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### **Statement of Academic Integrity**

I certify that I am the author of the work contained in this dissertation and that it represents my original research and conclusions. I pledge that apart from my committee, faculty, and other authorized support personnel and resources, I have received no assistance in developing the research, analysis, conclusions, or text contained in this document, nor has anyone written or provided any element of this work to me.

Signed:

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Date

HOOD COLLEGE



Federal Funding as a Driver of School Reform through Budgetary Decision Making Among  
Transformational Leaders in Title I Schools

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Hood College  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree  
Doctor of Organizational Leadership

by  
Yolanda R. Allen

Frederick, Maryland

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## DOCTORAL COMMITTEE

The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of Yolanda R. Allen find that this dissertation fulfills the requirements and meets the standards of the Hood College Doctoral Program in Organizational Leadership and recommend that it be approved.

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## DEDICATION

This milestone is a testament of the strength, determination and tenacity that was instilled in me, my faith that has guided me and the support that has held me.

This dissertation is dedicated to:

*My God who has brought me through many trials. I live by Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who Strengthens me.*

*My father, Alex Fitzgerald and my mother, Priscilla Fitzgerald, have raised me to be who I am today. You have taught me that hard work leads to achievement and that all things are possible with heart and determination. Dad, this one is for you!*

*My husband Albert Allen Jr for your unwavering support. My children, AJ, Alexis, and Alana, you are my reasons. Everything I do is to make the world a better place for you. Continue to live out your dreams and chart your own path.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	viii
ABSTRACT.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
The Historical Context: An Overview of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) .....	3
Reauthorization .....	4
Understanding the Funding Sources .....	6
Statement of the Problem.....	8
Theoretical Framework.....	9
Purpose of the Study .....	14
Research Methodology .....	14
Research Questions.....	15
Positionality .....	15
Significance of the Study .....	16
Limitations .....	18
Definition of Key Terms .....	18
Summary .....	21
Organization of this Study .....	22
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	25
Evolution of Title I Program Models.....	26
Comparability .....	27
Achievement .....	29
Theoretical Framework.....	32
Competing Perspectives.....	34
Funding and Student Achievement.....	35
Impact of Leader on Outcomes.....	39
Critical Analysis: Intersection of Leader Decision and Funding Allocations .....	42
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY .....	43
Research Design.....	44
Research Questions .....	48
Setting/Context .....	48
Participants.....	49
Data Collection Instruments and Procedures .....	50
Academic Performance .....	51

Practitioner Perspective .....	52
Alternative Viewpoints .....	52
Pilot Study/Pilot Testing .....	53
Data Collection and Analysis.....	53
Boundaries/Delimitations .....	55
Trustworthiness.....	56
Summary .....	56
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS/RESULTS AND ANALYSIS.....	58
School Leader Profile .....	59
Staff Profile.....	65
Findings.....	67
Academics .....	68
Spending .....	71
Transformational Leadership .....	83
Summary .....	92
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS .....	93
Impact of COVID-19 .....	97
Discussion .....	100
Implications.....	105
Implications for Future Research.....	111
Conclusion .....	113
CHAPTER 6: EPILOGUE.....	115
REFERENCES .....	121
APPENDICES .....	137
APPENDIX A: PERCENT FO STUDENTS AT TITLE I SCHOOLS QUALIFYING FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICED MEALS SERVICE FROM 2010-2019 .....	137
APPENDIX B: IRB MEMO MID ATLANTIC SCHOOL DISTRICT .....	139
APPENDIX C: IRB MEMO - HOOD .....	141
APPENDIX C: TITLE I PRINCIPAL EMAIL INVITATION .....	142
APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP PRINCIPAL EMAIL INVITATION .....	143
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	144
APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL .....	145
APPENDIX H: SPENDING PRIORITIES BY THEME .....	146
APPENDIX I: SPENDING PRIORITIES .....	149

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# Federal Funding as a Driver of School Reform through Budgetary Decision Making Among Transformational Leaders in Title I Schools

Yolanda R. Allen, DOL

Committee Chair: Kathleen Bands, Ph.D.

## ABSTRACT

Educational equity has been a long-standing goal among legislators since the passing of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (McLaughlin, 1975). While initially the focus was examining the disparity in resources available to schools in different geographical areas, as accountability measures were enacted, the achievement gap between socioeconomic disadvantaged groups and their peers emerged. Despite the many efforts of school reform from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which included provisions, Title I, to provide subsidies to schools servicing a high concentration of students from socioeconomically impacted communities, and the various iterations that followed, the discrepancy in student performance persists. There are, however, some economically impacted schools where gains are being made in narrowing this disparity in performance. Research related to student achievement have examined the impact of funding as well as the process that leaders use to make decisions (Lafortune, Rothstein, Schanzenbach, 2018; Bezzina, Gatelli, Grassetti, Vidoni, 2008; Martorell, Stange, McFarlin, Jr., 2015). The research, however, has neglected to study the concrete financial decisions made by principals coupled with leader behaviors that influence student outcomes.

Rooted in Karl Marx's theory of justice, this qualitative study contributes to the ongoing research around public education, funding, and equity to highlight strategies that leaders employ through the allocation of federal Title I funds that influence student achievement (Marx, 1976). With the moral underpinning of social responsibility as it relates to equitable opportunities for

all, this research explores the ideology of Transformational Leadership and its presence in Title I leaders along with spending priorities and decision-making processes to create a level playing field for students. The information garnered from this research will support the development of school-based leaders through academic and district-based development programs.

In Phase 1 of the study, district level state assessment scores for each Title I school in the sample were retrieved and analyzed to examine growth trends in the Title I schools across a 10-year period. The rate of growth in student performance was compared in two durations of time during NCLB (2010-2015) and ESSA (2016-2019). This performance data was used to further understand the leadership lens used in establishing budgetary priorities and processes among building leaders during these shifts in legislation. Phase 2 involved one-on-one interviews with Title 1 principals. Responses were coded where spending priority themes emerged, attention to the *The People, The Landscape, The Foundation and The Soul*. Phase 3 included two focus group sessions of five participants each. Principals included in these focus groups lead schools with a large socioeconomically disadvantaged population. However, the schools represented in the focus group samples do not qualify for the identification of Title I therefore are not recipients of Title I federal funding. Their responses coupled with those of Title I principals were used to align practices and procedures to the elements of Transformational Leadership. The combination of this data analysis asserts that effective school reform begins with a transformational leader who embodies charisma and develops a customized program for their school through collaboration and effective communication.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

The role of the public school system is to provide a free and equitable education for all students. Historically, student performance data have demonstrated a stark difference in achievement across race/ethnic groups and geographical areas (Snyder, 1993; Chmielewski, 2019). There are a variety of factors that may skew the data in one direction, including the ability of families to provide their children with experiences and support beyond the school day or student preparatory programs prior to beginning K-12 education. Regardless of the external factors, this continued discrepancy in performance among different social classes requires a deeper examination of practices employed at the district and school levels. One area of focus is the spending priorities and the method that leaders use to carry out their fiduciary responsibilities to appropriate funds to support an equitable education for all students. The current spending formulas for K-12 public education includes a base per pupil spending structure with additional money allocated through local, state, and federal taxes to support schools in high poverty areas (Burnell, 1991). Despite various iterations of this formula, the national achievement gap across socioeconomic levels persists. While gaps in academic performance exist among socioeconomic groups, there are some schools, however, that have successfully made gains in eliminating the disparity.

Although not the sole responsibility of the principal, the pressure to facilitate increased achievement of underserved populations and to meet the federal and state accountability measures increases the complexities of the role of principals. Principals are now asked to be instructional leaders, visionaries, accountants, change agents and much more (Harris, Ballenger, & Leonard, 2004; Kowalski, 2010). In Title I schools particularly, principals' decisions are more intricate as they manage large budgets and make instructional decisions that have far greater generational

implications (Coffin & Cooper, 2017). Title I is the largest federal aid package for public schools in America (Kirst, M., & Jung, R., 1980). The program provides supplemental funding to school districts to support the education of students in schools with a large concentration of students from low-income households. Seminal research has found a direct correlation between student academic achievement and generational poverty (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Mortenson, 1998). Generational indigence and inadequate education are cyclical in nature (Tsujita, 2012). The quality of education a child receives can affect the opportunities available as well as reinforce the socio-economic status quo. Strategic instructional decisions matching the needs of the student body while operating within budget constraints impact the manifestation of these disparaging outcomes for children as they move into adulthood (Glasman, 1984).

This dissertation is exploratory as it examines the connection between principal tactical judgements related to allocation of financial resources and the processes used to make those decisions coupled with the impact of these decisions on student achievement. In addition, the data is analyzed to determine how the procedures employed by Title I and Focus school leaders correlate to Transformational Leadership. The remainder of the introduction offers the historical context for Title I funding, including the emergence of accountability measures related to the academic performance of students living in poverty. Following this brief synopsis of the evolution of the educational system, a discussion regarding the purpose of the study in identifying the relationship between principal fiduciary decisions, funding structures and their connection to the theory of Justice and Equity is elevated. This chapter concludes with a review of the research questions, limitations of the study and definitions of key terms used throughout this dissertation.

## **The Historical Context: An Overview of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA)**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 shed a spotlight on the inequities in schools based upon socioeconomic status (McLaughlin, 1975). President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the legislation into law on April 9, 1965, after passing the Senate with 73-18 vote two days prior (Johnson, 2015). As part of President Johnson's, War on Poverty initiative, this act represented the government's commitment to equal access to quality education for all children (Paul, 2018). A large component of ESEA was Title I which provided federal grants to local jurisdictions for the education of children from low-income families. The purpose of these grants was to provide schools with textbooks, library books, specialized instruction, scholarships, and other academic support. Although the intentions of the funding were clear, local school systems used the capital to offset the cost of existing programs including teacher salaries and opportunities that were specifically targeted for students living in poverty. (Archambault, Jr. and Pierre, 1980) As this was not the objective of Title I, additional restrictions were added to the legislation in subsequent reauthorizations.

To strengthen the enforcement of ESEA, including comparability and Supplement/Not Supplant regulations, in 1970, Congress attached requirements to Section 105 (a)(3). The new statute stated, "State and local funds will be used in the local educational agency to provide services in project areas which, taken as a whole, are at least comparable to services being provided in areas in such districts which are not receiving funds under this title" (Supplement not Supplant regulation, 1970). In addition, the Department of Education issued regulations requiring that each Title I school be comparable to the average of non-Title I schools in the following five measures: teacher-student ratio; certified non-classroom-based, staff-student ratio; support staff-student ratio; instructional salaries-student ratio and per pupil spending. During this time, if one or more of a district's Title I schools were non-comparable, the district was required to file a plan showing

how comparability would be achieved in the following comparability report. Although strong in language, this regulation was followed by some but not by all states. Any enforcement or examination of state funding practices remained dormant.

## **Reauthorization**

Amendments to ESEA followed with the addition of acts that focused on programs and support for refugee children and children residing in low rent public housing. In 1981, the Education Consolidation Act was passed reducing federal controls around the usage of Title I funds, putting the decision-making back in the hands of the states and local jurisdictions (Paul, 2018). As accountability in student achievement measures were heightened, in 1988 the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary Improvement Act was passed. According to Paul (2018), “The additions called for synchrony between Chapter I (Title I) and classroom instruction, a raise in the achievement standard for low-income students by emphasizing advanced skills rather than basic ones and increased parental involvement. It also had two new provisions: program improvement and schoolwide projects” (Paul, 2018). Program improvement were plans that schools enacted when the academic performance of students did not improve. Schoolwide projects removed the provision of local districts matching funds and gave way to a larger number of high needs schools to implement the schoolwide programming structures. Despite these changes, there were still issues within the Title I funding structures resulting in another revision to ESEA, Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994. This new reauthorization gave even more control to states and local jurisdictions. This act also added performance criteria for literacy and math. The standard for the percentage of students living in poverty to implement school wide programs was reduced from 75 percent to 50 (Paul, 2018).

After 30 plus years of amendments, ESSA was reauthorized again, opening the doors for the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. The legislation focused on four key principles, stronger accountability for results; increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents and emphasis on teaching qualifications and methods. On the surface, this level of accountability made strides in closing achievement gaps, however the act also “created incentives for states to lower their standards, emphasized punishing failure over rewarding success, focused on scores instead of growth and progress, and prescribed a pass-fail, one-size-fits-all series of interventions for schools that miss their state-established goals” (Paul, 2016).

**Figure 1**

*Evolution of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*

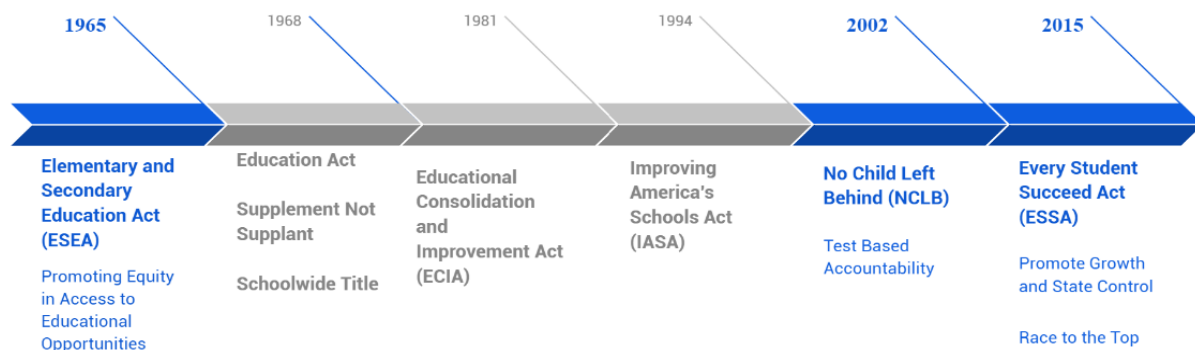


Figure 1 illustrates the multiple reauthorizations of ESEA. In December 2015, President Obama signed into law, Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA). This provision followed the NCLB act continuing the philosophy that education is a national priority and number one goal. One of the key components of this law was the new grants offered to districts serving low-income students, federal grants for textbooks and library books, funding for special education centers, and scholarships for low-income students. Like previous legislation, this law provided schools additional funding to increase spending for students/schools in high needs areas. Still known as

Title I funding, the regulations that supported ESSA gave local jurisdictions more autonomy over the model of service for socioeconomically impacted schools. District were given the option of adopting a targeted assistance or school-wide framework. The targeted assistance design established programs that were for specific students who qualify for support under the Title 1 statute. On the contrary, schoolwide programming allowed principals to develop initiatives that all students within the school could participate in. This framework gave Title I principals the freedom to be innovative in their spending. While measurable growth has occurred under this legislation, political and educational leaders continue to grapple with whether the increased funding has positively impacted the opportunity gap for students (Cruz et al., 2020).

### **Understanding the Funding Sources**

In the academic year 2012-2013, the federal government spent an estimated \$1.15 trillion nationwide on education at all levels (Department of Education, 2017). According to the data, school systems receive, on average, 47% of funding from the state government, 44.8% from local districts and 8.3% from the federal government to support the public education system (EveryCRSReport, 2019). State government fund education through personal and corporate income, retail sales and excise taxes. Local funding is derived primarily from property taxes. As time has progressed, the state contributions have decreased while local funding has increased. The 2015-2016 data highlights the subsidies breakdown for Maryland as follows: state 43.9%; local 50.2% and federal 5.8% (EveryCRSReport, 2019).

State school finance programs are intended to provide some degree of equalization of spending and resources. Programs through which state funding may be provided include: (1) Foundation Programs, (2) Full State Funding Programs, (3) Flat Grants, (4) District Power Equalizing, and (5) Categorical Grants (EveryCRSReport, 2019). These initiatives establish large



levels for “per pupil” spending. The student counts are based upon total student enrollment or in some cases a weighted count that considers student population needs such as disabilities, socioeconomic levels, limited English proficiency, and the like.

Funds from the state are combined with local contributions and then managed at the local district, LEA, Local Educational Agency level. In most situations, state and local funds are managed by the LEA resulting in individual schools not receiving a specific budget. In the State of Maryland, for example, many of the large school systems have adopted the practice of implementing budgets with parameters for spending. Those funds are managed by the principal and involve oversight at the district level. Schools also have an approval process for all purchases as funds are divided into three categories: textbook, instructional materials and general. This process includes a specialist for Title I schools, whose role is to work directly with the principal on an ongoing basis to evaluate and approve spending decisions. In addition, a bookkeeper is on hand each month to review financial records and ensure that practices are aligned with the district’s policies and procedures.

While these safeguards are in place and are instrumental to ensuring appropriate use of funds, the achievement gap between students from low SES and their peers continues to persist. As federal legislation loosened guidelines, the principal has become empowered as the Chief Instructional and Budgetary official. With this level of sovereignty, Title I principals’ decisions become the foundation for success in reforming schools. To that end, a vital component of understanding the true impact of Title I funding on student achievement requires an in-depth examination of the specific priorities determined by leaders for usage of these resources.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The achievement gap is a sustained disparity in academic performance among students of divergent economic status (Poplin & Rivera, 2005). District financial data demonstrate increased funding to schools primarily educating youth living in low-income communities. While additional resources are made available to these schools, students in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods continue to score lower on local and state assessments as compared to their peers. These findings have been noted in such literature as the Coleman Report and subsequent publications (Gamoran & Long, 2006; Saporito & Sohoni, 2007). As argued by Wright (2011), “Unfortunately, for the past 45 years, billions of dollars spent on school-based programs under ESEA have not been able to close the intractable gap” (Rowley & Wright, 2011, p.328).

Current research has focused primarily on distinct areas when addressing the underperformance of students in schools with high poverty rates including overall funding, parental involvement, and leadership processes within the organization. These topics have an impact on student achievement, however interventions in these areas have resulted in little progress in closing the gap. As the disparity in student achievement continues to rise, an understanding of factors at the micro or school level, that improve student achievement is prudent to the future of school reform. Specifically examining the connections between the leaders' spending priorities, decision-making processes and leadership style is essential to identifying budgetary implementation at the micro level that may influence student achievement.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is currently in its eighth iteration. Each modification to the act has been an attempt to equalize opportunities for students living in disadvantaged areas. With the overall goal of the public education system to create equitable educational opportunities for the students in which it serves, the principals of these schools, specifically Title I, become the core of these reform efforts. The principal’s style of leadership

coupled with their decisions on how resources are dispersed are key factors in moving schools to the ideal state of performance (Ouchi, 2006).

### **Theoretical Framework**

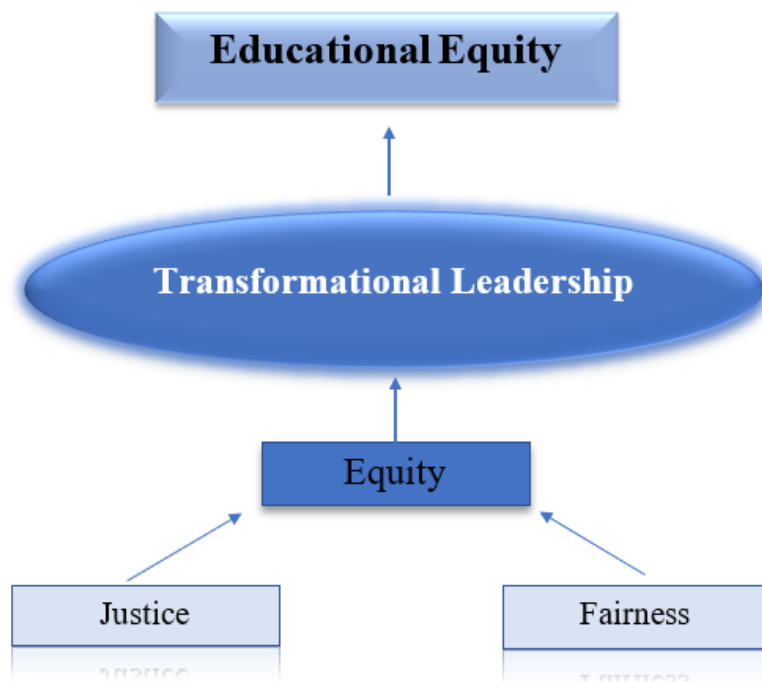
Equity was first introduced in the workforce as the relationship between inputs and outputs. Rewards were a direct correlation to the amount of work or contributions to a specific task. As this concept evolved, researchers began to add qualifiers to the definition. Derived from the notion of fairness, the converse of the initial idea around equity was also believed to be true, punishments are proportionate to the offense or lack of work (Adams, 1963; Homan, 1974). Karl Marx propels this idea of fairness through his perspective of justice. From the capitalism viewpoint, he contends, “if the value created by the worker is greater than the value of this labor power, the value of the commodities required for his sustenance, this ‘is a piece of good luck for the buyer, but by no means an injustice towards the seller’” (Marx, 1976, p.301). In lay terms, if a buyer receives a good deal on a service, then this transaction does not equate to an injustice against the seller. Conversely, Shandro asserts, injustice “is, rather, the necessary form of class relations, the systematic and forcible extraction of surplus - value from the working class to the profit of the bourgeoisie” (Shandro, 1989, p. 35). The byproduct of this injustice is the *rich get richer while the poor get poorer* (Angle, 1993). Shandro characterizes Marx’s feelings on injustice as being equivalent to “theft, robbery, exaction of tribute” (Shandro, 1989, p.34). Coupled with Marx’s theory of Justice, Leventhall enhanced the idea of fairness as he asserted, that justice is not only based upon the contribution rule, but also the needs or equality rules. The needs rule maintains that outcomes are decided by level of need, those with higher needs should receive greater outcomes. While the equality rule declares that everyone should receive similar outcomes (Leventhall, 1977).

In Leventhal's justice and judgement model he defines justice through the lens of distribution and procedures. In this design distribution “is defined as the individual’s belief that it is fair and appropriate when rewards, punishments, or resources are distributed in accordance with certain criteria. A specific criterion might require that matching of rewards to contributions, or matching rewards to needs” (Leventhall, 1977, p.6). In addition, the procedure rule is described as “an individual’s belief that allocative procedures which satisfy certain criteria are fair and appropriate” (Leventhall, 1977, p.6). These ideas surrounding equity and justice were critical in the development of the Educational Equity Theory (Boocock, 1979). Merriam Webster (2020) defines equity as “a system of law originating in the English chancery and comprising a settled and formal body of legal and procedural rules and doctrines that supplement, aid, or override common and statute law and are designed to protect rights and enforce duties fixed by substantive law. Justice according to natural law or right *specifically*: freedom from bias or favoritism.” Educational equity, therefore, is the measure of achievement based upon a system of principles that includes fairness and opportunity for all students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA), in addition to the subsequent reauthorizations, established at the national level, policy and procedures to achieve equity in schools located in high poverty areas. Through the allocation of resources based upon need, a fair and just system was created.

Figure 2 demonstrates the premise of how these theories work together to achieve equity in education. Education reform is rooted in the idea of justice and fairness. Policies, legislation, structures, and accountability systems have been established and revised as a foundation for providing equal opportunities for youth in our public education systems. The effectiveness of these policies is contingent upon how the regulations are implemented in the various LEAs across the nation. Since the principal leads these efforts at the local level their decision-making as to how funding is distributed plays a huge role in the overall success of reform initiatives (Miles, 2006).

**Figure 2**

*Educational Equity and Transformational Leadership*

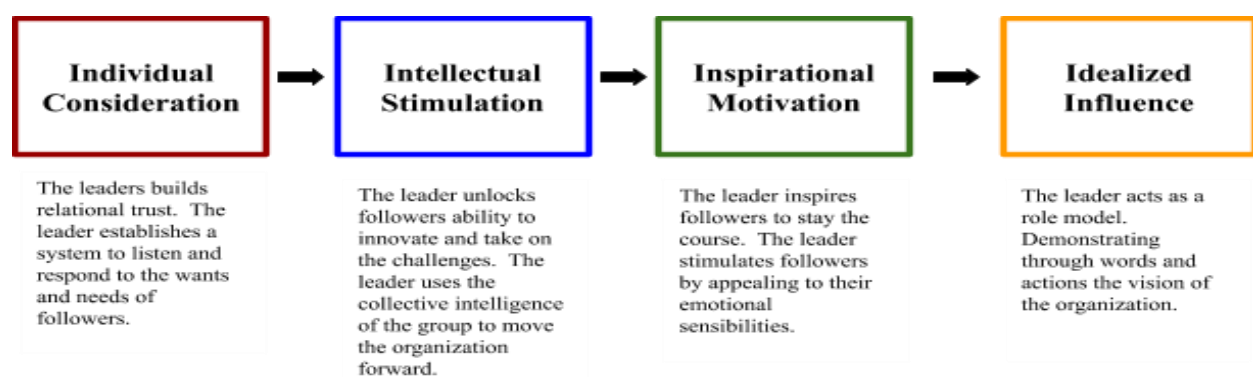


The fundamental goal of the public education system is “the establishment of a quality education that will enable all children to achieve their highest potential as individuals, serve effectively as citizens of a free society, and successfully compete in a changing global marketplace.” (World Data on Education, 2006) In order to achieve this goal, an equitable school environment must be established. As the foundation of school reform, an equitable education is the notion of providing each student with what he/she needs to reach their academic and social potential. To that end the vehicle to facilitate this change at the local school level is the principal.

An element that received little focus in restructuring efforts is the role of school-based leaders in the implementation of these measures and the impact those decisions have on student achievement. Throughout the reauthorization of ESEA, extensive measures were put in place by the federal government to ensure that the distribution of funding to the LEA was fair and followed the guidelines. Principals were given discretion as to priorities for spending within the school building however it was the responsibility of the LEA to monitor (McDonnell, 2005). Therefore, judgements made by building leaders and the processes used for decision-making are critical factors in transforming schools. Defined as mutual support between leaders and followers with the goal of increased motivation, transformational leaders are instrumental in moving organizations forward in achieving their goals, the achievement of an equitable education for all. (Burns, 1978). Represented by four key elements, Transformational Leadership is Individualized Consideration, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation, and Idealized Influence (Bass, 2006). Figure 3 describes these four dimensions in greater detail.

**Figure 3**

*Four Elements of Transformational Leadership*



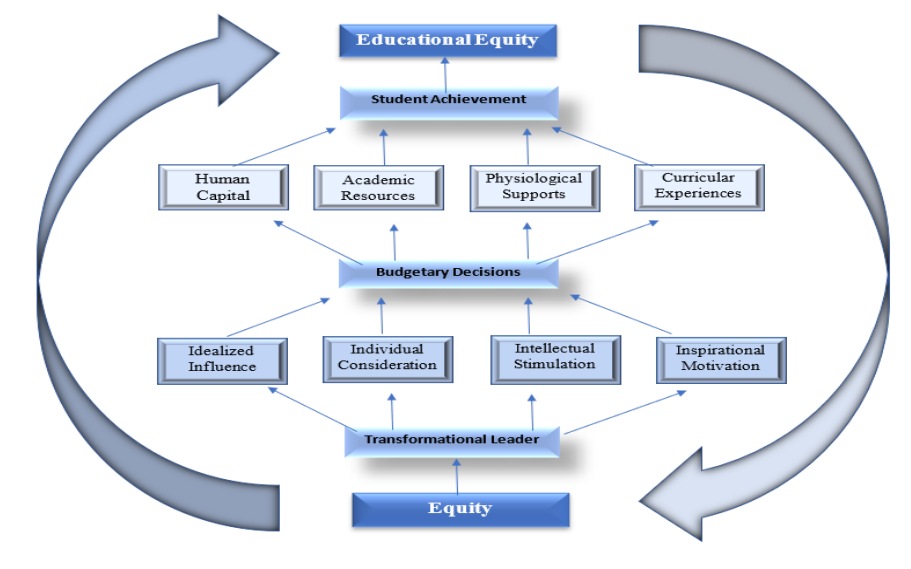
Although all four elements are essential, one of the key leadership factors of a transformational leader is *Intellectual Stimulation*. It is defined as a type of leadership that supports followers as they create new and innovative ways of doing the conventional which in the context

of this study, educating the youth who are currently living in poverty. The achievement gap among SES disadvantaged youth is a long-standing issue in education. The manner in which principals deploy resources and make financial decisions is paramount to facilitating change in their organization.

Figure 4, Conceptual Framework, demonstrates a relationship between student achievement as a measure of educational equity, however it concedes that there are mitigating factors such as principal discretion in spending priorities and leadership style that also influence the results. The impact on student achievement is multifaceted, however the influences of leadership style and spending priorities are two factors that impact the achievement of educational equity in high poverty schools.

**Figure 4**

*Conceptual Framework*



As former NEA President Dennis Van Roekel (2010) noted, “Education is the great equalizer...opening doors of opportunity for all. As a nation, we must be committed to providing education equity and resources all students need to succeed”. To gain equality in society, structures

must be in place to provide all youth with an equal foundation so that they can achieve their future goals. Through structures that encourage equity and justice, facilitated by transformational leaders, all students can achieve despite their socioeconomic status.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The achievement gap between socioeconomically disadvantaged students and their peers has been addressed through local, state, and national funding programs over the past 57 years. Despite these initiatives the gaps in performance overall remain large (Chmielewski, A. K. 2019; Reardon, 2011). Narrowing the gap would require a deeper examination of the leader appropriation of funds, spending processes and the direct impact of these collective strategies on student performance. At this time, the current body of research focuses primarily on overall funding allocations as compared to student achievement (Leefatt, S., 2015; Matsudaira, Hosek & Walsh, 2012). The objective of this study is to add to the growing body of literature by exploring the changes to the Title I legislation, leader spending priorities and processes that influence the academic performance of disadvantaged youth. Specifically, I examined the change in legislation over a period to identify Title I schools that made progress in student achievement. I then utilized a qualitative approach to explore how school leaders, principals, identified spending priorities, and their leadership processes to impact student achievement.

### **Research Methodology**

This qualitative study utilized archival state assessment data coupled with interviews and focus groups, to examine the impact of changes in Title I funding structures as it relates to student achievement. Data was collected in three phases. Phase 1 involved the identification of Title I school leaders as well as an analysis of their state assessment data during the two iterations of



ESEA: NCLB and ESSA. Student performance on state assessments before and after the change of funding structures was used to underscore the effectiveness of principal spending priorities. Phase 2 included interviews of Title I principals that provided the foundational data around spending priorities, and processes. In Phase 3, Focus school principals participated in focus groups to discuss their decision-making processes and procedures. Responses from focus groups coupled with those of the interviewees were aligned to the elements of Transformational Leadership to highlight leaders' practices that support school reform.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide the study:

RQ1: How have changes to the federal regulation Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, impact elementary school principal spending decisions in Title I school?

RQ2: In what ways have elementary school principals prioritized the use of federal, state, and local funds to increase access to high quality educational services to provide equitable opportunities to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households?

RQ3: How have these spending priorities impacted student achievement in Title I schools?

RQ4: How have the processes, procedures, and outcomes of financial stewardship in Title I schools aligned to leadership practices?

### **Positionality**

I bring both personal and professional expertise to this topic of study. As a product of working-class parents, my six siblings and I are remarkably familiar with the social ills that are associated with living below the poverty line. While as a family we have learned to overcome the

challenges that lack of resources brings, many students are not able to break the cycle of generational poverty due to lower academic achievement. The impact of student educational performance results in missed opportunities as adults, thus continues destitution (Davis-Kean, 2005). As an administrator having worked in a Title I school and with over 19 years of experience with my organization, I have direct knowledge of the variables involved in increasing student achievement for our most vulnerable learners. In addition, as the school leader, I have managed the Title I budget creating a school-based spending decision-making process that influenced student achievement. This research is personal for me as I have walked in the shoes of our socioeconomically disadvantaged youth and have a personal stake in ensuring that students living in these circumstances can change their life trajectory.

I find it to be educational malpractice to look from the balcony as has happened with the changes in policy but neglect the basement where the real work occurs. An in-depth examination of site-based management and leader strategies in relation to budgetary decisions should be widely studied to unpack additional variables that influence student achievement. The factors affecting student achievement are a complex phenomenon. While the issue of student achievement is complex, the study involves a deeper understanding of the innerworkings of the principals who make budgetary decisions and the processes manifested through their leadership style.

### **Significance of the Study**

Education is a critical component of economic growth. Generational poverty is in large part due to a lack of education (Beegle, 2009). Inequity in education leads to income inequality thus resulting in a continuous cycle of generational poverty and low academic achievement. According to Amadeo (2019), “between 1979 and 2007, household income increased 275% for the wealthiest 1% of households. It rose 65% for the top fifth. The bottom fifth only increased by

18%” (Aud, 2007). The gap between income levels continues to grow while the achievement gap widens as well. In addition, McKinsey (2009) found that on average Black and Hispanic students scored two to three years below their white counterparts on standardized tests.

Through the creation and enforcement of the Title I act, officials have recognized that the imbalance of resources is a factor in the discrepancies in student achievement. While legislators have worked diligently to implement criteria for consistency in the usage of these funds, the impact, in general, of these increased allocations to poverty-stricken schools has been minimal. (Van der Klaauw, 2008) ESSA (2015) returned the decision-making authority to the states providing latitude to local jurisdiction in how funding is allocated (El Moussaoui, 2017). While the ability of localities to decide between two models, targeted assistance and school-wide programs, creates inconsistency in implementation, however, it is an opportunity for an examination of specific school-based leadership moves that have assisted in closing the achievement gap.

Historically, research has focused on the impact of per pupil spending on student achievement (Jackson et al, 2015). Researchers have taken a cursory glance at state and district programs as compared to student performance; however, school-based leadership decisions have not been a emphasis on a grand scale. This research is significant because it provides an exploratory look into Title I principal's spending priorities and decision-making process. Student performance data before and after the implementation of ESSA will be analyzed and used as a complement to the effectiveness of these decisions. In addition, the practices of these leaders will be compared to the components of Transformational Leadership to highlight the leadership style that supports school reform. The outcome of this study will add to the body of research on school reform to accentuate additional areas of focus that may enhance the efforts toward achieving educational equity.

## **Limitations**

This study is exploratory in nature as it will utilize actual student data from one large urban school district in the State of Maryland. In addition, there are a limited sample of principals who participated in the interviews, seven out of 35 Title I schools, as well as the focus groups, 10 out of 41. Although the findings may have some generalizability to schools at the elementary level within the district, conclusions cannot be drawn on the impact of these expenditures. This study offers ideas for further study of leader decisions that have an impact on student achievement. In addition, this study adds to current research as funding structures are currently being analyzed within the State of Maryland by the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education (Dancis, J., 2017).

## **Definition of Key Terms**

- Achievement Gap - The achievement gap refers to the disparity in educational performance, based upon grade level standards, between socioeconomically disadvantaged students and their peers. Although sometimes referenced as an opportunity gap or learning gap, the “achievement gap refers to outputs- the unequal or inequitable distribution of educational results and benefits, while opportunity gap refers to inputs - the unequal or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities” (Great Schools Partnership, 2013). Conversely, the “learning gap refers to relative performance of individual students - i.e., the disparity between what students have actually learned and what they were expected to learn at a particular age or grade level” (Great Schools Partnership, 2013).
- Comparability - “A fiscal requirement that is intended to demonstrate that a local school district is using Title I funds to supplement, and not supplant, non-Federal funds that would otherwise be used for authorized activities under Title I-A” (Ohio Department of

Education, 2019, p.1). School districts are required to provide equivalent opportunities for all students, thus using additional funding authorized through Title I for enhancements to the base levels service.

- Eligible Children - Students eligible for Title I funding due to the socioeconomic status of their household.
- Educational Equity – The measure of achievement, fairness, and opportunity in education.
- Equity - To provide fair and just resources based upon individual needs. “Equity encompasses a wide variety of educational models, programs, and strategies that may be considered fair, but not necessarily equal” (Great Schools Partnership, 2013). According to Amadeo, equity in education has two dimensions: fairness and inclusion. Based upon these dimensions, personal and economic circumstances are not obstacles to achieving educational potential and there is a basic standard for all to achieve (Amadeo, 2019).
- Local Educational Agency - As defined in ESEA, a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a State for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a State, or for a combination of school districts or counties that is recognized in a State as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools (Race to the Top District Competition Draft, 2020).
- Opportunity Gap - “Refers to inputs, the unequal or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities” (Education Reform, 2013).
- Per Pupil Expenditure - The ratio of total student population and total allocations of funding for education. The legal definition includes:
  - “A) without regard to the source of funds--

- (i) the aggregate current expenditures, during the third fiscal year preceding the fiscal year for which the determination is made (or, if satisfactory data for that year are not available, during the most recent preceding fiscal year for which satisfactory data are available) of all local educational agencies in the State or, in the case of the United States, for all States (which, for the purpose of this paragraph, means the 50 States and the District of Columbia); plus
  - (ii) any direct current expenditures by the State for the operation of those agencies; divided by
    - B) the aggregate number of children in average daily attendance to whom those agencies provided free public education during that preceding year” (USLegal, 2019).
- Poverty - The family income is less than that of which would be considered by the federal government as sufficient for meeting basic human needs.
- Maintenance of Effort - Minimum additional state funding required to continue to the same level of educational services to students. It is a state law established in 1984 that requires every local government to spend at least as much per student as it did the previous year to receive additional state aid for education. MOE (maintenance of effort) funding is calculated for a school year by taking the official K-12 enrollment from the prior year and comparing it to the official K–12 enrollment from two prior years. The amount of enrollment change is multiplied by the cost per pupil for the previous year to determine the incremental funding change required under the MOE law. It is not sufficient to cover the increases in costs as it does not account for the basic cost increases for such things as utilities, textbooks, etc. For students with special needs, “the local maintenance of effort

(MOE) requirement obligates any local educational agency (LEA) receiving IDEA Part B funds to budget and spend at least the same amount of local — or state and local — funds for the education of children with disabilities on a year-to-year basis. The intent behind the LEA MOE requirement is to help ensure that the LEA is expending at least a certain level of non-Federal funds for the education of students with disabilities” (Center for IDEA Fiscal Reporting, 2015).

- School Reform – The change in school theory and practices.
- School-wide Program - An approach under the Title I act that allows local jurisdiction to make educational programmatic decisions based upon a comprehensive needs assessment.
- Targeted Assistance Program - An approach under the Title I act that focuses primarily on the quality instruction to a specific small group of eligible students within the classroom or in a pull-out program.
- Title I School - A school receiving federal funds due to a percentage of its population of students identified as living in poverty.
- Transformational Leadership – A leadership approach centered on causing change in the organization's structures and practices.
- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged - A child living in poverty.

### **Summary**

Education is essential for economic growth. An individual with a college degree will be paid 56% more than one with only a high school degree (Economic Policy Institute, 2015). A 2018 Federal Reserve study further highlighted the economic ramifications of inequity in the education system. The study identified three ways in which education creates wealth: generational wealth that allows children to have an advanced start in comparison to their peers, upward

mobility, and completion of higher education (*Report on the Economic*, May 2019). These startling statistics underscore the urgency for ensuring that students have equitable opportunities in their K-12 experience as student achievement is a precursor to a student's ability to advance to the next level of study.

In this chapter, I have presented the issue of the pervasive achievement gap among social classes. I have also outlined the historical policy changes that have a direct impact on the achievement of our most vulnerable learners. In the next chapter, I will provide the research surrounding school funding and leadership practices. Conceptual and theoretical frameworks are included as a guide to understanding how these theories work in tandem to achieve equity in education.

### **Organization of this Study**

The chapters in this dissertation are organized as follows:

#### ***Chapter 1: Introduction***

The first chapter outlines the purpose of the research and a foundation of understanding as to why there is a need to deepen the inquiry into factors that impact the academic performance of students living in high poverty areas. A historical synopsis of the evolution of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides the underpinning for the legislative measures taken to implement a structure that will hold districts accountable for the academic growth of students based upon the funding provided. The various iterations of this legislation have not yielded the desired outcomes thus the need for continued study of this topic. The rationale for this study is to connect principal spending priorities and decision-making processes to determine how these elements work together to increase the achievement of students in Title I schools. In addition, these



decision-making practices are aligned to elements of Transformational Leadership to highlight the leadership style that is paramount to successful school reform.

### ***Chapter 2: Review of Literature***

The second chapter examines the current research focused on the influential factors impacting student achievement in two areas: funding and leader decision-making. Lack of adequate funding has been a long-standing debate among educators and political leaders, hence per pupil spending structures and the like, serving as the cornerstone of studies among researchers. In addition, an investigation into the impact of effective leadership styles including shared leadership, and Transformational Leadership on student academic performance surfaced (Le Clear, 2005). This chapter begins to make connections among principal leadership behaviors as evidenced by spending priorities and procedures to enhance the achievement of students in high poverty schools.

### ***Chapter 3: Research Methodology***

As a qualitative study, the third chapter outlines the structure for this research. Quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis tools are used to determine the link between Title 1 legislation, process for principal financial decisions and spending priorities. The quantitative element of student performance data is used to underscore the effectiveness of these decisions. In Chapter 3, these processes are described in detail coupled with information related to structure the research.

### ***Chapter 4: Findings, Results and Analysis***

The analysis of student performance data during the two time periods of focus, NCLB and ESEA is highlighted in detail in the fourth chapter. In Chapter 4, the results from the key data sources were reported, and analyzed. Each layer of information was independently examined then brought together to find the interconnectedness among the participants' responses, student

achievement data and Transformational Leadership. The qualitative data served to underscore the effectiveness of principal decision-making procedures and priorities during times when the leaders needed to pivot from one legislation to another. Finally, the principal's practices were compared to elements of Transformational Leadership to identify the interrelatedness of the two. Conclusions were ascertained from these connections.

### ***Chapter 5: Discussions, Implications and Conclusion***

In the fifth chapter, the results from instruments garnered from the principal's leader instruments are coded and analyzed. In this chapter, I discussed the implications of this study for current practices, future research, and professional development opportunities. The discussion examines the themes that emerged from the spending priorities, attributes of leadership for Title I schools and how these elements connect to achieve educational equity in schools. Given the context of a global pandemic during the data collection phase of this research, I highlight the impact of COVID 19 in relation to participant responses and pivots in principal decisions.

### ***Chapter 6: Epilogue***

The sixth chapter serves as the Call to Action. The systems by which we operate as American citizens have been established to marginalized specific members of the community. Action is necessary to eradicate these structures of injustice.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

School reform efforts have been a long-standing topic among educational leaders since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The Equality of Educational Opportunity of 1966 found that the variation in student achievement was a result of external factors such as family background, socio-economic status, and race, rather than components of the educational experience such as teacher qualifications, allocation of funds and conditions of the building (Coleman, J., Campbell, E., Hobson, C., McPartland, J., Mood, A., Weinfeld, F. & York, R., 1966). As a part of this act, Title I provided strong impetus for funds to address this gap in resources.

While the impact of these external factors on student outcomes remains true, a substantial number of studies have examined the effects of internal elements (Christenson, S. L., Rounds, T., & Gorney, D., 1992; Lacour, M., & Tissington, L. D., 2011; Rowan, B., Correnti, R., & Miller, R. J., 2002). An example of such case studies falls within the “effective schools” research. “The Effective Schools Model of school reform is based on more than thirty years of research conducted nationally and internationally. This research identified schools in which students were mastering the curriculum at a higher rate and to a higher level than would be predicted based on students’ family background, gender, and racial and ethnic identification. In addition, these schools showed steady increases in achievement over time, and the achievement gap between students from low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic backgrounds narrowed” (Miller, 2012, para. 1).

The goal of this literature review is multifaceted. First, I will examine the evolution of funding structures provided through federal legislation to Title I schools and its impact on student achievement. Next, the review will probe into existing studies that investigate the role of school funding on student achievement. I will then explore studies on school leader practices and

decisions that influence outcomes for students. Finally, I will investigate the intersection of funding and school base leader practices and spending priorities.

### **Evolution of Title I Program Models**

Title I is a federal program which provides financial assistance to LEAs with a high concentration of children from low-income families to ensure that all children meet the state academic standards. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 requires that schools receiving funds under Title I be comparable in services to schools that do not receive Title I funds. The purpose of this public policy is to ensure federal financial aid is spent in addition to state and local funds to which all public-school children are entitled (McClure, 2008). The intention of Title I was to provide additional resources that would assist in closing the achievement gap in reading, writing and math for students living in poverty (Paul, 2018). Previous attempts to provide federal aid were met with opposition based upon two factors: race and religion. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI and the “child benefit” theory which developed a funding structure based upon the concentration of low-income children in a specific attendance area, Title I law was passed. With the child benefit formula, children would receive funds based upon geographical location rather than type of school the child attends (McClure, 2008).

The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 allocated federal funds to states and local school districts based primarily on the number of low-income students ages 5-17 in a geographical area (McClure, 2008). The \$1 billion federal appropriation for Title I was sent to jurisdictions without consideration for how these funds would be used once in the hands of local school districts. School systems continued to spend funds on district needs such as innovative programs for all students. In addition, school officials used resources to offset the cost of initiatives that were to be funded at the local level such as hiring specialty teachers and providing materials in all black

schools that were previously only available in white schools (McClure, 2008; McLaughlin, 1975). In 1969, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal and Educational Fund, Inc, in conjunction with the Washington Research Project published a study that highlighted the misappropriation of Title I funds noting that they were not reaching the intended population (Washington Research Project, 1969). The findings from this investigation supported the need for regulations that would hold states accountable for the usage of these resources, resulting in the comparability requirements.

### **Comparability**

Comparability safeguards required that LEAs provide Title I schools with the same services, through local funding, supplanting, that are available to non-Title I schools. The provision contends that Title I funding could not offset expenses that districts would normally assume the responsibility for but must be applied to additional programs targeted at the unique needs to the students for whom are entitled to these resources. The federal rule of Supplement/Not Supplant entered the vocabulary resulting in the implementation of strict guidelines.

The issue of Supplement versus Supplant was brought forth in a court case in Washington, D.C. resulting in the introduction of the first language around per pupil spending structures for public education. In the case of *Hobson vs Hansen*, 1971, Judge Wright ruled in favor of Hobson noting, “per pupil expenditures for all teachers’ salaries and benefits from the regular D.C. budget in any single elementary school, shall not deviate more than plus or minus five percent from the mean of all elementary schools” (McClure, 2008, p.8). Further clarity was provided for the definition of teachers to include specialist and special education teachers.

While the *Hobson vs Hansen* case provided some direction for an issue that Congress had been grappling with, the most notorious cases of misappropriation of federal funding occurred in

Mississippi resulting in a new statute limiting the use of Title I funds (McClure, 2008). Section 105 (a)(3) was added to the legislation in 1970 reiterating that states would use their local base funding to provide comparable services in all areas around the district. In addition, the Department of Education introduced legislation requiring that each Title I school be comparable to the average of non- Title I schools on six measures: student classroom teacher, student support professionals, student noncertified staff, student support staff, student instructional staff salaries and student resources costs ratios (McClure, 2008).

After audits and sanctions due to the misappropriation of funds, the comparability guideline was strengthened through the 1978 regulations and amendments containing detailed requirements including reporting structures and timelines (McClure, 2008). These new specifications were short-lived when the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1982 passed, renaming Title I as Chapter 1. The new law maintained that districts were compliant with comparability if they filed a written assurance that they have a “district-wide salary schedule, policy to ensure equivalence among schools in teachers, administrators, and other staff and a policy to ensure equivalence among schools in the provision of curriculum, materials, and instructional supplies” (McClure, 2008, p. 21). All stringent language concerning comparability in the previous legislation was scaled back allowing more autonomy to the LEA.

Comparability regulations focused on allocation of local, state, and federal funds at the school district level. Until this period, comparability was measured by human capital and concrete resources. In 1994, the Improving America’s School Act, issued on July 3, 1995, introduced the Integrated Program Reviews, to gain a better understanding of how federal funding was assisting local school agencies with their reform efforts. This new reauthorization ESEA, was void of language around supplanting, however, focused its attention on a collaborative relationship highlighting comparability as one of the 11 components of the review. Allowances for school wide

programs were also introduced, reducing the eligibility criteria to 40 percent of the student population qualifying for Free and Reduced Meals service (FARMS) (Education Week, 1994).

### **Achievement**

In 1995, the reauthorization of ESEA permitted two types of programs to exist in public schools: targeted assistance and school wide programs. Targeted assistance programs use Title I funds to support programs for eligible students only. In a schoolwide program model, Title I funds are used to upgrade the entire educational program of the school. Although evaluation requirements of programs were strengthened by Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary Improvement Act of 1988, a laser focus on student achievement occurred through the institution of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 introduced by then President George W. Bush's administration (Paul, 2018). This act signaled the first look at disaggregated data, with analysis by race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, and student achievement as a method for monitoring schools (Battle & Lewis, 2002). While student outcomes were an essential focus of this legislation, it was void of language around comparability or Supplement/Not Supplant. It was not until 2008 that both academic achievement in conjunction with comparability were added to the guidelines for Title I.

Initially based on student achievement in math and reading, with science added later, NCLB included strict accountability measures and large increases in federal aid. Academic progress was measured by 100 percent of all service groups reaching proficiency within a predetermined window of time or districts would be sanctioned (Lee, 2006). Although some states were able to demonstrate that there were increases in students meeting proficiency in literacy and mathematics, the data was skewed due to each state having different instructional programs and accountability measures (Lee, 2006; Hursh, 2007) Each state adopted its own standardized

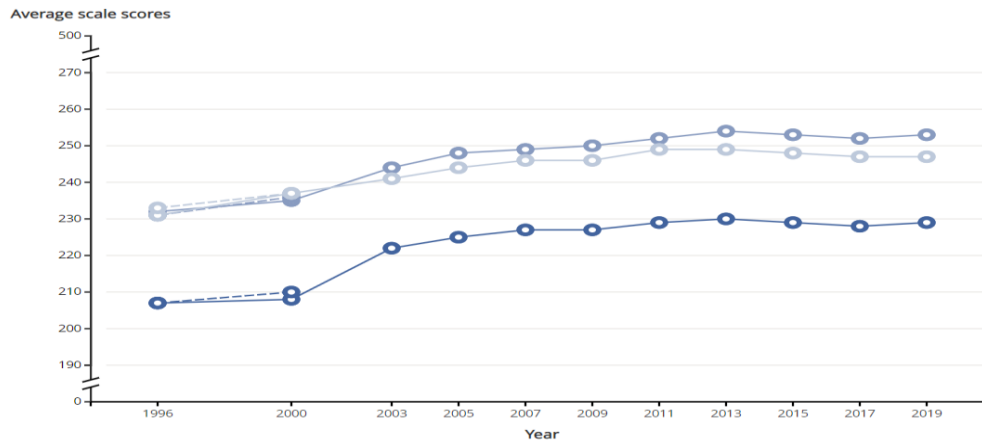
assessment to measure the performance of its schools. The National Assessment of Educational Program (NAEP) implemented a Math and Literacy assessment as a check and balance for effectiveness of NCLB. This test was administered to students in grades 4, 8 and 12. The variance between what the states reported from local assessments versus the NAEP data caused questions about the benefits of NCLB.

NCLB did not yield the results of narrowing the achievement gap. Figure 5 and Figure 6, demonstrate the changes in student achievement as measured by NAEP in the areas of mathematics and reading. Although there is a steady increase in student performance over time, the gap in achievement between students in poverty versus their peers remains stable prior to the enactment of NCLB and during the legislation. Student achievement in mathematics shows a constant disparity of 20-25 points as measured by student scale scores for students eligible for Title I funding and those who are not. Consistent with the results in math, the difference in reading proficiency for eligible and non-eligible students in reading was 25-30 points. As closing the achievement gap was a prominent component of NCLB, the legislation failed to achieve the outcomes intended.



**Figure 5**

*National Assessment of Educational Progress in Mathematics 1996-2019*  
(National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019)

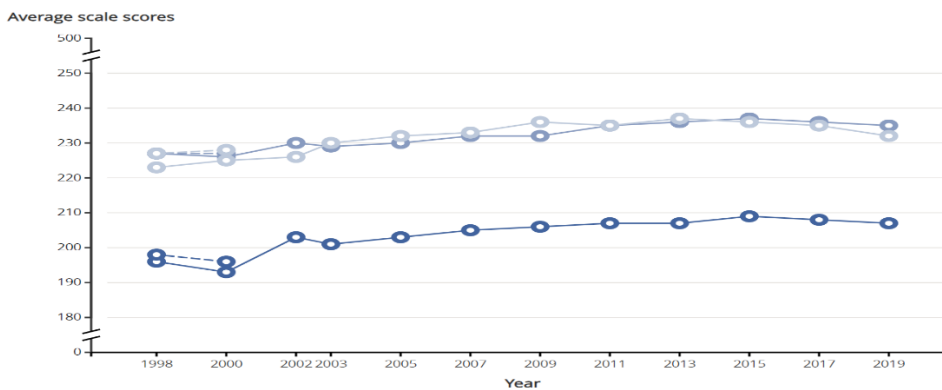


\*Data extracted from the Nation's Report Card  
NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress)

Qualify for FARMS  
Do Not Qualify for FARMS  
Undetermined

**Figure 6**

*National Assessment of Educational Progress in Reading 1996-2019*  
(National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019)



\*Data extracted from the Nation's Report Card

NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress)

Qualify for FARMS  
Do Not Qualify for FARMS  
Undetermined

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) expired in 2015. It was reauthorized as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) signed into law by President Obama in 2015. The intention was to give the power back to the states to implement strategies that will eliminate the achievement gap. Among other provisions, ESSA provided a framework, Common Core State Standards, to ensure that all students have access to high quality instruction.

States officials were encouraged by ESSA due to the provisions that incorporated input from states on local assessments used to measure performance, the inclusion of multiple data points to demonstrate meeting federal requirements and more flexible guidelines. The changes through the reauthorization, however, did little to close or eliminate the achievement gap as shown in Figures 4 and 5 which includes data through the last five years of NCLB and the first four years of ESSA. Although there is significant growth in overall performance, a 25-30-point difference between eligible and non-eligible students continues to exist as measured by NAEP (Nations Report Card, 2019). Despite eight reauthorizations of the federal legislation, the goal of providing an equitable K-12 experience for students living in poverty has yet to be achieved based upon national standardized data points. This continued discrepancy in performance underscores the need for further investigation into the idea of educational equity, specifically uncovering strategies that increase the academic achievement of students living in poverty.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Fair allocation of resources coupled with effective decisions related to distribution of funding provides the foundation for increased student achievement in schools located in impoverished neighborhoods. Equity in education is the lynchpin of reform efforts. Initially

focused on the disparities among social classes, regulations to ensure that all students achieve at high levels have expanded to include gender, race, ethnicity, and service groups (Special Education, ESOL, Section 504). While these sub classifications can overlap in students, the achievement gap among social classes remains the largest predictor of achievement (Battle & Lewis, 2002).

Based upon initial theories of equity as described through the framework of the workforce, an individual should only receive rewards that are equivalent to the value of the person's input. This ideology would support the initial practices in education marked by the discrepancy between schools in higher socioeconomic areas versus those in high poverty neighborhoods. As education is partially funded through federal, state, and local income tax dollars, families residing in higher socioeconomic areas would contribute more to the tax base thus be afforded the superior instructional, physical, and human resources found in schools located in wealthier districts (Adams, 1963; Homan, 1974). It is important to note that these ideas of equity originated during the period of segregation where race was a factor in civil liberties, academic prowess, and employment opportunities. Marx extended this idea of equity to encompass the idea of fairness. According to Marx, fairness suggested that the inputs and outputs do not need to be equal. Instead, he proclaims that injustice occurs when the upper-class benefits while the working class does not (Shandro, 1989). Leventhal enhanced these ideas in his justice and judgement model that contends that rewards should be matched to the needs (Leventhall, 1977). Equity is providing individuals with what they need, which may not be the same for each person. This notion served as a breakthrough in education as focus shifted to needs based support rather than offering consistent programs across districts.

As accountability measures have increased in education, a focus on the school-based leader, in this case, the principal has surfaced. In all organizations, the leader's role is multifaceted.

Their responsibilities span from budgets, safety, academic accountability, human resource manager, professional development expert and much more. In these changing landscapes, school leaders have power and influence on various aspects of the instructional program and how resources are distributed within their building. School leaders are no longer expected to maintain current practices or ensure the status quo. The complexities faced in schools today requires a leader that can transform the current structures and practices to increase student achievement for all groups with a focus on students that have been disenfranchised (Lynch, 2012; Kılınç, A. Ç., Polatcan, M., Savaş, G., & Er, E., 2022). With the primary job of overseeing all facets of the organization, principals must use their knowledge and skills to motivate staff to follow their vision. The characteristics of such a leader are described in Burns, the definition of a transformational leader (Burns, 1978). Effective school reform is partially contingent upon a leader's ability to develop a collaborative school culture in a finite unit of time which is at the heart of Transformational Leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Attention to this element of school improvement coupled with the allocation and distribution of monetary resources would provide additional guidance as we strive to achieve education equity for all.

### **Competing Perspectives**

Researchers have varying viewpoints as to what factors have the most impact on student achievement. Many of these ideas have been studied in isolation focused on one variable at a time such as decision-making processes of school principals, the role of school leaders, leadership style, and school funding, for example. (Sims & Wilhelmena, 2011; Bezzina, et.al., 2008; Jackson, Johnson, & Persico, 2015; Brown, Caldarella, Hallam & Shatzer, 2014). With the vast ideas available to examine there are equal quantities of competing perspectives that underscore the need

to look at this topic across various influences. Two popular perspectives are the impact of funding on student achievement and the influence of the leader on student outcomes.

### **Funding and Student Achievement**

“Title I funding have been the largest federal program of K–12 education for the past fifty years, the objective being to eliminate the educational disadvantage associated with poverty” (Johnson, 2015, p. 56). A higher percentage of resources is allocated to elementary education due to the belief that this practice will yield the greatest impact on student achievement. To provide compensatory services to students living in poverty, more than half of public schools receive this funding annually (Wong, K.K., 2014). However, evidence of the effectiveness of this funding varies (Matsudaira, et.al., 2012; Cascio, Gordon, & Reber 2013; Van der Klaauw 2008). Reviewing different impacts of Title I, each study found little to no positive change in student achievement and dropout rates. In Matsudaira, Hosek, and Walsh (2012) and Van der Klaauw (2008) research, they found no increase in test scores for eligible and noneligible students. The data from Cascio, Gordon, and Reber (2013) study revealed a decrease in high school dropout rates for white students living in poverty, but not African American.

Beyond Title I allocations, several researchers have examined the impact of spending on student performance. Dereshiwsky and Lamperez (2016) conducted a quasi-experiment which investigated the relationship between per pupil expenditure in Maricopa County K-12 Public School Districts and student preparation for post-secondary opportunities. Utilizing a sample of 9,534 students enrolled in select area community colleges, an analysis was performed which used per pupil quartiles (expenditures) as the independent variable and student preparedness as the dependent variable. The conclusion of this research yielded no correlations between per pupil spending and student preparation for post-secondary education (Dereshiwsky, et. al., 2016). The

study lacked ecological equity. “Ecological equity is the environment that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds endure in comparison to their wealthier counterparts” (Dereshiwsky, et.al., p.10, 2016). Per pupil spending does not completely account for those opportunities beyond the classroom and living circumstances outside of school that can have an impact on student achievement.

There is an increasing body of evidence which suggests that state school finance reform matters to improve both the level and distribution of short-term and long-run student outcomes. Specifically, in an analysis of the effects of school spending on educational and economic outcomes, Jackson, Johnson and Persico (2015) investigated the impact of school spending and finance reform efforts on long-term adult outcomes such as educational attainment and earnings. Although this study presented limitations found in previous work such as the correlation of actual changes in school spending with changes in student outcomes, the quasi-experiment overcame the “biases inherent in relying on potential endogenous observational changes in school resources by documenting the relationship between exogenous shocks to school spending and long-run adult outcomes” (Jackson, et.al., 2015, p. 159). By construction, this study isolated external changes in school resources by investigating the effects of changes in per pupil spending, due only to the passage of court mandated school finance reforms. The study found that for non-poor families there were minimal effects of increased school spending on academic attainment. However, for students living in poverty the attention to improved access to school resources significantly influenced the life of poor children thus reducing the intergenerational transmission of poverty. (Jackson, et.al., 2015)

In accordance with the work of Jackson, et.al. (2015), in Baker, Farrie and Sciarra (2016) empirical study, they found that “increased targeted staffing to higher poverty schools within states is associated both with high measured outcomes of children from low-income families and with

smaller achievement gaps between children from low-income and children from non-low-income families” (Baker et.al., 2016, p. 27). This study examined a multitude of resources which factor into the per pupil spending including class sizes, teacher salaries, and staffing levels. The analysis validated the conclusion that disparities in available revenues and expenditures are associated with differences in children’s access to real resources. These variations in the levels and distribution of these real resources are associated with levels and distribution of student outcomes across states (Baker, et.al., 2016). Utilizing the NAEP test as the measure of student of achievement, this study did not demonstrate a firm empirical conclusion that states school finance systems, and the reform of such systems are responsible for improvements of student achievement levels on national assessments over time (Baker, Farrie and Sciarra, 2016). Although there is substantial evidence that establishes a consistent positive relationship between substantive and sustained state school finance reforms and improved student outcomes in general, a state-by-state and district-by-district analysis is needed to determine the effectiveness of these reforms on the local level.

Across the nation there are a variety of structures used to determine the per pupil expenditures for each school district. “As part of each state’s overall school finance grade, *Quality Counts 2018* looks at per-pupil spending adjusted for regional cost differences across states. It captures factors such as teacher and staff salaries, classroom spending, and administration, but not construction or other capital projects” (Map: Per-Pupil Spending, State-by-State, 2020). The differences in allocated funds per student vary across the country with the national average being \$12,526. Vermont had the highest per pupil expenditure in the nation at \$20,795 while Utah has the lowest at \$7,207, respectively. In Maryland, the average per pupil expense was \$13,075. As noted in Table 1, larger urban districts spend more as compared to the rural areas in Maryland. These large urban districts per pupil spending being approximately \$3,000 above the state average (Map: Per-Pupil Spending, State-by-State, 2020). The base

funding provided through local funds is also a contributing factor to student outcomes making it difficult to separate out the impact of Title I.

**Table 1**  
*Per Pupil Spending for Fiscal Year 2019*

Per Pupil Revenues for Public Schools in Fiscal 2019						Ranking by Total Per Pupil Funding	
County	Federal	State	Local	Misc.	Total		
Allegany	\$1,165	\$11,165	\$3,770	\$49	\$16,148	1.	Worcester \$18,472
Anne Arundel	520	5,290	8,482	49	14,341	2.	Somerset 18,353
Baltimore City	1,482	12,223	3,703	85	17,493	3.	Baltimore City 17,493
Baltimore	780	6,951	7,426	73	15,231	4.	Kent 17,239
Calvert	602	6,129	8,153	28	14,912	5.	Montgomery 16,859
Caroline	1,005	11,118	2,617	112	14,852	6.	Prince George's 16,664
Carroll	444	6,118	7,749	208	14,519	7.	Howard 16,630
Cecil	666	8,223	5,616	32	14,537	8.	Allegany 16,148
Charles	504	7,776	6,921	54	15,255	9.	Dorchester 15,835
Dorchester	1,048	10,417	4,232	138	15,835	10.	Charles 15,255
Frederick	525	6,744	6,571	130	13,970	11.	Baltimore 15,231
Garrett	844	6,825	7,496	15	15,180	12.	Garrett 15,180
Harford	551	6,465	6,666	94	13,776	13.	Calvert 14,912
Howard	393	5,524	10,603	110	16,630	14.	Wicomico 14,882
Kent	1,032	6,524	9,572	111	17,239	15.	Caroline 14,852
Montgomery	481	5,507	10,807	64	16,859	16.	Cecil 14,537
Prince George's	784	9,792	5,982	106	16,664	17.	Carroll 14,519
Queen Anne's	647	5,559	7,584	181	13,970	18.	St. Mary's 14,390
St. Mary's	1,188	7,046	6,092	64	14,390	19.	Anne Arundel 14,341
Somerset	1,795	12,822	3,618	118	18,353	20.	Washington 14,289
Talbot	775	4,010	9,251	29	14,066	21.	Talbot 14,066
Washington	759	8,970	4,518	43	14,289	22.	Queen Anne's 13,970
Wicomico	1,035	10,713	2,963	170	14,882	23.	Frederick 13,970
Worcester	739	4,122	13,528	84	18,472	24.	Harford 13,776
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$713</b>	<b>\$7,543</b>	<b>\$7,507</b>	<b>\$85</b>	<b>\$15,848</b>		

Source: Local School Budgets; Department of Legislative Services

While the budgetary structures utilized to district and school level allocations are significant to successful school reform, there are other factors that have an equal or greater impact on student achievement. A widely studied area of focus is the leader's role in and impact on student outcomes. As school-based leaders facilitate change in their institutions, the effectiveness of the principal is critical to increasing the achievement of all students, particularly students living in poverty.



## **Impact of Leader on Outcomes**

Theories on effective leadership have progressed from an individual perspective to focusing on the interaction among the people in the organization to achieve goals that have a positive impact on society. Gini and Green describe Oprah Winfrey as “less an organizational leader than a cultural one, a pacesetter who vastly influences many people through her initiatives and example” (Gini & Green, p. 114, 2013). This quote speaks to the role of leaders in general whether it is in the private or public sector. Leadership has become more of a relational phenomenon rather than technical. What was once considered to be one dimensional has evolved into a system of beliefs, practices and assessments aimed at influencing society.

Initial studies described effective leadership as an innate list of traits that a person possesses. This perspective highlighted through the work of Stogdill (1948) and Mann (1959) suggested that there are characteristics that make leaders that do not exist in non-leaders including height, gender, for example. With a continued focus on the individual, Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, et al (2000) expanded the work of Stogdill (1948) and Mann (1959) as they examined the skills that leaders need to be effective. This approach, although still leader centered, focused on skills that can be taught and enhanced. As the research and practice of leadership continued, understanding of effective leaders evolved from a concentration on the individual to an organizational approach. Within this point of view a leader's action was predicated on the interactions between the leader and followers as outlined in the Leader Member Exchange theory, in addition to the task coupled with the skills of the followers as seen in the Situational Leadership theory (Nawaz, Z. A. K. D. A., & Khan, I., 2016).

From these philosophies on leadership, a system thinking approach emerged. Leading for change requires individual commitment and collective mobilization. Fullan (2001) defines effective

leadership as having “to (1) have an explicit ‘making-a-difference’ sense of purpose, (2) use strategies that mobilize many people to tackle the tough problems, (3) be held accountable by a measured and debatable indicator of success, and (4) be ultimately assessed by the extent to which it awakens people’s intrinsic commitment” (Fullan, 2001, p.20). Many researchers have attempted to provide a blueprint or advice for transforming organizations through a variety of strategies whether a top down, bottom up or skills-based approach. Through the evolution of school reform, instructional leadership has become a linchpin between school-based leader practices and student achievement.

Originally coined by James V. Downton in 1973, transformational leaders were defined as “those who seek to change existing thoughts, techniques and goals for better results and the greater good” (Spahr, 2015). This theory was later developed to include the role of followers in altering the landscape of an organization. James MacGregor Burns (1978) found that Transformational Leadership is present when leaders and followers work collaboratively to increase motivation and realize their purpose. In 1985, Bernard M. Bass expanded on this definition to include the impact that the leader has on followers. Bass examined ways in which Transformational Leadership could be measured and introduced the four elements: Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation, Idealized Influence, and Individual Consideration, that define this theory (Bass, B. M. & Avolio, B. J., 1994; Bass, B. M. & Riggio, R.E., 2006). Through his enhancement of the theory of Transformational Leadership, Bass integrated the notion of organizational change through the collaboration of leaders and followers in evaluating the situation, processes, and information to develop an effective solution that will empower organizations to reach optimal performance. A transformational leader uses his/her power of influence to inspire and motivate followers to realize the vision. The premise of school reform is to enact a paradigm shift in public education to create opportunities that are equitable across all racial, socioeconomic, and academic communities. Shatzer, R. H., Caldarella, P., Hallam, P. R., & Brown, B. L., (2014) found that leadership style influenced student achievement beyond school context and principal demographers. In his case study on *Transformational School Leadership and Student*

*Achievement*, Nash concluded that Transformational Leadership was critical to school improvement (Nash, 2011). Connecting these ideas, leadership style is a vital component in school reform.

The core responsibility of a school leader is to maintain safety for all while supporting the educational program through facilitating the implementation of high-quality instruction that meets the needs of each student. In addition, administrators oversee the application of initiatives to increase the effectiveness of the program. To that end, oftentimes these new approaches involve a change to current practices to achieve a goal. The most effective school-based administrators are those who learn to “live in two worlds” ----the world of their innovative subculture and the world of the mainstream culture of the larger organization (Senge, 1999). Navigating these two extremes is necessary for effective school reform. To that end, a Transformational Leadership style has been elevated as the vehicle to move initiatives forward. Described as the relationship between leaders and followers, Transformational Leadership is a process by which each group works together to achieve a common goal. Rooted in the four key elements of Intellectual Stimulation, Individual Consideration, Idealized Influence and Inspirational Motivation, the leader motivates and inspires followers to use their knowledge and skills transform the organization to reach the desired outcomes.

Instructional leadership has also been examined as a key component of school reform. Touted as the connection between leader practices and student achievement, an emphasis is placed on the outcomes or a principal’s actions rather than characteristics and preparatory skills (Jacobson and Bezzina, 2008). Transformational and instructional leadership work in tandem to create a structure that promotes collaboration and motivation with a laser focus on instruction. Although both schema highlights design for how decisions are made within a school, one category of decisions, how funds are spent at the local school level, remains latent in modern research.

### **Critical Analysis: Intersection of Leader Decision and Funding Allocations**

The evolution of the Title 1 legislation highlights the breakdown in the public educational system as it relates to creating equitable opportunities for the youth. At its core, the primary role of the public education system is to provide a free and appropriate education to children so that they are prepared to be contributing members of society. Through the eight iterations of ESEA which included increased accountability measures and flexibility for innovation at the state and district levels, the achievement gap between students from low SES households and their peers persists.

Research has examined the role of funding and effective leadership on school reform as measured by student achievement. Seminal studies have highlighted how moving from an individual to a collaborative, systematic leadership approach influences the academic gains of students. Likewise, theorists have explored the function of resources in creating an equitable classroom experience for all students. However, the continued presence of the achievement gap and student outcomes being predictable by socioeconomic status of families leads to the need for more analysis in this area for true school reform to occur.

### **CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY**

The conclusions of the Council on Efficiency and Equity in Education and Training recognize that the effectiveness of school leaders is a key factor in high achievement (Demeuse, M., & Baye, A., 2007; Branch, G. F., Hanushek, E. A., & Rivkin, S. G., 2013). Current research on school funding and student achievement often focuses on the lack of resources as the root cause of disparity in performance (Lafortune, et.al., 2018). Initial studies concluded that student performance was explained by external facets such as family background, characteristics of students within the school, and differences among schools (Coleman, 1966).

Research on external impact evolved to focusing, more specifically, on the effect of the family's socioeconomic status (Bielby, 1981; Reynolds & Creemers, 1990) and exploration into the influence of school funding on student achievement (Jackson, et.al., 2015). Simultaneous to these numerous studies was a concentration of literature on effective leadership. Senge (1990) highlighted the positive influence of a learning organization. He discussed the evolution of vision from being singular in scope to a shared commitment to change (Senge, 1990). Moore (2009) found that to achieve excellence through disruption of the status quo a leader must possess a high degree of emotional intelligence. Likewise, Fullan (2000) noted strategic leader behaviors matched to the current need are key to effective school reform. Each of these studies had a singular focus, the leader behaviors, or financial resources. The intersectionality of the two topics remained untapped.

As the questions of whether money matters and if funding structures have an impact, students in poorer areas continued to face years of schooling in buildings in disrepair, teachers with a fraction of the content and pedagogical knowledge (instructional strategies) as their counterparts, barebones materials, and minimum opportunities to engage in arts programs during

and after school (Lacour, M., & Tissington, L. D., 2011; Van der Berg, 2008). Adequacy has been used to define the level of funding to provide all students with a free and appropriate education. Adequacy was the baseline level of funding. Some scholars saw the pursuit of adequacy as tacit acceptance of a system of schooling that is both separate, in the sense of racially segregated to a significant extent, and unequal, in the sense of unfairly funded. Funding that allows for an adequate education for some children, but a far more expensive (and much better) education for others, undercuts the ideal of equal educational opportunity. The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), reauthorized in 2007, promised to provide a more equitable approach to funding. Despite these efforts we continued to see students lack academic growth in socioeconomic disadvantaged areas.

Currently in yet another reauthorization of ESEA, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the disparity in achievement among socioeconomically disadvantaged students ensues. As the literature available to the study of leader budgetary decision-making priorities and processes are scarce, the purpose of this study is to provide anecdotal data through an interview protocol of concrete categorical spending decisions and use the trend analysis of the student performance data as a complement to the effectiveness of those decisions. This comparison will provide an initial understanding of how the choices made by the principal affect student outcomes. In addition, the study seeks to examine the leadership practices employed by these principals to gain insight into the type of leadership style prudent for effective school reform to occur.

### **Research Design**

This qualitative study utilized archival state assessment data to identify trends in academic performance of students in Title I during the years 2010-2019. The data is stratified in two groups, during the period of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) 2010-2015 and the period of Every

Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) 2016-2019. The student performance on state assessments before and after the change of funding structures is used to underscore the pivots in leader practices necessary to create growth in student achievement through changes in legislation. Due to the latitude in spending offered with the new structures, I conducted interviews with building leaders, principals, of Title I schools to determine what were their specific spending priorities. In addition, to glean understanding of the processes used to in making budgetary decisions, I also facilitated focus groups of principals in schools with a high concentration of students who qualify for FARMS, referred as Focus schools, however these schools are not a part of the Title I network. Information from the interviews and focus groups was used to identify specific leadership practices that positively support school reform. These data points were used to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How have changes to the federal regulation Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, impacted elementary school principal spending decisions in Title I schools?

RQ2: In what ways have elementary school principals prioritized the use of federal, state, and local funds to increase access to high quality educational services to provide equitable opportunities to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households?

RQ3: How have these spending priorities impacted student achievement in Title I schools?

RQ4: How have the processes, procedures, and outcomes of financial stewardship in Title I schools aligned to leadership practices?

Table 2 illustrates the measures and tools that were used to gather knowledge around these research questions. The quantitative measures are based upon archival data while the qualitative data was collected through a series of semi structured interviews and two focus groups.

**Table 2***Alignment of Data Sources and Research Questions*

	Quantitative Measures		Qualitative Measures
	Instrument(s)	Data	
Academic Performance (RQ 1)	Maryland State Assessment (MSA)  Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP)  Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers)	Reading and Math proficiency level data for students in Title I (students qualifying for Free and Reduced Meals and students not qualifying for Free and Reduced Meals) from 2010-2014 and 2015-2019	
Leader Funding Distribution Decisions (RQ 2)		Categorical data on spending priorities	Semi-structured interviews with principals at select Title I schools.
Impact on Leader Decisions (RQ 3)	Maryland State Assessment (MSA) Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) <i>Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers</i> (PARCC)	Reading and Math proficiency level data for students in Title I (students qualifying for Free and Reduced Meals and students not qualifying for Free and Reduced Meals) from 2010-2014 and 2015-2019  Categorical data on spending priorities	Semi-structured interviews with principals at select Title I schools.
Leadership Practices (RQ 4)			Semi-structured interviews with principals at select Title I schools. Focus Groups with principals from Focus Schools



Table 3 highlights the connection between the research question, the quantitative measures, and the interview questions.

**Table 3**

*Alignment of Research Questions and Interview Questions*

Research Question	Interview Questions	Measures
<b>RQ1:</b> How have changes to the federal regulation <a href="#">Every Student Succeeds Act</a> of 2015, impacted elementary school principal spending decisions in Title I schools?	How have changes to federal regulations impacted the manner in which you allocate funds in your school?	Mathematics and English Language Arts Performance Maryland School Assessment (MSA): 2010-2014 Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)/Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP): 2015-2019
<b>RQ2:</b> In what ways have elementary school principals prioritized the use of federal, state, and local funds to increase access to high quality educational services to provide equitable opportunities to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households?	What are your priorities in terms of spending (human resources, technology, instructional resources, etc.)?  Describe how federal accountability impacts your role as school manager and instructional leader.	
<b>RQ3:</b> How have these spending priorities impacted student achievement in Title I schools?	Describe your decision-making style?  Describe the process you use when determining how to allocate funds.	Mathematics and English Language Arts Performance Maryland School Assessment (MSA): 2010-2014 Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)/Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP): 2015-2019
<b>RQ4:</b> How have the processes, procedures, and outcomes of financial stewardship in Title I schools aligned to leadership practices?	What factors restrict your decisions?  How is student past performance data used to inform decisions in regards to allocation of resources?	

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How have changes to the federal regulation Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, impacted elementary school principal spending decisions in Title I school?

RQ2: In what ways have elementary school principals prioritized the use of federal, state, and local funds to increase access to high quality educational services to provide equitable opportunities to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households?

RQ3: How have these spending priorities impacted student achievement in Title I schools?

RQ4: How have the processes, procedures, and outcomes of financial stewardship in Title I schools aligned to leadership practices?

## **Setting/Context**

The basis of this study is to examine the impact of leader fiscal decisions on student outcomes, identify spending priorities and the leadership practices that positively support school reform in Title I schools. The focal point is elementary schools in a Mid-Atlantic school district in the State of Maryland that have been classified as Title I schools over the past 10 years. Serving over 165,000 students within 208 schools, this school district uses a modified threshold to discern Title I schools from a traditional comprehensive elementary school. With this alteration, the requirement for the percentage of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) for the purpose of Title I status is lower than that of neighboring school districts. A lower qualifying entry point allows more schools to benefit from the additional funding.

Included in this study are the seven principals out of a possible 35 schools who were identified as Title I between the years 2010 and 2019. Appendix A illustrates the variability of all

the schools in this district falling under this category in a nine-year span. Interviews were conducted during the summer months following the onset of the largest global health crisis of the century. Principals participated in the interviews and focus groups via the Zoom platform which had become the vehicle for the delivery of instruction to students for well over 10 months between two school years. During data collection, principals were adjusting their budgets to fit the context of their “new normal”, virtual instruction. Participants were faced with an additional challenge of combating the digital divide to ensure that all students had access and opportunity to learn in this unique environment.

### **Participants**

Consistency was key for the selection of participants for this study. Principals were invited to participate based upon characteristics of the population desired and objective of the study, however of this group, participants volunteered to take part in the research. The criterion for participation in the interviews was that the schools needed to be a part of the Title I network throughout the ten-year period of interest and the principals had tenure of five years or more. Having been a leader in their respective buildings during NCLB and ESSA, these individuals are equipped to provide insight as to the impact of the changing in funding structures on the leader decisions and thus student achievement outcomes. Of the 35 schools identified as Title I, 19 met the criteria in both areas: serving as a Title I school for 10 years with the principal in place for five years. Of these schools seven principals volunteered to participate in the interviews. These participants provided insight into spending priorities and processes used to determine how to allocate their budgets. Conversely the Focus group included more participants as there is a larger population to select from. The focus groups consisted of 10 principals out of the 41 possible participants. From this group data was collected that encompassed how leaders from high needs

school collaborate with key stakeholders to make decisions that influence student achievement. Although Focus schools are not a part of the Title I network, their FARMS rates are significant compared to other comprehensive schools. The Focus school principals were able to provide a viewpoint that is unique however encompasses a need that is like that faced by Title I school leaders. Data from both groups was then triangulated to determine themes among both groups that could be applied on a larger scale.

### **Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

As a qualitative study three data collection instruments were employed: archival student state assessment performance data, interviews and focus groups. The foundation of the study was qualitative which included interviews with Title I school-based leaders, principals and two focus groups, with principals from Focus schools. The selection of leaders for the interviews was based upon the school classification, Title I and from that group principals who met the criteria, leading the school over the two iterations of the ESEA and being a part of the Title I network, were asked to volunteer. Focus group participants followed the same protocol however the category of school, Focus, included institutions that did not meet percentage for students qualifying for FARMS however the percentage of students living in poverty was significantly higher than other comprehensive elementary schools in the district. Schools and leaders were identified through pseudonyms to protect the privacy and integrity of individual participants and institutions.

Title I status is determined by the percentage of students qualifying for Free and Reduced-price Meals (FARMS). The threshold for this percentage varies from year-to-year and is based upon an established minimum determined by the district. For example, as a school-wide program model, district leaders can decide if the metric for this particular year is 75% for discernment whereas in the previous year the minimum rate for identification was 78%. Schools identified for

the Focus status have a high FARMS (Free and Reduced-price Meals) rate, however, they do not meet the requirement for Title I. School-wide program model is comprehensive reform strategies designed to upgrade the entire school program while other models focus of targeted groups of students. Within the school-wide program model funding is dispersed across the student body.

The context of this study included the examination of school assessment data from 2011-2019 which spanned the two iterations of the legislation. Principals from these schools served as building leaders for five or more years. During this time district minimums for Title I status ranged from upper 60<sup>th</sup> to mid 70<sup>th</sup> percent. On the contrary, to qualify for Focus status, the FARMS rate for schools averaged between 45%–65%. After identifying schools that met the criterion for Title I stratification, students' academic achievement data in literacy and math were analyzed. This performance data provided a connection between principal financial decision-making and the impact on student achievement.

In the quantitative aspect, publicly available state assessment from state department of education website for years 2010-2019 was disaggregated into subgroups focusing on students receiving Free and Reduce Meals (FARMS) services. The data set was divided into two bands, 2010-2015 and 2016-2019 indicating the changes in reauthorization of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act). The data was used to compare growth by school under the two laws in order to provide context on the effectiveness of principals' spending priorities.

### **Academic Performance**

Publicly available state assessment data, extracted from the Maryland Department of Education website was analyzed. This assessment data measured student achievement toward grade level math and literacy goals outlined in the State Standards. The sample of schools in the study administered the state assessment throughout the entire period of interest, 2011-2019.

The analysis of school achievement data among Title I was used to provide context into principal spending priorities by looking at trends and patterns in relation to changes in legislation and testing instruments. In addition, the data demonstrates the need for these principals to pivot in their decisions to address the current needs of their schools (see Appendix A).

### **Practitioner Perspective**

As part of the IRB (Internal Review Board) process for the district, a memo from Hood College approving the research topic was required and an official memo was sent to Title I principals and Focus School requesting their voluntary participation in the research (see Appendices B and C). After the district memo, two invitation emails were sent to select principals requesting their participation. One email was to confirm participation of Title I principals in the interview while the second email provided an opportunity for Focus school principals to participate in a focus group (see Appendices D and E). The email outlined the purpose of the study, time commitment, format, consent form and the safeguards that were in place to ensure anonymity. The email also contained a link to Sign Up Genius for Title I principals to confirm their interview time.

All interviews were conducted via the web-based video conferencing system, Zoom due to pandemic restrictions on interactions in person. Interviews occurred during July and August of the year 2021. Yearly budgets for Title I principals are due in March of each school year for the upcoming school year. Due to the timing of the interviews, budgetary decisions processes and selections were at the forefront of the principal's thinking as they were in the process of carrying out those budgets through purchases for the Fall of 2021 (see Appendices B and C).

### **Alternative Viewpoints**

In a quest to provide a balanced perspective to budgetary decision-making processes and focus, I conducted a discussion with a cadre of 10 Focus school leaders to gain insight into their

priorities for spending. The focus group was conducted via zoom and began with a list of predetermined questions followed by an open discussion centered around processes for spending patterns and opportunities for improvement. It is important to note that in the district studied Focus schools receive additional human resources and reduced class sizes in grades Kindergarten through Second however are not afforded additional financial capital as available to Title I schools.

Upon completion of the requirements to conduct the research, subsequent interviews and focus groups, an analysis of each component of the data ensued. The elements of the research were analyzed separately then brought together to look for connections among the individual parts.

### **Pilot Study/Pilot Testing**

The semi structured interview protocol was piloted among a specific cohort of principals who were not a part of the sample. The purpose of the pilot was to determine if the questions would result in the level of detail needed to fully understand the thought process of the decisions of building leaders. Questions were formulated in both open-ended and closed format to garner a wide range of responses. During the pilot study participants were able to provide responses to all the questions except one with the level of specificity and detail desired. Due to the pilot participants lack of knowledge around ESEA, the question related to the change in legislation from NCLB to ESSA needed further clarification as the schools that the participants' led budgets were not impacted by the changes.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The analysis of the data occurred in three phases. Phase One included a quantitative review of student performance on state assessments in reading and math for each Title I school in the study. This information was publicly attained from the state department of education archives.

(Appendix A) The data were disaggregated by school then analyzed to determine the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the state benchmark for the grade level standard. The performance data was analyzed in two bands 2011-2014 and 2015-2019 to acknowledge the change in legislation and testing instruments. These results were graphed to display longitudinal growth and regression.

Phase Two entailed one on one interviews via zoom with participants and subsequent analysis. The researcher discovered that with seven respondents, the data gathered reached saturation. Additional interviews would not enhance understanding therefore in alignment with Ritchie et al. (2003), the participants were kept at seven as theoretical saturation was achieved and further investigation would lead to diminish return. During the initial analysis of the interview responses, descriptive coding was employed where a matrix of individual responses to each question was created. From these responses a word or phrase was noted that encapsulated the spirit of the participants response. In the second passage of the data analysis, the established codes, from the word or phrases for individual responses, were then grouped to elevate themes that described principal spending priorities and decision-making processes. This data will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4 (see Appendices H and I).

In Phase Three two focus groups were convened and recorded via zoom. These groups of principals represented schools with low SES but are not identified as Title 1. The questions (see Appendix F) asked were similar to those of the Title 1 principals however questions for Focus School principals were limited to priorities and process and did not reference the change in legislation as Focus School principals were not directly impacted by this change. The responses given to the questions posed were organized by question. The top-down approach of deductive coding was employed to categorize responses into characteristics of transformational leaders (Medelyan, 2020). Coupled with the responses from the interviews of Title I principals, theoretical



coding was used to underscore the relationship between leader decisions and the framework for Transformational Leadership. Originally developed by Burns (1978), then more empirically researched by Bass and Avolio (1985 & 1996), the term Transformational Leadership evolved from being a term, transforming, used to describe the actions of political leaders to a concept practiced in organizational psychology. According to Bass and Avolio (1985), each of the four components describes characteristics that are valuable to the transformation process leading to performance beyond expectations. The leader transforms the work of followers through his or her idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and inspirational motivation. In theory with these four pieces present, an organization would achieve growth in meeting performance outcomes. In this ultimate step of analysis, the intersectionality of spending priorities, the impact on student achievement and components of Transformational Leadership was analyzed.

### **Boundaries/Delimitations**

This study was exploratory in nature. The intent was to understand more about financial decision-making, stewardship and transformational leadership in Title I schools. In order to do this, a small sample of Title I principals were selected for the qualitative data collection. The findings can be used to further conversations around leader spending priorities and financial decision-making process. However, conclusions cannot be drawn on the impact of these expenditures on this population. This study can offer ideas for further study of leader spending priorities and processes that have a positive impact on student achievement. In addition, this study can add to current research as funding structures are currently being analyzed within the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education.

## **Trustworthiness**

Inherent in any study is the presence of researcher bias. As a principal this topic is pivotal to the success of the students I serve. As a former Title I principal intern, the financial decisions, and priorities that I made could influence the way the responses to the questions were interpreted. From a personal standpoint, my life has mirrored that of students coming from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes. The support and interventions availed to me during my formative years may not be the same needs of our youth today. To that end, to enhance the credibility of the study, multiple data points were used to substantiate the findings. Objective student performance data were utilized to provide context for the spending priorities and processes employed by principals. This data encompasses a 10-year time period and includes over 19,000 data points. The qualitative instrument, interviews, are further enhanced through focus groups to understand a leader's work within the framework of poverty. In addition, as the participants were colleagues of mine, an alignment matrix was employed to ensure that interview and focus group questions data were objective and aligned to the research questions (Appendix E and F).

## **Summary**

The design of the research was to conduct a qualitative, exploratory study to better understand, the spending priorities and processes of Title I school-based leaders through the context of student achievement. Anchoring the next layer of understanding, principal priorities, and processes, in the concrete data source, student achievement, emphasized the outcome of these decisions. In addition, an alignment between these decision-making procedures to Transformational Leaders was conducted to highlight leadership practices. This strategic approach to triangulation of the data resulted in the reliability of information that will promote informed decisions in the future.

A multi-phase approach was used in the collection of the data. The first step involved the identification of Title I and Focus schools in the district. From this data set, publicly obtained student performance data was extracted from the state department of education archives. In addition, principals who serve in the two categories of schools were asked to participate in interviews, Title 1 principals, or focus groups, Focus School principals. Participation was voluntary and yielded seven Title I principals and ten Focus School participants. The goal of these interactions was to ascertain the spending priorities and impact of the changes to the ESEA legislation on spending for Title I principals. In addition, to understand the processes utilized in making budgetary decisions for both groups of participants and the alignment to Transformational Leadership. Chapter 4 will include an in-depth discussion around these findings.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS/RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

The chapter presents the research findings of data collected from multiple measures to determine principals of Title I schools spending priorities, processes, and the impact of these decisions on student achievement. In addition, I explored how these principals' leadership behaviors aligned with the Transformational Leadership Model. Rooted in the grounded theory methodology, a methodology that utilizes inductive reasoning to expand upon an explanation of a student achievement in Title I schools by identifying the key elements of contributing to success of students, and then categorizing the relationships of those elements to the context and process of decision-making. The study was conducted to answer the research questions:

RQ1: How have changes to the federal regulation Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, impacted elementary school principal spending decisions in Title I schools?

RQ2: In what ways have elementary school principals prioritized the use of federal, state, and local funds to increase access to high quality educational services to provide equitable opportunities to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households?

RQ3: How have these spending priorities impacted student achievement in Title I schools?

RQ4: How have the processes, procedures, and outcomes of financial stewardship in Title I schools aligned to leadership practices?

The main source of data for this study was interviews of Title I principals, however the data is put into context by state level student achievement data for these schools and focus groups of principals of schools with a high FARMS enrollment not meeting the Title I designation rate.

## **Organization of Chapter**

This chapter begins with a foundational understanding of the sample used to conduct this research. The demographics of the schools, principals and student population are provided in a table format to provide context into the summary analysis. The synopsis of the participants is followed by an in-depth review of the process used to analyze transcripts from seven individual interviews where themes emerged. In addition to the interviews, state level academic achievement data in reading and mathematics is utilized as a support to the impact of principal decisions on student achievement. The themes coupled with Focus group responses and the achievement data from Title I schools are then examined to uncover the connection to the resultant theory, Transformational Leadership.

### **School Leader Profile**

Out of the 35 total Title 1 schools with 19 of the schools meeting the criterion outlined for participation. Of these 19 candidates, seven respondents, three men and four women volunteered to take part in the one-on-one interviews. Each respondent engaged in the interviews with excitement and passion about the topic, in addition to the possible impact of this study on student achievement in Title I schools. All the interviewees hold a minimum of a master's degree while one of the participants has earned her Doctorate Degree and a second principal is currently in a doctoral program. Per requirement for the Department of Education for the State of Maryland, participants have earned an Administrative I and II certificate in Elementary Leadership.

Table 4 highlights the demographics of the schools included in this study. Pseudonyms were assigned to each school to respect confidentiality. Out of the seven schools referenced, six (85.7%) are led by African American principals and one (14.2%) is led by a White principal. The interviewees had varying levels of experience in the role of school leadership ranging from 5 –20

years. In addition, the race, ethnicity, and mobility rate differed from school-to-school. The mobility rate for students is described as the measure of how many students are transferring in-and-out of a school. The mobility rate of the schools studied ranged between 9.6 –21.4 percent or 80 to 90 percent of students in each school returned each year. As with the student population, the participants in the study also had longevity in their school.

**Table 4**  
*School Demographics*

	2020-2021 Official Enrollment by School									
	%			% Racial/Ethnic Composition						
	Total	FARMS	Mobility	AM	AS	BL	HI	PI	WH	MU
<i>Andrews</i>	421	69.1 (6)	10.6 (6)	≤5%	8.3	28.5	50.4	≤5%	8.1	≤5%
<i>Barranger</i>	585	67.5 (7)	18.5 (2)	≤5%	5.8	60.0	25.8	≤5%	≤5%	≤5%
<i>Crame</i>	568	76.9 (4)	21.4 (1)	≤5%	≤5%	24.6	63.4	≤5%	6.2	≤5%
<i>Douglas</i>	530	78.5 (3)	15.6 (3)	≤5%	5.5	9.4	75.7	≤5%	7.2	≤5%
<i>Entemp</i>	736	82.9 (2)	15.6 (4)	≤5%	5.7	10.7	78.3	≤5%	≤5%	≤5%
<i>Frederick</i>	494	84.4 (1)	9.6 (7)	≤5%	7.1	25.7	61.1	≤5%	≤5%	≤5%
<i>Gonzola</i>	693	73.2 (5)	15.2 (5)	≤5%	8.9	25.0	55.8	≤5%	6.6	≤5%

\*AM = Native American; AS = Asian; BL = African American; HI = Hispanic American; PI = Pacific Islander; WH = White American; MU = Two or More Races

\*\* number in parenthesis – rank order (highest to lowest percentage of students) for FARMS and Mobility Rates

## **Mr. Adams**

Mr. Adams, principal of Andrews Elementary School, is an African American male in his mid-forties. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and Master of Science Degree in Administrative Leadership. He has nine total years of administrative experience with four and half of those years serving as principal. Mr. Adams was originally hired as an assistant principal at Andrews Elementary school. After a four-year tenure he transferred to another school to complete his principal internship. While completing his one-year internship, the principal of

Andrews at that time left for personal reasons. Mr. Adams was asked to come back to Andrews to serve in the capacity of acting principal and was subsequently hired as the permanent principal the following year.

The student body at Andrews Elementary School is 28.5% African American, 50.4% Hispanic, 8.1% White and less than 8.3% Asian. Among the schools studied, Andrews has the second lowest mobility and FARMS rates.

### **Mrs. Brown**

Mrs. Brown, principal of Barranger Elementary School, is an African American female in her mid-forties. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Education, Master's Degree in Educational Administration, and a Doctoral Degree in Organizational Leadership. She has fourteen total years of administrative experience with eight of those years serving as principal at Barranger Elementary School. Mrs. Brown was drawn to her school based upon the demographic, social, emotional, and academic needs of the students. As an elementary school student, she witnessed the effects of busing as many inner-city minority students as possible who attended her predominantly white school were bused from their local elementary schools. Mrs. Brown noted the disconnect and lack of belonging those students felt during this era. Her goal is for students to believe, *belong and succeed at Barranger Elementary School*.

The student body at Barranger Elementary School is 60% African American, 25.8% Hispanic, 5.8% White and less than 5% Asian. Among the schools studied, Barranger has the second highest mobility and the lowest FARMS rate.

### **Ms. Crews**

Dr. Crews, principal of Crame Elementary School, is an African American female in her late forties. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Education, Master of Science Degree in

Educational Administration, and a Doctoral Degree in Organizational Leadership. She has twenty total years of administrative experience, with twelve of those years serving as principal. Mrs. Crews became the leader of her school through encouragement from her then supervisor. During her interview she exclaimed, “I did not choose my school, my school found me. My school needed something different, and my supervisor knew that I had those qualities of that something different.”

The student body at Crame Elementary School is 24.6% African American, 63.4% Hispanic, 6.2% White and less than 5% Asian. Among the schools studied, Crame has the highest mobility rate and the fourth highest rate for students receiving FARMS.

### **Mr. Douds**

Mr. Douds, principal of Douglas Elementary School (DES), is a white male in his late forties. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Education and Master's Degree in Educational Administration. He has over 20 total years of administrative experience with twelve of those years serving as principal at Douglas Elementary School. He spent eight years working in the capacity of assistant principal at neighboring schools within the district. Mr. Douds has served in multiple roles such as classroom teacher and staff development teacher at DES. He was appointed principal of Douglas during a time of restructuring. Douglas was experiencing turnover in the teacher workforce of 20 –25 teachers each year. Student achievement data as measured by state assessments was extremely low. During Mr. Douds tenure he has transformed the climate, student achievement data and staff turnover rate.

The student body at Barranger Elementary School is 9.4% African American, 75.7% Hispanic, 7.2% White and less than 5.5% Asian. Among the schools studied, Douglas falls within the middle when comparing the mobility and FARMS rates.



**Mrs. Edwards**

Mrs. Edwards, principal of Entemp Elementary School, is an African American female in her mid-forties. She holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Black and Puerto Rican Studies and Elementary Education and a Master of Arts Degree in Pre-Elementary Education with an emphasis in Special Education. In addition, she holds two certifications in Administration and Supervision (I & II). She has ten total years of administrative experience with eight of those years serving as principal. Mrs. Edwards spent seven years at Entemp Elementary School.

The student body at Entemp Elementary School is 10.7% African American, 78.3% Hispanic, less than 5% White and less than 5.7% Asian. Among the schools studied, Entemp has the second highest FARMS rate and the third lowest mobility rate.

**Mr. Fick**

Mr. Fick, principal of Frederick Elementary School, is an African American male in his late thirties. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education, Master of Arts Degree in Reading, and a Doctoral Degree in Education Policy. He has six total years of administrative experience with three of those years serving as principal at Frederick Elementary School. When selecting schools to interview for, Mr. Fick applied solely to Title I schools. His reasoning was because “the stakes are higher.” He is committed to making Frederick the hub of the community.

The student body at Frederick Elementary School is 25.7% African American, 61.1% Hispanic, less than 5% White and less than 7.1% Asian. Among the schools studied, Frederick has the lowest mobility and the highest FARMS rate.

## **Mrs. Greg**

Mrs. Greg, principal of Gonzola Elementary School, is an African American female in her early thirties. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education and Master of Arts Degree in Educational Leadership. She has seven total years of administrative experience with four of those years serving as principal. Mrs. Greg has been recognized at the district level for her work as principal. Her attraction to her school stems from her experience as an elementary school student in the district where she serves. She sees herself and her siblings in the students. She feels that the students can reach their goals despite their current circumstances.

The student body at Gonzola Elementary School is 25% African American, 55.8% Hispanic, 6.6% White and less than 8.9% Asian. Among the schools studied, Gonzola ranks in the middle of schools studied in relation to mobility and FARMS rate.

While district leaders are responsible for the selection of the principal, the principal is the hiring manager for the staff. In Gershenson, et al (2018) study, *The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers*, he highlights the importance of diversity in all schools but particularly extreme poverty schools. He notes, “In the elementary school setting, for black children and especially disadvantaged black children, the effect of having even just one black teacher is fairly big and robust and a real thing” (Gershenson, et al, 2018). The study found a positive correlation between the dropout rates of black boys when they have a black teacher between third and fifth grades. The study also found that the effect was the strongest for children from low-income families.

The next section will examine the demographics of the staff among the participating schools. Although not the focus of this study, the impact of the race and ethnicity of staff on student achievement in schools has been widely studied. Coupled with staff tenure, these attributes have

been found to have been found to influence student achievement among students from socioeconomically impacted communities.

### **Staff Profile**

In this large Mid-Atlantic school district, school-based positions are assigned based on enrollment. Classroom teachers are allocated based on the student teacher ratio of 18:1 in Kindergarten through Second grade; 26:1 Third grade and 28:1 for Fourth and Fifth grades. ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) instructor positions are distributed using a formula that considers the student ESOL level (Newcomer, Level 1 student up to Level 5). Multiple measures are used when determining a student's ESOL level including standardized testing, length of time a student has been in the United States and consistency of instruction prior to entry. Academic Intervention and Reading Literacy teachers are assigned using the metrics of student population and student performance data. All these allocations are standardized across the district utilizing school demographic and academic data.

Title I schools are allocated funds through a per pupil spending ratio with additional federal financial resources provided due to the high FARMS rate at the school. In addition to the monetary capital, Title I schools are staff with a reduced class size formula for their primary grades (kindergarten through second grade) as well as supporting teachers for academic, intervention and special programs. Title I schools are equipped with more staff than a traditional comprehensive school of like size. The demographic data and tenure of the teacher level staff members in each school are included below.

**Table 5****Professional Staff Profile**

<b>2019-2020 Professional Staff Diversity</b>										
	Total Staff	% Racial/Ethnic Composition				% Gender		% Years of Experience		
		AS	BL	HI	WH	Female	Male	<5yrs	5-15	>15
<i>Andrews</i>	49.7	5.3	14.0	8.8	70.2	84.2	15.8	14.0	38.6	47.4
<i>Barranger</i>	55.1	3.3	34.4	3.3	57.4	85.2	14.8	18.0	29.5	52.5
<i>Crame</i>	60.1	9.7	17.7	12.9	58.1	85.5	14.5	43.5	27.4	29.0
<i>Douglas</i>	55.1	7.8	13.9	10.9	73.4	90.6	9.4	25.0	32.8	42.2
<i>Entemp</i>	73.1	11.4	13.9	19.0	51.9	92.4	7.6	32.9	48.1	19.0
<i>Frederick</i>	54.9	9.7	11.3	6.5	67.7	87.1	12.9	24.2	33.9	41.9
<i>Gonzola</i>	74.1	3.7	21.0	6.2	69.1	92.6	7.4	12.3	42.0	45.7

\*AM = Native American; AS = Asian; BL = African American; HI = Hispanic American; WH = White American

Although Entemp and Crame Elementary Schools have a higher percentage of staff with less than five years of experience, all other demographic data is comparable among schools. The difference in total staff for each school is due to the variation in enrolment. Comparable to most public primary schools, each school has a predominantly female staff, between 84 and 92 percent. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), during the 2017–2018 school year 79 percent of all elementary teachers were White. This is only a five percent decrease over 17 years as 84 percent of the teaching workforce was White during the 1999–2000 school year. Racial breakdown of the district’s staff is also in line with national average, with the following breakdown: 56.4% White, 18.4% African American; 14.5% Hispanic; 8.8% Asian and 1.5% Two or More Races. Given these statistics, each of the schools studied is above the national and district average when assessing the racial and ethnic diversity among the professional staff.

In addition to teacher level positions, schools are equipped with a variety of additional employees to support instruction and management of the building. Supporting service staff members include paraeducators, secretarial staff, media assistants and building service

workers. As with the professional staff, supporting service personnel mirrors the national statistics in relation to gender. On the contrary, in analyzing racial and ethnic diversity, the data revealed more equilibrium among these ethnicities as compared to the professional staff. Table 6 emphasizes the racial balance among the supporting service staff at the respective schools.

**Table 6**

*Supporting Service Staff Profile*  
(Data as of 2019-2020 school year)

<b>2019-2020 Supporting Services Staff Diversity</b>							
	% Racial/Ethnic Composition				% Gender		Total Support Staff
	AS	BL	HI	WH	Female	Male	
<i>Andrews</i>	10.7	7.1	28.6	53.6	78.2	21.4	20.688
<i>Barranger</i>	13.3	26.7	16.7	36.7	86.7	13.3	25.875
<i>Crame</i>	12.5	12.5	33.3	37.5	87.5	12.5	19.600
<i>Douglas</i>	8.7	8.7	43.5	39.1	87.0	13.0	20.238
<i>Entemp</i>	16.0	12.0	44.0	28.0	84.0	16.0	21.562
<i>Frederick</i>	14.7	29.4	29.4	23.5	79.4	20.6	27.438
<i>Gonzola</i>	9.4	21.9	28.1	37.5	90.6	9.4	25.075

\*AM = Native American; AS = Asian; BL = African American; HI = Hispanic American; WH = White American

## Findings

The primary data were seven interviews of current Title I school principals. Student performance data at each participating principal's school was used to provide context for each leader's selected approach to decision-making; however, it was not intended to make a direct correlation. This academic data serves to validate the level of thinking and reflection of the principals as they determine how to increase academic achievement at their schools. In addition, using a comparison model, information gleaned from focus groups was analyzed to compare approaches to decision-making at Title I and Focus schools. As both schools serve students from low-income circumstances, this information is vital to understanding priorities and processes that

span across categories of schools. After each interview, the script was analyzed through descriptive manual coding and reviewed for emerging themes. These themes were matched to the elements of Transformational Leadership to expound the connection to this theory.

## **Academics**

During the 2011–2019 school years, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) had undergone two reauthorizations. The data in Table 7 and 8 reflects student performance on the Math and Literacy state assessments during these time periods. From 2011–2014 education systems operated under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. The instrument used to evaluate student performance was the Maryland State Assessment (MSA). The format of the test was paper pencil. In 2015 the Department of Education transitioned from NCLB to Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) therefore assessments were not administered during that year. This regulation involved a change to the Common Core State Standards, thus a different testing product. As with the Maryland State Assessment (MSA), Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College (PARCC) measured student proficiency in grade level standards however it differed in that it was presented in an online format.

Table 7 illustrates the impact of changes in regulation coupled with testing instruments on math proficiency rates. During the time from 2011-2012 under the NCLB legislation proficiency rates were above average with 75.71-90.86% of students meeting or exceeding the mathematics standards. As another reauthorization neared with the impending change in presidential administration, these proficiency rates begin to dramatically decline. In 2016 math proficiency rates hit an all-time low with the introduction of ESSA. After the initial decline in performance perhaps due to changes in instrument and format, four of the seven schools demonstrated a steady

increase in student mastery in subsequent years. Two schools, Andrews and Entemp, exhibited 10-15% gains from the onset of ESSA to the 2019 administration of the state assessment.

**Table 7**

*Math Proficiency Rates by Year*

School Name	2011	2012	2013	2014	2016	2017	2018	2019
Andrews Elementary	83.24%	87.21%	79.62%	57.69%	28.65%	26.23%	36.26%	38.04%
Barranger Elementary	85.05%	86.29%	85.10%	64.89%	27.93%	26.69%	29.07%	29.87%
Crame Elementary	75.71%	80.53%	75.83%	51.95%	25.30%	19.26%	16.98%	19.49%
Douglas Elementary	88.06%	90.09%	78.18%	65.45%	38.50%	39.42%	40.74%	42.44%
Entemp Elementary	76.53%	80.56%	76.62%	54.61%	25.96%	35.19%	38.52%	40.28%
Frederick Elementary	90.86%	87.57%	85.34%	73.03%	42.29%	40.57%	35.02%	38.58%
Gonzola Elementary	81.34%	88.36%	65.54%	59.25%	36.34%	33.15%	26.37%	30.86%

Table 8 demonstrates a notable steady decline in student performance in Reading from 2011-2014. While each school remained above the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile mark of students reaching or exceeding proficiency there was an average of a 20 percent decrease in achievement over the course of those four years. On the contrary, after the initial implementation dip from the first administration of the PARCC assessment in 2016, six of seven schools demonstrated an increase in performance from 2016-2019 with Andrews and Entemp touting 9-10% gains in proficiency rates from 2016-2019. Crame and Frederick Elementary Schools continue to show a decline in student achievement from 2016-2018, countered with a nominal increase in 2019.

As with the math performance data, the literacy assessment results show a steady overall decline in performance with an average of 20% from 2011-2014. In addition, the implementation dip from the onset of the administration of the PARCC assessment is evident. While in the Crame and Frederick Elementary Schools data also demonstrated a decline in performance for math from 2016-2018, their literacy scores illustrate continual improvement. In 2018, Gonzaga

Elementary School hit a low with 20% of their students reaching or exceeding proficiency, however quickly regained their momentum by increasing the proficiency rate to 30% the following year. Douglas Elementary School peaked at 50 percent proficiency rate before dropping to 47% in 2019.

**Table 8**

*Literacy Proficiency Rates by Year*

School Name	2011	2012	2013	2014	2016	2017	2018	2019
Andrews Elementary	83.82%	90.12%	82.80%	83.21%	26.04%	28.96%	30.77%	36.42%
Barranger Elementary	89.32%	86.29%	87.42%	79.74%	32.30%	31.29%	32.05%	36.12%
Crame Elementary	83.17%	85.27%	85.83%	76.69%	25.30%	20.42%	21.32%	26.84%
Douglas Elementary	92.04%	89.25%	86.82%	86.70%	39.56%	36.10%	49.59%	46.61%
Entemp Elementary	82.26%	80.44%	83.50%	70.79%	24.32%	28.09%	31.82%	33.98%
Frederick Elementary	93.62%	95.11%	92.15%	83.00%	44.05%	40.17%	43.19%	45.63%
Gonzola Elementary	81.95%	85.04%	79.25%	78.85%	32.77%	26.97%	21.76%	30.86%

The academic data demonstrates some growth in student performance throughout the years studied. The analysis of the data also revealed that as leaders pivoted with the change of legislation, there was a 40-50% drop in performance. Commonly referred to as the implementation dip, this decrease could have been attributed to the change in testing instrument, format, or content. Although the achievement results fell drastically in 2016, on average, performance outcomes began to trend up in the subsequent years. Of particular importance to this study is what were the spending decisions made by principals to move the needle in a positive direction? This question and more were the underpinning of the interviews.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How have changes to the federal regulation Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, impacted elementary school principal spending decisions in Title I schools?



RQ2: In what ways have elementary school principals prioritized the use of federal, state, and local funds to increase access to high quality educational services to provide equitable opportunities to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households?

RQ3: How have these spending priorities impacted student achievement in Title I schools?

RQ4: How have the processes, procedures, and outcomes of financial stewardship in Title I schools aligned to leadership practices?

In subsequent sections, an exploration of these questions coupled with an analysis of the responses is employed. The goal is to provide an understanding of how these elements work in conjunction to reach the pinnacle of performance that supports the attainment of educational equity.

## **Spending**

The first interview question asked of the participants was, “How have changes to federal regulations impacted the manner in which you allocate funds in your school?” In each interview, the respondents needed further clarification of the intent of the question. Once clarified to mean how the move from NCLB to ESSA affected how monetary resources were allocated, six out of seven principals could not answer. As shared by a subsequent interview with the Director of Title I Services, the department attempts to shield principals from the burden of the nuances of the federal legislation that do not directly impact their work. The Title I office deploys specialists to ensure that spending is aligned to the expectations outlined in the law and that resources are allocated to the correct categories. However, the per pupil spending structures from which the formulas are derived are not within the scope of information shared at the principal level. Table 9

highlights some of the responses from the leaders when questioned about the changes in the legislation.

**Table 9**

*Federal Regulation Impact on Spending Decisions*

Legislation	Example quote
NCLB/ESSA	<p>“It really hasn’t changed” (Douds)</p> <p>“As we made the transition from nickle b (NCLB) to ESSA they (legislation) have become even more strict on how funds are used, what they are used for and the timeline.” (Mrs. Crews)</p> <p>“There's a part of this that I don't know so I noticed something changed in terms of the way the allocation is calculated, so we got more money this year, even though we were about the same size.” (Fick)</p> <p>“It has not for me. There are support people to take care of it the nuances of that.” (Brown)</p> <p>“I cannot tell you how. I know that during it there was a point where I did see a good increase each year, this past year, and this upcoming year I saw it has been decreased.” (Adams)</p>

Research question 2 sought to garner specific areas of spending that Title 1 principals felt would positively influence student achievement. Specifically, this research question asked, *“In what ways have elementary school principals prioritized the use of federal, state, and local funds to increase access to high quality educational services to provide equitable opportunities*

*to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households?”* While the first research question focused on the impact of changes in the legislation, this question drilled down to the micro level elevating concrete decisions that led to positive school reform.

When asked about their spending priorities participants shared key areas of interest. After coding the responses, three clear categories emerged, *Human Capital*, *Co-Curricular Experiences* and *Academic Resources*. The fourth category, *Physiological Supports*, shown in Figure 7, is a comprise of responses that do not fit into the other three categories. Six out of the seven respondents found human resources to be the top priority for their school. Holiday support (gifts for students and families, meals) and basic needs as characterized as *Physiological Supports* were second in priorities for spending however the participants acknowledged that these needs are met through external resources outside of the school’s budget and the constraint of the current legislation significantly impacts how principals can spend in this area. With the constraints to spending in areas defined by *Other*, coupled with basic needs often being met outside of the school, the categories of *Academic Resources* and *Co-Curricular Experiences* quickly rose in importance.

**Figure 7**

*Categories of Spending in Title I Schools*

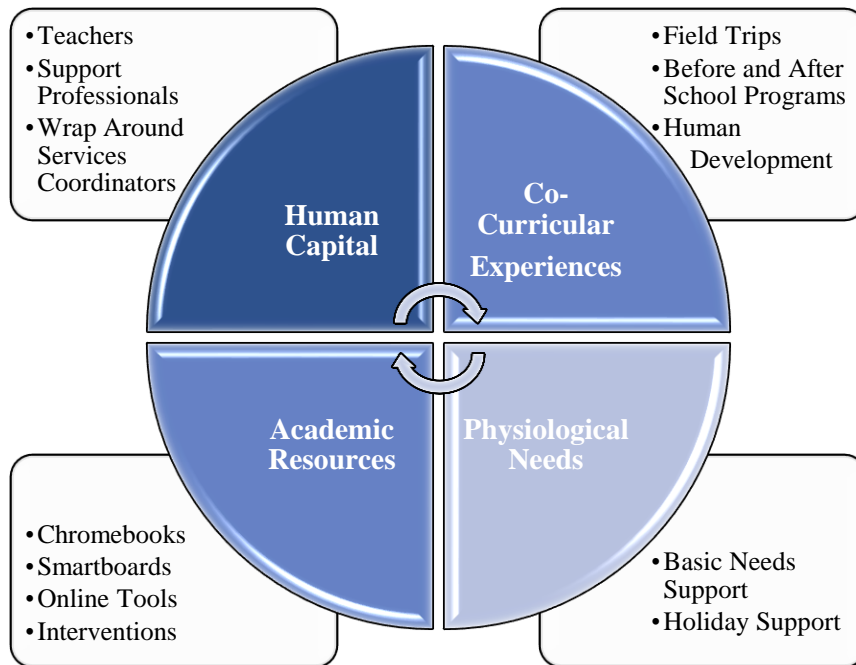


Table 10 includes anecdotal responses from participants as it relates to the key areas for spending priorities. The table outlines the alignment between the participants answers to the questions and the categories noted. While each priority is evident, the passion for people emerged as the leading contributor to school improvement.

**Table 10***Key Spending Priorities*

Top Priorities	Example quote
Human Capital	<p>“Always valued spending Title I funds on people. Our budget year in and year out is spent on people. I have \$6,000 dollars left in instructional materials. I spend almost every single penny on people” (Douds)</p> <p>“Around reducing class sizes, when I can, ensuring that we have specialized positions that will maximize student performance. For example, over the years I have added a math specialist” (Crews)</p> <p>“She will be able to help in conjunction with our parent Community Coordinators that can use school liaison this crisis intervention” (Fick)</p> <p>“Human capital is definitely something that I wanted to increase.” (Gonzoga)</p> <p>“This year I spent more money on Human Resources. I hired additional Special Education teachers to reduce caseloads and student support positions. Then we hired a few focus academic teachers to assist with writing.” (Andrews)</p>
Academic Resources	<p>“So, the first thing is the core sort of online curriculum content, whatever we might need to support that. Then human capital” (Fick)</p>
Co-Curricular Experience	<p>“More hands-on deck and so I did have a priority to add some level of like enrichment and excitement. I wanted to go the STEM route would be the best way to do it.” (Gonzoga)</p>
Physiological Supports	<p>“And those types of things that lead in our community food distribution networks, etc.” (Fick)</p>

The responses were underscored when looking at the spending trends of principals in relation to their staffing. In Title I schools, principals have the discretion to purchase additional positions based upon their student and community needs. In Table 11 the highlighted positions,

Focus and Instructional Assistants are additional vacancies selected by the Title I principals in this study. Focus positions are positions that deliver specific support. These individuals are teacher level and are trained in the targeted area of need, for example, math, literacy, language, parent liaison. In contrast the instructional assistants work under the direction of the teacher providing small group support in a variety of academic and behavioral areas. On average, schools in this study purchased an additional five professional/teacher level, and 12 support positions. Although the principals could not provide a specific cost for these positions as the salary is contingent on the individual's years of experience, degree, and current position in the district, they noted that the added positions accounted for 40-60% of their Title I budget.

**Table 11**

*Instructional Staff Support Positions*

<b>2019-2020 Instructional Staff Support Positions</b>						
	<i>Number of Full-Time Positions</i>					
	Classroom Teachers	Academic Intervention	Focus	ESOL	Reading Literacy	Instructional Assistants
<i>Andrews</i>	20	0.6	3.4	3.9	1.0	11.375
<i>Barranger</i>	27	0.8	1.4	2.4	1.0	14.875
<i>Crame</i>	29	1.0	5.7	7.6	1.5	7.975
<i>Douglas</i>	26	0.7	4.8	6.2	1.5	9.925
<i>Entemp</i>	36	1.2	7.9	9.7	1.5	8.625
<i>Frederick</i>	23	0.8	4.8	5.8	1.5	15.625
<i>Gonzola</i>	33	1.0	7.5	8.0	1.0	13.575

*N=number of full-time positions*

Four themes emerged from the four spending priorities categories of Human Capital, Academic Resources, Co-Curricular Experiences and Physiological Supports, developed through the principal interview responses. These themes include focus on *The People*, *The Foundation*,

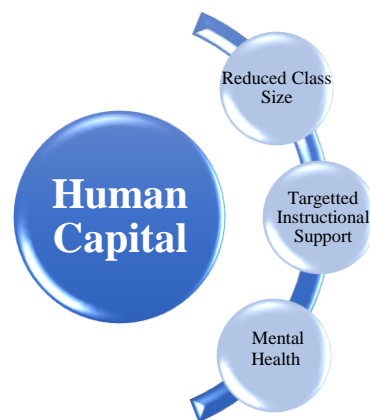
*The Landscape and The Soul.* In the next section each topic is explored in greater detail as a connection to research question three which asks, *how have these spending priorities impacted student achievement in Title I schools?*

## **Theme 1: The People – Human Capital**

The respondents touted human capital and resources as their top priority in their budgetary decisions. As noted in Figure 8, human resources encompass funding used to purchase additional staffing to perform duties that may include teaching to reduce class sizes, specialists to provide expertise to instructional staff, support professionals to instruct using targeted intervention curricula, and mental health providers to support the social emotional well-being of students.

**Figure 8**

*Components of Human Resources*



Participants noted that to effect changes in academic performance, expertise was needed in key areas. Mrs. Crews underscores this notion when she states,

*I did not have a math specialist and math was an area where our performance declined so I wanted to make sure that I could dedicate someone who could just spend their time on math and be an added staff developer in the area of math.*

Mr. Douds agreed as he shared his rationale for investing in human capital. The basis for his decisions centered on content knowledge coupled with relationships. He shared,

*Our instructional program took a hit because everybody (district wide) was so focused on technology they forgot that what was really important was the teacher to student connection. We have a really comprehensive intervention program that focuses primarily on reading. That is the cornerstone of our school academic support program. In addition to that because current relationships are so essential to us, I funded a Parent Community Coordinator to make sure that we had strong parent relationships.*

These findings are consistent with the research around human resources and student achievement. In Hemelt et al (2021) research “*Do Teacher Assistants Improve Student Outcomes? Evidence from School Funding Cutbacks in North Carolina,*” they found a positive correlation between teacher assistants and student performance in reading and math. The effects were most notable in high-poverty schools and among minority students. While principals in the study stressed the importance of staffing, they acknowledged that a great deal of attention and support was allocated to addressing the physiological needs of students.

## **Theme 2: The Foundation – Physiological Supports**

Based on the Theory of Motivation, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs outlines the five categories of need. This concept was first introduced by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper “A Theory of Human Motivation” and in a future book *Motivation and Personality*. The hierarchy suggests that the basic needs must be fulfilled prior to moving to other more advanced needs. The



goal is to get to self-actualization which is where realization of a person's potential and peak experiences occur. This phenomenon is vital to educational growth and development as students must believe in themselves to experience true success. Figure 9 illustrates the various levels of need.

**Figure 9**

*Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*



The lowest level of need is the physiological needs which include food, water, sleep, and shelter. In this study, these needs are summarized as the foundation as they are the basis for growth and development. While all the participants believe that the foundational needs are a priority, they also noted that many of these needs are met through external resources and do not impact their budget hence four of seven participants selected this area as their second highest priority. Despite the extrinsic support, some participants felt that more could be done and elected to allocate funds to those sources. Mr. Fick suggested:

*And those types of things that lead in our community food distribution networks, etc. We need to make it easier for our families to get the resources to take care of their basic needs.*

Concurrent with Maslow's Theory of Motivation and priorities for respondents, Burleson

and Thoron (2014) found that when basic needs are not being met for students, “other concerns will then take precedence over learning and achievement” (p. 1) In addition, Gosslinger’s (2019) paper on the impact of basic needs on student outcomes, noted that addressing the needs would also strengthen relationships between the school and families, thus fostering a home school connection.

Another area of deficit in low-income communities is access to progressive technology. The absence of these tools creates an uneven playing field. Substandard resources have oftentimes been touted as a contributing factor to the discrepancies in performance between students from low-income families and their peers. Principals in the study share this belief which will be discussed further in the next section.

### **Theme 3: The Landscape – Academic Resources**

Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has included many advancements in instructional practices and resources by which we use to facilitate teaching. One of the most notable changes was the progression in technology. One of the participants, Mr. Fick, stated that technology was his top priority while three participants ranked it as their third highest priority. When thinking about the years in question, some participants found that technological “gadgets,” such as smart boards were not a major factor in increasing student achievement while others considered the online curriculum supplements instrumental to their programming. When discussing smart boards, Mr. Douds stated,

*They outfitted every room with a smart board, and I mean it was great, but honestly it did not make a difference.*

On the contrary, Mr. Fick saw technology as a vehicle to overcome language barriers allowing for equal access among the different sections of the community.

*We bought everything that we could buy, we bought all the reading curriculums. We are able to buy whatever stuff they said they need. All of the online resources are invaluable, especially for our diverse community that needs access to things in multiple languages.*

Leaders in the field of communication science such as Jan A.G.M. Van Dijk (2020) call attention to the notion of digital divide. Digital divide is defined as the gap between those who do and those who do not have access to computers and the internet. In her research, she found that the inequity in distribution of digital literacy was more prominent in low-income communities and elders. Du, Havard, Sansing and Yu's (2004) work underscored Mr. Douds feelings. In their analysis of the Educational Longitudinal Study on Computer Use, they found little evidence to support a correlation between student performance and utilization of computers at home or in school. While there were mixed reviews in relation to the effectiveness of the distinct types of technology available, all participants agreed that with the onset of the Coronavirus, and the need to move their entire school to virtual learning, that technology quickly became the top priority over human resources.

With technology, students need the equipment, however equally important is the understanding and skill to operate the tool. As corroborated by the digital divide, the prominent difference between low-income households and medium to higher income families is the access to provide their children with opportunities that go beyond the academic day. Technology allows students expand their realm of understanding outside of the current setting. These moments build background knowledge that students can employ when learning through text.

#### **Theme 4: The Soul – Co-Curricular Experiences**

Human development is a summation of what we learn and experience. Academic achievement is often enhanced by the background knowledge that students bring with them. One

key point that separates the wealthy from the socioeconomically disadvantaged families is the ability to provide experiences for their children. As a fourth theme, participants believed that these experiences are essential to academic growth and achievement. Ms. Brown ranked these opportunities as the second highest financial investment priority for her school. She stated,

*We increased our after-school program offerings to ensure that every student has an opportunity to be a part of these programs.*

Although not rated as highly, Mr. Fick and Mr. Andrews concur.

*One of the things that we were able to do was to hire a community school liaison so that person could do a bunch of work with our partnerships (Fick)*

*A few years ago, when I first came, I wanted to provide opportunities for my students that we typically don't have so I started a STEM program and hired a STEM teacher and we put about \$10,000 into the program. (Andrews)*

An analysis of the increase in student performance in Title I schools coupled with the principal decision-making priorities that are congruent to research findings personifies the notion of school improvement. While Focus school budgets are not equivalent to that of Title 1 schools', comparable questions were asked of these building leaders to garner an understanding of their priorities in relation to spending. Like Title I schools, Focus schools have reduced staff student ratios in kindergarten through second grades. These schools also allocated one professional and one supporting services staff member to implement academic interventions. One area where these schools differ is in their budgets. Focus school principals do not receive additional funding beyond the state and local monetary resources. The difference in the schools' financial allocation ranges from \$250,000-\$300,000.

With limited funds to Focus school, principals' priorities varied from that of their counterparts. While focus group participants discussed the importance of their staff to the success

of their schools, they noted that due to budgetary constraints they concentrated on academic resources. For these leaders, academic resources were defined as culturally relevant text, technology and other materials that complemented the curriculum. It is critical to note that when focus group principals were asked “*If you had unlimited finances and no rules to follow, what would you do to increase the academic achievement of socio-economically disadvantaged students?*” all participants responded with adding staff to reduce class size across the grade levels.

At the center of school reform is the school-based leader, the principal. The principal’s role is to facilitate change that transforms their institution to ensure that students reach their academic promise. In this next level of analysis, the findings from the interviews and focus groups were connected to the theory of Transformational Leadership. Research question 4 asks, “*how have the processes, procedures, and outcomes of financial stewardship in Title I schools aligned to leadership practices?*” As Title I and Focus schools' budgets vary widely, an examination of the processes for making these financial decisions are a key consideration for comparison. Although financial resources did not align between each type of school, processes used to make decisions were parallel. Through the alignment of Title I and Focus school principals' responses to the four elements that characterize this style of supervision, an understanding of Transformational Leadership at work in high needs schools was uncovered.

## **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leaders are characterized by their ability to navigate the four key areas of *Individual Consideration, Intellectual Stimulation, Idealized Influence, and Inspirational Motivation* (Bass and Avolio, 1994). These elements exemplify focal points for moving an organization to peak performance. In this study, the principal’s decision-making priorities are linked to three characteristics of a transformational leader, Individual Consideration, Idealized

Influence, and Intellectual Stimulation, while the fourth element, Inspirational Motivation, is inclusive of the processes used to make decisions.

Individual consideration requires a leader to be thoughtful about the students and community of which he/she serves. To educate the whole child one must understand their current needs, past experiences, and overall understanding to move them forward in their academic journey. The principals in this study exemplified this level of insight as noted through the themes. In the priorities shared during the interviews, great care and consideration was given to ensuring that the student's basic needs, *The Foundation*, were addressed. While not having a profound impact on the budget due to external support, all principals agreed that it was paramount to tackle the physiological needs of students prior to focusing on academics. From an instructional standpoint, the themes of *The Soul* and *The Landscape* consider two major factors in a student's level of understanding, their past experiences, and current abilities. *The Soul* encompasses a student's background knowledge and opportunities available to them outside of the school day. These moments of continued growth create expertise beyond the classroom that can then be utilized to better understand the grade level content. In conjunction with prior knowledge, present levels of understanding are prudent to a student's academic development, *The Landscape*. Although specific to technology in this study, contemplation in relation to a student's academic abilities is essential to designing a program that meets them at their current performance level to provide strategies and supports to reach grade level standards.

The attributes of Intellectual Stimulation and Idealized Influence are underscored through the theme of *The People*. A critical responsibility for principals is hiring the right people who will support the realization of the vision. Teachers know their students best. The expertise of these professionals is critical to the process of deciding materials and interventions, in addition to implementation of these supports. The relational trust between a teacher and a student is vital in

engaging students into the learning process and instilling in students a belief that they can achieve at high levels.

While the themes generated from the principal's spending priorities envelop three characteristics of Transformational Leadership, the fourth element, Inspirational Motivation is the foundation of the process of decision making. Through collaboration and communication with key stakeholders, transformational leaders develop customized programs that follow their vision thus meeting the needs of the community in which they serve. During the interviews and focus groups participants were asked to "*Describe your decision-making style.*" In Table 12, their responses were aligned to the elements of Transformational Leadership. Sample responses from each group are captured under these four ideas: *Customization, Collaboration, Communication and Charisma.*

**Table 12***Decision Making Style Through Four Elements of Transformational Leadership*

School Type	Individual Consideration	Intellectual Stimulation	Inspirational Motivation	Idealized Influence
	<i>Customization</i>	<i>Collaboration</i>	<i>Communication</i>	<i>Charisma</i>
Title I	<i>"When my team says when the kindergarten team says hey, I want to try, we want to try to use Orton Gillingham for card our findings, I say that is a fun idea let us try it."</i>	<i>"So, I put it to my core team and say here's my rough idea around a decision and the work that." (Fick)</i>	<i>"Like the Center myself in my values and to think about what based on now like what's my vision for where we need to be based on where we are." (Fick)</i>	<i>"I would say that it has made me a getter leader and more fiscally responsible even with my local budget?"</i>  <i>"It has made me more frugal in a good way regarding how we spend but also really thinking about what the most useful way is to spend."</i>
Focus	<i>"There may be things that other people might be really important"</i>	<i>"I talk to my core team about my ideas and get their input then I speak to my leadership team and parent community"</i>	<i>"So, from there now think what I should, what can I do incrementally this year or over the next couple of years or just at the next meeting to improve our school"</i>	<i>"Holding yourself accountable for the money you're spending to make sure it is getting to the needs."</i>



Transformational leaders tailor their decisions to address the needs of the population in which they serve. The principals studied made selections based upon the needs of their respective communities. In addition, they drilled down to the micro-level to provide specific team and subgroup support when allocating funds. To get to this level of specificity, leaders collaborated with key stakeholders for input. While acknowledging the need for this high-level engagement from their community, principals ensured an alignment of decisions with their vision and expectations for the schools. The leader's behaviors exemplified a customized approach rooted in communication and collaboration. As one principal noted, "I talk to my core team about my idea and get their input then I speak to my leadership team and parent community."

Idealized Influence in transformational leaders is also synonymous with charisma. Charisma is defined as the ability to influence devotion among others through charm. Idealized influence is two-fold in the decision-making process. Idealized influence is demonstrating your moral and ethical fortitude in the face of your followers as they are guided to reach the end goal. In response to the statement "Describe your decision-making style," the participants highlighted their values, self-reflective processes, and personal accountability. These attributes underscore the premise of idealized influence.

Through the focus groups and individual Title 1 principal interviews the data yielded a connection among the spending priorities and decision-making processes with Transformational Leadership. The triangulation of these data points to the four key elements underscores this style of leadership in action in high needs schools. In the next section, these ideas are brought together to answer the research questions.

## **The Intersection**

As the foundation for this study, the research questions served as a guide to understanding leader spending priorities and budgetary decision-making processes in high poverty schools. In addition, these data points were triangulated to demonstrate the alignment of these procedures to Transformational Leadership. In the earlier section, I described in detail how the analysis data started to address the specifics within the research questions. Here I will summarize the findings from the examination of student assessment data, one-on-one interviews and focus groups.

### **RQ1: How have changes to the federal regulation Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, impacted elementary school principal spending decisions in Title I schools?**

The first question asked of interview participants was intended to gauge their understanding of the legislation that governs Title I schools. As the leadership in the office of presidency changed, the reauthorization of the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) ensued. With each iteration of the statute comes a difference in funding formulas and structures. Interviews with the principals and the office that oversees Title I schools for the district, revealed that while principals are not responsible for interpreting changes in legislation, the district office makes formulated decisions based on legislative changes and then provides allocations to principals that they use to meet the needs of their individual schools. The centralized department of Title I services provided specialists for each school. These specialists were tasked with understanding the expectations and allowances under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). As shared by the director, the intent of this structure was to allow principals to focus on the needs of their communities and how to enhance the current academic performance of their students. In summary, the change in the law did not seem to impact the calculus of principals' decision-making. The organization of the school system empowers

principals to make decisions on how to steward their financial resources to meet the needs of students.

**RQ2: In what ways have elementary school principals prioritized the use of federal, state, and local funds to increase access to high quality educational services to provide equitable opportunities to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households?**

The second research question sought to uncover the spending priorities and practices of Title I school principals. The manner in which funds are allocated is pivotal to the academic growth of students. Principals are tasked with distributing resources to best meet the needs of the school community. A one size fits all approach is not viable, however leaders have determined key resources needed for success. The participants' responses were categorized under four topics: Human Capital, Academic Resources, Co-Curricular Experiences and Physiological Supports.

Principals shared that their human capital was essential in improving student achievement. The additional staff were used to reduce class size, to provide specialized instruction in targeted areas and to implement social emotional services and interventions. While human resources were paramount to the instructional program when attending the brick-and-mortar facilities, technology became the most crucial resource during virtual learning as a result of the pandemic. Access to the digital world and lack technological of skills created another divide that exacerbated the achievement gap. Regardless of the additional barriers caused through learning in the virtual space, participants agreed that the relational connection and specialized instruction remained the single most critical factor in student academic growth.

The other two areas, Co-Curricular Experiences and Physiological Supports were lower in the list of importance related to budgetary expenditures. Experience encompassed after school and outreach support. This phenomenon was elevated based upon the background knowledge that

students bring to their learning environment. The absence of such opportunities creates a disconnect for students as they try to relate the topic of study to their world. While the idea of background knowledge is instrumental to learning, principals found that it was more crucial for students to have the fundamental skills provided through targeted interventions. The last category, Physiological Supports, included items such as basic needs. This support was often provided through collaborative partners representing the Department of Human and Health Services, thus not having an impact on the school budget.

### **RQ3: How have these spending priorities impacted student achievement in Title I schools?**

Student achievement is impacted by a variety of factors including environment, teacher efficacy, student abilities, for example. It is impossible to make a direct correlation between spending decisions and the academic achievement of students without controlling these and other variables. The student performance data highlighted in the study was used to examine the trends and important pivotal points where principals had to make modifications to how and what budgetary decisions were made. The data illustrates that as legislation changed, student performance initially declined, probably due to changes in testing instruments, then slightly moved in a positive direction. The academic data in connection with the participant responses to the interview questions and seminal research underscores the notion that funding distributions influence achievement. Having funds to impact human resources and provide additional academic resources is crucial to meeting the needs of students from low SES households. This idea is discussed more in depth later in Chapter 5 as I look at the implications for future research.

**RQ4: How have the processes, procedures, and outcomes of financial stewardship in Title I schools characterized principal's leadership practices?**

Transformational leaders are the nucleus for school improvement. To achieve educational equity within schools, more specifically Title I schools, these institutions must be led by an individual that can change the trajectory of a student's life but also influence stakeholders to share in the vision. This shared commitment to academic excellence and the belief that students can achieve at high levels are key ingredients for growth.

The principals interviewed for this study embodied the attributes of a transformational leader: *Individual Consideration, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation, and Idealized Influence*. The participants begin their decision-making process with their personal values and perceptions of what their school could be. Their charisma and authenticity attracted others to follow their lead. These attributes are the foundation for idealized influence. Once the vision was established a customized program was developed through collaboration and communication. These innovative practices were employed to move the schools toward achieving educational equity for all students.

Two distinct groups of leaders participated in the study: Title I and Focus School principals. While each group of leaders shepherd institutions with high poverty rates, their funding allocations are significantly different due to the percentage of socioeconomically impacted students attending each school. Due to this difference spending priorities differ; however, their decision-making processes are parallel. At the core of these principals' structures are collaboration, communication, customization, and charisma.

## **Summary**

This chapter focused on bridging the connection between Title I and Focus school principal decision-making priorities and practices, student achievement in Title I schools and Transformational Leadership. I analyzed longitudinal state academic performance data in literacy and math to assess trends in growth or regression during the two iterations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This data was coupled with interviews with Title I principals to learn about budgetary priorities where four themes emerged: The People, The Foundation, The Soul, and The Landscape. During the interviews and subsequent focus groups with principals from Focus schools, decision making style and processes were explored. The analysis of the student achievement data, interviews and focus groups were combined to determine the alignment with the four components of Transformational Leaders. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the conclusions drawn based upon the interrelatedness of Transformational Leadership, student achievement data and principal decision-making habits.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the connection between principal strategic decisions related to spending priorities and the processes used to make these selections coupled with the influence of these judgements on student achievement in Title I schools. The data was analyzed to determine the alignment of these procedures employed by principals to Transformational Leadership. In addition, the decision-making processes utilized by Focus school principals were used as a comparison model. The academic performance data coupled with Title I and Focus school principal responses were then aligned with the four elements of Transformational Leadership to highlight the role of *Idealized Influence*, *Inspirational Motivation*, *Intellectual Stimulation*, and *Individual Consideration*, in achieving educational equity.

Educational equity is a complex phenomenon that begins with an understanding of justice and fairness. The history of the United States of America is filled with systems that tout segregation, separate but equal, and privileged, and non-privileged. The fiber of our nation is comprised of social constructs such as classism and socioeconomic status which are in direct contrast to the notion of equity. The larger systems of government continue to be marked by the social and racial unrest and injustices which are biproducts of these inequitable structures. As a part of the larger system, public education also continues to be plagued with student achievement results that are predictable by the socioeconomic status of families despite legislation and decades of work to eliminate the achievement gap. According to the World Data on Education Report (2006), the fundamental goal of the educational system is “the establishment of a quality education that will enable all children to achieve their highest potential as individuals, serve effectively as citizens of a free society, and successfully compete in a changing global marketplace.” Given the current achievement gap in the educational system, we are far from reaching this goal. It is

important that leaders, like the principals in this study, continue to work to provide an education where all children can succeed.

According to Bergen, Zuijen, Bishop, & Jong (2016) a common predictor of student achievement is the socioeconomic status of the family. There is a direct correlation between early development of literacy and math skills and the home learning environment. Children from low SES households typically do not have access to language rich written materials such as books, therefore enter school at a deficit compared to their peers of the same age. (Orr, 2003) The lack of development of early language skills such as phonological awareness, vocabulary, and oral language, coupled with the absence of instructional and monetary resources generates an achievement gap prior to students entering the public school system. This gap is more prevalent in Title I schools as compared to other comprehensive elementary institutions. The responsibility of eradicating this disparity is shared among the federal government, state educational agency, LEA, and the principal of each school. While there is shared accountability, the principal as the school-based leader has been found to have a profound impact on student achievement (Herrington and Nettles, 2007; Leithwood, K.S. and Seashore-Louis, K., 2012; Corcoran, R. P., 2017).

Given the context of the prevalent achievement gap among students from low SES households and the impact of principals on school improvement, I sought to answer the following questions in this study.

- How have changes to the federal regulation Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, impacted elementary school principal spending decisions in Title I schools?
- In what ways have elementary school principals prioritized the use of federal, state, and local funds to increase access to high quality educational services to provide equitable opportunities to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households?
- How have these spending priorities impacted student achievement in Title I schools?



- How have the processes, procedures, and outcomes of financial stewardship in Title I schools characterized principal's leadership practices?

Chapter 1 began with a historical exploration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which sought to provide equity in public education. The intent of the original legislation and the subsequent eight reauthorizations of this law to include additional student groups and accountability measures laid the groundwork for the significance of educational equity and the importance of this study. With many different measures in place to provide additional resources to schools in low SES areas and mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of these supports, on average the achievement gap persists between Title I schools and other comprehensive elementary schools. I presented the theoretical framework that provided a foundational understanding of equity rooted in the theory of justice. This notion was then extended to education equity. Within the conceptual framework the idea of Transformational Leadership was also introduced to capture the attributes necessary to effect change. As this study is examining a moment in time for one school district, I identified potential limitations as well as my position within the context of the research. Key vocabulary terms were also defined.

In Chapter 2, I took an in-depth look into the evolution of Title I programs and defined comparability. This phenomenon is essential to understanding the rationale for the reauthorization of ESEA. The theoretical framework is expounded upon to deepen the understanding of the root of educational equity through the premise of Karl Marx's ideas of fairness integrated with Leventhal's justice and judgement model. (Marx, K., 1976; Leventhall, G.S., 1977) Adding to this body of research I explored current studies that analyzed the impact of school funding on student achievement and the influence of leaders on the attainment of academic outcomes. The synthesis of these viewpoints highlighted a void in research and further confirmed the need to closely

examine the intersection of leader decisions and funding allocations, and analysis of leadership practices at the school level for Title I schools.

In Chapter 3 I discussed the research methodology utilized in this study. In the design I examined Title I schools in a large Mid Atlantic school district. I identified the sources of data and how each piece of data fits into the schema. Principals were offered an opportunity to participate in the study if they met the criterion of leading a Title I or Focus School. Guidelines included being a part of a school that met the FARMs rate for identification as a Title I or Focus school and having led that school from 2011-2019. Data collection occurred in three phases. In Phase 1, an analysis of student academic performance results on state assessments in Reading and Mathematics during the years of 2011-2019 was used to demonstrate trends in achievement over the 10 year span of time between the two reauthorizations. The changes in scores were noted and framed the context in relation to modifications in testing procedures along with implementation of a standardized objectives, Common Core. There were 35 schools in the Title I network during the period of interest. Of this group, 19 were eligible to participate based upon the standards set. Principals were then invited on a voluntary basis to participate in the study through one-on-one interview. Phase 2 involved virtually recording the one on one structured interviews with seven Title I principals. In Phase 3, two virtual focus groups of five principals representing Focus schools convened to answer preset questions. The data from the one-on-one interviews with principals was analyzed. The findings were compared to the analysis of focus group responses. Information gleaned from these groups was then aligned to the four elements of Transformational Leadership.

In Chapter 4, the results from the key data sources were reported, and analyzed. Each layer of information was independently examined then brought together to find the interconnectedness among the participants' responses, student achievement data and Transformational Leadership. The quantitative data served to underscore the effectiveness of principal decision-making

procedures and priorities during times when the leaders needed to pivot from one legislation to another. Finally, the principal's practices were compared to elements of Transformational Leadership to identify the interrelatedness between these actions and the theory. Conclusions were ascertained from these connections.

In this chapter, I discuss the implications of this study for current organizational school leadership practices, future research, and professional development opportunities. The discussion examines the themes that emerged from the spending priorities, attributes of principals' leadership for Title I schools and how these elements connect to achieve educational equity in schools. Given the context of a global pandemic during the data collection phase of this research, I highlight the impact of COVID 19 in relation to participant responses and pivots in principal decisions.

### **Impact of COVID-19**

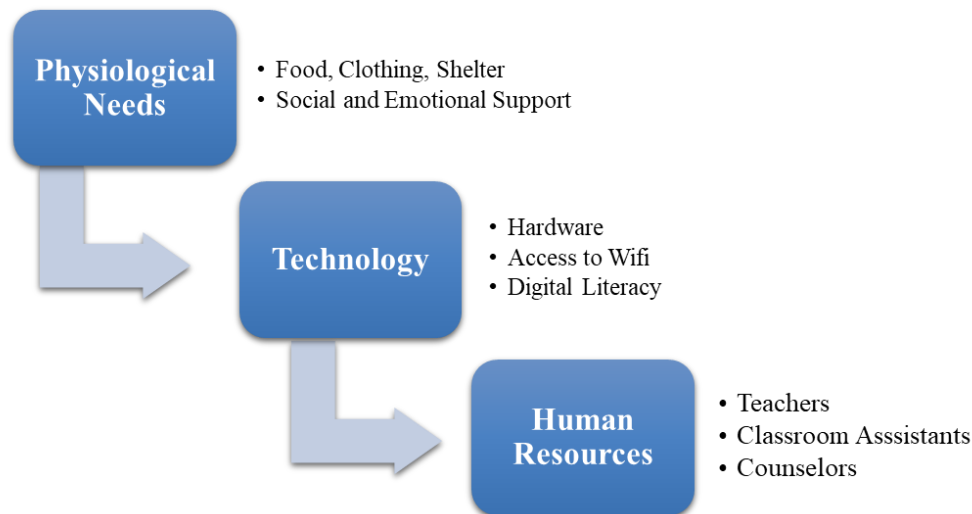
In 2019, COVID 19 changed our world. The onset of this global health crisis affected instructional delivery and required a swift shift to alternative virtual and online teaching. The instructional model utilized exposed and exacerbated the inequities that already exist within and beyond the classroom. Within the school district some schools had one-to-one computer devices as that was how the principal allocated funding while other principals concentrated on other non-technology areas of need. Moving to full virtual instruction left many students and families without the resources needed to continue students' academic pursuits. This issue was compounded by the lack of Wi-Fi in homes throughout the district. Education became inaccessible for some students; however, this impact was more prevalent in low SES communities specifically students attending Title I school.

While Title I principals overwhelmingly selected human resources as their top priority for spending, they also noted the pandemic required them to shift their thinking to ensure access and

opportunity for all students. Principals recognized that psychological needs (food, water, and safety), as noted by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, moved to the top of the priority lists as many parents were unable to work and students depended on the schools for their meals. While the entire state was in lockdown, a plan was developed to disseminate food, and hygienic resources in the short term. Once it was evident that this would be a long-lasting event, a sustainable solution was created for the period when students were unable to access the school building. Another system was created to distribute the technological tools necessary for the students to engage in learning. These tools included chrome books, textbooks, and Wi-Fis. This dissemination required concerted and collaborative efforts from the many departments within the system as some schools are not within walking distance of a student's residence. Within the technology plan there were targeted actions to increase digital literacy. Although students had access to these tools in school, they were not the foundation of instruction and there were always staff on hand to assist. In this new phase of learning students would have to navigate these tools independently or rely on an older sibling who may also be in school. To that end, the third priority, human resources, was key. Principals had to repurpose current staff, add additional support, and key into student's social emotional needs. Figure 10 highlights the change in priorities during the initial phases of the pandemic.

**Figure 10**

*Title I Principal Leadership in Addressing the Pandemic*



During the interview and focus group process, the participants were preparing their school staff and communities for a return to buildings for face-to-face learning, in addition to offering hybrid and continued virtual learning. The schools had offered a hybrid model for a small subset of students from March until June. However, in July principals were planning to reacclimate their entire student body and staff to the schools after an 18-month hiatus. Again, the budget shifted to prioritizing social emotional and well-being of staff and students. As noted in Figure 10, principals and their staff were tasked with rebuilding stamina; developing coping skills due to anxiety over the new variants of the virus, loss of loved ones, newfound separation from parents and overall mental health support caused by trauma in the home.

The impact of COVID 19 is far reaching and still prevalent across society. Schools are conquering learning loss coupled with developmental concerns as students' social prowess was compromised due to lack of interaction with peers. Social emotional learning remains at the forefront as the pandemic is now becoming an endemic. This added layer of strain to Title I

principal's budget further exacerbates the achievement gap between students from low SES households and their peers. Title I principals are spending more money on human capital, counselors, social workers, and community coordinators to address these needs so that students are in a mental space to learn.

## **Discussion**

While COVID 19 has highlighted even more the inequities that exist within public education, one cannot ignore the long-standing achievement gap that has prevailed in Title I schools. With the eight reauthorizations of federal legislation, there continues to be a significant disparity in academic performance among students from low SES households and their peers. Although in general these discrepancies have existed for many years, some individual schools have been successful in moving the academic attainment of students from low SES households forward despite the external challenges they face. Understanding how the leadership practices of Title I school principals impacts school reform is vital to moving student achievement.

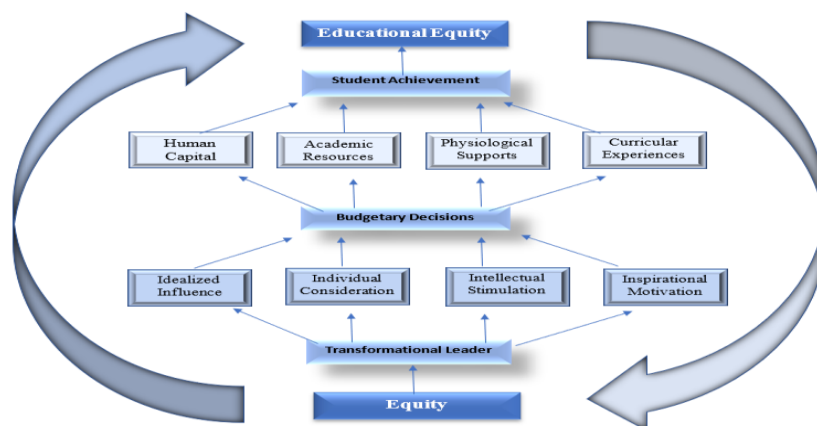
The word “transform” is synonymous with change, alter, modify and reshape. In the context of this study, leaders in Title I schools are tasked with altering the current landscape for the students they serve. These leaders must convert the institutional practices and current teaching methodology to align with the needs of their community. The principal is the change agent whose role is to create equitable opportunities for all students so that each child reaches their fullest potential. The Conceptual Framework, Figure 11, conveys the role of the transformational leader (principal) in making budgetary decisions that positively impact student achievement thus leading to educational equity.

Bass (1985) characterizes a transformational leader as someone who embodies these four elements: *Individual Consideration*, *Intellectual Stimulation*, *Inspirational Motivation*, and *Idealized Influence*. It is with these components that a leader can affect change within their

organization. This study sought to demonstrate that the leaders in the Title I schools of interest personified the idea of a transformational leader through their financial stewardship and priorities. The results of these decisions are highlighted by the state math and literacy academic achievement data. The math and literacy proficiency rates by year illustrated in Table 7 and 8, in Chapter 4, underscored the impact of change in testing instruments and legislation on student achievement. During the early years of NCLB student proficiency rates in both content areas were steadily above 75%, from NCLB to ESSA there was an average of a 15% drop in performance in math while the variance in literacy was approximately 30%. Part of the plunge could be attributed to the implementation dip (Fullan, 2020). Regardless of the rationale for the deficit, leaders needed to pivot their practices to address the change. After the initial implementation of ESSA, Title I leaders began to see nominal yet positive gains in performance with an average of 5-10% gains from 2016-2019. The process of how this type of positive change in school reform occurs is illustrated by the Conceptual Framework in Figure 11.

**Figure 11**

*Conceptual Framework*



The foundation of school improvement is equity. Leaders in this study personified passion, humility, and a willingness to act first and ask for forgiveness later. Their passion was centered on the desire to provide a level playing field for the students they serve. These principals saw it as their mission, whether through past firsthand experiences as a student or through their moral compass, they lead to ensure that all students reach their academic promise and can compete in the global market. Their understanding and commitment to equity was at the core of their vision and the basis for school reform. In conjunction with the passion for the work, Title I principals in the study each possessed a humble spirit. Realizing that they did not have all of the answers, they sought out the expertise of key stakeholders, teacher specialists, community leaders, for example, in designing innovative, individualized programs that met each student at his/her current performance level and moved students toward grade level proficiency. The principals epitomized the tenets of Transformational Leadership, *Idealized Influence*, passion/vision; *Individual Consideration*, innovation; *Intellectual Stimulation*, collaboration and *Inspirational Motivation*, communication. These leaders used their power of influence, synergic spirit, and commitment to alter the academic trajectory of this vulnerable population of students.

While these attributes of a leader are vital to school reform the impact happens when these elements are employed through processes and practices. Specific to this study, is what happens between the end goal of educational equity as measured by student achievement and the transformational leader. In examining the monetary support of school improvement, the research questions served to bridge gap between leader actions and the forces that influence the academic achievement of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. In the next section each question is listed with a discussion of how these phenomena interact to reach equity in public education.



*(RQ1) How have changes to the federal regulation Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, impacted elementary school principal spending decisions in Title I schools?*

I was perplexed by the answer to this question as it was the foundation to the original design of this study. The historical overview of literature revealed that the purpose of the many reauthorizations was to eradicate the achievement gap and provide comparable opportunities for all students, with a focus on subgroups that have been historically disenfranchised. Thus, the new statute would serve as the catalyst for increased student achievement, however principals have little influence on how money is allocated to the local schools. It makes sense that for these laws to be effective the people responsible for executing the regulations and who are closest to the students must have a thorough understanding of the design, intent, and updates to the guidelines. In the district examined in this study, this level of specificity was confined to the district level personnel. Principals felt that although they were not well versed in every aspect of the statute, they had the information needed to make financial decisions for their school community. While the level of collaboration regarding distribution of allocations was not present between the district and principal, within each school community, the leaders established partnerships with staff and families to garner input in making fiscal decisions. For a district of this size, this approach to financial management is effective given the complexities of the role of the principal.

*(RQ2) In what ways have elementary school principals prioritized the use of federal, state, and local funds to increase access to high quality educational services to provide equitable opportunities to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households?*

*(RQ3) How have these spending priorities impacted student achievement in Title I schools?*

These two questions work in conjunction to highlight the spending priorities of Title I principals and the impact on student achievement. While the nature of this study does not lend

itself to making a direct correlation between spending decisions and student achievement, the student academic achievement data illustrates nominal gains over the two periods of interest, NCLB and ESSA. The data revealed an implementation dip due in part to the change in assessment instrument resulting principals needing to pivot in their thinking around student preparation, instructional practices and supports. This level of understanding was crucial to school reform and served as a basis for prioritizing resource allocations.

The spending priorities of the principals focused on human capital, Co-Curricular Experiences, academic resources, and physiological support. Human capital was the highest priority as these additional staff members were used for targeted support in the areas of curriculum, social and emotional services. Having these concentrated reinforcements allowed schools to meet students where they were and move them to grade level proficiency. Structures that do not have this level of specificity rely on a one size fit all model that result in students falling through the cracks (Baldner, M., 2021). Human capital works within the framework of the other three priorities. In implementing programs that support academic deficits, an expert in that area would need to facilitate the learning. In conjunction with these academic aids are the experiences outside of the classroom that shape student understanding of how the curriculum fits into the larger societal context. In the *Every Experience Matters* study, Malone (2008) found that experiences outside the classroom helps to build a child's whole development and helps them to make sense of what they are learning within the classroom (Malone, 2008). While physiological support was also in the top four priorities, these needs are addressed through external partnerships that did not directly impact the budget provided to Title I principals.

***(RQ4) How have the processes, procedures, and outcomes of financial stewardship in Title I schools characterized principal's leadership practices?***

Research question 4 examined how these processes and procedures connected to leadership practices. The foundation of the school reform work from Title I and Focus principals was collaboration and innovation. They provided their staff with latitude to make decisions around curriculum and instruction that would best meet the needs of the specific student population in which they serve. These leaders understood that what works for one grade level may not work for another and that people who would have the most insight into what that “thing” is would be the practitioners. The teachers and support professionals who deliver services to students and parents are key stakeholders in developing a robust academic and social emotional program.

The responses to the interview and Focus group questions provided great insight into the thought processes of these transformational leaders as well as elevated areas of growth in current practices. Through their vision of effective instruction that meets the needs of the community in which they served; these leaders used their collaborative skills to develop innovative programs that were customized for their communities. In the next section, the findings from this research are used to note upgrades in practice that will enhance the effectiveness of leaders within high impacted schools.

### **Implications**

Equity is the state of being just and fair. In the educational arena, equity is providing students with the tools and resources necessary to reach their academic promise. These supports may differ depending upon the needs of an individual or the school community. This research sought to examine changes in regulations, financial practices, and leadership as catalysts for increased student achievement. While all these driving forces may influence student performance,

the impact of some is more significant than others. An analysis of the student performance data and interviews yielded a richer understanding of leader priorities, processes, and best practices. However, due to the lack of knowledge of the principals as it relates to the intricacies of the changes to federal legislation, the reauthorizations to ESEA did not influence student achievement as the changes were not considered during the budgetary decision-making process.

While a direct correlation between spending decisions and student achievement cannot be made based upon the data analyzed, there are implications that will enhance current practices. There are four key revelations that can be gleaned from the findings.

1. *School reform is not policy driven but directed and achieved by the people*

This study found that changes in regulations are not the cornerstone of school reform. School reform is impacted by the people. The leader and the followers. The leader's vision, processes for determining budgetary priorities work in collaboration with staff, teachers, and community members to improve student performance. Given this context, time and resources must be invested in curating that practitioners understand the landscape in which the students live in addition to strategies and structures to help students to reach their academic prowess. The organizational chart for the district in this study includes specialist positions who are responsible for ensuring that principals are allocating funds in alignment with the legal requirements under ESSA. This practice took the burden of understanding the nuances of the law away from the principals so that they could focus their attention on their staff, students, and community. With the complexities of the laws, principals and school-based leaders cannot effectively concentrate on their schools while checking boxes to ensure spending alignment with legislation. An effective transformational leader creates a vision around educational equity then deploys resources to carry out that vision. Practices,

such as this, support administration and accountability of work then allow principals to focus on the big picture are vital to the success of schools.

2. *Educational equity is achieved through individualized systematic support that directly addresses student and community needs.*

Reform is the action or process of transforming an institution or practice. The key point in the definition is the singular verbs and nouns used. Educational equity is not achieved through a one size fits all approach. Noted through the interviews and focus groups, leaders (principals) emphasized the unique attributes of the community, students, and how to provide the best learning environment to meet needs. However, COVID-19 and the timeframe for this research emphasized that environmental and social factors also impact school improvement. For example, during the time of this research, racial unrest was on the rise and highly publicized and in addition, the world was experiencing a pandemic. These two situations had a profound impact on the budgetary priorities of the principals as well as their processes for decision-making. To that end at the district and local school level, a root cause analysis of the barriers to learning is a crucial step before developing a plan for improvement. This information coupled with the knowledge and abilities of the staff are the formula for achieving an equitable system.

3. *District leaders and hiring managers should examine hiring practices with a specific focus on the types of leaders that might fit well with Title I schools.*

Educational equity begins with a transformational leader. A transformational leader employs the tools to alter the current state of a school which is school reform. The data is clear, and compelling that students in Title I schools are not performing on par with their

peers in comprehensive elementary schools. To eradicate this injustice, changes in processes and priorities are required. A transformational leader who personifies the elements of Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation, Idealized Influence, and Individual Consideration embodies the attributes necessary to facilitate this change.

The leaders in this study epitomized passion, humility, and the ability to take initiative. Principals shared that they often ask for forgiveness instead of permission. They exemplified the element of Idealized Influence as their firsthand experiences as students and leaders helped to craft a vision by which they used their charisma and influence to gain followership. These principals created customized programs for their students and schools through collaborative processes with key stakeholders. Hiring managers and district leaders should consider incorporating interview questions such as: *Describe your decision-making process; What are key considerations and processes for implementing change within a school; How do you describe your leadership behavior/style?*

4. *Enhancements to leadership development programs that focus on the specific school communities are imperative for school improvement to occur.*

Leadership development programs within districts need to be enhanced to provide a deeper understanding of how diverse learners and communities require different approaches, resources, and leaders. These programs serve as a complement to the certificated programs offered at the college and university level which tend to be generic in nature. However, enhancements at the college, district, and school site-based levels are also needed. At the collegiate and district level, course work and training opportunities should include a comprehensive study of leadership style, and practices specifically targeted at schools with

a high FARMS rate. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) framework are grounded in equity, and community care for students, in addition to the fundamental professional capacity of school-based leaders: vision/mission; operation/management and curriculum/instruction. While leadership development programs offer high level instruction in the area of supervision, the decision-making processes and procedures required at Title I schools are far different from that of other comprehensive schools and are the foundational of PSEL. The complexities of balancing a budget that is often five to six times that of a traditional school require explicit instruction, procedures, and analysis. If equity is the goal, these factors must be included in preparatory programs and professional development opportunities for new and current principals.

Within the school setting, time and attention needs to be devoted to teaching practitioners how to establish the vision and collaborate with key stakeholders to determine a plan that supports student learning. Current global strategies and practices do not prepare principals for the mental, emotional, and physical strain of working in these highly impacted institutions. In 1998, principals reported high levels of satisfaction with their work despite the demands and time commitment (Doud & Keller, 1998). As the needs of students, staff and families increased the responsibilities for school-based leaders soared, causing an increase in the attrition of principals (Boyce, J., & Bowers, A. J., 2016). Schools became much more than an educational institution. In Title I schools, families rely on the school to provide instruction for students and wrap around services (counseling, medical and dental care, financial support). In addition to collaborating with families and staff, leaders are charged with partnering with social services, police, religious institutions, and other agencies to ensure that families have what they need for students to be ready to learn each

day. The skillset needed for this concerted effort requires more than the standard professional development currently offered.

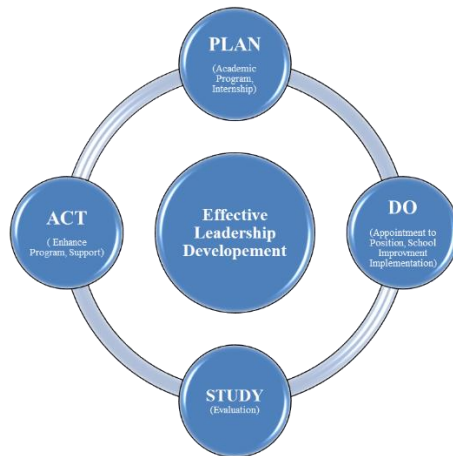
Pre, during and post development and training programs are essential to the success of principals. The Plan-Do-Study-Act method of change, noted in Figure 12, is an invaluable tool for effectively leading school reform. Current leadership development programs provide the academic concept, however, miss the opportunity to institute continuous growth for leaders. An element to add to this program experience is a multi-year internship program within the school setting of interest, Title I. Instituting this level of training will provide candidates with the full scope of the academic year. School improvement planning typically occurs the year prior to implementation of any plan. A potential principal would need to be involved in that work to comprehend the range of decision making necessary to effect change. The *Do and Study* parts in this framework occur after being appointed to the principal position. During this time, the leader is carrying out the school improvement strategies with the support and guidance of district leaders. The assistance of specialists well versed in the Title I regulations and policies as well as a consulting principal are crucial to ongoing development of the leader and affords time to be spent on carrying out the vision. In addition, the processes and procedures are evaluated based upon impact on student achievement, and community and staff climate. The final phase, *Act*, takes this feedback to make modifications to programs and future support.



**Figure 12**

*Plan-Do-Study-Act Method of Change*

(Taylor, M. J., McNicholas, C., Nicolay, C., Darzi, A., Bell, D., & Reed, J. E., 2014)



The global pandemic has brought about a greater need within the leadership development program. While the health crisis, COVID-19, brought to the forefront the racial and economic inequities in our schools and communities, crisis management was highlighted as school-based leaders were forced to pivot in their thinking to address the social, emotional, and instructional needs of students. Principals were pushed to prioritize care and well-being of their staff, students, and community over accountability measures. Simultaneously, leaders needed to provide students with free and appropriate public education (FAPE). This level of crisis management from a societal context is a crucial part of preparing principals to lead in the educational system.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study provided insight into the spending priorities for Title I principals, how practices by these leaders align with Transformational Leadership and the process employed to make

budgetary decisions. When analyzing the longitudinal student performance data there exists a slight increase in achievement among the schools for the periods studied. This improvement may in part be attributed to the budgetary priorities, however the level of analysis needed for a direct correlation is not the focus of this research.

Seminal studies explore one or two facets of the spending process that can influence student achievement, however, fall short of delving deeper into the specific intricacies around these decisions. Specifically, the field of academia has a void in studies that investigate the direct correlation and intersectionality among the diversity of staff, spending decisions and student achievement. Two different approaches, qualitative and/or quantitative, could enhance research in this area.

From a quantitative standpoint, a study that examines the correlation between the diversity of the staff selected as compared to the student body coupled with the categories of spending and the impact on student achievement would provide vital information that supports the attainment of school improvement goals. Although this level of research would require the collection of data over multiple years to ensure consistency in cohort groups of students and principal, this current study can serve as a springboard as the categories of spending have been defined. In addition, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which measures a broad range of leadership approaches, could also be employed. This psychological inventory is comprised of 45 items that examine leadership style and outcomes. The MLQ measures three leadership methods: transformational, transactional and passive/avoidance, developed by Bruce J. Avolio and Bernard M. Bass in 1990. The assessment includes two parts: self-rating and input from supervisors, subordinates, and others. While this study took an inverted approach to aligning leadership budgetary priorities and decision-making processes to explore how principals in the Title I schools

are transformational leaders, another perspective is to use the MLQ as a part of the selection process for participation or as a data point to use in exploring leadership behaviors.

In the qualitative arena, staff, student, and parent voice data would be an asset to understanding the full scope of the impact of these leaders' decisions. This perception data would provide greater understanding of the level of collaboration involved in the decision-making process. Other areas of focus for future research could include: an investigation into the decision-making practices and priorities of Title I principals who are engaged in the nuances of the federal legislations and an examination of trends in spending and leader practices and procedures across varying types of schools (Title I, Comprehensive). The enlargement of the data set to include additional participants in each type of school studied or more principals in general would allow for disaggregation of the data set based upon a variety of factors to include race/ethnicity, years of experience, geographical area, for example. In addition, the inclusion of divergent perspectives would provide alternate approaches to address school reform as a “one size fits all” technique is not effective.

## **Conclusion**

As a former Title I principal intern, Focus school leader for over five years and a product of Title I schools, I often pondered what was the “thing” that separated students from those who make it out of their current circumstances and those who continue the generational poverty that plagues our society. Seminal research has established different phenomena that impact student achievement. However, there is a lack of studies that get to the micro level of examining principal specific spending priorities in Title I schools. Although this study fails to establish a direct correlation between spending priorities and student academic performance, it highlights through

the priorities and processes utilized by Title I principals, key characteristics of the type of Transformational Leadership needed for school reform to occur.

This study touted macro understandings as our educational system attempts to provide equity through its reform efforts. Improvement within this arena begins with transformational leaders who guide highly impacted schools toward equity. These reform attempts are not driven by policy as the laws are a mechanism for accountability but by the people. A focus on human capital which includes staffing a transformational leader as the catalyst for school improvement. The selection of the right personnel to address critical need areas as well as utilizing this staff in the decision-making process is vital to the success of a school. Other priority areas gleaned from this study were Co-Curricular Experiences, Academic Resources and Physiological Support.

Chang (2018) wrote, “Giving school leaders flexibility over their resources isn’t what drives change; it’s what leaders do with those resources that drives change.” At a time of an economic and educational crisis in the United States where there is a shortage of school personnel, the country is in financial distress as we recover from a global pandemic and an increasing achievement gap, it is imperative that school leaders are strategic in completing their fiduciary responsibilities. All students need the highest level of services to recover from the learning loss over the past 18 months. Even more paramount is the need to ensure that every decision made on behalf of this disenfranchised group of students, socioeconomically disadvantaged, yields positive returns in relation to their academic, social, and emotional well-being.

## CHAPTER 6: EPILOGUE

The United States of America was established on the principles of equality, and liberty for all however the systems and structures that continue to exist to disenfranchise people of color. The economy was built on the backs of Africans stolen from their native land to a life of enslavement that resulted in the creation of wealth for Europeans. For 246 years under the guise of a United States, Africans were denied the fundamental freedoms of religion, education, acquisition of land, to name a few. Even after the passing of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment, which abolished slavery, legislation existed to systematically exclude and suppress communities of color. The effects of these initial constructs have become part of the fabric of policies that exist today and require a *Call to Action* if educational equity is to be achieved.

Although this study focused on school reform beginning with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), the disfunction of the American educational system began long before. After the abolishment of slavery, under the Separate but Equal doctrine, states were permitted to have segregated facilities, services, schools, employment, transportation, public accommodations, for example. One aspect of the tenet was true: these facilities were separate but far from equal. While white students received newer school buildings, textbooks, and supplies, minority pupils were taught in dilapidated spaces with subpar equipment and used academic resources. In addition, the black schools were overcrowded, often having multiple grade levels taught in a one room facility (Reardon, S. F., & Owens, A., 2014).

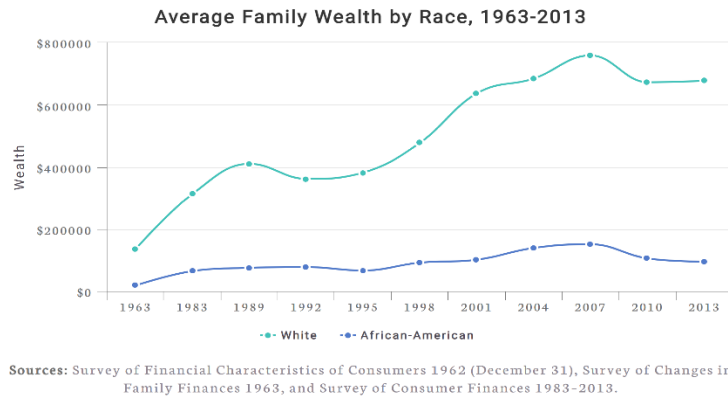
Beyond the school building and resources, instructors in white institutions had more formal schooling and training than those in black schools. During the Jim Crow era, many minority students did not continue their education beyond the primary grades. Students in these schools were taught to prepare them for agriculture and domestic work. In the 1900s, only two percent of

the black population were working in a professional setting: teachers, ministers, and doctors. In 1931 when the Stanford Achievement Test was administered to a large group of black teachers, it was discovered that the average score as compared to the national level was equivalent to ninth grade. Black educators were teaching at levels beyond their own capacity of understanding which resulted in a cycle of achievement deficits prior to “school reform.”

With an educational system established to marginalize a community, the labor market emulated that structure. The wage disparity between minority teachers and their white peers was huge. In the 1941 NAACP pamphlet entitled, “Teacher Salaries in Black and White”, it was noted that on average black teachers earned 40 to 50 percent of what white teacher were paid. After the landmark decision, *Brown vs Board of Education* of 1954, the effects of the education system on the economy continued to exist. According to the Jim Crow: Now & Then report, “in 1963, the average wealth of white families was \$117, 000 higher than the average wealth of African Americans compared to \$500,000, seven times the wealth by 2013”. Factors that influence this discrepancy include the economic and education systems. These two systems work in tandem to create a structure that disenfranchises the black community. Figure 13 highlights the economic impact of these social constructs over time.

**Figure 13**

*Average Family Wealth by Race over 40-year Period*

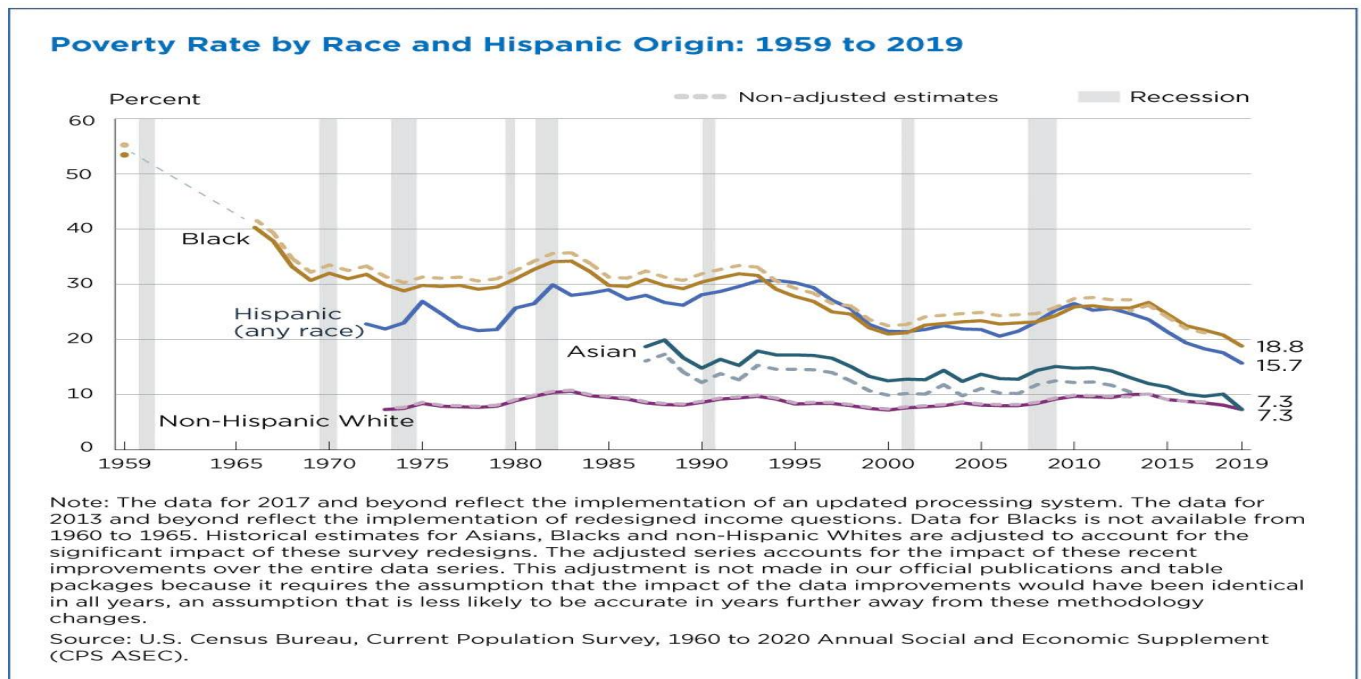


<https://cibonayrae.github.io/jimcrow/economic.html>

Also worth noting is the discrepancy in poverty rates for minorities and their white counterparts. The US Census reports a poverty rate of 18.8% for Black Americans and 15.7% for Hispanic Americans whereas the rate in 2019 for White and Asian Americans was 7.7% respectfully. During this time period the poverty rate for Black and Hispanic Americans was double that of their peers with the national rate being 10.5%. Figure 14 illustrates this fact, while also highlighting the economic gap that has persisted over time.

**Figure 14**

*US Poverty Rate by Race*



<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/09/poverty-rates-for-blacks-and-hispanics-reached-historic-lows-in-2019.html>

The cycle of poverty is exacerbated as education is funded through a tax base system. It makes sense that communities with lower tax revenue would not have the same level of resources as those with higher income earnings. ESEA was established to eradicate these differences and close the achievement gap, however, has fallen short of reaching this goal. The digital divide is an area where we see these discrepancies in resources playing out. The digital divide is the gap between those who have access to technology and those who do not. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households were unable to participate in school due to instruction being offered virtually and families lack of or inadequate internet service. As school officials tried desperately to provide students with the hardware, computers, laptops and WIFI devices, the infrastructure of their dwellings and/or space to engage in school were not



conducive to learning. Therefore, despite the public policy and structures in place to promote equity, the preexisting economic systems increased the achievement gap even further.

Despite the changes in legislation, the United States educational system continues to operate in a manner that is separate but equal. The divide is socioeconomic with a racial underpinning. The impact of the laws, practices, and beliefs from slavery to the Jim Crow era and beyond are also prevalent in the justice system. The school to prison pipeline is one example of this level of influence. The school to prison pipeline describes the relationship between school disciplinary practices and increased juvenile justice contact. In the public education system, minority students are more likely to be suspended and expelled due to the criminalization of typical adolescent developmental behaviors and discretionary offenses such as truancy, insubordination, disruption, and other similar transgressions (Mallet, 2016). The result of such harsh consequences to these infractions is more time out of class and students of color falling further and further behind. Consequently, students return to the classroom frustrated and disengage causing more infractions hence a cycle of in and out of school until students give up completely and stop attending.

Educational equity does not begin in the school building. It is a phenomenon that encompasses every aspect of our nation. Full participation of all citizens, organizations and structures is necessary to obtain a equity within the educational system. As a principal with over 20 years of experience, I have witnessed how these social constructs stifle the development of the current and future generations. With similar experiences I was fortunate to be able to escape the generational poverty that is too common in the black community.

As a principal, I have witnessed how societal ills such as inequities in the educational setting have impacted families for generations. Our youth continues to be stripped of their promise based upon the systems that exist in our education, economic and judicial systems. In reflection of my own work, I have used the data garnered from this study to evaluate my financial stewardship

and how I target the needs of the individuals that I serve. Although I do not currently serve in a Title I school, like every school, I support students living in socioeconomically disadvantaged households. While a school-wide program model is one that is used in Title I schools, this approach is not the best practice for all schools. Using the elements of Transformational Leadership, principals must create customized innovative levels of support that is directed to individual students. To that end, I have pivoted in my own practices of the use of my budget and resources to reach those who need different programming and support.

It is with passion and persistence that I call upon our politicians, educational leaders, and business executives to be the change agents needed to make this county a true United States. The collective effort of each system is paramount in effecting reform where true equity can exist. In the words of the late civil rights activist and politician John E. Lewis said it best, “If not us, who? if not now, when?”

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Percent of Students at Title I Schools Qualifying for Free and Reduced Meal Service from 2010-2019

	<i>Percentage of Students Qualifying for Free and Reduced Meals by Year</i>								
<i>School</i>	<b>10-11</b>	<b>11-12</b>	<b>12-13</b>	<b>13-14</b>	<b>14-15</b>	<b>15-16</b>	<b>16-17</b>	<b>17-18</b>	<b>18-19</b>
Acres	90.80	90.89	94.62	94.67	94.31	96.27	94.62	91.98	90.25
Douglas	84.10	83.77	81.86	82.21	83.46	81.18	79.39	81.53	81.30
Hills	83.84	82.28	89.91	83.38	85.19	87.67	87.47	86.52	85.17
Estates	80.98	85.71	89.88	90.20	93.50	90.25	92.54	90.22	89.32
Hall	80.89	78.64	78.40	77.63	78.57	81.52	81.67	78.51	76.50
Wade	76.88	77.64	78.23	79.80	77.52	76.34	75.56	76.29	80.17
Apple	76.45	72.36	78.93	75.60	75.56	73.68	74.04	77.07	76.38
Frederick	75.41	79.87	78.96	81.10	84.83	82.53	82.71	81.42	83.33
Lake	74.35	74.81	77.86	76.08	79.95	83.33	85.45	81.87	82.72
Entemp	73.87	76.31	81.12	81.93	82.34	81.59	81.23	79.25	82.66
Crame	73.08	71.31	71.53	76.17	79.59	79.44	77.78	68.38	77.41
Mill	71.55	74.85	73.80	75.68	77.56	78.68	76.59	79.81	79.14
View	69.90	68.23	71.73	69.89	70.29	76.38	79.85	74.37	71.97
Rider	68.11	75.63	78.29	77.43	83.07	81.30	83.74	81.85	85.41
Crest	67.65	67.26	67.65	70.33	73.10	72.05	76.31	73.10	69.64
Vills	66.91	70.69	73.14	71.05	70.11				
Barranger	66.31	69.43	66.06	68.38	70.89	73.47	74.40	77.73	73.69
Grove	66.29	74.53	72.08	73.37	73.52	75.25	73.01	74.29	72.82
Gonzola	66.27	67.15	68.29	70.75	74.06	74.72	77.54	76.93	76.61
Brook	66.00	63.86	67.90	65.15				69.60	70.13
Glen	65.70	68.74	70.17	67.69	66.91				
Cooper	65.03	65.63	72.13	71.56	67.85	69.26	67.47		
Andrews	63.45	66.42	66.53	64.58	66.74	67.84	67.48	70.35	
Tyler	60.73		65.34	66.79	68.12	71.08	71.89	72.38	71.86
Brown	60.61	66.09	65.12		66.91	69.02	68.46	68.07	
Springs	60.46								
Walter	60.41			66.20	68.87	71.16	75.18	77.47	79.02


Bernard	59.62	63.90	67.08	65.00	67.34	68.22			
Knoll	58.63								
Rose	56.57								
Daly			65.19	67.17	71.05	70.90	71.31	72.46	70.73
Bell				67.21	70.29	70.15	71.18	69.80	68.76
Gainesville				67.95					
Flower				65.22					

<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DSFSS/TitleI/Schools.aspx>

**Appendix B**  
**IRB Memo – Montgomery County Public Schools**

MEMORANDUM

To: Ms. Karen Stratman, Chief of Staff

From: Dr. Kecia L. Addison, Director, Shared Accountability 

Subject: Approval of Request to Conduct Research

In compliance with Regulation AFA-RA, *Research and Other Data Collection Activities in* [REDACTED] this request to conduct research has been reviewed and approved by the Office of Teaching, Learning, and Schools-Shared Accountability (OTLS-SA). The request is recommended for approval by the Chief of Staff. Mrs. Yolanda Allen, Principal, Snowden Farm Elementary School, requests permission to conduct a dissertation research study titled *The Impact of Federal Funding on School-Based Leader Decision-Making and Student Achievement*. The purpose of this study is to examine principals' priorities and decision-making for the usage of federal funding provided to highly socioeconomically impacted elementary schools and their impact on student achievement.

**Participant Recruitment and Participation**

Using publicly available student demographic and academic achievement data, the researcher identified 65 elementary principals to invite to participate in the study. Principals from 31 Title I schools and 34 Focus Schools listed in Appendix A will receive an invitation by email that includes a consent letter that specifies the study's purpose, data collection activities, and protocol to maintain confidentiality of collected information. Up to 25 elementary school principals who consent to participating will be interviewed or participate in a focus group meeting. Participation is voluntary.

**Data Collection Activities**

Data collection activities will occur between May and August 2021. Principals from Title I schools will be asked to complete a 45-minute interview conducted via Zoom regarding their school's priorities and decisions on use of federal funding. Principals from Focus Schools will be requested to participate in one focus group meeting conducted via Zoom that will take approximately 45 minutes. All data collection activities will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon date and time. With permission of participants, the interviews will be recorded on the phone. Any information participants provide will be kept confidential.

The Hood College Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved the research study. All data will be reported in summary format. The names of participants, schools, and the school district will not be used in the summary of results. The study is supported by Mrs. Cheryl Dyson, Area Associate Superintendent, OTLS.

Ms. Karen Stratman

2

May 19, 2021

There can be no changes to the scope and objectives of the study. The approved study and associated data collection activities must be consistent with what is included in this memo. Any proposed changes in data collection activities must be communicated to OTLS-SA for review and approval. If you have questions regarding this request, please contact Dr. Helen Wang, coordinator, Applied Research and Evaluation Team, OTLS-SA, via e-mail at [Helen\\_Wang@mcpsmd.org](mailto:Helen_Wang@mcpsmd.org).

KLA:hw

Copy to:

Principals of Selected Schools  
Directors of Teaching, Learning, and Schools  
Area Associate Superintendents  
Dr. D. Collins  
Mrs. Allen  
Dr. Handy  
Mr. Lloyd

Approved: *Karen Stratman*  
Karen Stratman, Chief of Staff

## Appendix C

### IRB Memo – Hood College



March 12, 2021

Ms. Yolanda Allen  
401 Rosemont Ave.  
Frederick, MD 21701

Dear Ms. Allen,

The Hood College Institutional Review Board reviewed your revised proposal for the study entitled *"The Impact of Federal Funding on School-Based Leader Decision-Making and Student Achievement"* (Proposal Number 2021-25). The committee approves this study for a period of 12 months. This approval is limited to the activities described in the procedure narrative and extends to the performance of these activities at each respective site identified in the IRB research proposal. This approval does not authorize you to recruit participants or conduct your study on site at other institutions. Should you decide you would like to systematically recruit participants and/or conduct your study on location at other institutions or facilities you will need to receive IRB approval from those organizations *prior* to any recruitment activities or data collection.

In addition, due to the current COVID 19 precautions, Hood's IRB is restricting all in-person (e.g. face-to-face) data collection with participants at this time. You may only recruit participants and collect data online. You are not authorized to meet with your participants for the purpose of data collection until notice from this IRB. In accordance with this approval, the specific conditions for the conduct of this research and informed consent from participants must be obtained as indicated.

All individuals engaged in human subjects research are responsible for compliance with all applicable Hood Research Policies:  
<https://www.hood.edu/sites/default/files/Hood%20IRB%20Policy%20revised%20September%202013.pdf>.

The Lead Researcher of the study is ultimately responsible for assuring all study team members review and adhere to applicable policies for the conduct of human sciences research.

The Hood College IRB approval expiration date is March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022. As a courtesy, approximately 30-60 days prior to expiration of this approval, it is your responsibility to apply for continuing review and receive continuing approval for the duration of the study as applicable. Lapses in approval should be avoided to protect the safety and welfare of enrolled participants.

No substantive changes are to be made to the approved protocol or the approved consent and assent forms without the prior review and approval of the Hood IRB. All substantive changes (e.g. change in procedure, number of subjects, personnel, study locations, study instruments, etc.) must be prospectively reviewed and approved by the IRB before they are implemented.

Sincerely,

Diane R. Graves, PhD  
Chair, Hood College Institutional Review Board

Hood College • 401 Rosemont Avenue • Frederick, MD 21701-8575 • [www.hood.edu](http://www.hood.edu) • Tel. 301-663-3131

**Appendix D**  
**Title I Principal Email Invitation**

Good afternoon Colleagues,

I hope that this email finds you well. You are invited to be a participant in a qualitative research study with a quantitative component, of Title I elementary school principals' spending priorities, decision making processes and outcomes. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a Title I principal and during the years 2010-2019 student state assessment data demonstrated growth in areas of reading and/or mathematics for your school. Your perspective related to prioritizing your budget to meet the needs of your students is vital as I examine the decision-making trends among Title I principals that have had a positive impact on student achievement. The perceptions of principals—like you—can offer valuable information about strategically using resources to enhance student performance. Participating in the interview is completely voluntary and at any time you can decide to end your participation. By participating in this interview, you are assisting with the collection of data. The recorded session will be approximately 45 minutes. This will be a structured interview in a virtual meeting format using Zoom.

If you agree with participating in this process, please sign up for a time slot using the Signup Genius below. If the dates or times do not work for your schedule, please email me some dates and times that would allow you to participate.

Signup Genius Link Below:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C054CABA72AA0F85-title>

Thank you for your support.

Regards,

**Mrs. Yolanda Allen**

Principal

Snowden Farm Elementary School

[Yolanda\\_R.Allen@mcpsmd.org](mailto:Yolanda_R.Allen@mcpsmd.org)

Phone: 240-740-5800

Fax: 240-740-5820

Twitter: @PrinSFES



**Appendix E**  
**Focus School Principal Email Invitation**

Good afternoon Colleagues,

I hope that this email finds you well. You are invited to be a participant in a qualitative research study with a quantitative component, of Focus school principal spending priorities and decision-making processes. You were selected as a possible participant because you are the principal of a Focus school. Your perspective related to prioritizing your budget to meet the needs of your students is vital as I examine the decision-making trends among socioeconomically impacted schools and the positive impact on student achievement. The perceptions of principals—like you—can offer valuable information about strategically using resources to enhance student performance. Participating in the focus group is completely voluntary and at any time you can decide to end your participation. By participating in this focus, you are assisting with the collection of data. The recorded session will be approximately one hour. This will be a semi-structured discussion in a virtual meeting format using Zoom.

If you agree with participating in this process, please sign up for a time slot using the Signup Genius below.

Signup Genius Link Below:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C054FCNI72AA0F74-title>

Thank you for your support.

Regards,

**Mrs. Yolanda Allen**

Principal

Snowden Farm Elementary School

**[Yolanda\\_R.Allen@mcpsmd.org](mailto:Yolanda_R.Allen@mcpsmd.org)**

Phone: 240-740-5800

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Twitter: @PrinSFES

## Appendix F

### Title I Principal - Interview Protocol

**Tentative Title:** Federal Funding as a Driver of Decision Making Among Transformational Leaders in Title I Schools

**Tentative Research Question & Sub-Questions:**

**RQ1:** How have changes to the federal regulation Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, impact elementary school principal spending decisions in Title I school?

**RQ2:** In what ways have elementary school principals prioritized the use of federal, state, and local funds to increase access to high quality educational services to provide equitable opportunities to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households?

**RQ3:** How have these spending priorities impacted student achievement in Title I schools?

**RQ4:** How have the processes, procedures, and outcomes of financial stewardship in Title I schools characterized principal's leadership practices?

Question Type	Title 1 Principal Interview Protocol
<b>Warm-up</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How long have you worked in the school system?</li> <li>2. Why did you select to work at your current school?</li> <li>3. What are you most proud of in regard to your tenure here?</li> </ol>
<b>RQ1</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How have changes to federal regulations impacted the manner in which you allocate funds in your school?</li> </ol>
<b>RQ2</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are your priorities in terms of spending (human resources, technology, instructional resources, etc.)?</li> <li>2. Describe how federal accountability impacts your role as school manager and instructional leader?</li> <li>3. As Title 1 regulations have changed, describe how your decisions in regard to spending have evolved?</li> </ol>
<b>RQ3, RQ4</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describe your decision-making style?</li> <li>2. Describe the process you use when determining how to allocate funds?</li> <li>3. What factors restrict your decisions?</li> <li>4. How is student past performance data used to inform decisions in regard to allocation of resources?</li> </ol>
<b>Magic Wand</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What advice would you give to others giving similar school demographics?</li> </ol>
<b>Hypothetical Question</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If you had unlimited finances and no rules to follow, what would you do to increase the academic achievement of socio-economically disadvantaged students?</li> </ol>

## Appendix G

### Focus School Principal - Focus Group Protocol

**Tentative Title: Federal** Funding as a Driver of Decision Making Among Transformational Leaders in Title I Schools

**Research Questions:**

**RQ1:** How have changes to the federal regulation Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, impact elementary school principal spending decisions in Title I school?

**RQ2:** In what ways have elementary school principals prioritized the use of federal, state, and local funds to increase access to high quality educational services to provide equitable opportunities to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households?

**RQ3:** How have these spending priorities impacted student achievement in Title I schools?

**RQ4:** How have the processes, procedures, and outcomes of financial stewardship in Title I schools characterized principal's leadership practices?

Question Type	Focus Group Protocol
Warm-up	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How long have you worked in the school system?</li> <li>2. Why did you select to work at your current school?</li> <li>3. How would you define equity?</li> </ol>
RQ2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From the lens of equity, how would you describe the differences in resources available to a Focus school and a Title 1 school?</li> <li>2. What are your priorities in terms of spending (human resources, technology, instructional resources, etc.)?</li> </ol>
RQ3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describe your decision-making style?</li> <li>2. Describe the process you use when determining how to allocate funds given the variation in socioeconomic needs in your building?</li> <li>3. What factors restrict your decisions?</li> <li>4. How is student past performance data used to inform decisions in regard to allocation of resources?</li> </ol>
Magic Wand	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What advice would you give to others giving similar school demographics?</li> </ol>
Hypothetical Question	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If you had unlimited finances and no rules to follow, what would you do to increase the academic achievement of socio-economically disadvantaged students?</li> </ol>

## Appendix H

### Spending Priorities by Theme

Quotation/ Theme	Priorities	Quotation
Human Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESOL Teacher</li> <li>• Targeted Academic Support Teachers</li> <li>• Parent Community Liaison</li> <li>• Counselors</li> <li>• Paraeducators</li> <li>• Translators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Always valued spending Title I funds on people. Our budget year in and year out is spent on people. I have \$6,000 dollars left in instructional materials. I spend almost every single penny on people”</li> <li>• “Around reducing class sizes, when I can, ensuring that we have specialized positions that will maximize student performance. For example, over the years I have added a math specialist”</li> <li>• “She will be able to help in conjunction with our parent Community Coordinators that can use school liaison this crisis intervention”</li> <li>• “Human capital is definitely something that I wanted to increase.”</li> <li>• “This year I spent more money on Human Resources. I hired additional Special Education teachers to reduce caseloads and student support positions. Then we hired a few focus academic teachers to assist with writing.”</li> <li>• “I just looked at my budget just recently, I know I have 5.2 teachers so that is five whole people and have like 2.2 new paraeducators.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “...thought it was really, really important that we have one person who is dedicated to interventions and as much as I, like my local reading specialist and staff development teacher.”</li> <li>• “Because you have to build staff capacity, you have to support that means just a lot, so I hired an intervention coordinator, I needed someone to pull the data talk about the data.”</li> </ul>
Co-Curricular Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field Trips</li> <li>• Clubs: Gardening, Technology, Science, Math, Cooking, Athletic, Dance</li> <li>• Assemblies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “So, the first thing is the core sort of online curriculum content, whatever we might need to support that. Then human capital”</li> <li>• “I feel that students need experiences outside of the classroom, we collaborated with Whole Foods to create a gardening club”</li> <li>• “As a former dance student, I wanted to bring arts to the school. Students are able to learn all types of dances after school”</li> </ul>
Academic Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Math and Literacy Interventions</li> <li>• Chromebooks</li> <li>• School Supplies</li> <li>• Books</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “More hands-on deck and so I did have a priority to add some level of like enrichment and excitement. I wanted to go the STEM route would be the best way to do it.”</li> <li>• “Figure out like looking at our data knowing how great the need is for like remedial and</li> </ul>

intervention work is that really all that I want to use my money on, and I decided not to I decided to put in a stem teacher.”

- “I did have a priority to add some level alike enrichment and excitement and I felt like going the stem route would be the best way to do it.”
- “instructional materials we bought some.”
- “culturally diverse books that we really, really needed, and so Those are some of the things that we've prioritized.”

Physiological Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food</li> <li>• Clothing</li> <li>• Eyeglasses</li> <li>• Toiletries</li> <li>• Holiday Help</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “And those types of things that lead in our community food distribution networks, etc.”</li> </ul>
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## Appendix I Spending Priorities

### *Participants' Rankings of Spending Priorities*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Second</b>	<b>Third</b>	<b>Fourth</b>
Adams	Human Capital	Curriculum Experiences	Academic Resources	Physiological Supports
Brown	Human Capital	Curriculum Experiences	Physiological Supports	Academic Resources
Crews	Human Capital	Co-Curricular Experiences	Academic Resources	Physiological Supports
Douds	Human Capital	Co-Curricular Experiences	Physiological Supports	Academic Resources
Edwards	Human Capital	Academic Resources	Co-Curricular Experiences	Physiological Supports
Fick	Academic Resources	Physiological Supports	Human Capital	Co-Curricular Experiences
Greg	Human Capital	Academic Resources	Co-Curricular Experiences	Physiological Supports

*Note.* Indicate the four categories of priorities