



SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

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Department of Educational Leadership, Western Illinois University

Editors' Message

It is our pleasure to share with you the first issue of *Spotlight on Research*, a collection of selected dissertation abstracts that highlight the research that has been conducted by the doctoral students in Western Illinois University's Department of Educational Leadership.

The *Spotlight on Research* is the vision of Dr. Jess House, Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership, and it is under his watch that this issue is sent to you. The purpose of this research brief is to share our work with other education scholars and practitioners and to reach out to policy makers, school administrators, and other education stakeholders.

Featured in this issue are four dissertation abstracts written by doctoral students who were members of the first cohort of our program. These studies covered a wide range of issues in education from school finance and professional learning communities, to continuous school improvement practices and barriers to

women entering the superintendency. We appreciate this opportunity to demonstrate our doctoral dissertation research and hope that this issue stimulates your thinking in these important topic areas.

We would like to take a moment to thank Western Illinois University administrators, Dr. Jack Thomas, Provost, and Dr. Nick DiGrino, Dean of the College of Education and Human Services, and all of the individuals who have contributed to the development of this issue. We also look forward to sending our second issue of *Spotlight on Research* this fall. Feel free to share these publications with your colleagues or to contact us or the authors about their research. We would be delighted to hear from you.

Dr. Bridget Sheng, Editor
Dr. Donna McCaw, Associate Editor
Dr. Lloyd Kilmer, Associate Editor

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School Board Accountability: The Role of Continuous Improvement

*Author: J. Jay Marino, Superintendent,
Dunlap Community Unit School District #323*

Abstract

This study measured the extent to which school board presidents utilized continuous improvement practices in their boardsmanship, which has been identified as an effective practice of school boards. The results of this study revealed that school board presidents perceived the extent to which they were implementing continuous improvement practices in their boardsmanship was somewhere between “slightly true of our board and somewhat true of our board” as measured by a mean score of 4.91 (out of a total possible 6.0 on a Likert scale) on a 31-item survey. Pearson Product Moment Correlations, One Way Analysis of Variance, and *t*-tests revealed no statistically significant correlations with the independent variables and the

application of continuous improvement practices in boardsmanship.

Practical Application

This study can assist school board members and their professional organizations in the identification of effective continuous improvement practices in boardsmanship. Identified in the study are key findings and recommendations that can positively impact the effectiveness of school boards in their pursuit of continuous improvement practices.

Citation

Marino, J. J. (2008). *School board accountability: The role of continuous improvement*. Doctoral dissertation, Western Illinois University. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database (Publication No. AAT 3338881).

The Relationship Between Instructional Expenditures and Academic Achievement for Illinois Schools 2003-2007

*Author: Michael J. Oberhaus, Associate
Superintendent for Operations and Quality,
Rock Island School District No. 4*

Abstract

The study examined the relationship between expenditures and student achievement in Illinois school districts for the years 2003 through 2007. A strengthening negative correlation between operating expenditures per pupil and

student achievement was found. For instructional expenditures per pupil, the study indicated a strengthening significant small positive relationship. When disaggregating the instructional expenditure and student achievement correlations, district type and size had little influence on the relationship. For districts that expend less than 65% of their budget on instruction, the analysis showed a strengthening positive small correlation.

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For districts expending more than 65% of their budget on instruction, the relationship is insignificant and small. This suggests that more funds will not necessarily lead to higher student achievement but that increasing the percentage of the budget expended for instruction will lead to higher student achievement. However, this may not hold above 65%.

Practical Application

The study was significant in that it provides valuable data to school districts and state and federal governing bodies in the annual allocation of funds for education

and how the funds are utilized by schools. It also refutes that the expenditure of a minimum mandated percentage of the budget on instruction, 65%, will lead to increased student achievement.

Citation

Oberhaus, M. J. (2008). *The relationship between instructional expenditures and academic achievement for Illinois schools 2003-2007*. Doctoral dissertation, Western Illinois University. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database (Publication No. AAT 3338882).

The Relationship Between the Elements of Professional Learning Communities and Student Achievement of Illinois Spotlight Schools

Author: John S. Tignor, Superintendent, Washington Grade School District #52

Abstract

Utilizing the instrument *School Professional Staff as Learning Community*, developed by Shirley Hord, data on high-performing, high-poverty Illinois Spotlight Schools were analyzed to determine if there was a relationship between student achievement and the elements of a professional learning community (PLC). Results from the data demonstrated that principals ranked their schools as mature PLCs in regards to the indicators in the survey. The study suggested that high-achieving schools do incorporate most of the elements of a PLC. Perceptions of the principals denoted each element as functioning or flourishing within his or her school. Also, this study found that a relationship did not exist

between student achievement as measured by the reading and math portions of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and the perceptions of Illinois Spotlight School principals as measured by the *School Professional Staff as Learning Community* instrument.

Practical Application

This study can assist school administrators as they research best practices for school improvement.

Citation

Tignor, J. S. (2008). *The relationship between the elements of professional learning communities and student achievement of Illinois Spotlight Schools*. Doctoral dissertation, Western Illinois University. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database (Publication No. AAT 3338884).

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Women Superintendents in Illinois: Barriers to the Superintendency and How These Barriers Are Considered as Reasons for Leaving the Profession

Author: Vicki VanTuyle, Adjunct Professor,
Western Illinois University

Abstract

Barriers to women in the superintendency in Illinois and the reasons women may choose to leave the superintendency were the issues addressed in the research study. The mixed method research sought to answer questions about the characteristics, career pathways, personal and professional barriers, and the factors considered in choosing to leave the superintendency. Women superintendents of PreK-12 districts in January 2008 were asked to participate in a Web-based survey. Responses to items concerning barriers identified familial responsibilities, gender discrimination, employment opportunity, and self-confidence as the major barriers. Employment opportunities, familial responsibilities, and peer support emerged as factors considered by women as reasons for leaving the superintendency. Interviews with six survey respondents clarified survey responses and provided specific understanding of the barriers related to the role of Illinois women superintendents.

Practical Application

As more women in education are aspiring to and preparing for superintendent positions, this study informs women of barriers they may confront. As well, the study asserts the need to recognize and to understand why gender bias exists in employment opportunities for women seeking the superintendency and recommends that women in education develop networks of support that develop their self-efficacy.

Citation

VanTuyle, V. (2008). *Women superintendents in Illinois: Barriers to the superintendency and how these barriers are considered as reasons for leaving the profession*. Doctoral dissertation, Western Illinois University. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database (Publication No. AAT 3338885).

