

Public School Leadership in Times of Uncertainty: A Rendering of the Influence of Education Policy on Leadership Practice in Florida Schools

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND HUMAN SCIENCES, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY, TALLAHASSEE, FL

DR. DANIEL MORAGUEZ, MARIA HUEZO, JOSIE CARUSO, JILLIAN MCPHERSON, & BENJAMIN KELLY



| | <p>BACKGROUND</p> <p>Educators face increasing pressure to address issues of inclusion, social justice, and equity in schools, often taking on roles beyond teaching. However, conservative pushback against discussions on race, gender, and equality has intensified, particularly in Florida, leading to challenges for educational leadership. This study aims to understand how the political climate in Florida affects educational leaders' ability to teach anti-racism and promote inclusion. By gathering feedback from leaders, we seek to improve training methods for educators to navigate politically charged environments while upholding equality.</p> | | <p>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the most pressing issues K-12 school leaders addressed with school stakeholders in the previous year? • In what ways does a hostile political climate influence leadership practice? • What additional tools or resources do school principals need to lead organizational change for equity, social justice, diversity, inclusion, and antiracism? | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|---------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|---------|-----|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|--------|-----|---------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|---------|-----|-------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|---------|-----|---|-------------|--|---------|-----|
| | <p>ABSTRACT</p> <p>In the United States, there have been increasing efforts to draw back diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in public education. In response, educational leadership is dealing with the consequences of attempting to create equitable environments for all students within schools while appealing to the politics of their state. Current research has looked at political atmospheres and teacher attitudes but has not identified any solutions for how educational leaders should respond. We hope to discover how educational leaders feel in response to these initiatives and how we, as educational leadership trainers, can adapt our training methods to help leaders prepare to handle politically charged school environments. For the purpose of this study, we decided to look at 2 counties in Florida (referred to as River County and Forest County). We solely focused on K-12 public schools. In order to discover the attitudes of educational leaders, we conducted 30-minute semi-structured interviews with 5 principals. After conducting the interviews, we developed transcripts and completed a data analysis. The results of this study indicate difficulties educational leadership experience managing teachers and faculty in implementing culturally responsive education. We were interested to discover that in majority-minority schools, administrators experience an atypical protection from state mandates, and as a result, feel that they do not need to comply with anti-dei legislation.</p> | | <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>PSEUDONYM</th> <th>RACE & GENDER</th> <th>POSITION & LEVEL</th> <th>EXPERIENCE (CURRENT ROLE)</th> <th>TITLE I FUNDS</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>PRINCIPAL HOPKINS PANTHER ELEMENTARY</td> <td>BLACK, FEMALE</td> <td>PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC ELEMENTARY (PK-5)</td> <td>2 YEARS</td> <td>YES</td> </tr> <tr> <td>PRINCIPAL BROWN DOLPHIN CHARTER</td> <td>BLACK, FEMALE</td> <td>PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC CHARTER (PK-5)</td> <td>1 YEAR</td> <td>YES</td> </tr> <tr> <td>PRINCIPAL WILSON ALLIGATOR ELEMENTARY</td> <td>BLACK, FEMALE</td> <td>PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL</td> <td>5 YEARS</td> <td>YES</td> </tr> <tr> <td>PRINCIPAL ROBINS MANATEE ELEMENTARY</td> <td>BLACK, FEMALE</td> <td>PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC ELEMENTARY (PK-5)</td> <td>5 YEARS</td> <td>YES</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL WRIGHT IGUANA MIDDLE SCHOOL</td> <td>BLACK, MALE</td> <td>ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC MIDDLE (6-8)</td> <td>2 YEARS</td> <td>YES</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | PSEUDONYM | RACE & GENDER | POSITION & LEVEL | EXPERIENCE (CURRENT ROLE) | TITLE I FUNDS | PRINCIPAL HOPKINS PANTHER ELEMENTARY | BLACK, FEMALE | PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC ELEMENTARY (PK-5) | 2 YEARS | YES | PRINCIPAL BROWN DOLPHIN CHARTER | BLACK, FEMALE | PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC CHARTER (PK-5) | 1 YEAR | YES | PRINCIPAL WILSON ALLIGATOR ELEMENTARY | BLACK, FEMALE | PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL | 5 YEARS | YES | PRINCIPAL ROBINS MANATEE ELEMENTARY | BLACK, FEMALE | PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC ELEMENTARY (PK-5) | 5 YEARS | YES | ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL WRIGHT IGUANA MIDDLE SCHOOL | BLACK, MALE | ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC MIDDLE (6-8) | 2 YEARS | YES |
| PSEUDONYM | RACE & GENDER | POSITION & LEVEL | EXPERIENCE (CURRENT ROLE) | TITLE I FUNDS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| PRINCIPAL HOPKINS PANTHER ELEMENTARY | BLACK, FEMALE | PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC ELEMENTARY (PK-5) | 2 YEARS | YES | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| PRINCIPAL BROWN DOLPHIN CHARTER | BLACK, FEMALE | PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC CHARTER (PK-5) | 1 YEAR | YES | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| PRINCIPAL WILSON ALLIGATOR ELEMENTARY | BLACK, FEMALE | PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL | 5 YEARS | YES | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| PRINCIPAL ROBINS MANATEE ELEMENTARY | BLACK, FEMALE | PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC ELEMENTARY (PK-5) | 5 YEARS | YES | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL WRIGHT IGUANA MIDDLE SCHOOL | BLACK, MALE | ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL, PUBLIC MIDDLE (6-8) | 2 YEARS | YES | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | <p>METHODOLOGY</p> <p>We employed basic qualitative methods, interviewing four current principals in Leon county to understand their leadership practices, strategies for handling political changes, and efforts toward student equity. Data analysis involved deductive coding based on ecological systems and turbulence theory, supplemented by inductive coding to identify connections and main ideas. Analytic memos were recorded after each coding round to track key themes and framework connections. A holistic analysis was then conducted to identify common themes and recurring patterns in the data.</p> | | <p>FINDINGS AT A GLANCE</p> <p>We interviewed five educational leaders from River County and Forest County, Florida, discussing their experiences, perspectives on race conversations in schools, and needs for support. Preliminary findings highlight the importance of creating a comfortable environment for addressing race-related grievances, providing tools for difficult conversations, and recognizing the influence of the political climate on education. Educational leaders face challenges in managing diverse staff, particularly in minority-majority schools, where leniency from state mandates aids equity goals. Limitations include the small sample size and lack of diverse perspectives, but the study suggests common obstacles for educational leaders in addressing equity and race issues in Florida schools and has implications for comparative research across states.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | <p>KEYWORDS</p> | | <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> <p>Education policy or politics</p> <p>Community Level Systems</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical self-reflection Change agency Ethics Personal commitments </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>School Level Systems</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culturally sustaining practices Distributed leadership Instructional leadership Collaboration Professional development for equity, diversity, and inclusion </div> <div style="width: 10%; text-align: center;"> <p>Teachers</p> <p>Students</p> <p>High expectations for teaching and learning</p> </div> <div style="width: 45%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hiring and managing resources for equity Difficult conversations School culture and environment Relationships Equity audits </div> </div> </div> </div> <div style="width: 45%; text-align: right;"> <p>District level leadership or control</p> <p>Family and community engagement</p> <p>Shared leadership</p> <p>Modeling equity</p> <p>Action oriented</p> <p>Partnerships</p> </div> </div> <div style="width: 10%; text-align: right;"> <p>REFERENCES</p> <p>FINAL FINDINGS</p> </div> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |