statewide and local]; students; teachers; school administrators; parents; community members; teachers union members; and other concerned individuals.) Attendees at the one-day regional meetings included 21 RJE practitioners and 123 other stakeholders. Fifty-one of the regional convening attendees completed an

anonymous survey that collected perspectives on RJE promising practices, and 36 completed an anonymous evaluation that collected data on important areas of RJE.

Attendees' perspectives were analyzed to create a taxonomy of key RJE concepts and practices. Responses from attendees' discussions and survey data were categorized by content and clustered thematically into subcategories. After categorization, a review team, including experienced RJE practitioners, lawyers, a mediator, researchers, equity experts, and educators, distilled and analyzed the data further. The data were organized into RJE Core Principles and RJE Supportive Practices. In a separate article, implementation strategies, facilitating factors and barriers to RJE implementation will be discussed.

In organizing concepts, we strove to cluster similar concepts together while also reporting in the words employed by stakeholders. When words and concepts deviated from the cluster group such that there was concern about losing meaning by omitting the term, the terms were included within the cluster and reported as a separate line-item in the table. The sources of the data and the frequency of the comments were also documented. Discussion with the review team further fleshed out the concepts, providing additional depth, and underscoring the importance of specific categories. Redundancy and overlap within and across categories were assessed and simplified to streamline the presentation.

The RJE core concepts and supportive practices developed by the attendees are presented below. Practitioner and stakeholder definitions of essential components of RJE were wide-ranging, with substantial variations in terminology. This diversity makes apparent the need for common terminology so practitioners can "speak the same RJE language."
The specifics of the Core Principles and Supportive Practices are outlined in Table 1. Core RJE concepts and practices include Indigenous Wisdom and Balanced Relationships, Community Inclusiveness and Sensitivity, and Circle Processes.

Core RJE Principles

Meeting attendees considered these items as fundamental to RJE.

Indigenous Wisdom and Balanced Relationships

These concepts include those of bringing the harmed and harmer together to restore balance to the community in a just way. Indigenous wisdom refers to tribal and cultural traditions that deeply value respect, courage, compassion, justice, and balanced relationships among people and in the natural world. Righting wrongs and restoring equilibrium is a foundation of RJE that runs counter to an authoritarian model of top-down school discipline. The indigenous healing tradition of respecting each human being provides the foundational framework in which RJE practices occur. (Zehr, 2015; Oakland Unified School District, 2015; McElrea, 2012) Employing nature and art to establish these balances is also a long-held tradition among indigenous peoples and was reflected in participant responses. (Hopkins, B. 2003; Dewald, 2015; Louv, 2008) Components of the Indigenous Wisdom and Balanced Relationships category were cited by the Guidance Group, two geographic convenings, and in the survey.

Community Inclusiveness and Cultural Sensitivity

Participants reported that all aspects of the community are important to prevent disruption and to define and regain balance once it has been disrupted. Community was clearly defined to include students, teachers, parents, administrators and other members who may be helpful and

supportive in regaining a functioning, peaceful equilibrium. In the convening discussions, cultural appropriateness or sensitivity was considered essential to understand not only the specific traditions and rituals of communities, but also that underserved communities face stressors that range from structural racism to cultural oppression to micro-aggressions (i.e., verbal, behavioral, or environmental comments or situations that are, or may be, perceived as hostile). (Nigatu, 2013)

When cultural strengths and wisdom are integrated into educational experiences, they can help ensure that students succeed in school and are healthy, functioning community members. (Alsubaie, 2015) Some stakeholders used the term cultural appropriateness; however, we prefer the term cultural sensitivity, which asks all to be humble and to continually learn as we work with different cultures, both new and familiar. This requires ensuring that dominant cultural mores do not interfere with an individual's or community's ability to succeed in school.

Since student behaviors are usually the primary focus of RJE, students must be considered essential actors in the process. Providing students with roles in school governance and decision-making bodies allows them to become vital, positive, and contributing members of the school community. Including and valuing students, doing things with them instead of to or for them, can create high levels of motivation and accountability within the school environment. Components of the Community Inclusiveness and Cultural Sensitivity category were cited in three of the geographic convenings, in the survey, and in the evaluations.

Circle Practice

Circle Practice is a fundamental process for operationalizing the first two core concepts: indigenous wisdom and balanced relationships, and community inclusiveness and cultural sensitivity.

Practitioners and stakeholders identified circles more frequently than any other practice as a central tenet of RJ; these references included both the processes employed in circle practice and the short-term goals of the practice. Circle practice represents a non-hierarchical approach to building healing practices that establish or revive a balance among the participants. For example, in a classroom circle, a student who bullies another student is asked to explore his motivations and to repair the harm. The harmed student states what is required to heal the harm.

Circle practice is an interactive approach designed to respect indigenous cultural traditions and wisdom, recognize individuals, encourage their participation, and share ideas and goals in a fair and non-judgmental setting. Circles are used to create an emotionally safe place where trust can be established and conflicts prevented or resolved. A wide range of stakeholder responses cited practices that support students' learning to inquire, reflect upon disagreements, be transparent, and resolve conflicts in a constructive manner. Components of the Circle Practice category were cited in the Guidance Group, all three of the geographic convenings, and in the promising practices survey.

Table 1. Core Concepts and Practices for Restorative Justice in Education

Responses from Stakeholders: Guidance Group (GG) (n=30), Regional Convenings (n=144), Surveys (n=51), Evaluation (n=36)			
Stakeholder Responses	**Number of Convenings where Concept was Cited**	**Cited in Promising Practices Survey**	**Cited in Evaluations**
Indigenous Wisdom and Balanced Relationships			
Harmed and harmer come together to restore balance in relationships.	2 convenings	Yes	Yes
Shared responsibility; invitation to take responsibility.	2 convenings	No	No
Build interpersonal and community relationships as a preventive and repairing-harm approach.	1 convening	Yes	No
Accountable, fluid.	1 convening	No	No
Use creative approaches (nature and art) to create balance and to encourage creativity.	Guidance Group	No	No
Community Inclusiveness and Cultural Sensitivity (Youth, Parents, School, and Community)			
Community inclusiveness (students, parents, school, community). Student voice is critical.	3 convenings	Yes	Yes
Cultural appropriateness and inclusiveness: respect for community, its history, and norms.	2 convenings	Yes	Yes
School community stakeholders critical in identifying solutions.	3 convenings	No	No
Student facilitated circles, leadership development.	3 convenings	Yes	Yes
Understand underlying reasons for behavior related to culture and community.	3 convenings, Guidance Group	No	No
Cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness: respect for community, its history, and norms.	2 convenings	Yes	Yes
Circle Practices			

Responses from Stakeholders: Guidance Group (GG) (n=30), Regional Convenings (n=144), Surveys (n=51), Evaluation (n=36)			
Stakeholder Responses	**Number of Convenings where Concept was Cited**	**Cited in Promising Practices Survey**	**Cited in Evaluations**
Transform power relationships, reduce hierarchy; Transparent interactions and fairness.	3 convenings, Guidance Group	No	No
Continual inquiry, curiosity, humility, learning.	2 convenings	No	No
Ask respectful, curious questions, honor privacy; speak and listen with respect.	1 convening	Yes	No
Be willing to be uncomfortable, be willing to grow; increase self-reflection.	1 convening	No	No
Employ affective statements (Avoid blaming statements).	2 convenings	No	No
Collaborate, build consensus.	2 convenings	No	No
Reduce stigma, increase healing.	1 convening	No	No

Supportive Practices for RJE

Supportive Practices include Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Narrative Inquiry, and Trauma-Sensitive Approaches. The category includes concepts that some RJE practitioners consider very important, but not all practitioners utilize them. Each of these concepts or practices exists separately as its own field of study or can be attached to other interventions. When employed with RJE, they can strengthen the experience and support the Core Concepts.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Stakeholders' responses in this category focused on the self-awareness and self-management approaches that facilitate social interactions and the reframing of options. SEL teaches students the skills and understanding involved in learning self- and social-awareness; self- and relationship-management; and responsible decision-making (Zins, Bloodworth, Weisberg, & Walberg, 2004). Specific competencies include self-awareness, self-management, confidence, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. (Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley, & Weissberg, (2017) As students learn these skills, they are able to recognize their own and others' emotions and develop empathetic approaches for dealing with each. Similarly, students learn to control their impulses and negotiate social situations in ways that support positive relationships and problem solving. One portion of self- and social-awareness is mindfulness, the

practice of stilling one's mind so that an individual can return to a state of equilibrium and think prior to speaking or acting. A key aspect of decision-making is to define the issue, reflect upon alternative views of it, and focus on solutions that meet the needs of those involved. These approaches help students think ahead and come to class focused and ready to learn. Components of the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) category were cited by the Guidance Group, all three geographic convenings, and in the promising practices survey.

Narrative Inquiry Practice

Narrative inquiry employs students' stories as a basis for exploring issues relevant to them. Narrative inquiry is based on the premise that we come to understand and give meaning to our lives through stories. These stories are not just a mirror of life but actually shape our lives. (D. Nylund, personal communication, September 13, 2018; Clandinin, D., 2007) Instead of a dialectic of teacher-centered approach versus one that is student-centered, narrative processes are centered on strengthening relationships—a major principle of restorative justice. (Cohen, 2018) In narrative inquiry, probing for root causes occurs so that the definition of the issue or problem becomes the 'real' issue, not a mere symptom of a deeper issue. Narrative inquiry focuses on issues or problems, not on blaming or shaming individuals or groups involved. This is exemplified by its guiding insight: "The problem is the problem. The person is not the problem." Students and teachers benefit from this process because it names the problem for what it is (e.g., "disruption," "gossiping," "misunderstanding") rather than casting blame on any individual. Components of the Narrative Inquiry category were cited across the Guidance Group, all three geographic convenings, in the survey, and in the evaluation.

Trauma-sensitive Approaches

Trauma-sensitive approaches consider how imbalance in power relationships have been used against community members, individually or in groups. They focus on the effects of trauma on psychological and physical development and seek to ameliorate trauma and build procedures and policies that foster safety and recovery in school and community settings. (Walkley, M., & Cox, 2013) Acute and chronic stress (whether from violence, child neglect, or toxic stresses in the community) are addressed in order to enable children and youth to flourish. One must consider, for example, that zero tolerance policies may re-traumatize students who have already experienced trauma at home, in schools, or in the community. (Ridgard, Laracy, DuPaul, Shapiro, & Power, 2015.)

Sensitive community-engaged practitioners build upon communities' traditions rather than replacing or destroying core values or practices. These sensitivities also include understanding past infractions imposed on communities and cultures. These stresses can range widely, from seemingly small actions, such as not looking someone of a different race or ethnicity in the eye, to larger structural oppressions, such as authoritarian school disciplinary policies. Components of the Trauma-Sensitive Approaches category were cited across the Guidance Group, all three geographic convenings and in the promising practices survey.

Table 2. Supportive Practices for Restorative Justice in Education

Responses from Stakeholders: **Guidance Group (GG) (n=30), Regional Convenings (n=144), Surveys (n=51), Evaluation (n=36)**			
Stakeholder Responses	**Number of Convenings where Concept was Cited**	**Cited in Promising Practices Survey**	**Cited in Evaluations**
Social Emotional Learning (SEL)			
Self-awareness; self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making.	3 convenings	Yes	No
Reframe options with focus on learning.	3 convenings, Guidance Group	Yes	No
Modeling healthy adult relationships.	1 convening	No	No
Non-judgmental awareness.	Guidance Group	Yes	No
Narrative Inquiry			
Understand stories.	3 convenings	Yes	Yes
Help people see alternative stories; understand that people are multistoried.	3 convenings	Yes	Yes
Language shapes reality.	3 convenings, GG	No	No
Probe to get to underlying (root) causes.	3 convenings, GG	No	No
Focus on issues, not person.	1 convening	No	No
Trauma-Sensitive Approaches			
Understand community stressors, micro aggressions, cultural oppression, and trauma-informed approaches.	3 convenings	Yes	No
Understand implicit bias and its consequences.	2 convenings	Yes	No

Note on Core Principles and Supportive Practices

It is important to emphasize that in practice, core and supportive concepts and practices are blended and merged in ways that address actual on-the-ground situations. RJ educational practice is always responsive to individual circumstances and eschews an approach that simply employs a check-off list. Successfully tailoring approaches to the circumstances at hand requires creativity and attention to detail, while also respecting the principles being implemented. As in other fields, such as public health or psychology, the principles are blended to create a customized response or intervention that responds to specific needs in a timely and sensitive manner.

Discussion

The disproportionate numbers of racial and ethnic minorities in America's incarcerated population led to a re-examination of the school disciplinary policies that, by suspending or expelling students, lead to school dropout. The consequences of school dropout include reduced educational achievement, lower learning prospects, and other societal costs. (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2018; Belfield, 2014; Levin & Rouse, 2012; National Dropout Prevention Center, 2004) Education is key to attaining health, economic, and community stability, which is why social and economic justice leaders focus on establishing equitable approaches to keeping students in school and engaged.

A few evaluations of RJE are currently in process. Acosta, *et al.* (2016) describe an RJE randomized cluster design evaluation being conducted in Maine communities. The Atlantic Philanthropies is funding a 15-school evaluation of RJE in conjunction with another program, Diplomas Now. (Wachtel, 2014; Passarela, 2017) The Department of Justice is funding a 22-school implementation in Pittsburgh, with evaluation conducted by RAND. (Wachtel, 2015) While some RJE outcomes have been documented, such as reductions in suspensions and expulsions, and encouragement of academic pursuits, in general, research is lagging behind implementation. Rigorous research tying these processes and outcomes together is needed. (Song & Swearer, 2016; Gonzalez, 2014; Fronius, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016.)

When emerging fields expand to new contexts, such as restorative justice into educational settings, it is critical to assess concepts and practices to assure that practitioners employ the same framework to seek standardized outcomes. (Jones, Bailey, Brush, Kahn, 2018) Several practitioners present helpful frameworks and guidance. (Oakland Unified School District, 2017; Berkowitz, 2012; Wachtel, 2016) However, practitioner-agreed upon concepts are lacking, and detailed descriptions of concepts, practices and implementation guidelines for RJE have not yet appeared. Additionally, there is no current research assessing RJE practitioner and stakeholder understanding of these concepts and how they are employed in practice. (Song & Swearer, 2016; Russell & Crocker, 2016). If the RJE framework is not understood by the school's teachers and personnel, the practices will not be successfully instituted. (Russell & Crocker, 2016) Additionally, without common concepts, practices, and fidelity in implementation, RJE outcomes cannot be rigorously measured and evaluated. (Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley & Petrosino, 2016; Tauri, 2000; Acosta, *et al.*, 2016) In this study, we attempt to advance the discussion of core RJE practices so that a consensus decision can be reached.

As noted, in California, suspension rates for school years 2006-07 and 2012-13 showed an overall decrease of almost half, but the proportion of suspensions for youth of color increased when compared with those for white students. (Gonzalez, 2014). The African American rate changed from three times more prevalent than the white rate to five times more prevalent. Over

this six-year period, the Latino rate also decreased, but it is still 2.5 times that for white students. (Gonzalez, 2014)

Current literature notes that, while disproportionality was not eliminated in the cited studies, gains were made in reducing disciplinary actions for students of color. (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2015; Simpson, 2014; Gonzalez, 2014) Recent research that attempts to understand the disproportional suspension rates indicates that the decision-making process is complex and needs to be thoroughly understood by all levels of participants. (Sparks, 2018) Recommendations such as ongoing coaching or monitoring sessions should be explored to help assure that school and community participants understand and effectively implement RJE practices.

Further research on practitioner and stakeholder understanding of RJE core concepts and supportive practices, as well as a more thorough understanding of the nuances of decision-making in the suspension process will further the potential positive outcomes of RJE in California and the nation.

Recommendations

Based on the responses from RJE participants who participated in this study, we recommend:

1. Consider using the consensus concepts and practices developed in this, and future, studies to define an agreed-upon terminology and methodology to document RJE progress and outcomes. Standardize RJE practices, common data collection elements, and desired outcomes to further communication, research, and practice in the field;

2. Develop funding for well-structured RJE programs and evaluations so that promising practices can be identified and implemented; and

3. Increase opportunities for relationship-building and advocacy among RJE allies, including students, parents, practitioners, educators, funders, and researchers. Opportunities should reflect diversity across regions and demographic groups.

Conclusion

RSVP, a California RJE non-profit organization, convened a group of diverse RJE practitioners and stakeholders from across California to determine a set of promising RJE practices in order to further development of the discipline. The consensus suggested a set of core principles and supportive practices for RJE. Core principles include Indigenous Wisdom and Balanced Relationships, Community Inclusivity, and Circle Practice. Supportive Practices include Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), Narrative Practice, and Trauma-sensitive Approaches. RJE requires a cadre of creative, adaptable people, well-trained in RJE concepts, to run programs in schools and to be consultants to the teachers and other personnel who work with the program. Further research and support of these endeavors will improve documentation of RJE outcomes and facilitate comparisons to alternate approaches. The ultimate goal of RJE is to assist schools and communities in preventing and ameliorating conflict and school suspensions so that students can thrive.

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Perceptions of Latina K-12 Leaders' Experiences with Mentorship and Career Advancement

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Abstract
The purpose of the study reported in this article was to explore Latina leaders' perspectives about their mentorship and career advancement in K-12 education. Potential school administrators who are Latina are at particular risk to achieve a position of leadership within the educational setting for a variety of reasons (Méndez-Morse, 2000; 2004; Magdaleno, 2011). This article describes how six Latina leaders within California describe their mentoring and career progression, including their perceived barriers and sources of support from family and other mentors. Implications are presented for purposes of building the capacity of Latina K-12 school leadership in a way that is reflective of the ethnic community they serve.

Keywords
Latina leaders, Latina educators, K-12 leadership, career advancement, mentoring

Introduction

Latinas who pursue professional careers as educational leaders encounter many barriers in their efforts to successfully navigate the educational system. With an increasing number of Latina/o students in California schools, the need for Latina/o leadership is crucial. According to Magdaleno (2006), school leaders are "most often perceived by Latina and Latino students as positive role models who represent their future" (p. 12). Furthermore, because of "their inherent diversity and humanistic values," such leaders "are strategically poised to help create a culturally accessible and compassionate society that values people and community before material wealth and individual advancement" (p. 13).

Underscoring the critical nature of this view, Robicheau and Krull (2016) observed, "For the first time in history, the overall number of Latino, African-American, and Asian students in public K-12 classrooms is expected to surpass the number of non-Hispanic whites" (Maxwell, as cited in Robicheau & Krull, 2016, p. 24). Given changing demographics, racial education-achievement disparities (Raskin, Krull, & Thatcher, 2015), and an opportunity gap (Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016), an urgent need is for students of color to see people of color leading their school

experience. "Leaders of color can empathize with students of color and provide a racial perspective when making decisions about student learning, as they have likely overcome barriers" themselves (Robicheau & Krull, 2016, p. 25).

However, there exists a relative lack of information describing the perspectives, leadership, and experiences of Latina/o school leaders. In an exception, Méndez-Morse (2000; 2004) developed a framework to examine Latina educational leaders' perspectives about how they sought mentors from various sources that met their specific needs and priorities, including family mentors. As she noted, by studying the unique characteristics of various minority female educational leadership, research can contribute to expanding the understanding of leadership in general, as well as recognition of the importance of particular qualities of minority women administrators. This study builds on Méndez-Morse's (2000; 2004) framework to explore further Latina educational leaders' perspectives about their career progression as well as those individuals who they considered significant mentors.

Literature on Latina Leaders

With exceptions (Magdaleno, 2011; Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jimenez, & Hernandez, 2015), studies examining the work attitudes and experiences of educational administrators have not often included Latina/o leaders. Those studies that have examined Latina women administrators' perspectives specifically (e.g., Méndez-Morse, 2000, 2004; Ortiz, 2001) have focused on Latina women administrators' perspectives on their work experiences and careers in K-12 settings, including both school site and central office positions. Thus, this study utilized literature on mentoring and Latina leaders' experiences with leadership preparation. This literature furthered better understanding of the challenges Latina leaders face and the role of important components such as mentoring to address the barriers.

Latina Educational Administrators and Mentoring

Among the barriers for Latina leaders, according to Méndez-Morse (2000; 2004), is stereotyping of what a Latina/Hispanic woman is or can be, the limited acknowledgment of historical Latina leaders, and the small amount of research focusing on minority female educational leaders. Using both the terms *Latina(s)* and *Hispanic* to refer to those of Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Spanish, Central American, or South American descent, Méndez-Morse (2000) provided an overview of issues confronting Latina educational leaders. She identified stereotypes regarding Latina women in three areas dealing with issues inside and outside of the home. One area was male domination by a father, husband, or male sibling. A second area was fulfilling the traditional responsibilities of wife, mother, and homemaker. A third consequence from the first two was that these factors lead to limited access to educational and work opportunities outside of the home.

This stereotyping of Latina women, however, may limit consideration of them as leaders. Méndez-Morse (2000) demonstrated, through a review of scholarship on Latina leaders (Avery, 1982; Carranza, 1988; Colon Gibson, 1992), that such leaders did not adhere to these stereotypes. From her review, Latina professional and entrepreneurial women received encouragement and support from their spouses and their families. Spouses accommodated schedules, provided moral support, and assisted with household chores including child care, and family members provided strong role models. Additionally, women drew on family members and community Latina leaders as role models, thus "Hispanic women have *created* their own paths of leadership development" (Herrera, as cited in Méndez-Morse, 2000, p. 592).

Following up on the theme of mentorship, Méndez-Morse (2004) explored mentoring among six Mexican American female administrators in West Texas, finding that these leaders created paths to leadership by constructing "a mentor from varied sources that collectively met their specific needs and priorities" (p. 561). Her goal was to identify the role models and mentors of these women. She defined a role model as "someone whose characteristics or traits another person would want to emulate," and a mentor as "someone who actively helps, supports, or teaches" (p. 561) the mentee so that she will succeed. Other research on mentoring has identified key aspects of leadership development. "Mentoring for leadership development is a long-term, one-on-one dynamic process of role modeling and reflection designed to amass knowledge, skills, and self-confidence for personal development and leadership empowerment" (Hasting and Kane, as cited in Crisp and Alvarado-Young, 2018, p. 38). In Méndez-Morse's (2004) study, the significant role models and mentors of the six Latina educational leaders studied were often from nonprofessional areas of the women's lives, mitigating "the absence of a formal, traditional mentoring relationship" (p. 561). However, unlike many states, California has been active for several years in providing formal administrative mentoring cohort programs for Latina and Latino leaders (Magdaleno, 2011; Center for Leadership Equity and Research, n.d.).

According to Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jimenez, and Hernandez (2015), female educational administrators are often similar "in having experienced limited recruitment, a focus on elementary school or curriculum areas, and more years of teaching experience than their male counterparts" (p. 173). Eckman (2004), in her study of male and female principals in the Midwest similarly found female principals to be older when acquiring their first principalship, with more years of teaching experience. Further, Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jimenez, and Hernandez (2015) noted that compared with non-minority female administrators, minority female administrators often lacked sponsors or mentors to facilitate their career advancement. Furthermore, they were "largely leaders of predominantly minority student campuses or districts, and contend[ed] with the double burden of ethnic or racial as well as gender stereotyping" (p. 173). Expanding on the burden of ethnic and racial experiences, Robicheau and Krull (2016) focused on the lived experiences of a sample of (male and female) African American school administrators. They found leaders experienced barriers of three types, a) those racial in nature, b) those involving requirements to prove leader quality, and c) those involving microaggressions or "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities" (p. 32). Robicheau and Krull (2016) advised that "communities that engage in dialogue and discussion about race will be more likely to see and remove barriers" (p. 36) for leaders of color. What might these potential barriers look like for Latina leaders?

Ortiz (2001) explored the perspectives and barriers of three California Latina superintendents. Additionally, she employed the framework of social capital to analyze their perspectives, focusing on such aspects as "social structure" reported by women and networks "consisting of social ties between members" (p. 62). Maintaining that women "develop multilayered networks to gain access" (p. 68) to higher-level administrative positions, she noted that women and people of color may not have access to "as extensive a network of influentials" (p. 68) as those of White men. Women's multi-layered networks included, for example, "professional connections, multiple mentors from inside and outside their immediate circles, and groups who may not appear immediately beneficial but may be in the future " (p. 68). According to Ortiz (2001), with a growing Latino student population in the U.S., K-12 district top leadership would benefit from leaders who represent their community's population. In mid-sized districts at

the time of her study, she observed there were approximately 25 to 30 Latina superintendents nationally, the majority located in Southwestern states.

Finally, Metzger (2003) drew on a psychological as opposed to a social capital perspective to study educational leaders' work experiences. She explored the self/inner development of educational administrators, utilizing a sample of superintendents and college deans. Not all respondents provided their racial/ethnic designation but three deans indicated they were African American, and two superintendents were Latina or Hispanic. The study suggested a number of concepts that might be usefully applied to leaders, including the importance of self/inner development. In her study, administrators had an "aware[ness] of the current trend and the importance of focusing attention on inner and spiritual dimensions of leadership" (p. 683). As she proposed, self/inner development was likely associated with the following six themes: balance, self-actualization, personal improvement, values, inner focus, and relationships. These factors also appear in related research that cites personal qualities of education leaders including fostering loyalty, displaying humility, and providing recognition to others (Miskel, Fevurly, & Stewart, 1979; Bolman & Deal, 2011). Some of these characteristics also appear akin to descriptions of Latina and Latino school leaders as positive role models grounded in the values of "service, integrity, fairness, and equity" (Covey, cited in Magdaleno, 2011, p. 87). This article describes how Latina school leaders in California describe their mentoring and career progression, while considering the literature on the perspectives and barriers of Latina leaders related to leader preparation.

Current Study

Literature on Latina leaders emphasizes that with a growing Latina and Latino student population in the U.S., school district leadership will benefit from leaders who represent the community's population (Magdaleno, 2011). Méndez-Morse (2004) emphasized the quality of mentoring relationships and leadership that Latina leaders are able to establish, and Ortiz (2001) suggested that leaders who are connected to external as well as internal networks may be even more successful.

Given these issues, the purpose of this study was to explore K-12 Latina leaders' experiences with mentorship and their career advancement. Three associated sub-purposes were to 1) expand the literature pertaining to the perspectives of California Latina school leaders; 2) describe and analyze the experiences that prepared them to become leaders and the challenges they encountered; and 3) describe and analyze how these leaders acquired mentors and role models, and how they perceived their race and gender influencing their opportunities to become leaders. That is, what preparation did Latina leaders view as preparing them for leadership? What were some challenges they encountered along the way? The primary participants were six Latina educational administrators known to the researchers as actively employed in their career in educational leadership positions in southern California. The aim was to include Latina leaders who had experience in K-12 administration/governance and whose career longevity could offer reflection concerning their administration advancement. Their perceptions on challenges and barriers were also sought, even as administrative mentoring programs continue to be formulated and developed in the state.

Participants and Procedures

The research followed several steps. First, the individuals were contacted and the study's purposes explained, and permission requested for interviews. All individuals were geographically

accessible to the researchers and some were in districts with a history of collaborative working relationships with the local university where the researchers were working. Next, we scheduled interviews with the administrators at a location of their choosing. Study participants are displayed in Table 1, as well as their age ranges, levels of education, and positions held. There were six study participants: Alejandra, Berta, Caridad, Delina, Elisabete, and Fairuza (all names are pseudonyms). With respect to age, two were between 35 and 45, one was between 45 and 50, and three were over 60. All had held positions in K-12 education. Three study participants worked in K-12 education at the district level as coordinators or directors, two had served as school board members, and another held an elementary principalship.

Table 1.
Participant Description

Female Latina Leaders	Age Range	Highest Level of Education	Positions Held
Alejandra	60-65	Master's Degree	Grant writer District-level-coordinator (administrative-services-and communication)
Berta	40-45	Education Doctorate	Teacher Principal District-level-director(English learners, parent engagement)
Caridad	45-50	Education Doctorate of Philosophy	Researcher District-level coordinator (public-private partnerships)
Delina	35-40	Master's Degree	Higher education administrator School board member (former)
Elisabete	60-65	Master's Degree	Instructional aide Teacher Multilingual program director Vice principal Principal
Fairuza	60-65	Education Doctorate of Philosophy	School board member State university professor

Interview Protocol

Interview questions probed specific areas related to the leaders' backgrounds, mentoring received, goals and challenges encountered, and views of leadership. For the questions on background and mentoring we drew on descriptions of interview questions from Méndez-Morse (2004). We added specific questions about how these leaders' childhoods influenced their perspectives on leadership. Sample questions from the interview protocol included:

- *Background* - Could you describe your family/professional background? What attracted you to leadership/administrative work? How has your childhood affected your leadership role?
- *Mentoring* - How does a leader acquire mentors throughout his/her career? Tell me how you acquired assistance and from whom?

- *Goals and challenges* - What are your goals in education and what prevents you from being successful in meeting your goals? How do you think women administrators may encounter challenges? Please describe how you address challenges?
- *Views on male/female leadership* - How do you see a woman leader acquiring a mentor as opposed to a male leader? Do you think a woman's style of leadership differs from a man's? How do you think male leaders experience the same challenges as female leaders?
- *Views on Latina leadership* - Describe any professionally-related interaction that you have had that made you feel that you were being excluded or treated differently because of your ethnicity.

The first author conducted and transcribed all interviews, which were audiotaped. In order to obtain a more holistic understanding of who these women were and their experiences, we first developed detailed portraits of each Latina leader. These portraits were shared among the research team and used to develop a set of initial themes. These themes included background influences, mentoring experiences, barriers (e.g., racial), male/female roles, and Latina leadership roles. We then revisited the portraits to develop more fine-grained categories, following the two-stage process described by Grubb and Flessa (2006) in their portraits of schools. They characterized this process as "analysis from the bottom up" (LeCompte & Schensul, as cited in Grubb & Flessa, 2006, p. 524). We then chose to articulate the emergent categories to organize our findings. These categories became the sections of this paper: (a) leadership developed and cemented at an early age, as well as a sense of purpose to help children; (b) primacy of family and professional mentors; (c) barriers, including race; gender; the need to prove oneself; and micro-aggressions; and (d) strategies for overcoming barriers.

Findings

Regarding background, all study participants were Mexican Americans, creating a special setting for the study. These study participants mirrored the population they served and, moreover, identified with the children their school districts served.

Early Family Life Influential on Educators' Leadership Roles and Sense of Purpose

The influence of early family life formed a foundation for the study participants' leadership roles and the purposes they gravitated to in their public education careers. As Delina, one of the study's two former board members, stated, "I learned a lot from my parents. Even though they didn't go to college, I learned a lot about some fundamental skills that I still feel have helped me be successful." Alejandra, a district-level coordinator, described her father (a mechanic) as her mentor, teaching her to do her best in whatever she did, saying, "'Whatever you do, ... you do the best job you can' . . . I've always heard him in my head for all of my life pretty much giving me some direction." Although he was not initially supportive of her choice to attend college far from home, she perceived her father as a strong early influence. Consistent with Méndez-Morse's (2004) description of support provided by mothers, all participants identified their mothers as mentors. Alejandra noted that her mother "supported [her family] in what we did" as, for example, one of the only room mothers in her school's PTA. And, Berta, a district-level director, identified both her mother and father as "the ones who guided me and supported me" but said that her mother had especially been her personal and professional mentor for life.

Study participants also described an important influence from their backgrounds: the roles these leaders took on as children. These assumed roles shaped their later careers by underscoring that leadership started in the home. As Berta said, her leadership role was cemented from a young age when, as oldest child, she was expected to be responsible for and to lead younger siblings. As a second grader, she cared for a younger sibling, feeding her breakfast, dressing her for school, and walking her to and from school. Delina, as the first grandchild in her family, would care for her younger cousins, guiding and playing with them. She commented, "When you're the eldest you care. You think of [the] people you lead and you support [them]. . . . Some of those skills translated into who I am now, I think so." Another participant, Elisabete, an elementary school principal, was a middle child with older siblings who worked in field labor, so she cooked and otherwise cared for her younger siblings. She indicated that it was this responsibility that taught her to be a leader.

Our participants also articulated a belief within their families that education was influential, which shaped their own choice of an educational leadership path. Delina said that she chose to pursue leadership "to benefit students . . . because it probably touches on a personal background," adding, "Education was a big and major game changer for me and for my family."

Our participants also found society's mistreatment of their parents as influential, as they noted an early recognition and awareness of institutional disadvantage for the children and parents they would serve as leaders. Caridad, a district-level coordinator, said that she witnessed racism against her parents, partly because her parents did not speak English and they relied on her and her siblings to translate for them. She stated: "Of course, you as a child come to know what's being told to [parents] because you're translating it." Elisabete provided another example of being reprimanded by a teacher for speaking Spanish. She said that she associated the teacher's definition of the Spanish language to her mother's language as something shameful, extending this feeling of shame to her mother. When Elisabete became a principal, she mended her relationship with her mother, and included this lesson in her school leadership. She stated, "I don't think any child should feel embarrassed of who they are or the language they speak or be embarrassed of their parents. I think that's wrong and that was one of the things that drove me into education."

A belief that education was a game changer and an early awareness of institutional disadvantage shaped a common desire for these study participants to help children. Alejandra's commitment to help children was reflected in her volunteer work at her own children's school while working outside of education, and then securing an education position involving grant-writing to acquire additional resources for students. Berta's initial career choice was teaching in order to support students and help them learn. Later, she entered administration, believing she could extend that support to more students. She also searched for "progressive [districts in which employers were] willing to push the boundary and not sit on the status quo, who were at the cutting edge of student learning, and who wanted to make a difference." Elisabete's choice of teaching was also a "way to serve" students, and, in an administrative job, the "possibility of positively influencing or impacting more students than those who were just in my classroom." She stated:

> We have an opportunity to make an impact on a growing life and it's such a precious time in such a short amount of time that I would…want to do everything I can in my power to make it a positive and a great learning experience for children…childhood is such a formative and powerful time in a human being's life.

Particularly emphasized were personal experiences leading to sensitivity that participants brought to their leadership roles. Delina felt leadership was the means to helping students who did not have easy access to the education system. She indicated that her personal experience as an English learner provided her with the sensitivity to understand "underrepresented students who

traditionally have lower-than-average rates for a lot of major areas: education, employment, health and so on." Caridad's personal motivation to help children was based on her experience growing up in poverty. She desired to support children, especially the socioeconomically disadvantaged. A large part of that goal was the "assurance that in our [educational] system, that there was a voice from, not only a Latina, but also from someone who grew up in poverty and understood the importance of supports for children." Elisabete said that her experience as a migrant working child gave her the sensitivity to understand the challenges that such children encounter as they moved from one school to the next.

Primacy of Family Mentors and Finding Professional Mentors

As noted, the study participants indicated that their first mentors were family members, and most identified their mothers as their primary mentors. Other family members named included fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Delina emphasized that several members of her family were mentors, including her parents, who did not go to college but from whom she learned "some fundamental skills that I still feel have helped me be successful now, such as being responsible, time management, commitment to values, not giving up, and perseverance." She also mentioned "aunts and uncles who went to college [who she] definitely looked towards to get some guidance academically." As they grew, participants sought and cultivated educational and professional mentors. Several received guidance in applying and attending college. As Elisabete said,

> [In high school,] I had a special mentor . . . who came in through a program called Upward Bound. . . . He looked at my records and stuff and he noticed that I had straight As…[and] asked, "Has anyone talked to you about college?" I said, "No." . . . And he said, "Well you need to apply. . . . You know he kind of got me into doing that.

Regarding professional mentors, several study participants mentioned Latina/o leaders as their professional mentors, with others including White non-Latina/o professionals and even parents in a school, and women who were educators or parents. Citing "multiple mentoring relationships" (Magdaleno, 2011, p. 93; Ortiz, 2001), Elisabete indicated that her three mentors consisted of a male Latino superintendent, a male White non-Latino vice principal, and a female White non-Latina administrator. Fairuza sought male Latinos in leadership positions in her community to be her mentors, asking them how they started on their paths to leadership positions. She also sought women, both educators and parents in the schools where she worked, as mentors. As she stated,

> So [mentoring] was from the women I spoke to--and not just women who were in highly visible positions but, for example, mothers who were part of school site councils and [other committees]. . . . I honestly learned quite a bit from those mothers. Even though they didn't have a high level of education, they were very involved in their child's school [and would initiate and bring issues to the school's administration].

Delina stressed that her professional mentors were individuals with the same values who had her best interests in mind when advising her.

When discussing a leader's acquisition of a mentor Elisabete said that sometimes "mentors just present themselves without you really knowing it." She provided an example of a superintendent who approached her asking whether she had ever considered going into administration. She said:

> And it's not something I have to say I really thought about. I thought about it afterward, after he [spoke] with me, but not only was he a mentor…he also provided support along the way. . . . For instance, instead of going directly into a principalship, he is the one who

> advised, "You really should try being a vice principal first." [He] gave me the opportunity of being a vice principal at actually two separate schools so I was able to see how two separate principals worked under their guidance.

Barriers to Latina Leadership

Study participants mentioned gender and race and the need to prove as barriers, as Robicheau and Krull (2016) previously identified in their study of leaders of color (i.e., African-American school leaders).

1. Gender and race. Noting "I definitely think that there could be challenges in the daily experiences of Latina or women administrators," Delina noted challenges associated with the perceived scarcity of women leaders and as a result their striving to be visible:

> I think that there's [a] perception [that] we don't have as many women in educational administrator roles in this state. So therefore, to break through to be *heard, to be seen,* to really have the opportunity to be that vehicle--to get to the end goals for our students--is going to be harder for women who have not typically been seen as the catalyst to get us to the educational goals that we're trying to get to.

Once in their positions, study participants pointed to the differential treatment of males and females and leaders of color, thus providing an additional barrier. Elisabete perceived that

> male leaders are treated differently than female leaders and I know it's not just my imagination because I've seen that. White leaders are treated very differently from Latino or Black or leaders of color. And White women are treated differently from Latino [leaders] or leaders [who are] women of color, yes. Our society is so engaged [with this difference].

Associated with micro-aggressions (Robicheau & Krull, 2016), racial and ethnic-based disparities in treatment were often noted as surprising and unpleasant. In one example, Elisabete was a member of a recruitment panel that was interviewing applicants for a classified position. One applicant displayed disrespect toward Elisabete (a first-year principal) by laughing and saying, "Ha, you can't be the principal! . . . " when she introduced herself. One panel member commented, "I've been in numerous interviews with different principals and I have never ever witnessed such disrespectful behavior!" Elisabete stated, "I wish I was making this up, but you know how many White principals are going to be faced with that? I don't think too many."

Other participants expressed being misunderstood and/or not valued by their male superiors. For example, for Berta, her work at her school was not appreciated until after she left her district. She shared, "[My supervisor] underestimated my work and was not necessarily very supportive, but, after the fact, after I left that district, he reached out later on to tell me that I had done amazing work and he had not realized the kind of work I was doing at that particular school." She went on to express her disappointment of being misjudged, "which is very disconcerting. It's very unfortunate that [supervisors] are not able to realize the kind of work that individuals are doing to serve the community until they're gone." She added, "Eventually, even the male parents who had been difficult reached out and said 'I'm sorry for not realizing the kind of work that you were doing.'"

Another key concern was that despite the importance of mentoring, it was viewed by all participants as more difficult for women than for men to find mentors who could support them on their career path. Indeed, "mentors may not be as readily available to women as they are to men" (Magdaleno, 2011, p. 93).When asked to share their impressions, Elisabete, for example, stated that that male leaders were "groomed for . . . the next position up," and Fairuza that opportunities increase for male leaders as a result of the expectation that males acquire leadership positions.

2. Need to prove. Study participants expressed a "need to prove their quality and readiness for advanced leadership work" (Robicheau & Krull, 2016, p. 32). For example, to a question about how her sensitivity to others affects her leadership role, Berta responded, “It impacts my role every day. I think I have to be very cognizant about how others are going to perceive what I say or don't say and how that's going to be interpreted in relationship to my leadership practice.” She shared that as a female leader, she perceived working harder than her male colleagues to ensure her completed work was of highest caliber. It was more important that she completed her work in a timely manner, which meant she worked longer than the contracted workday to complete her assigned tasks. As she commented, "We have to work twice as hard to even be considered for the same position. I think we have to continue to push ourselves and do better in order to be considered equal or even close to it."

Caridad echoed that female leaders must prove they are capable of fulfilling their responsibilities. She believed female leaders must conduct themselves to be "conservative" in approach--i.e., not being loud, opinionated, or bossy, while acknowledging that the same behavior might be perceived as a strength for male leaders. She believed female leaders therefore must be continually strategic in their thinking and be prepared for questions as to, for instance, ‘why’ a leadership directive was given. Caridad noted the exhaustion female leaders could experience from constantly and consciously strategizing.

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

Our participants offered suggestions for overcoming obstacles and advancing in leadership, giving examples from their own experience. Several emphasized the importance of networking among one's peers and colleagues so they could support and learn from each other. Alejandra said that she built and utilized peer networks and felt they were important because "we share the same objectives and challenges." Delina too, had networks which she sought to build and utilize, also seeking various networks to assist her in supporting others. The type of networks sought were professional networks, collegial networks, or simply networks of people who shared the leader's values and ideas. Delina stated that she does not work alone, but has always worked with others or networks of allies to assist her in successfully supporting others. As she commented,

> I feel that it’s those networks and those allies, as we call them, that I’ve needed. I don't think that I am in this position of leadership alone, by working by myself. I think that…I got here because of so many people I work with.

She added, “in my mind everything I do is with the hope that there is a collective benefit to what I'm doing, that people are benefiting by the programs by the ideas and initiatives that I'm moving forward.”

To build and utilize her networks, Berta mentioned connecting with educational organizations such as the California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators or CALSA (see Magdaleno, 2011); California Association for Bilingual Education or CABE; and the University of Southern California or USC Trojan network. She networked with Latina superintendents and keeps current on the latest research in education. A political organization, the Mexican-American Political Association (MAPA) was also mentioned as part of networking. Returning to the mentoring theme, these participants mentioned the importance of cultivating mentors as a way of building networks. As Berta emphasized:

> If you have cultivated a relationship through a mentorship process, then you’re going to hear about different opportunities more readily. [You] are going to be encouraged and

> invited to participate [in these opportunities, whereas] if you haven't been able to develop those networks, then you might not hear about them.

Continuing on this theme, Delina suggested that there were a few ways to make mentoring happen. The first option was to “actively pursue them.” But the second was that they might “just fall into place. They’re the people that you have repeatedly gone to, to seek advice, and then you realize after some time, ‘Gosh, they really are mentoring me.’” These mentors could be found "subconsciously" by looking for the behaviors, styles and skills the mentee wanted to duplicate. But they might also be “those people we connect with, that we tend to go to seek advice to help us personally, professionally, and in other areas.”

Berta, too, reflected that leaders might consider two different ways to acquire a mentor in an administrative position. "You either seek them out, or they are individuals who see the caliber of work that you produce and therefore will offer to support you." However, it might be more difficult for women to seek out mentors (previously described), and women may "anticipate more problems stemming from this relationship" as reflected in "genderlects" (Magdaleno, 2011, p. 93). As Berta put it, male mentors "might not necessarily understand your perspective or your reality in trying to navigate the system and really aspire to grow as a professional." Fairuza added that she "always look[s] to see if [she] could find female mentors because women in leadership positions face different obstacles." As a Latina woman then, Berta advised being "very mindful and very intentional as to who you are engaging with" as mentors. Further, she reflected on her own learning about how to navigate between (her) culture being Latina and Mexican descent first-generation Spanish-speaking, "making sure that I’ve connected and been able to work within my cultural environment and community but also learn how to navigate in the dominant culture, the white English-speaking male-dominated environment."

Others spoke broadly of styles and skill sets that could be pursued by prospective or acting Latina leaders. Berta took care to build specific skills before aspiring to an administrative position. “We, as women, might be very mindful and want to master a certain skill or some area before moving into the next space, a male might just want to take it on." In a separate point about how she approached administrative tasks, she suggested that Latina leaders could consider the difference between the performance of daily tasks for female and male California K-12 public education administrators. If a male administrator is direct and to the point, the perception is that the male administrator means business and one needed to adhere to his directive. If a female administrator is direct and to the point, the perception could be that the female administrator was aggressive, inflexible, and/or unwilling to work with others. As a result, female leaders might find a different way than their male colleagues to do their daily tasks:

> You have to figure out a way to get to get your work completed [according to] your vision and [have] your vision realized…You have to find a way to make it a reality…It could be very straightforward with a male, [but for] a woman you have to figure out another way of being able to bring people along in order to engage in that process.

In this way, participants indicated a woman’s style of leadership also needs to be different from a man’s style. Women leaders need to be able to assess a situation, listen to different perspectives, and bring people along in order to make changes in the organization. As Berta said, “We have to take into account the needs of a group [and] adjust our leadership style to make things happen. [This] ultimately results in a very fruitful product because you're actually moving everyone along within the process.” Further, delivery seems to be important for the Latina leaders we spoke with. The challenge is to "make adjustments—constantly—to how you are delivering your style or delivering your message based on your audience and based on what you want to

achieve." Berta believed women were able to multitask and perceive things differently from their male colleagues, which could be a strength.

Perhaps most broadly, Delina expressed that while still in school, female Latinas in education should be encouraged to become leaders and praised for their leadership skills. She commented, "Are we identifying the ways that they can get there? Are we being strategic and thoughtful and actually asking them so that we have more women who are interested?"

Summary and Conclusion

Although of a small sample of Latina leaders in one state, this study indicated that participants considered such factors as parental mentoring and support, responsibilities assumed at an early age, and the experiences of child poverty and/or family discrimination as influential in guiding them to assume educational leadership roles. Influences of early family life included teachings from parents and the roles these leaders took on as children. Ceja (2004) indeed reported parents as important influences, sources of support, and encouragement. Further, in the present study, helping siblings and other relatives underscored that leadership started in the home. For one participant, for instance, caring for younger cousins translated to her skills as a leader. These characteristics of early family life fostered leading and supporting others, seemingly consistent with Metzger's (2003) approach by placing people at the forefront. The influence of early family life thus formed a foundation for the participants and their orientation to leadership. Our findings also paralleled Méndez-Morse (2004) by indicating that the Latina leaders in this study often wanted to become educators to "mitigate the negative experiences they had when they were children" (p. 580), such as society's mistreatment of parents.

Later, the leaders in this study sought and cultivated educational and professional mentors as they advanced their educational careers. As a result of their conducting themselves to work hard to prove they were capable for their leadership positions, they continued to strategize about their career progression. Nevertheless, stress was reported with having to constantly perform at a high level as they experienced discrimination and/or feelings of isolation as a result of their ethnicity or gender. Furthermore, consistent with Méndez-Morse's (2004) study, throughout their careers these leaders "constructed" or assembled mentors from different sources including parents, educators, and supervisors. One participant said there were two paths, however. One was seeking out a mentor, and the other was coming to the attention of a mentor who saw the "caliber of work you produce." Another participant agreed that there were a few ways to make mentoring happen. These additional paths appeared closer to the notion of a traditional mentor, contrasting somewhat with the earlier findings of Méndez-Morse (2004).

In terms of study implications, school districts might do more to work with students, parents, and parental outreach to encourage female students who are still in school. As one participant suggested, female Latinas in education should be praised for their leadership skills and encouraged to become leaders. She suggested that more care might be taken to be "strategic and thoughtful" in encouraging females who might envision and pursue leadership career paths. In addition, consistent with Magdaleno's (2011) call, formal mentoring programs should be considered. Mentoring for Latina leaders might leverage cultural capital based on cultural values of "family, respect, service, humility, care, and compassion" (p. 88) As he indicated, the close Latina and Latino community is a strong base for supporting new school leaders and being models for teachers and families.

This study has several limitations that suggest some directions for future research. First, the study utilized a small sample of leaders within California's southern region. Future studies

might expand research efforts to include larger samples as well as other regions in the state. Second, while our focus was on similarities in perspective within a relatively experienced group, more fine-grained analyses of Latina leaders with different experience levels could be conducted. That is, given the scope of this paper to examine Latina leaders with substantial experience within education, studies might include newer entrants to the education profession. Third, whereas most of our participants were first in their families to attend college--and they considered parents, particularly mothers, their most important mentors--future research might examine whether there could be differences for Latina women who were not first in their families to attend college. Such research could discern whether there are first-generational differences that influence the perspectives of the participants. Fourth, given Magdaleno's (2011) description of formal mentoring programs (e.g., the CALSA administrative mentoring program), a future study could be situated in just such a program. Research might explore, for example, the experiences of "pairs" of mentors and mentees. For example, such a study could examine how and whether such mentoring mitigates some of the challenges reported by Latina leaders.

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Understanding Leadership within Comprehensive Early Childhood English Learner Reform

Anya Hurwitz, *SEAL (Sobrato Early Academic Language model)*

Abstract
English Learners represent a significant student population in California, yet schools and districts have persistently been unable to support their learning needs. The current policy setting of new standards that situate language in more prominent and cross cutting manners make this an ideal context to study reform leadership focused on English Learners. This is a critical case study of one district implementing a comprehensive early childhood reform model focused on English Learners. The concepts that frame this inquiry are rooted in the socio-political context, shared-ownership, and the crafting of coherence within reform implementation. Findings indicate that leaders enact implementation by building a coalition while navigating critical socio-political factors. Implications suggest that practitioners, policy makers, and researchers committed to understanding and improving education for English Learners should consider the deeply political nature of school improvement efforts that centralize English Learners' needs.

Keywords
English learners, leadership, school reform

The persistent inability of schools in California to support their Latino ELs makes the current transition to new, more rigorous 21st century standards a challenging and critical time. Despite their growing numbers, few districts and schools have been able to build high quality programs and services that meet the academic needs of Latino ELs (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003). One study found that 59% of secondary level ELs in California were "Long Term English Learners", having been in California schools for over 6 years without making adequate progress on the path to English proficiency while also struggling academically (Olsen, 2010). The majority of these students enter California schools as preschool or kindergarten students and are Latino ELs. The *Getting Down to Facts II* report released in September 2018 reaffirms that California's education systems continue to underserve its Latino ELs (Santibanez & Umansky, 2018).

Meanwhile, California's adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010 represents an era of increased expectations of rigorous, higher-order learning for all students, and are said to be the most ambitious set of standards yet developed (Pearson & Hiebert, 2012).

Pearson and Hiebert highlight the emphasis on critical thinking and collaboration, as well as standards for language and literacy throughout the content areas as key elements of increased rigor. Scholars focused on ELs note that there are major issues regarding how to make CCSS accessible to ELs (Goldenberg, 2012; Hakuta, 2011; Valdés, Kibler, & Walqui, 2014).

This set of circumstances makes California an ideal context to study attempts to implement CCSS in ways that specifically meet the needs of Latino ELs. The Sobrato Early Academic Language model (SEAL) was developed as a response to these issues. The SEAL model is designed to build the language and literacy skills of young ELs in preschool through 3rd grade within rigorous standards based thematic instruction. SEAL is a comprehensive model, not an intervention or program that happens in a specific time of day. When implemented fully, SEAL integrates language arts, science, social studies, and English Language Development (ELD). The model is taught throughout the day ensuring that rich language development is explicitly planned across content areas. Schools work in sets of three or four to implement the model, building communities of practice across sites. It takes three years for all teachers, preschool through 3rd grade, to go through the training series. Schools are required to have an internal coach to support teachers with implementation and support job-embedded professional learning.

This study examines the leadership dimensions of SEAL implementation within a small suburban district in Northern California. Implementation of the model is an intense process for teachers who are the primary actors of the reform. Nevertheless, research suggests that leadership plays an important role in reforms, and shared ownership across actors is necessary for deep and sustainable implementation (Coburn, 2003; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2002). The following research questions guide this study: What do district and site leaders do to implement SEAL? What are the contextual factors that create more enabling or constraining conditions for leaders implementing SEAL?

Literature Review

Policy plays a key factor in determining the context and content of school reform, and in turn, how key actors work to implement reforms. Since the 1990s, standards-based reform has been a key component of educational policy across the nation. The notion of systemic reform began to influence policy makers, linking ambitious visions of teaching and learning with standards, professional development, and assessments to monitor progress (Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011; Smith & O'Day, 1990). By the mid 1990s, almost all states had developed academic standards and most were developing accompanying assessment systems (Gandal, 1996). By the late 1990s, several states began developing high-stakes accountability systems, paving the way for "mean" or coercive measures to lead the next iteration of systemic reform (Hess, 2006). With the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, all states were subject to severe consequences for not meeting performance targets based on standardized test achievement linked to academic standards. This brought significant issues for districts and schools serving high number of ELs because these standardized tests were in English.

Though NCLB is credited with bringing a heightened awareness to underserved populations, it has done little to improve the outcomes for these students. Some argue it created perverse incentives for districts and schools (O'Malley Borg, Plumlee, & Stranahan, 2007; Ryan, 2004). O'Malley Borg and colleagues (2007) posit that high-stakes accountability will not positively impact minority students because a single policy agenda such as high standards cannot accomplish two goals simultaneously— raising overall student performance and closing the gap for historically underachieving students.

Scholars note that one of the main costs of NCLB was a narrowing of curriculum (Au, 2007; Coburn et al., 2011; Hout & Elliot, 2011). As schools and districts were held accountable to a limited measurement of student learning via standardized tests, the scope of curriculum and instruction was reduced to that which the assessments emphasized. In turn, basic skills driven by purchased curricula were increasingly employed across districts throughout the country (Coburn et al., 2011). At the height of NCLB, federally-funded research served to deepen reductive notions of literacy development and reinforce federal policies, specifically those associated with high-stakes testing. In response to the 2008 National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) report, several scholars warned that the findings were inaccurate and could have detrimental consequences on early literacy, particularly for ELs (Dickinson, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2010; Gutierrez, Zepeda, & Castro, 2010). Dickinson and colleagues (2010) posit that the report preferences discrete code based skills because they are easy to measure and have strong shorter-term gains in the early elementary grades, yet alone will not lead to lasting literacy development. The authors worry that the report undermines the role of oral language, and in turn, instruction that supports its development, which is essential to long-term literacy achievement. Furthermore, Gutierrez and colleagues (2010) argue that it is insufficient to generalize research based on monolingual students and apply it to the learning and development of dual-language learners. Both these responses to the NELP report illuminate the dangerous inclination to preference curricula and instruction that is easier to measure over that which supports more complex learning. Furthermore, the NCLB era of educational reform and policy proved problematic for historically underserved student populations, specifically ELs.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) represent the newest wave of standards-based reform and are said to be the most ambitious set of standards yet developed (Pearson & Hiebert, 2012). There are major changes within these new English Language Arts (ELA) standards. Pearson and Hiebert (2012) highlight four main elements of CCSS for ELA that are new and different from previous standards. They are: 1) close and critical reading, 2) integration of language processes and disciplinary content, 3) media/research literacy, and 4) text complexity. These authors point to the importance of capacity building for teachers and schools.

Educators focused on equity also raise concerns about the potential negative implications of CCSS for historically underserved communities. A key problem is the standards' lack of consideration for culturally and linguistically relevant pedagogy (Chen, Macey, Simon, & King, 2013; Davidson, 2010). As O'Malley Borg and colleagues' (2007) argue in regards to NCLB discussed earlier, the dual goal of increasing rigor for all students while simultaneously addressing historically underserved students' lower achievement levels is inherently difficult and problematic. Pearson and Hiebert (2012) argue that raising text complexity expectations will be a challenge, yet this challenge is more complicated when students are already reading below grade level. Schools and districts serving historically underachieving student populations are therefore under enormous pressure.

Hakuta (2011) aptly notes that there are major issues regarding how to make CCSS accessible to ELs. California's revised English Language Development (ELD) standards, adopted in 2012, are the state's attempt at outlining the new expectation for the teaching and learning of ELs within the context of CCSS. Similar to CCSS, these new standards outline the role of ELD within content areas. In a report published by TESOL, Valdés, Kibler, and Walqui (2014) discuss the importance of teacher expertise in ensuring that ELs are included in CCSS aligned instruction. The authors go on to argue for the need to make conceptualizations and theories of language

explicit. Furthermore, they note that previously there have been extremely different and often contradicting notions of language.

Both CCSS and the revised ELD standards support a broader notion of language than those of previous standards and are better aligned with research and theory that supports a more comprehensive conceptualization of language and literacy (Dickinson et al., 2010; Gee, 2001; Gutierrez et al., 2010; Hakuta, 2011; Madda, Benson Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael, 2011; Valdés et al., 2014). This is particularly important and relevant for ELs. The implementation of both CCSS and the revised ELD standards in California present both great opportunity and challenges to transforming and improving the learning experiences of ELs.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that drives this critical case study is rooted in the need to better understand the socio-political context within which leaders operate and reforms are implemented. Much of educational research seeks to distill ‘interventions’, and study them against comparable contexts. This approach is based on a simplified notion of context that is usually defined by limited factors such as socio-economic demographics and location. Alternatively, the theoretical base of this inquiry elevates the complexity of the socio-political context, and explores how political games and the local, state, and national policy milieu impacts leadership and implementation (Malen, 2006, 2011; Shipps, 2003). Additionally, this conceptual framework is grounded in notions of shared-ownership and partnership across actors as important to understanding leadership of reform (Coburn, 2003; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; M. I. Honig & Copland, 2008; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2002). Though leaders have different roles and responsibilities, exploring the extent to which they take ownership of and partner around reforms emerges as an important element of implementation. Relatedly, how leaders work to customize reforms and negotiate the coherence between initiatives, programs, and curriculum becomes key to creating the conditions for deep and lasting instructional change (Datnow, 2002; M. I. Honig & Hatch, 2004a; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2002; Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001; Thompson & Wiliam, 2007).

Socio-Political Context: Power, Politics, and Policy

Often missing within literature on reform implementation is a discussion of power dynamics and politics. Malen (2006) argues that politics must be attended to, using the framework of political “games” to help name and explore the factors that affect reform implementation. She advocates for paying attention to several key political components, such as: a) whose interests are served, b) the clusters of actors who are most influential in particular circumstances, c) their efforts to be influential, and d) the structures that create opportunities for actors to be influential. Though Malen notes that empirical evidence is not vast enough to predict how power and politics will affect implementation, the evidence indicates that it is an ever-present dynamic. Political games play out at both the micro and macro levels, and analysis of them can lead to far deeper understandings.

Shipps (2003) uses notions of civic capacity, urban regime theory, and three general types of educational reform to create a conceptual framework to analyze school reform in Chicago. Her study unpacks the complexity of coalition building. The author concludes that the type of reform, in other words the “what”, is interrelated to the type of coalition. Shipps warns reformers that they should pay attention to the relationships between a reform’s agenda and coalition membership. In this sense politics are an essential element of reform implementation, one that can both assist and

impede. This adds complexity to ideas of shared-ownership and partnership within reform implementation, which will be discussed in a later section of this conceptual framework.

Malen (2011) argues that there has been a significant move towards centralization over the last 50 years, and that policies associated with standards and high stake accountability seem to be particularly durable. High-stakes accountability systems have become the key measure of effectiveness within public education (Malen, 2011; Trujillo, 2013; Trujillo & Woulfin, 2014). Therefore, exploring how actors make sense of the policy context, specifically accountability, and their related notions of effectiveness are important to understanding reform implementation.

Shared-ownership and Partnership

Notions of shared-ownership and partnership emerge as important concepts within reform implementation. Within her multidimensional framework, Coburn (2003) advocates for the transfer of ownership as a core element of scaling reform. McLaughlin and Mitra (2002) also posit that there must be a transfer of authority where reforms move from being external to internal. Coburn (2003) notes that most authors conceive of ownership as “buy-in” rather than authority for and knowledge of the reform. She then goes on to point to building internal capacity to provide professional development, make key strategic decisions, and generate on-going funding as key elements of ownership. Stringfield, Datnow, and Ross (1998) study comprehensive school reform (CSR) models and find positive effects when the CSR model is enacted at all levels including reform designers, local policymakers, school site educators, and when the model connects families and the school.

Building from these scholars, I define reform ownership in three dimensions: 1) actors’ support for reform implementation grounded in beliefs about its “fit” within schools’ cultures and instructional programs; 2) transfer of authority for reforms from external actors to internal actors; and 3) internal actors’ knowledge of and authority for the reform that manifests through building the internal professional capacity to lead professional development and provide on-going funding for reform implementation.

Another related and enduring set of concepts within reform implementation are joint-work and partnerships. Partnership is characterized by collaboration among stakeholders as the central method of interaction, and this is integral to enacting shared-ownership. Supovitz (2006) advocates for deep collaboration between districts and intermediaries but warns that the relationship must be partnership-oriented. Levin, Glaze, and Fullan (2008) write about Ontario’s success at large scale reform and point to one of the key elements being “coherence and alignment through partnership” (p. 278). Relatedly, Honig and Copland (2008; Honig, 2012) argue that jointly defined work builds concrete partnership around specific areas that have mutually high levels of significance and importance. This allows for the co-construction of solutions and collaborative planning, leading to plans that are contextualized, shared, and better situated to address stakeholder needs. Joint-work is the setting within which shared-ownership and partnership-oriented relationships are lived.

Building relationships focused on partnership helps reorient the district office to be in support of instructional improvement (Honig, Copland, Newton, Matson, & Rogers, 2010). Coburn and colleagues’ (2008) study helps to prevent an over-simplification of partnerships. Individuals and groups are bound to have differing perspectives, power tensions, and competing priorities. These authors find that even among insiders, issues of authority impede reform implementation. They suggest that creating alignment of goals and points of view, and clearly delineating authority can promote effective implementation.

Customization and Negotiation to Craft Coherence

Scholars focused on the implementation and scaling of instructional reforms note the importance of building systems and strategies for adaptability and customization to schools' contexts (Datnow, 2002; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2002; Thompson & Wiliam, 2007). This research indicates that reforms are best positioned to have lasting impact on classroom practices if they incorporate ways to adapt implementation to specific district, school and even teacher contexts.

Sense-making offers a strong theoretical basis for understanding how reform actors interact with reforms (Datnow & Park, 2009). In simplest terms, sense-making is the process of making sense. Sense-making is inherently reciprocal, where ideas are simultaneously constructed and received, authored and interpreted, created and discovered (Weick, 1995). Rooted in social psychology and organizational theory, sense-making acknowledges that local actors are not just responding to external demands but are also deeply engaged in interpreting and creating implementation. Research suggests that as implementers make sense of and implement reforms, their existing beliefs and instructional practices deeply influence how those reforms are enacted (Cohen, 1990). This conceptualization places context, including the existing knowledge, beliefs, and instructional practices of reform actors at the forefront.

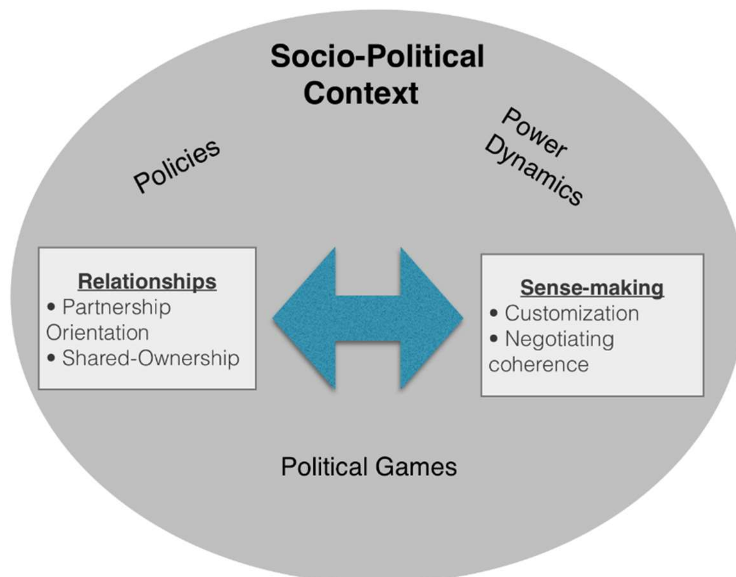
McLaughlin and Mitra (2002) posit that theory-based change requires co-invention and flexible implementation because it must engage those doing the changing and be fully contextualized. Similarly, Datnow and Park (2009) and Stringfield, Datnow, and Ross (1998) argue that co-construction of reform implementation by designers and implementers allows for consideration of the sociopolitical and cultural dimensions. Notions of co-construction and co-invention are an attempt to shift the power dynamics so policy-makers, reform designers, implementers, and even community members, partner to collaboratively create context specific reforms. As such, shared-ownership and partnership are key to creating co-constructive, adaptive reforms.

A related concept, coherence, permeates educational reform literature. Kennedy's (2016) review of professional development literature raises concerns about the "noise" that teachers are inundated with, filled with conflicting ideas and goals, which are both self-imposed and imposed by others. The notion of coherence seeks to address this "noise". Newmann and colleagues (2001) define instructional program coherence in three parts: 1) an instructional framework that links teaching, curriculum, assessments, and the learning environment; 2) working conditions that support the framework; and 3) resources to advance the framework and avoid diffuse, disconnected efforts. Honig and Hatch's (2004) conceptualization focuses on coherence, "…not as objective alignment but as an ongoing process involving multiple actors both internal and external to formal school systems" (p. 17). This notion requires schools and district offices to negotiate internal and external demands, and incorporates the importance of partnership-oriented relationships. Crafting coherence is connected to customization and adaptability of reforms to the specific contexts within which they are being implemented.

In sum, this conceptual framework theorizes that the socio-political context is key to understanding reform leadership. As illustrated in figure 1 below, this context is set by current policies, as well as the political games and power dynamics which are key to understanding reform implementation. Furthermore, this framework posits that when relationships between leaders are characterized by partnership and reform ownership is more widely shared, reform implementation can be positively impacted. The arrow in the figure below attempts to signify the mutual dependency between these relationships and the crafting of instructional coherence. Shared-

ownership across actors and customization of the reform are situated within the socio-political context of the school and district, and will impact the process and capacity to craft coherence.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Methods

This critical case study examines leadership of SEAL implementation within one school district representing a case that yields important information in the pursuit of knowledge development (Patton, 2001). Using the conceptual framework described above, I explore how leaders define their roles within SEAL implementation, and seek to uncover the constraining and enabling factors they experience. Case study methods are most appropriate because the contingent nature of school reform requires a thorough and deep understanding of the specific context within which the reform is situated (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2003). Furthermore, qualitative methods allow me to explore the themes of my conceptual framework: the socio-political context, relationships and reform ownership across leaders, and instructional coherence across programs, initiatives and curriculum.

The context of this study is a suburban school district located in the San Francisco Bay Area which I've given the pseudonym, Sequoia Grove School District (SGSD). This elementary school district serves about 11,000 students, with 45% coming from low-income homes. About half the student population is Latino, 30% are ELs, and 20% are Fluent-English-Proficient (FEP). The district began implementing SEAL in the 2013-14 school year within their four Title 1 schools where the majority of their ELs are enrolled. They rolled out implementation in another twelve elementary schools in subsequent years.

When I conducted this inquiry, I was the Deputy Director of the SEAL model and firmly situated as a researcher practitioner. When I took on this position in 2014, the beginning of the second year of SEAL replication, there was no articulated theory of action for how to engage principals and district leaders with their role in implementation of this reform. As such, I began working with my colleagues to build that dimension of our external support for our district

partners. Focusing on the leadership dimensions of this comprehensive instructional reform is an authentic problem of practice.

SGSD represents a critical case to further investigate these elements of reform implementation primarily because shared-ownership and partnership around reform implementation appeared to present prior to this investigation. The following research questions guide this study: What do district and site leaders do to implement SEAL? What are the contextual factors that create more enabling or constraining conditions for leaders implementing SEAL?

In order to explore the leadership dimensions of reform implementation within SGSD, I used purposeful selection; participants and subunits of analysis were chosen because they could provide information that was particularly relevant to my research questions and conceptual framework (Maxwell, 2013). Furthermore, given that a core idea within my conceptual framework is the notion of coalitions and shared-ownership across actors (Malen, 2006, 2011; Shipps, 2003), I chose participants with different types of leadership roles, focusing on the district and two schools as subunits of analysis. I selected a total of 11 participants: three key district leaders, two principals, three coaches and three teachers. Both schools began SEAL implementation the fall of 2013 and were in year three of implementation when data gathering began. They were chosen purposefully because they represented two of the four schools within the district with the highest numbers of English learners and represented information rich contexts to gather data.

There were four phases of data collections. Data gathering occurred from July 2016 through March 2017. The first phase was a review of key district documents, the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) and the Five Year Strategic Plan. These documents were chosen to provide background information about the district's stated goals, to analyze if/where SEAL appeared in these plans, and to illuminate how the district defines its overall agenda. The LCAP is a state mandated process that requires districts to write a plan articulating their goals and activities related to the revised state funding formula, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Through this new formula, funds are generated based on the unduplicated number of English Learners, low-income students, and foster youth. Within the LCAP, districts must address the state's 8 strategic areas: basic services, implementation of standards, course access, student achievement, other student outcomes, student engagement, parent involvement, and climate (California State Board of Education, 2014). The Five Year Strategic Plan (2015-2020) was a charge of SGSD board of trustees and was written with input from staff, parents, community members, and various district committees. Both the LCAP and the Strategic Plan represent information that helps elucidate the district's response to the larger and local socio-political and policy context.

The second phase—interviews with district leaders, principals, and coaches—served as the core data collection period where the most information was gathered. The primary data collection strategy was structured open-ended interviews. The interview protocols were generated to support inquiry into the two research questions. My conceptual framework also guided my interview question development. I purposely left considerable room for interpretation of questions, to be authentically open-ended and allow participants to share their perspectives and opinions (Patton, 1990, 2015).

Interviews of teachers and observations of staff meetings constituted the third stage. Teacher interviews followed the design described above. Additional data was gathered through observations of staff meetings at each school, brief classrooms observations, and observations of SEAL professional developments. These observations allowed for data to be gathered in authentic environments, to create additional data points, and to get at "…tacit understandings and 'theory-

in-use,' aspects of the participants' perspectives that they are reluctant to directly state in interviews" (Maxwell, 2013). Observations allowed me to challenge both my own bias as well as those inherent in using self-reporting through interviews. Data was recorded through field notes.

The final phase involved follow-up interviews with two of the district leaders, both principals, and the two coaches to deepen questioning in some areas and begin to test some emerging patterns. These methods and sources of data were chosen given the epistemological nature of this study, which is firmly constructivist and participatory.

Data analyses within this study were both deductive and inductive. This is a theory-based critical case study and therefore its design is grounded in my conceptual framework. As such, theory-based codes were employed to analyze data (Creswell, 2013; Givens, 2008; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Inductive strategies were also used to build on the constructivist nature of the methods, to leave room for unknown dimensions to arise, and challenge bias. Core to data analysis was the acknowledgement of the complexity of the phenomena of school reform implementation. Furthermore, being a participant-observer required me to confront my preconceptions and bias in an ongoing, rigorous manner. As such, data analysis was iterative and data were analyzed multiple times. I began with a set of deductive codes that were derived from my research questions and conceptual framework. This set of theory-based codes evolved throughout the analysis. Because interviews were the central data gathering strategy, their analysis was the most complex.

Given the context-driven nature of this study, I was not concerned with the strict replicability associated with the notion of reliability that emerges out of a positivist notion of research (Creswell, 2013). Nevertheless, the procedures for data gathering and analysis were applied consistently. The two key strategies to ensure qualitative reliability were: 1) the interview protocols were followed to create uniformity across data gathering; and 2) data analysis processes and outcomes were shared with colleague researchers to get feedback and check for consistency (Yin, 2014). These opportunities for collaboration supported metacognition, creating internal distance for greater awareness and reflection (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Key to this was the acknowledgement of my assumptions and biases, generating ways to test and challenge them.

Throughout this investigation I strived to recognize my positionality, and my associated assumptions, biases, and values in an effort to strengthen reliability (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, I continually used my theoretical framework and my knowledge base to guide and situate the design, data collection, analyses, and findings. Additionally, the nature of this study is constructivist and participatory, employing recursive reflection associated with action research methods to maintain distance and some "objectivity" within my perspective level (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). As Peshkin (1988) advises, I have continually strived for awareness of how my subjectivity have shaped this study—research questions, methods, case selection, etc.

Peshkin (2000) notes, interpretation within qualitative research is an ongoing process that requires the perception of importance, order, and form. Deeply examining how my role as a participant effected my interpretations was key to strengthening the reliability of this study. This includes looking for alterative explanations and striving to understand the difference between what Walker (1995) identifies as "public discourse versus private beliefs". Furthermore, it has been essential to incorporate other researchers and practitioners to access differing perspectives and interpretations.

As a practitioner scholar, I bring a unique and important perspective shaping this study's contribution to the knowledge base. Nonetheless, occupying this role also creates limitations.

The constraints of time were an important factor to be accounted for, and in turn the sample size of the subunits of analysis; only two of the 14 schools implementing SEAL within SGSD were analyzed. Though these two schools represent strong cases for selection, a more comprehensive analysis of all schools within the district would have allowed for a more robust study. Additionally, I was only able to gather data from one coach and one teacher from one of the schools, skewing the data to some degree.

While the methods used offered in depth, descriptive data that revealed the complexity of leadership within reform implementation, the findings cannot be generalized to other districts or reform initiatives. Nonetheless, findings from this critical case study do three important things: 1) corroborate important claims from the research base on reform implementation, 2) deepen understandings about the complexity of reform implementation, and 3) inform the support provided by the external partner (SEAL) within the unique context of SGSD.

Findings

The first key finding asserts that to implement SEAL, SGSD leaders have built a coalition amongst themselves, grounded in a belief in the model's ability to address the unmet needs of ELs, which requires them to centralize the needs of ELs such that SEAL is their primary initiative for the early elementary grades. One important aspect of this coalition is that many of its members have instructional experiences working in bilingual education. SGSD leaders work, with varying degrees of success, to craft instructional coherence across existing programs and curriculum, and limit new initiatives. This requires collaboration and partnership amongst themselves, but also valuing and resourcing the collaboration and partnership of teachers who are the primary implementers.

The second main finding is that this coalition of leaders is navigating three key socio-political contextual factors, and how they do so impacts SEAL implementation. The larger policy context related to the new era of standards seems to support SEAL implementation, yet the more local factor of declining enrollment, and relics of the accountability frame leftover from the previous policy context associated with NCLB represent potential inhibiting factors. These three factors are important given that the SEAL model is a reform that centralizes the needs of young ELs, making it especially politically vulnerable. I further unpack these findings below.

What do district and site leaders do to implement SEAL?

The key action leaders have taken to implement SEAL is to build a coalition across actors grounded in the belief of the model's ability to meet their students' need. Yet ensuring that this coalition is effective in leading implementation is a work in progress. There are four key patterns that substantiate this finding, which are framed by my conceptual framework: 1) reform ownership is shared across actors and is connected to a belief that the SEAL model is needed to serve their ELs and therefore "fit" the schools' instructional needs; 2) actors enact ownership differently, having varying authority for and knowledge of the model; 3) all actors seem to value and partake in collaboration and partnership, but those with formal power characterize it as listening to others, showing support, and removing obstacles, whereas coaches and teachers experience it as negotiating complex dynamics associated with implementation; and 4) all actors struggle to craft coherence, working to make sense of how SEAL fits with other initiatives and programs, reinforcing the notion that coherence is process not a state

As discussed in the conceptual framework, I borrow from multiple scholars (Coburn, 2003; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2002; Stringfield et al., 1998) to define reform ownership. For the analysis

of my data two key dimensions stood out as most useful: 1) actors' support for reform implementation is grounded in beliefs about its "fit" for their schools; and 2) internal actors' knowledge of and authority for the reform manifests through building the internal professional capacity to lead professional development and deepen instructional practices. As such, elements of ownership for SEAL implementation appear to be shared across various actors within SGSD. Nevertheless, ownership seems to manifest differently across actors and within actors. The question is therefore not whether reform ownership is present or not across all actors, but rather how do actors define and make meaning of their ownership?

Leaders believe SEAL instructionally fits the needs of their schools

All participants appeared to be supportive of SEAL implementation, indicating that it was a "fit" within their schools' cultures and instructional programs. Furthermore, this notion of "fit" expressed itself in two key ways. First, participants had different roles in the decision to bring SEAL to the district and schools, but no one responded that they felt it was pushed on them. Additionally, district leaders, principals, and coaches, representing eight out of the 11 participants, discussed that the decision to bring SEAL into the district was related to an overall collective understanding that English Learners were underserved and that they needed to revamp their approach to educating this student population. In this sense, the "fit" of this reform within SGSD was related to its focus on centralizing the instructional needs of ELs.

The district leaders all spoke about an espoused belief in and work towards educational equity that preceded SEAL implementation. This was also demonstrated within the district's Five Year Strategic Plan and the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) that was reviewed for this study. Furthermore, all three district leaders discussed a process preceding their decision to implement SEAL where they studied their EL data and EL programs and recognize this as a major area of need.

Similarly, all principals and coaches discussed how their schools had been persistently in Program Improvement within the state's previous accountability system, and that they felt they were failing their ELs. The principal and two coaches from School A were part of the group that made the initial decision to adopt the SEAL model within SGSD. The principal and coach from School B were not yet employees of the district at the time when SEAL was first introduced as a possibility. The School A participants discussed their role in deciding to bring SEAL to their schools. They went on a visit to a school where SEAL had been piloted, and observed several classrooms across all preschool through 3rd grade classrooms and across bilingual and Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms. They also received a comprehensive overview of the model and implementation process and commitments. They then went back to their school staff and had in depth conversations about whether to agree to implement the model. The principal of School A shared how he had originally not been interested and didn't even want to go on the visit. After he saw the classrooms and the level of student participation and production of language, his mind was changed. In these ways, SEAL's fit within SGSD is related to their awareness of instructional program ineffectiveness, their desire to change instructional practices, some knowledge of the SEAL model, and their belief in education equity.

The second, related dimension of "fit" is linked to the transition to new standards that also necessitated changes of instructional program. The SEAL model is seen as a needed departure from SGSD's previous instructional practices and curriculum. All 11 participants reported that they saw SEAL as aligned with CCSS and that the model was key to their transition to CCSS.

More so, all participants asserted a belief in the "type" of learning that CCSS called for and that the SEAL model enacted, in contrast to the NCLB era of instruction. As one principal said:

> I was super glad when common core came in and I was super glad to pick up something like SEAL… because I think for our kids it's going to work really well. It's a different sort of way of teaching because clearly what we were doing before wasn't doing it, no matter what Bush said.

Here we see a more complicated notion of SEAL as an instructional program that "fits" given that it was brought in to disrupt the previous instructional practices associated with NCLB. Though participants report beliefs in the need for this disruption, it nonetheless indicates the potential for tensions and areas of mismatch with preexisting instructional practices.

Another important dimension of instructional "fit" is related to bilingual education. Unlike many districts across the state, SGSD was able to maintain bilingual programs in three of their Title I schools throughout the Proposition 227 era, whereas many districts closed their programs. Given that SEAL promotes bilingual education, and works to strengthen and/or start new programs, this represents a clear area of "fit". Furthermore, seven of the 11 participants, including all three district leaders, both principals, one coach and one teacher, had significant experience within bilingual educational programs and therefore had related pedagogical knowledge that is aligned with the SEAL model. This has likely influenced their level of ownership, as well as their prior knowledge of related aspects of the model, and has helped to solidify their coalition.

There is varying authority for and knowledge of SEAL across actors

All 11 participants reported varying degrees of teacher ownership across the schools implementing SEAL, but also reported that they felt few teachers had no ownership of SEAL, and therefore almost everyone was implementing the model to some degree. The three teachers asserted the importance of trying all the strategies, "fully implementing the model", and not skipping out or avoiding the more complicated strategies. Furthermore, they all indicated that teachers could weaken and undermine the model by not implementing it fully. As such, an important element of ownership for teachers is the actual "doing" of the model, the extent to which they implement the model. This relates to both the depth of their knowledge of the model and their authority for the model.

The critical role coaches play within SEAL implementation was acknowledged by all participants. Teachers and coaches stressed the role of coaches in developing and refining the SEAL thematic units, and facilitating teachers within this process. All three coaches emphasized their responsibility to ensure quality, helping teachers deepen their understandings of the model, and assisting in the reflection and refinement of both the units and the instructional practices associated with SEAL. All coaches and teachers, totaling six of the 11 participants, underscored the important role coaches play in ordering and organizing materials and resources, getting teachers the tools they need for implementation.

Both principal participants signaled the need for them to know the model well enough to recognize different elements and be able to speak to the components. They both recognized that the coaches' depth of knowledge about the model was far greater than theirs', and that they rely on coaches to deepen their understandings and to do the "in the weeds" support for the teachers. Nevertheless, both principals acknowledged the importance of their stance as "learners" of the model.

One of the principals, as was a pattern across two of the district leaders, referred to herself as a "cheerleader", that her role was to celebrate and encourage teachers' implementation. She

stated, "It helps to be the cheerleader for SEAL and to talk it up." The other principal stressed the significance of removing barriers and obstacles that might get in the way of implementation. He asserted, "I make sure that they (coaches) have what they need so they can get the teachers what they need. I try to do problem solving and I try to troubleshoot." In this regard, both principals highlighted the importance of playing supportive roles.

Knowledge of and authority for SEAL varied highly across district leaders. The main commonality is that they each took responsibility for bringing SEAL to the district and some responsibility for sustaining the implementation. The superintendent described her ownership as symbolic, "…ensuring that there is a very clear understanding that this is important to our system." The assistant superintendent defined his ownership as focused on resourcing implementation, working across the district office departments such as Human Resources, the Business Office, and Educational Services to make sure the system was working together to support implementation. He also described his role as a "cheerleader", to listen to the requests of teachers, coaches, and principals, and make sure everyone has what they need. He repeatedly expressed the pressure he felt to have data to prove SEAL's effectiveness. In this way, his authority for SEAL was in part experienced as political pressure. For the Director of English Learner Programs, authority for SEAL was explicit, and she referred to SEAL as her "baby". She explained the way she works closely with coaches, meeting weekly to problem-solve and align their work. She described her role as "hands on", keeping all the pieces and elements of implementation moving forward. Furthermore, the systems and practices that she and the coaches have put in place are evidence of internal professional capacity to lead professional development.

Ownership and authority manifest differently across all internal actors. This pattern is important because it indicates that though actors will have differing roles, it is key that they each play an active and appropriate part within implementation.

Partnership and collaboration appears more complex at different levels

As explored within the conceptual framework, learning focused systems use partnership and collaboration as a strategy to build internal and external capacity (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2010; Levin et al., 2008; Thompson, Sykes, & Skrla, 2008). Nevertheless, relationships within and across organizations prove to be complicated (Coburn et al., 2008). Joint-work cuts across different parts of the system and is defined as a vehicle to enacting partnership oriented relationships (M. I. Honig, 2012; M. I. Honig & Copland, 2008).

Notions of collaboration came up as a pattern across participants. All those in formal leadership roles—three coaches, two principals, and the three district leaders— spoke about collaboration as a part of their leadership of implementation. This was characterized as shared-leadership, distributed leadership, and working as a team, but all entailed the idea that part of leadership is to listen to, work with, and empower others. The assistant superintendent stated, "To be a leader you have to become a part of a team. I'm not authoritarian I don't believe in authoritarian leadership." Similarly, a coach from School A shared:

> I think leadership is really about someone who has a solid vision and kind of knows where they're headed but is able to trust and delegate, build leaders in their school. Someone who doesn't think that they're the one and only who can do everything, but that they build and develop on everyone's strengths and use those to benefit the greater good.

This quote characterizes a sentiment across actors that collaboration is an important part of leadership. In this sense, strong leadership is equated with empowering others, and for leaders, being a good collaborator means being part of the team, not just directing the team. Additionally,

there was a common understanding across all 11 participants that CCSS required collaboration from students as a 21st century skills, which validated and necessitated their work to also be collaborative.

Both the assistant superintendent and the director of EL programs discussed elements of joint-work within their roles. The assistant superintendent talked about working across different departments within the central office as part of his role within SEAL implementation. He shared the importance of working with the Human Resources and Business departments to ensure that "everyone has what they need" to implement the model. This included scheduling substitutes so that teachers could go to professional development and collaborative-planning days, releasing funds for materials to be purchased for thematic units, and having both the budget and position openings to hire SEAL coaches. The director of EL programs elaborated on the weekly systems she has in place to work with coaches to "problem-solve" and plan for implementation. In these ways, both these district leaders report that SEAL represents areas of joint-work that require partnerships across the system.

However, there was a deeper awareness of the complexity and complications of collaboration within some participants. The director of EL programs use of the term "problem-solving" suggests that her notion of collaboration includes the complexity of navigating different perspectives, competing needs, and/or complex personal dynamics. Furthermore, all teachers and coaches, six of the 11 participants, spoke about the complexity of collaborating across grade levels and sites, and stressed the important role coaches play to facilitate that process. In this sense, good and productive collaboration for these participants required facilitation, and the incorporation and working through of diverse perspectives. Within the SEAL process teachers develop grade-level thematic units across multiple sites. This is often the most comprehensive collaborative professional experience they have been a part of. As such, the SEAL model is built on the belief that scaffolded teacher-driven joint-work is the most powerful way to change instructional practice. Data indicated that though all 11 participants valued this component of the SEAL model, the teachers and coaches more fully understood its complexity and difficulty.

Crafting coherence is a complicated process, representing public discourse

Scholars suggest that adaptability and customization to schools' contexts are important dimensions of reform implementation (Datnow, 2002; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2002; Thompson & Wiliam, 2007). This framing acknowledges the context specific nature of school change, and that reforms get layered onto existing knowledge bases and experiences of educators. Therefore, the notion of crafting coherence (M. I. Honig & Hatch, 2004b; Newmann et al., 2001) becomes important because it illuminates the multidimensionality within which reforms and initiatives operate, requiring a process of negotiation.

The SEAL model attempts to create room for customization through the unit development process. Teachers work collaboratively to develop their units and are encouraged to use and embed existing materials, programs, and units or lesson plans if they address the standards and support student learning and language development. Furthermore, the process of unit development requires teachers to collaboratively customize and adapt to both students' and teachers' interests and needs.

When asked about SEAL in relationship to other external partnerships and initiatives, all participants reported that they felt there was coherence. All participants indicated that they felt SEAL, as a TK through 3rd grade model, fit well with their upper elementary instructional model.

One district leader stated, "We've tried to stay pretty focused, and whatever we bring in kind of compliments and goes with it (SEAL)." This is representative of a general pattern around the public discourse surrounding coherence where it was described as being in place.

Nevertheless, approaches to coherence building varied across the two schools. The principal of School B shared about his process to connect SEAL with a larger instructional framework that the district was adopting across all sites. She shared, "I had to sort of integrate both (SEAL and other initiative) which makes my job harder…" She went on to explain that the other initiative was an overall instructional frame that was supposed to apply to all grade levels, and that she felt it was both aligned to SEAL and to their school's existing vision and mission. Nevertheless, it required intentional integration so that she saw the relationship across the initiatives and could describe them to her staff.

The principal of School A described a different process where he felt the district had a history of not sustaining initiatives and scattered attempts at building a shared vision for instruction. He stated:

> I feel like we have been very fragmented and sort of disjointed in our focus for several years and I feel like now we may be coming to a point where we're looking really at simplifying things and making sure that we're on the right track. And the fact that we are working with (the other initiative) for two years in a row rather than dumping them like has been our pattern for a while, I think is a good sign.

The two principals approached crafting coherence from very different perspectives, though they were both actively engaged in negotiating the district's attempts to develop a shared instructional vision. In this sense, coherence is subjective and very much relates to one's perspective.

The public discourse indicated that the five district and site leaders felt they were crafting coherence with regards to SEAL implementation, yet there was evidence of the complexity of this process. At School A, they had begun also implementing a new writing model because they felt their teachers needed a more delineated writing program. The principal stated, "It will fit really well with both (the upper grades instructional model) and SEAL." Yet one teacher indicated that she saw it as completely separate from SEAL. Follow up interviews with coaches confirmed that at the time little had been done to make connections between this new initiative and SEAL. Though the principal articulated understanding the importance of negotiating coherence related to SEAL and other initiatives and programs, it seemed to be underdeveloped. This evokes what Walker (1995) warns of concerning public discourse versus private beliefs. As such, a sentiment, often one that the researcher wants to hear, is discussed publically but doesn't fully represent the whole picture. The data gathered directly related to coherence proved to largely be public discourse.

Data from this study supports that crafting coherence is a multifaceted process, and awareness of this complexity within SGSD leaders appears to be somewhat superficial. Data also indicates that building coherence is subjective and defined quite differently across participants. This supports the concept that instructional coherence is a process not a state, and those participating in the process may have distinctive perceptions. This is significant because the perpetual shifting of the educational policy context requires leaders to work in an ongoing manner to limit the fragmented, disjointed nature of public education. The subjectivity of coherence plays a role in leaders' ability to negotiate coherence. As such, the crafting of coherence related to SEAL implementation will likely prove to be consequential to the model's sustainability over time.

What are the contextual factors that create enabling or constraining conditions for leaders implementing SEAL?

Findings suggest that there are three important contextual factors that are impacting SGSD leaders as they implement SEAL, and the ability of leaders to maintain and strengthen their coalition in relationship to these factors will prove to be significant to SEAL implementation. The three core factors influencing the leadership of reform implementation are: 1) declining enrollment within the district which undermines economic stability and shifts the political games at play; 2) the larger policy context related to the new era of standards which enables SEAL implementation; and 3) the continued impact of the accountability frame established within the NCLB era.

Declining enrollment and economic instability shift attention and decision-making

SGSD, along with many districts in the Bay Area, is experiencing declining student enrollment. Participants report that this is related to the fact that many of their low-income families cannot afford to live in the area anymore and are leaving for places with more affordable housing. This declining enrollment, and the subsequent fiscal consequences on the school district, came up throughout the course of data gathering. Below, I explore how it impacts the political games playing out within SGSD.

Malen (2006) argues for the need to pay attention to four key political components: a) whose interests are served, b) the clusters of actors who are most influential in particular circumstances, c) their efforts to be influential, and d) the structures that create opportunities for actors to be influential. The economic context affects these components, influencing the power dynamics and political games at play within the district and schools.

At the start of SEAL implementation there were multiple streams of revenue that supported the reform effort generated by a statewide focus on CCSS implementation and ELs. The state gave districts one-time CCSS dollars to help make the transition to these new standards. Additionally, the same year the district began implementing SEAL the state instituted a new funding formula called the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which tied increased funding directly to districts' EL and low-income populations. These factors helped create the political context to support SEAL implementation, making the conditions possible for this large investment in a model of CCSS implementation that centralized the needs of EL. It created the opportunity and structures for actors at various levels to align around SEAL. Now that the district faces a grim set of fiscal circumstances, interests are shifting, as are the cluster of actors who are most influential and the structures that create opportunities for them to be influential.

District leaders all shared the pressures they face given that their budget is increasingly constricted, fewer resources are available, and hard decisions must be made. Some of the issues raised were related to the possibility of closing a school and consolidating programs. Furthermore, at the start of the 2016-17 school year, the year within which this study focuses, student enrollment was down about 200 more than expected which resulted in shuffling of teachers across schools and overall instability. These pressures have both overt and less obvious impacts on the context within which SEAL implementation takes place.

Last minute increases in combination classes, where grades are mixed within a classroom, became necessary creating changes in teachers' assignments even after the school year began. Within SEAL implementation, teachers work in grade level teams to plan thematic units tied to the grade level content standards. Having a class with two grade levels creates a very different curricular context then just one grade level. Such belated changes have significant impacts on teachers' instruction and curriculum, and therefore their ability to serve students best. The

Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent both shared their concern about SEAL units within combination classes.

Nevertheless, challenges can serve to strengthen commitments. The Superintendent shared:

> We continue to be challenged with enrollment and the implications that has on funding. We have to be strong, not compromising the significance of giving teachers the opportunity to be prepared when they step into a classroom, and feel like they are at a high level of implementation and effectiveness because they have the time.

Here we can see that the Superintendent reasserts the value of giving teachers' time to work collaboratively even in the face of decreasing funding. The public discourse represented here indicates that economic instability could serve to reinforce commitments to the reform. Nonetheless, the context is changing which will impact how this reform is implemented.

The larger economic pressures that are affecting the families that SGSD serves also came up as a constraining factor. Both principals and all three teachers reported on the struggles of poverty their students and families face, and a sense that it is increasing. One teacher described a student who had become homeless, sharing both her sadness for his situation and the pressure she felt to ensure that he did not fall behind his classmates. This sentiment, both sadness for their students and anxiety about how to meet their needs, was represented across all three teachers. One principal shared her sense that the economic situation for many of the families in her school is becoming increasingly more difficult, and that it impacts the overall climate and socio-emotional environment of the school. This changing context has the potential to influence the schools' and district's focus, and could result in a shift away from one initiative and onto another. The economic context of both the communities and families who attend SGSD, as well as the district itself, plays a significant role in the socio-political context of this reform implementation.

Statewide policy context seems to enable leadership of SEAL implementation

Malen (2011) asserts that standards and accountability are particularly durable policy efforts. This is congruent with the ways in which the leaders of SGSD understand their policy context. Participants overwhelmingly cited two influential policy contexts: the transitions to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the California ELA/ELD framework. When asked which policies they think most about, all 11 participants mentioned these interconnected policies. Furthermore, all participants indicated overall approval of this new era of standards. As one participant shared, "The overall philosophy of common core is very congruent with the philosophy of what education should look like".

Furthermore, all participants acknowledged the alignment between SEAL and this new era of standards. A district leader explained, "This (SEAL) is exactly what we needed to implement the common core". The principal of School B shared, "SEAL was our district's response to the need to implement the Common Core in a systemic way that would integrate this new generation science standards, that would integrate the new ELA/ELD framework." These quotes are representative of all participants.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was mentioned by five of the 11 participants, contrasting the differences between CCSS and NCLB. One coach referred to NCLB as "the accountability time", where the joy of education was lost. Another district leader described the NCLB era as being, "…driven by assessment and having the kids bubble in…there wasn't much thinking." She went on to discuss how hard it is to change that mentality within teachers and the overall school

system. Participants frequently contrasted the NCLB era, specifically accountability and scripted curriculum, with SEAL and CCSS.

The NCLB era accountability frame endures even though it is disliked

A contradiction emerged related to the overall negative perception of NCLB and the related high-stakes accountability system, and yet the untiring pressure of accountability that has persisted into this new era of policy. Though SGSD leaders contrast the current era of new standards and the SEAL model from that of NCLB, the forces of accountability emerge as enduring and prevalent.

Within the district's Five Year Strategic Plan, accountability is the first priority, with equity and closing the achievement gap as second. Isolating accountability as the first priority of their strategic plan, separate from equity and the achievement gap, is questionable since they would seem to be interrelated. This strategic plan was written during a time when the state accountability system was being redefined and redesigned, as is illustrated in this excerpt from the "Accountability and Continuous Improvement Report" (CA Dept of Education, 2016):

> California has started on a pathway towards the creation of a better system for our students, one that rests on a foundation of student success, relies on high standards, more equitably distributes resources (through the Local Control Funding Formula), and trusts local educators and communities to design the educational structures and supports that our students need to reach their full potential (through the Local Control and Accountability Plans).

This emerging "California Way" is framed quite differently from previous notions of accountability, continuous improvement and trust are the core tenets. These shifts have not seemed to translate to local policy in SGSD where accountability still focuses on test scores to drive their planning. The goals and objectives of the SGSD Strategic Plan are quite consistent with that of the previous era.

The need to have "data" to show that "SEAL is working" was also a pattern across two district leaders, one principal, and one coach. Each of these participants spoke of the significant qualitative changes in their classrooms but the need for "data" was unyielding. One district leader shared, "I'm stressed all the time about those results even though I question in my heart how important is that really…".

Although a departure from the previous era of standards and accountability seems to enable SEAL implementation, a contradictory pattern also arises within SGSD. The accountability frame from NCLB continues to permeate the pressures put on leaders. This force translates to a hyper focus on data that is based on assessments that are largely decontextualized skill-based standardized tests. Furthermore, they are generally not designed for ELs and pose serious questions around validity. Though leaders in SGSD have some understanding about these issues, this accountability frame is still influencing the context.

Implications

This study attempts to illuminate the contextualized nature of educational reform and leadership rather than make casual claims about what is definitively causing particular implementation dynamics. As such, I do not attempt to explain how one aspect of reform leadership is directly changing another, nor that it leads to a specific outcome. This study's design, and qualitative methods generally, have an important role in more fully explaining the complexity of how educational reform and change is firmly situated within socio-political contexts.

Furthermore, education overall is a deeply social, cultural, and political enterprise, and attempts to study it in ways that do not acknowledge its interconnected, contextual nature can be seen as short sighted. This study endeavors to position the context as central to understanding how implementation takes effect and how actors operate within change efforts, raising some important considerations for practitioners, policy makers, and researchers.

Implications for Practitioners—Findings from this study suggests that though shared-ownership may be an important element of reform implementation, different actors enact ownership in different ways. As such, practitioners working to implement educational reforms should consider how to engage different actors across the system, both internally and externally, and work to define their different roles. In this way, shared-ownership becomes a more complicated notion that should be understood and defined contextually. Ownership can, and perhaps should, look different depending on these different roles of actors and different contexts. Therefore, findings from this study indicate that practitioners should think strategically about who and how they engage actors across the system in reform implementation. Historically reforms focused on ELs operated in a silo, disconnected from much of the core of schooling. If we are to enact the vision of the California ELA/ELD Framework, actors across the system must define their role within EL focused reform efforts.

Implications for Policy Makers—Different components of educational reform policy tend to be conceived of, implemented, and analyzed in isolation. This study suggests that though SEAL is a reform primarily situated as a standards-based policy implementation effort, layering an economic lens deepens understandings and informs policy makers. As SEAL was first being implemented in SGSD, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was also being implemented across the state. The alignment between LCFF and SEAL, particularly that both elevate the importance of serving ELs, likely reinforced each other within their respective implementation processes. Policy makers continue to primarily use standards as the policies intended to reform curriculum and instruction. It can be argued that part of the aims of LCFF is standards implementation through the related Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) that include standards as an area of focus. Nonetheless, the core effort is aimed at redesigning the financing formula and getting rid of categorical funds. This study suggests that policy makers consider deepening the intentionality between aligning different policy strategies and adopt a multidimensional strategy that includes instructional and economic policy reform efforts.

Implications for Researchers—My final set of implications are directed at scholars, where I argue for the need for more cross-cutting, cross-systems analysis that support deeper understandings of the complex, nested nature in which educational change occurs. This study illuminates the interrelated dimensions of school reform. In an attempt to build "scientifically" strong investigations, we often see attempts to distill and isolate variables to create objective truths. Such positivist research poses an epistemological dilemma for educational research because the nature of learning is so deeply social, and schools are firmly situated in nested sets of social systems. Though it is impossible for scholars to simultaneously investigate all the elements at play, this study reinforces the need for research to take on cross-cutting perspectives that allow for deeper understandings of the relationship between different actors, forces, and levels of the system. Moreover, when reform efforts are oriented towards the classroom, research tends to focus on instructional and curricular change. Implications suggest the importance of also investigating the leadership dimensions of instructional reform, as well as the broader socio-political context that influences reform efforts.

This study contributes to practice, policy, and scholarship as it attempts to broaden perspectives while layering complexity into the ways we examine educational reform leadership focused on the schooling of ELs. I use a widened definition of leaders, focusing on actors across the system. The theoretical concepts guiding this inquiry bridge scholarship on instructional change, systems change, and politics within educational reform. As a practitioner researcher, my aim for this study is both to deepen understandings about how the socio-political context impacts reform leadership, while also gaining insights into promising practices of those working to lead ambitious equity-minded instructional reform.

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Whole Child Framework: Supporting Educators in Their Plight toward MTSS and Equity

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Abstract

The Whole Child Framework (WCF) was created to assist educators globally seeking to develop or refine a comprehensive system to meet the needs of all their students through the lens of equity. The WCF is rooted in social ecological model (SEM) and the various interventions approaches to the strategies within this framework are also rooted in empirical evidence from neuroscience, biology, psychology, and educational best practices. The WCF intentionally separates the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional learning (SEL) domains and provides framework in each domain and tier that is rooted in evidence based educational techniques and wellness research. The academic domain is represented upside down on the trapezoid in between the SEL and behavioral pyramids that make up the trapezoid. The purpose is for educators to understand that SEL and behavior systems do not stand alone, and that they both serve as the pillars to completing the 'whole child' in education. SEL is considered as the process where students acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills critical to understand and manage emotions, as well as the capacity to feel and demonstrate empathy, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Colorado Education Initiative, 2014). Generally, factors that hinder student success overlap and are multifaceted. These complex issues raise challenges when attempting to measure exactly how to support students through their academic journey. WCF was developed to help educators have a framework that is evidence based around academic, behavioral, and SEL interventions, since several notions are being presented *de novo.*

Keywords

whole child framework, MTSS, equity, special education

Educational De Novo

The concern around behavioral and social emotional learning (SEL) interventions is that there is still no clear definition, and several notions are being presented *de novo*. *De novo* means lacking academic rigor and ignoring past researchers' intellectual development of comparable notions (Anderson Turner, Heath, & Payne, 2016). Traditionally, educators run with these ideas and concepts, but they do not understand the theoretical underpinnings or limitations of these ideas and how these ideas apply to their specific educational setting. Generally, educators do not understand the theoretical implications and true science behind how interventions work in the SEL

and behavioral domains. Since the education system was engineered to instill academics and punish bad behavior, educators often create comprehensive systems which illuminate negative outcomes and create interventions that only focus on the individual, not the larger issue. Anfara and Mertz (2006) stated that the main character difference of social sciences in comparison to natural sciences is its numerous theoretical approaches. These differences at no time manage to find a fixed consensus in academia, like the empirical referents or explanatory schemes which are embodied by the natural sciences. It appears that rival theories obtainable in social sciences are frequently glamorized because they set to correct a certain issue. The nature of the phenomenon being studied allows its consideration through multiple perspectives, which can add more confusion and create contradiction between the individual and the social structures with most research only focusing on one of these aspects (Anderson et al. 2016).

The education system has historically dealt with extreme SEL and behavior problems with special education, individual skill building (ignoring the systematic oppression), or punitive practices. The education field has failed to understand the recent advancements in neuroscience, biology, and psychology as it pertains to human development and wellness. This dynamic in turn, is harming students by not modifying these new best practices into an educational setting to best serve students. For instance, complex trauma disorder appears in various diagnoses given to disenfranchised students such as: attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder, memory loss, trouble concentrating and several other behaviors or cognitive deficiencies. Complex trauma is known to be misidentified as the aforementioned labels among marginalized students; but in reality, these conditions are a manifestation of repeated and concentrated daily trauma one is experiencing in their daily life. This type of exposure can create negative outcomes to an individual's physiological reaction to this type of recurring stimuli (Perry & Szalavitz, 2008), and needs a different level of intervention. This lack of understanding in public education has misplaced many of the students who are suffering from complex trauma disorder in special education or have displaced students from school without proper intervention. If the lack of understanding continues in the next 5 years, this (the lack of people in education understanding intervention and theory) should be considered as an epidemic and we need to find ways to help education serve our students properly, rather than solely placing them in special education, kicking them out, or not providing the proper intervention according to modern day research. Most districts use the tiered system to label students as "tier three" or the "individual" with issues. This has created a colossal issue within the education system as educators lose faith in positive behavior systems or positive discipline practices, because most of these interventions are not designed to understand complex trauma disorder and best practices when it comes to Educational-Neuroscience and building on an individual who lives in a community saturated in poverty. What tends to happen is that systems are built, in which children are rewarded through extrinsic motivation simply to comply with a direction, but without the safety net and proper treatment for the student to benefit intrinsically.

This dynamic of feeding a child's survival brain with extrinsic motivation often can skew data and offer the facade that improvements are being made, but the child is simply being bribed or manipulated due to the misunderstanding of how to develop targeted evidence based interventions that align to the internalizing and externalizing factors. There is an art and science behind intervention and the public education system simply is not designed to respond to SEL and behavioral interventions that will heal individuals, families, communities, and systems. In the past decade, it has been acknowledged that non-cognitive factors can essentially change the trajectory of a wide range of students (Anderson et al, 2016; Duckworth & Yeager 2015; Goleman, 1995;

Tough, 2012). There is concern around non-cognitive skills or these forms of interventions, being that there are still no clear definitions, and several notions are being presented *de novo* (Anderson et al., 2016). Easton (2013) suggested that research has not found a consensus on the meaning of non-cognitive skills or interventions, and in education this term is used broadly since there is no better alternative. We create systems/programs in education and hire consultants to come save our students, and we blame our students (usually the one's with the most needs) or skew the data (to manipulate the results we want) when the intervention or strategies do not work; but in reality it is because most of these ideas have no theoretical basis and educators are overwhelmed looking for the "silver bullet." This creates an absence of perspective and confounds the growth of theory as well as the advancement of educational practices in general. In education, there is a criticism that these recreated concepts assume that personal attributes remain significant from that of operational contexts (Anderson et al., 2016). By strengthening theoretical practice, we can support educators and politicians alike understand how to best develop enriching experiences for all students in all educational settings (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015).

Over the past few years a new system called Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) has emerged as a promising practice which offers a preventive framework that emphasizes on evidenced based interventions which are driven by data based decision making to improve learning, behavior and SEL for every student. MTSS infuses Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) with Response to Intervention (RTI) to encompass more of a comprehensive approach to meeting all students' needs in a certain educational setting. MTSS strives to provide equity for all subgroups and eradicate the disproportionality that exists in education (specifically with the subgroups) among academic achievement and access to a quality life, now, and in the future (Colorado Education Initiative, 2014). This comprehensive tiered system encompasses behavior, SEL, and academic interventions by tier and intentionally supports educators to develop systems that encompass shared leadership, universal screening and progress monitoring, evidence based instruction, intervention, and assessment practices, data-driven decision making and problem solving, and family, school and community partnerships (Colorado Education Initiative, 2014). MTSS offers educators a triangle tiered model that educators utilize as a framework to list interventions that they feel fit in the tiered model. This article argues that most educators miss the idea of equity and social justice for all students by perpetuating traditional ideals of education that lead to today's disparities in education. This article offers a model to help educators not only look at the whole child specifically by various domains, but helps transform the system from within to help traditionally marginalized populations reach equitable outcomes, heal, from their trauma, and be in a position to have the same access as other students and areas in the same state.

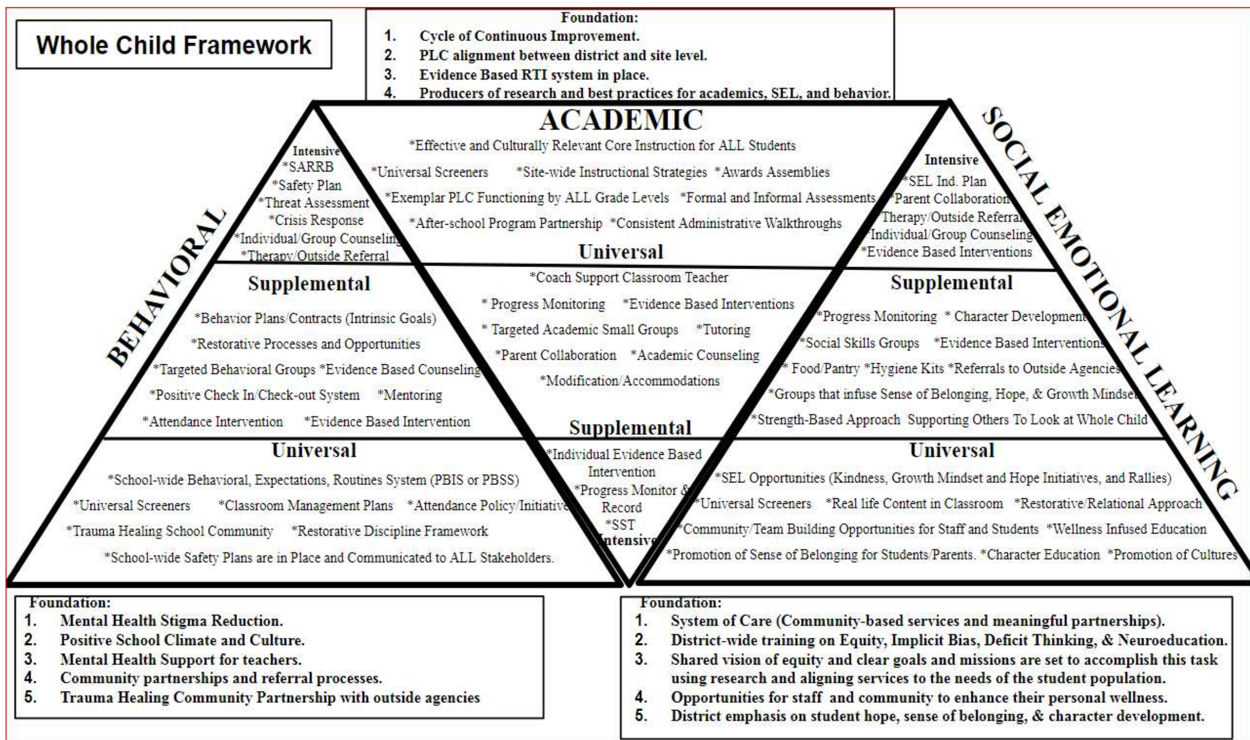
Whole Child Framework (WCF)

The Whole Child Framework (WCF) will be used to explain how school districts and school sites can actually transform the system to meet the needs of all students. A trapezoid is used to symbolize the WCF. The logic behind this illustration is that in education the behavioral and SEL domains often get combined in the traditional triangle tiered model; which causes confusion for educators as most do not understand the difference between SEL and behavioral interventions. The WCF intentionally separates the academic, behavioral, and SEL domains and provides framework in each domain and tier that is rooted in trauma informed and neuroscience research to help the public education system really accomplish equity and growing the whole child. In addition, it provides foundational initiatives and philosophies for each domain before starting the work; because there is a certain shift in mindsets and practices that needs to take place within

educators and policymakers at this foundational level in order for any tiered system to be effective. The trapezoidal model was created by Dr. Felipe Mercado to assist the educational field in meeting the needs of our all students in education across the world (see model 1).

The WCF offers educators a framework that has a theoretical foundation (social ecological model), and is rooted in Educational-Neuroscience*,* system of care framework, academic evidence based philosophies, and supports educators in assessing the whole child with the intention of equity for all children. It is critical that the people in education understand the need to recreate itself from the inside out to meet the needs of the students they serve in each community. School generally neglects the students' needs by providing extrinsic motivation that feeds the traumatized psyche of a child that is at the time only wired for survival. With the explosion of research around trauma informed practices and neuroscience which can inform educators on best practices around neuroscience, epigenetics, epidemiology, and network and system theory we now have new insights to the origins of social, health, and learning outcomes and we must adapt as an educational system. Over the past few decades, scientific discoveries in epidemiology, neuroscience, epigenetics, and network and systems theory have changed our understanding of the origins and dynamics of social, health, (Anda, Martin, & Porter, 2016), and educational challenges.

Model 1
Whole Child Framework



Theoretical Underpinning

Dealing with the whole child takes a societal approach that intersects and affects communities and families with the goal to have profound positive impacts on children now and in the long-term. The social ecological model (SEM) offers a lens to understand how individuals relate to themselves, the people, and the social contexts that surround them, how they influence

each environmental sphere, and how the environment in turn influences them (CDC, 2018). The SEM allows educators to observe and address the factors that put children at risk for or protect them from experiencing or perpetrating this harm. The model goes deeper by providing the prevention strategies that can be used at each level to address these factors such as the WCF. At the individual level listed are personal factors that include characteristics, biological factors, behavior, and personal experience, such as education, income, gender, age, level of social connectedness or isolation, employment status, substance abuse, or history of violence. At the next level the interpersonal phase of the SEM includes family or relationship factors that can create adverse childhood experiences such as lack of child supervision, family violence, divorce or separation, various types of child abuse or emotional or physical neglect; which can help educators make more accurate assessments when it comes to children and their needs. The lens of the SEM model helps educators understand the community based organizations that exist or do not exist in their area that meet the needs of various stakeholders. It also encourages for educators to develop partnership with these entities to better meet the need of our students holistically. SEM is used to create the WCF to support educators with a theoretical framework that intentionally addresses the whole child and supports educators in their mission to reach more humane practices that capture the needs of all our students in their communities and across our nation and does not displace certain subgroups. The next sections break down the WCF model by domain: academic, behavior, and SEL using evidence based research to define the systems and interventions within every tier; with the sole focus on equity, healing trauma, and building and sustaining systems of care (SOC) in efforts for all students to flourish holistically now and beyond adulthood.

Inclusive Academic Domain

The academic domain is represented upside down on the trapezoid in between the SEL and behavioral pyramids that make up the trapezoid (see model 1). The purpose is for educators to understand that SEL and behavior systems stand alone, and that they both serve as the pillars to completing the whole child in education. The next sections of this article will highlight the various best practices that should be found in an effective comprehensive system after the foundation is set by the district and site administration. At the foundation of the academic pyramid you have the following non-negotiables set forth by the district and inspired by the site before utilizing any MTSS model or the WCF:

- Cycle of Continuous Improvement.
  - Plan, do, study act (PDSA), Improvement science, growth mindset.
- PLC alignment between district and site level.
  - High Functioning, collaborative, data driven, and strength-based.
- Evidence Based RTI System in Place
  - Curriculum that aligns to the student needs and that is culturally practical and realistic that encompasses a three tier systems that is concentrated with evidence based interventions that are embedded with progress monitoring, tracking, and recording strategies.
- Producers of research and best practices for academics, SEL, and behavior.
  - Educators should be producers of knowledge and evidence best practices that align to their student population for their particular subject area, grade level, and/ or role.

Academic- Tier I

- Effective and Culturally Relevant Core Instruction for ALL Students
  - Should be student-centered and meet the basic needs of a child, as well as their development and neurological needs.
  - Students should be able to engage in a variety of thought-provoking activities such as explaining, finding evidence and examples, generalizing, applying, making analogies and representing the topic in new ways.
  - Should honor the understanding of multiple intelligences and embrace it.
- Universal Screeners
  - A brief evidence based assessment that can be conducted with all students at a grade level, that is followed by additional testing both short term and long term to identify or predict students who may be at risk for poor learning outcomes academics outcomes should be in place for all subject areas as a method to get student targeted intervention that is specific to their academic need.
- Site-wide Instructional Strategies
  - Administration must collaborate with teachers to create what their top 5-7 high leverage strategies are for their site that both engages students and stimulates learning and ensure that these strategies are universally implemented when appropriate.
- Awards Assemblies
  - This does not just have to be for traditionally high achieving students, you can add in awards like the A for "effort" award, the biggest growth in the quarter in a certain subject, best study habits, improvement in attendance and etc.
- Exemplar Professional Learning Community (PLC) Functioning by ALL Grade Levels
  - Collaboration, discussions focused on student learning and engagement, collection of evidence and data, consolidation on subject methodology and assessments, and healthy conflict centered around what is best for students is the environment we want to create.
- Formal and Informal Assessments
  - All learning opportunities and decisions should be made using data driven informed decision making. Everything should have a purpose and be tracked by the entire class, the individual, and by subgroups.
- After-school Program Partnership
  - A partnership between site administration and the after-school coordinator is critical. They also must find ways to enrich the academics during this time for students without mentally exhausting them from a whole day of learning.
- Consistent Administrative Walkthroughs
  - In education at times this is one of those checkboxes administrators click to say they completed the task. Administration needs to be intentional, mindful, consistent, and remember you are a coach there to support when conducting walkthroughs. Feedback and relationships between administration and the classroom teacher is huge as change often happens during the dialogue after the walkthrough when done effectively.

Academic- Tier II

- Academic Coach Support Classroom Teacher

    - At times teachers need an extra set of eyes and extra support such as co-teaching and effective feedback to support their instructional practice. Having a respected and highly skilled academic coach can support teachers working with students with higher needs.
- Progress Monitoring
    - An evidence based tool or system that can assess a student's (individual or entire class) academic performance and quantify a student's rate of improvement or responsiveness to instruction (RTI), while at the same time evaluating the effectiveness of instruction considering cultural and linguistic factors that recognize the strength of the students in your present class.
- Evidence Based Interventions
    - Practices, programs, or systems that have a theoretical framework, have been peer reviewed, embedded in empirical evidence that specifically align to your need.
- Targeted Academic Small Groups
    - Teachers work with targeted small groups in rotations (when necessary) to differentiate, alternate, or target students' individual learning needs.
- Tutoring
    - Highly qualified educators that can provide similar methodology to what is being created in the classroom that have a knack for connecting with students during unstructured time and after school.
- Parent Collaboration
    - Creating venues to bond and inform parents in their language of the academic requirements, pedagogy, resources, high leverage non-cognitive skills, and strategies that can provide them the same access as any other parent
- Academic Counseling
    - It could be a counselor or done intentionally in the classroom; but students need to understand the ins and outs of their grades, the standards, and have realistic goals set for them as the educator uses a strength based perspective in guiding the students.
- Modification/Accommodations
    - A teacher can create opportunities for students to thrive in specific subject area or areas of learning by adjusting assignments for the student to have a better opportunity to grasp and be successful with the learning task.

Academic- Tier III

- Individual Evidence Based Intervention
    - That are progressed monitored, targeted, recorded, and have realistic and specific goals set for the student.
    - This could include tutoring, replacement curriculum, and other individual high leverage strategies that are research based and align to the specific goals we are trying to accomplish for a student.
- Intentional and Specific Progress Monitor & Record
    - Documentation that can tell a timeline and story of targeted interventions rooted in data of the strategies provided for the student and the rationale behind why that approach was used, and how and why the student did or did not benefit, as well as the rationale to why you did the next step you did and the data to prove this.

- Student Success Team (SST)
    - Student success teams should only be referred to when all interventions within the WCF have been tried with fidelity and tracked and monitored. The team should consist of various experts in the academic, behavioral, and SEL best practices as well as the student's teacher(s), parents, and other who know the student well and have good intentions for the child.

Inclusive Behavior Domain

Schools have dealt with misbehavior by implementing suspension, expulsion, and other means of punishment that they call discipline that generally shames, reproduces trauma, and can create resentment and sometimes hate within an individual toward the system and situation. With Educational-Neuroscience providing academia with new insight to how human beings process various stimuli in the academic setting, it is important that we create new frameworks that help the educational system not recreate punitive types of experiences for students, and create interventions that repair students now and in-the future. The behavior domain is one that needs to be handled with sensitivity as many educators' implicit biases do not allow them to shift mindsets when it comes to the new behavioral paradigm of teaching students and not just punishing them. To help offset this dynamic here are some recommended foundational items that need to be in place by the district level and reinforced by site administration.

- Mental Health Stigma Reduction
    - Supports with intervention and breaks down the stigma that disenfranchised populations can hold around getting intervention around mental health.
- Positive School Climate and Culture
    - At the core, schools are a business, and by aiming to provide experiences at every opportunity that create a healthy and caring culture and positive climate as well as the highest degree of customer service for all stakeholders that interface with the system.
- Mental Health Support for teachers
    - Teachers have baggage and they need to have healthy and built in outlets to seek proper support, as well as experiences that enrich mental health.
- Community partnerships and referral processes.
    - Systematic process between school and community based organizations that accurately place students in the proper service.
- Trauma Healing Community Partnership with outside agencies
    - Builds the capacity of the community to whole-heartedly create new cultural norms that improve collective health, safety and productivity for current and future generations (Anda, Martin, Porter, 2016)

Behavior- Tier I

- School-wide Behavioral, Expectations, Routines (PBIS or PBSS)
    - Universally communicated behavioral systems that include a fair and accurate tracking system, clear expectations, routines, and promote a positive school culture and student connectedness.
- Universal Screeners

    - An empirically based tool that can accurately classify the unique behavioral traits, challenges, and strengths a student has which can identify and match the appropriate intervention for the student to have healthy behavioral temperament.
- Classroom Management Plans
    - At the beginning of the year, every teacher should turn in a classroom management plan that includes their class routines for transitions, attention signal, procedures for all interactions from late assignments to how to ask for help during an assignment, how they deal with discipline in their classroom, and their known biases in the classroom around misbehavior.
- Attendance Policy/Initiative
    - With attendance being a mandate, educating the community and promoting attendance to be something that is fun and builds school connection and community can help create a paradigm shift for those who do not see public education as a safe haven or equitable learning center for their student.
- Trauma Healing School Community
    - These healing centered approach forces educators to observe the cultural, spiritual, civic action, and collective healing that needs to be tended to heal the whole person and a community.
- Restorative Discipline Framework
    - Discipline that aligns to the misbehavior or action that provides that student with an opportunity to learn and repair the harm caused that is humane, fair, equitable, trauma informed, and holds the end goal of sustaining a positive school relationship and holding the student accountable for their actions.
- School-wide Safety Plans are in Place and Communicated to ALL Stakeholders.
    - School lockdown, fire drills, and other safety procedures are communicated, taught, and practiced universally by students and all staff, as well as systems are in place to communicate to parents, the community, and internally before and after procedures take place.

Behavior- Tier II

- Behavior Plans/Contracts (Intrinsic Goals)
    - Systems that help students be aware of their behavior and help the student and teacher be self-reflective of their behavior during various transitions in the day and/or in the classroom.
    - The end goal should be to develop resilience for a student and extrinsic motivation.
- Restorative Processes and Opportunities
    - Opportunities and the right personnel who are certified and trained which can facilitate healing circles, restorative conferences, healthy dialogue and conflict for students and all staff.
- Targeted Behavioral Groups /Evidence Based Intervention
    - That is consistent, monitored, and specifically designed to offset or improve a specific behavioral conditions for an individual or group of individuals.
    - When developing any program, please ensure it has a theoretical foundation, it is tracked and monitored, strategies are archived, and that the professional is operating on the experience and carries it on with integrity and fidelity.
- Evidence Based Counseling

    - With so many good ideas, not every idea is evidence-based or should be tried with students. Counseling provided to students should have purpose, be intentional, have interval goals, and be codified in research.
    - If a counselor is using multiple approaches they should understand why and be able to articulate why the approach works best for one child over another.
- Positive Check in/Check-out System (CICO)
    - A systematic approach to support and foster positive relationships between a student and school officials should be progressed monitored and have set goals and outcomes for the student.
    - The program has to be designed around staff members or mentors that have a knack for connecting with all children and can see strengths that generally other staff members cannot see. The CICO intervention has to be created around the idea that the relationship between the student and staff member is where the magic happens (intrinsic); not in the reward or praise given for meeting benchmarks (extrinsic).
- Mentoring
    - A program where students can connect to others in which they feel that they identify with what provides positive and wise feedback and learning opportunities.
    - A student advocate that can help the school system better meet the needs of the student and the students navigate the school system that much better.
- Attendance Intervention
    - Fostering and advertising healthy habits of attending school and reinforcing the message with the importance of a community, sense of belonging, and resources to offset any reasons people miss that are not connected to excused absences.

Behavior- Tier III

- SARRB
    - At the tier 3 level, we have already set meetings with parents, provided resources to the family/student and exhausted all of our tiered resources. Here we are looking at other alternatives and outside services that can help support the situation.
- Safety Plan/ Threat Assessment
    - When it is assessed that a student wants to harm themselves or others, schools must ensure that they have a pre-planned process and systems in place to filter this out before and after the threat or safety issues occurs.
    - Modes of communication and confidentiality should also be systematized.
    - Universal flowcharts that document and outline procedures developed at the district level and universally used by the proper professional.
- Crisis Response
    - A developed team with roles when it comes to crisis that can provide expertise and intervention during times of different crisis.
- Individual/Group Counseling
    - At this level, counseling interventions should be progress monitored, specific, and based in empirical methodology.
    - A counselor can infuse empirical ideas, as long as there is logic and the approach meets the need of the student.
- Therapy/Outside Referral

    - Specialized professionals that operate differently than the school that can provide students and families additional consistent, targeted, and specialized support.

Inclusive Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Domain

The WCF supports the idea that social and emotional variables are the most powerful influence on academic performance. The SEL domain is generally the most misunderstood and underdeveloped area in education. SEL is crucial when it comes to educating the whole child and ensuring that they have the best chance to thrive into adulthood.

- System of Care (Community-based services and meaningful partnerships)
    - A spectrum of effective, community-based services and supports for children and youth with or at risk for mental health or other challenges and their families, that is organized into a coordinated network, builds meaningful partnerships with families and youth, and addresses their cultural and linguistic needs, in order to help them to function better at home, in school, in the community, and throughout life (Blau, Friedman, & Stroul, 2010)
- District-wide training on Equity, Implicit Bias, Deficit Thinking, & Educational-Neuroscience
    - Exemplary training to support all staff on the above topics. Being able to have a conceptualization of equity infused with the aforementioned topics sets up the collective to offset disparity and provide equity and access for students.
- Shared vision of equity and clear goals and missions are set to accomplish this task using research and aligning services to the needs of the student population.
    - Creating a task force team to ensure that the above items are being met across the school system, and developing protocol to best communicate these approaches.
- Opportunities for staff and community to enhance their personal wellness
    - Developing opportunities for all stakeholders to interact and build community around their personal wellness.
- District emphasis on student hope, sense of belonging, & character development.
    - These non-cognitive skills can be considered very high leverage to be taught and intentionally exuded for students by a school system, teacher, and community.

Social Emotional Learning- Tier I

- SEL Opportunities (Kindness, Growth Mindset and Hope Initiatives, and Rallies)
    - Fostering skills such as kindness, growth mindset, and hope at the universal level can naturally support students' social emotional development.
- Universal Screeners
    - A systematic assessment of all students on social-emotional indicators for the purpose of identifying students who are at-risk, and may require support that varies in terms of level, intensity, and duration.
- Real life Content in Classroom
    - Learning should be fun and engaging. Infusing real life content can support a student's SEL by providing examples and content that they can relate to; which helps them feel connected, heard, and like they have hope.
- Restorative/Relational Approach
    - Conversations, opportunities, and approaches that unconditionally provide connection, bonding, humanity, and fairness.

- Community/Team Building Opportunities for Staff and Students
  - Team building and community building should take place at every opportunity, in the classroom, during unstructured time, and before and after school.
- Wellness Infused Education
  - If we want to breed the whole child and raise career and college ready individuals, we must not ignore issues like mental health, health, spirituality, and other soft skills that can sustain human success and longevity.
- Promotion of Sense of Belonging for Students/Parents.
  - Sense of belonging or better yet a sense of actual belonging should be a focus that schools should not ignore when it comes to children and parents/guardians.
- Character Education
  - Intentionally taught individual traits that focus on building the whole child with the focus on growing students to be more responsible, caring, kind, and contributing citizens to society.
- Promotion of Cultures
  - With all school demographics orientating differently, it is important to understand all the various subgroups and bring in cultural ambassadors to promote culture activities and help the school become more culturally sensitive and competent.

Social Emotional Learning- Tier II

- Character Development
  - When students do not respond to the character education approach conducted universally, it is critical that etiquette classes, and other classes that provide students with an opportunity to develop their character with a healthy role model they trust and feel connected to.
- Social Skills Groups/ Evidence Based Interventions
  - Some of our students come in with a lack of social skills for various reasons and it is important that school sites create opportunities to teach students healthy and positive social skills and build on SEL strengths.
- Food/Pantry and Hygiene Kits
  - Having a built in system can help students get their basic needs met (Maslow, 1954), and help with their social emotional learning.
- Referrals to Outside Agencies
  - Partnership through the SOC should include places and opportunities for students to go in efforts to build their social emotional efficacy and capacity.
- Groups that infuse Sense of Belonging, Hope, & Growth Mindset
  - Interventions that offer students with the aforementioned skills that are rooted in empirical evidence or with a logical plan of action.
- Strength-Based Approach Supporting Others to Look at Whole Child
  - Professional working with students at this level should observe strengths that students have and help others across students build off these strengths.

Social Emotional Learning- Tier III

- SEL Individualized Plan
  - Specialized plans for individual students that understand and have a plan in place for a student and the school to follow to create success for both sides.

- Parent Collaboration
  - Through the various tiers parent partnership, sense of belonging and voice is critical; but at the tier 3 level, this collaboration involves trying to get services, supports, and resources for the student as well as for the parent/guardian.
- Therapy/Outside Referral
  - Partnerships, referral, and communication protocol between schools and outside agencies to offer students and families additional support that meets their need.
- Individual/Group Counseling/Evidence Based Interventions
  - Monitored for progress and very targeted around a specialized need.

Conclusion

The WCF was developed to help school districts create a framework rooted in 21st century pedagogy and theoretical tactfulness which offers school systems with an understanding of how to achieve equity utilizing an MTSS framework. These concepts serve as an evidence based framework that infuses evidence based strategies like progress monitoring, universal screening, and the cycle of continuous improvement within every tier. The WCF uses MTSS language to ensure that it aligns with the new educational paradigm and does not confuse educators. The WCF emphasizes on the types of interventions and the substance needed within these interventions to meet equity and meet the needs of our students using improvement science, aligned vision, tracking, monitoring, and evidence and research based approaches. The aforementioned list of domains and the various tiers within them are to be used as a framework to create experiences for all students to thrive through equity, social justice, and guide educators in a public education setting. A well designed comprehensive system like WCF can positively impact the trajectory of all students' mental health, academic career, and ultimately their life as a whole. WCF needs to be further explored to determine the reliability and effectiveness on all students' academic and holistic wellbeing when implemented with fidelity in an educational setting.

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