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Closing the Achievement Gap in Elementary Schools: A Policy Advocacy Dissertation

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CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

A POLICY ADVOCACY DISSERTATION

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

December, 2014

NLU Digital Commons Document Origination Statement

This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The "program" can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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ABSTRACT

My paper details a policy recommendation for elementary schools in a large

school district in Florida. Its aim is to provide equal educational opportunities and equity

for all students. I developed it in part based on an educational, economic, social,

political, and moral-ethical analysis. My policy's purpose is to enhance the educational

experience for all children, maximize time-on-task (TOT) on all subjects, and close the

achievement gap. It discourages the use of the pull-out program for remediation in

reading and/or other areas. My new policy, combining the collaborative specialization

model, which I developed, with a push-in program, will provide students the required

TOT to maximize learning in all subjects without getting pulled out for remediation.

PREFACE

The policy advocacy project has been the most challenging piece of the

dissertation process. I have learned many leadership lessons throughout this journey.

After completing my Program Evaluation Proposal (PEP) and the Change Leadership

Plan (CLP), a few concerns arose with regards to how my school is trying to close the

achievement gap. As a current teacher leader, it is hard to sit back and see that not all

students are receiving an adequate education because they are constantly being pulled-out

to receive reading remediation during core subject areas. As a leader, one must look for

the best interest of all students and make adjustments to meet their needs.

The current problem of pulling out students for reading in my school was the

motivation for my proposed policy. Currently, schools in my school district have been

trying to close the achievement gap by implementing different versions of pull-out

programs, which resulted in students losing time-on-task (TOT) in other subjects. As a

leader, my goal in designing this proposal was to help struggling students receive the

necessary TOT in order to learn in all subject areas, while receiving the necessary

assistance in reading that they may require. It is all about proficiency. Providing

students with the TOT they need does show that it makes a difference with student

achievement. I am hopeful that my study and recommendations will help not only my

school, but other schools and districts change the way they remediate students and

thereby enhance their learning in all curricular areas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I want to thank my mom for her endless love and support

throughout this journey. Thank you for pushing me and encouraging me my entire life.

You told me to "go for it" and I did. Without your love and support I would have never

been able to complete this work. To my father, who is not physically with me, but

always guiding me, I dedicate this dissertation to you. I love you both with all my heart and cannot thank you enough for everything you have done for me.

To my sister Monica, Thank you for always being there, inspiring me, helping me, and giving me the words of encouragement I needed at times. I love you!

I am grateful for all the love and support my grandparents and godmother have given me. You all not only believed in me, but made this a reality by helping me with the finances of this doctoral degree.

I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my committee chair, Dr. Jim Schott. Your leadership, words of encouragement, constructive feedback, and wisdom have made this process an enjoyable one. I am truly honored to have had you as my chair. Thank you for your friendship and countless hours working with me on this process. Without your guidance and support, it would have been next to impossible for me to complete this journey.

I want to acknowledge the National Louis University faculty, Dr. Jim Schott, Dr. Daniel Buckman, Dr. Carol Burg, and Dr. Stu Carrier, for providing me with the educational knowledge I will need as a future leader. I would also like to thank my doctoral cohort group (TA001), especially Nancy Martinez, a close friend and colleague. Without you, I would have been alone in this journey. Thank you for sharing this adventure with me. I will forever treasure our friendship.

To my canine family, past and present, thank you for the love and entertainment you have provided me throughout the years. Lord knows that I needed those breaks throughout this process. Baby and Bella, you are appreciated!

To my extended family, thanks for all your love and support. You all have been my inspiration and given me the strength I needed to accomplish this goal.

Thank you to the faculty, staff, and students who participated in my research. Without your assistance I would have never been able to complete these studies.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work in the memory of my father, Manny Villaverde, and grandfather, Jose R. Villaverde. Although you are both no longer with me physically, I know that you have been guiding me through this process and cheering along the way. I miss you both and know that you are always with me.

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SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT

Introduction to the Problem

Imagine an elementary school where all teachers are able to differentiate their students' lessons daily in order to meet their individual learning needs; that would be a school where all students would be making academic gains in all subject areas. However, the truth of the matter is there is not enough time for one teacher to make individual lesson plans for each child in her classroom. As a result, students in the same classroom receive the same lesson even if they are three grade levels behind. The reality is, not all students are at the same level and although teachers do their best to close the achievement gaps, by the time some of these students get to the third grade, the gaps are often much wider. The achievement gap I am referring to is the disparity that exists today between the academic achievement of students in low-income areas and minority students, including English Language Learners and the other more advantaged students. The gap seems to be continuously growing.

Students entering the third grade have gaps that range from kindergarten skills, where they are unable to pronounce letters, to second grade skills where they cannot comprehend what they are reading. The ideal state would be having all students ready to enter kindergarten. Research has confirmed the theory that the younger children are, the easier it is for them to learn as their cognitive development is at the optimal level to learn and retain information (Jha, 2012). Research has also shown that the achievement gap that exists between kindergarten students tends to widen through the school years (Early Education for All, 2005). In fact, young struggling students who enter school behind

their classmates are unlikely to ever catch up, therefore contributing to a great extent to the achievement gap our schools, districts, and nation are facing today.

Ideally, we would have all students in kindergarten through second grade, who are showing deficiencies in reading and math, receive the interventions they require through the implementation of a push-in program. Waiting until they are in third grade is not the solution to narrowing the achievement gaps these students have. Right now, this is what my school is doing to remediate years of deficiencies. We start pulling out students from other courses in third grade.

Reading remediation during the school day usually has been provided through a push-in or pull-out program. Push-in models include a specialized teacher who co-teaches and assists the teacher in the general classroom. On the other hand, the pull-out program removes students from time-on-task (TOT) in one subject or another in their classroom to work with a special teacher for a certain length of time (Shanahan, 2008).

After completing my Program Evaluation Proposal (PEP) and the Change Leadership Plan (CLP), a few concerns arose with regards to how my school is trying to close the achievement gap. During the 2012-2013 school year, we developed a real concern for closing the achievement gap in reading. As a result, school leaders decided to use two reading resource teachers to pull students from class. This was done throughout the day so students would receive an additional 30 to 45 minutes of intense reading instruction. The school pulled students during math, science, or social studies. The adverse effect was that students were missing TOT in those subjects, making it hard for them to sustain their learning in those areas.

For example, in my school the number of students meeting high standards on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) for reading and science showed improvement. However, a closer look at the testing data for those specific students who were in the 5th grade and receiving interventions through the pull-out program and missing TOT in math, science, and social studies, is concerning. When I analyzed the 56 students who received reading interventions, the number of students meeting high standards in reading who previously scored at a level 1 or 2 went from 0 to 34%. These students were receiving their required 90-minute reading block and an additional 30 to 45 minute block of time each day for a reading pull-out program. Although the pull-out program was able to raise the reading achievement scores for 34% of the students, 66% of the students once again received a level 1 or 2 on the FCAT reading.

When examining math and science scores carefully, of the 11 students who were pulled from science instruction, only one student or 9% passed the science portion of the FCAT with a level three. Of the 45 students who were being pulled during math instruction, only 40% of the students scored a three or higher on the math portion of the FCAT. Furthermore, of those same 45 students who were being pulled during math instruction, 15 students went down a level or more on the FCAT math test. Therefore, the pull-out program appeared to have an adverse effect on the students who were missing TOT from science and math.

Currently, there is an ideological shift occurring in education. The focus of education politics has shifted from equality issues to issues related to proficiency, accountability, and choice. Therefore, because of high stakes tests, like those related to common core and the Florida Standards Assessments, it is important that students get the

required TOT to master skills in all areas beginning in elementary school. Providing

students with the TOT they need does show that it makes a difference on student

achievement.

<div align="center">**Critical Issues**</div>

Two key policies that I will discuss in detail that relate to my program change are

the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Response to

Instruction/Intervention (RtI) Implementation Plan. These two policies are crucial in the

discussion and implementation of policies that are currently in place that address

instruction in very important ways. Since the revision of the IDEA in 2004, there has

been a move toward the RtI model, or as it is now titled, the Multi-tiered Systems of

Support (MTSS). IDEA (2004) is a law that ensures specific services to children with

disabilities throughout our country. IDEA determines how states and public agencies

should provide early intervention, special education, and other related services to

individuals with disabilities.

In June of 2008, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) published an RtI

Implementation Plan, which provided the framework to assist districts with critical

components as well as definitions and applications to support the development of school-

wide implementation. That plan, which was a reflection of the collective intent, marked

an important point in Florida's development. Phase one of the implementation for

problem-solving and response to instruction came to a close in 2011. Phase two, of the

now called MTSS has emerged. Since this is a public policy change proposal concerning

how teachers provide additional support to struggling students, it should be known that

these two public policies direct local policy requirements and actions. One emerges from the federal interest and the other from the FDOE.

The RtI model has become a customary organizational design for schools across my school district. This model currently is being used for screening, identifying, and placing students for intervention. Kame'enui (2007) stated that RtI schools will limit the over-labeling of and misplacing problems associated with the special education system. The RtI design will help lessen the load on the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) classrooms that currently serve struggling readers who have no learning disability (Montgomery, 2006).

According to the National Center on Response to Intervention, RtI is a multi-level prevention system that includes 3 levels of intensity or prevention for students. "The primary prevention level includes high quality core instruction. The secondary level includes evidence-based intervention(s) of moderate intensity. The tertiary prevention level includes individualized intervention(s) of increased intensity for students who show minimal response to secondary prevention" (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2013, para. 1).

The RtI model combines progress monitoring that is individualized to meet student needs with a research-based intervention program provided within the classroom. The goal of RtI is to reduce the number of students who are being labeled as having a learning disability, when in actuality the student may just be a struggling with no actual disability (Richards, Leafstedt, & Gerber, 2006). Early identification and prevention programs offered through RtI have reduced reading problems by 70% nationally in the primary grades (Responsiveness to Intervention and Learning Disabilities, 2005). These

findings support reading instruction to students in the general education classroom (Montgomery, 2006).

While I briefly described RtI earlier, I feel it necessary to expand my previous comments. RtI is a three-tiered approach to instruction and classification of students. Tier one is a representation of all general education students who receive core classroom instruction. Instruction is differentiated and utilizes strategies and materials that are scientifically research-based to meet all student needs. Assessment, monitoring, and interventions are all facilitated through the general education teacher. If students are in need of interventions at the Tier 1 level, the general education teacher assists students through small group instruction, differentiated instruction, or one-on-one assistance (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2013).

Tier 2 is represented by students in the classroom who need modifications and accommodations (National Center, 2013). Therefore, the classroom teacher uses supplemental materials to further assist students with content. At this level, interventions may occur in or out of the general education classroom. Progress monitoring of these students occurs more frequently.

The last tier, or tier three, is described as students needing instruction that is intense and continuous (National Center, 2013). According to the RtI model, this can occur within the classroom by having another teacher push-in to give instruction or teach students outside of the classroom where a group of students who are at the same level all receive specialized help. During tier three interventions, students receive targeted instruction for a minimum of two 30-minute sessions every week for nine to 12 weeks. Tier two and three are very similar, the only major difference is that during tier three

interventions, the lessons are intensified, focused, frequent, and longer in length
(National Center on Response to Intervention, 2013).

Sad to say, not all students who are classified as a tier two and three on the MTSS
nationally are getting the additional support needed. Interventions are not being given to
them and therefore these individual students are "falling through the cracks." As a result,
they keep falling further behind in their academics. For those students who are receiving
the additional interventions, there is not enough support given to them and therefore they
too are unable to catch up. The current approach of teaching students who have not
mastered one standard a week for 30 minutes is not working as indicated by the FCAT
scores I reported earlier. Without additional time in our school day, this approach will
never work as intended.

Closing the achievement gap is something all schools strive to achieve. For Title
I schools like mine, it means that the majority of students within the school are
disadvantaged enough to qualify for free or reduced price lunches and in general have
more learning deficits. However, Title I schools do receive further funding to aid the
students with resources to insure equity in the quality of instruction needed for academic
success. At my school, we had a real concern for reading and using Title I funding we
added two reading resource teachers to assist in closing the achievement gap during the
2012-2013 school year. Although reading scores went up, our math scores went down
because these students were missing TOT from subjects like math and science. This
adverse effect caused our administrative team to change the roles of the resource
teachers. This year, we have two math resources teachers and one reading resource
teacher since we have a greater need now for math.

Recommended Policy and Envisioned Effect

There are a variety of ways to define policy. Fowler (2004) identified seven different definitions, ranging from very broad to very narrow definitions. Public policy was defined as "the dynamic and value laden process through which a political system handles a public problem. It includes a government's expressed intentions as well as its consistent patterns of activity and inactivity" (Fowler, 2004, p. 9). Educational public policy was described by Schott (2010) as "the written constitutions, laws, regulations, and procedures as well as the unwritten continuous practices or courses of action that govern and direct schools in what they do to fulfill their public vision, mission, and purpose" (Unpublished).

My district is addressing elementary school remediation needs consistent with both written federal and state laws and regulations and its practice is to allow individual schools the choice of using either the pull-out or push-in schedules for this purpose. There are numerous ways to address the issue I am dealing with in my policy advocacy project. My policy proposal is to minimize the use of the pull-out program in elementary schools for remediation in reading. I chose this position since I determined that it would be unrealistic to eliminate the pull out option given the complexities of implementing such a student scheduling mandate. However, I thought the latter would be less problematic if I simply provided a more workable set of options that would best protect the learning time for students in all academic core subject areas

There are four options that would provide the necessary reading remediation without having students miss TOT on other subjects. These options are to implement a

push-in program; provide remediation during non-core academic times, such as physical education, music, and art; implement the collaborative specialization model in the intermediate grade levels; or implement both the push-in program with collaborative specialization in intermediate grade levels.

Currently, pulling third through fifth grade students from their core subjects of math, science, and social studies is not the answer as these students already have years of deficiencies. Moreover, I believe if these students had received the required interventions without missing core content, the gap would likely have been much narrower, resulting in greater mastery and success. My recommended program and policy change of decreasing the use of a pull-out program for remediation will address this latter problem. It is designed to help teachers assist their MTSS tier 2 and 3 students within their classroom without having them pulled out.

The first option mentioned is the implementation of a push-in program. Program changes consistent with my policy recommendation might include assigning one resource teacher to each grade level, using funds provided by the school district. This resource teacher would serve as an additional person to push-in to classrooms on a daily basis and work with students classified on the MTSS at tier 2 or 3. Students currently are missing more than 25 minutes a week of instruction because they are traveling from their homeroom classroom to a resource teacher's classroom. I contend that having an additional person in the classroom to serve the needs of all students would be a better solution.

In the second option, all students would be given a waiver, requiring their parents' signature to participate during their 30 to 45 minutes of special areas of instruction that

presently include art, music, physical education, to go to additional remediation classes or

special assistance programs, such as English speakers of other languages (ESOL) and

ESE. Another public policy that relates to the latter change is the 2013 Florida Statutes,

Chapter 1008: Assessment and Accountability. The statute states that parents must be

notified of any reading deficiency as well as the schools progression plan for the student.

Our students now must have parental consent in order to waive the required 150 minutes

a week for physical education.

The third option would be to implement in grades 3 through 5, the collaborative

specialization model I helped develop and implement as part of my Program Evaluation

Project. Collaborative specialization is defined as a group of teachers who are paired in

collaborative teams. In my study, one team consisted of all teachers teaching English

language arts and social studies. The second team consisted of math and science

teachers. The other collaborative team included two different content area teachers who

were sharing the same group of students within the day.

My study showed that this model works because it improves instruction and

learner outcomes. Teachers were able to provide more rigorous lessons and had the

opportunity to plan more effectively as they were only responsible to teach two subjects.

Teachers were able to become more specialized in the content areas they taught and were

able to provide deeper understanding of standards since they became "experts" in their

content areas. Moreover, teachers using this model of instruction were able to focus on

two subjects instead of all subjects, and were able to spend more time developing plans

with fewer time constraints.

Of the four strategies I have described, the greatest potential lies in combining the collaborative specialization model with the push-in program. Implementing a push-in program as well as a collaborative specialization model in the intermediate grade levels would provide students with more rigorous content and aid them in becoming more proficient in all content areas. By incorporating the push-in program with the collaborative specialization model of instruction, teachers would be able to focus even more on the struggling students and support their individual needs. The grade level resource coach would be able to sit with the tier 2 and 3 students and provide them with assistance while the teacher is providing whole group instruction. The resource teacher would have content knowledge and be able to plan with teachers and collaborate to meet the needs of the students within the classroom environment. Therefore, these struggling students would not be missing TOT for remediation, but would be receiving grade level content with the assistance needed almost simultaneously.

These two strategies working together could greatly alleviate the challenge of providing intensive reading instruction without pulling students because of the more effective and efficient use of time in teaching all subjects. Students would not be missing TOT to receive any required remediation and miss valuable instructional time in their core academic areas. The latter would result from more joint planning by teachers to teach reading in the content areas. Moreover, this recommendation would minimize the gap with struggling students as they would be given adequate interventions that lead to improved scores in reading, math, science, and writing.

My policy change proposal and suggested program changes to help implement it would not violate federal or state laws or my district's current policies, but would be fully

compliant with them. However, not all public policy is in written form. One's practices over time become in fact, if not by law, the district or school policy. Currently my school district follows the state's policy of using RtI and MTSS to identify students and place them into the appropriate support system. However, our schools have no written board policy on how students are to obtain the support they require. Therefore, the unwritten policy is schools may implement the prescribed laws and related regulations in whatever way they choose. County wide, schools are using a variety of ways to meet the needs of their students that represent a variety of practices that become independent school policies. Some schools are using pull-out programs, others are using push-in programs; yet others do both to meet the needs of all learners.

Currently at my school, the practice is to have students pulled for reading and math, up to two times a week, and pushed-in for the math block, once a week for 30 minutes. In my judgment, this practice is not working well. Students are not receiving the additional TOT to gain the information they are missing in their core subjects in order to close the achievement gap. My proposal is to reduce and in the future, possibly eliminate the pull-out program as an option. To do that, I would submit for approval the four optional implementation strategies presented in this document along with the admonition to minimize the use of the push-in program except when used in my collaborative specialization model or other such model that insures little if any student loss of instructional time in the core academic areas. My policy change proposal would be a positive step forward in helping all our struggling students meet the state standards for all subjects as indicated by their performance on FCAT or any other state assessment.

My policy would require reading remediation be delivered through an alternative strategy. Pulling students out of other classes for remediation would be discouraged. Remediation options for students could not take needed instructional time from math, science, or social studies. Therefore, the pull-out program would be diminished and a push-in program with the addition of collaborative specialization or some comparable schedule that provides students with the necessary TOT in core academic courses, would be required.

SECTION TWO: NEEDS ANALYSIS

Moral/Ethical Analysis

On January 8, 2002, George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. The law states that all children must be highly proficient in their learning. With the passage of this law, the State of Florida began developing higher standards of accountability and more recently raised the bar even higher with the adoption of its own version of the Common Core Standards, the Florida Standards. In addition, it is requiring all districts and schools to hire highly qualified teachers in all the core subjects (NCLB, 2002). Although schools are trying to meet the challenge of NCLB, schools really have no clear answer to solving the numerous issues that revolve around closing the achievement gap they face.

As a fifth grade teacher, it is hard to close the achievement gap of my students when they are three or more grade levels behind. There has to be a better solution for these students. This issue of closing the achievement gap has been on my school district's radar for years. In fact, schools across our nation have been trying numerous strategies to close the achievement gap, but with limited success. Different programs are being purchased for schools that use a variety of strategies and or resources to help all students succeed. For example, this year at my school we have transitioned from having two reading resource teachers to having one resource teacher who pulls students from class. Since math scores declined, we have a new math resource teacher who pulls students as well as a push-in strategy for extra student support. Our specials rotation system also was altered. Instead of students going to the computer lab, students now are receiving an additional 30 to 40 minutes of math lab time once every 8 days.

My proposed policy, program, and strategy changes would likely advance the values of equality of opportunity and equity. Economically disadvantaged students would benefit greatly since they are the majority of the individuals who are classified as needing the most interventions (Early Education for All, 2005 & Nelson, 2006). By establishing my proposed policy change, students have a better opportunity to learn more and become self-sufficient individuals who are capable of increasing their knowledge and skills in all subject areas and meeting the demands presented by each grade level as they move toward high school completion and beyond.

Equity is a moral imperative that cannot be ignored when educating students. The pull-out programs cause students to lose valuable learning opportunities in core subjects. It is not fair to deprive these students from learning in more depth the core subject areas and cause them to fail to receive the knowledge and understanding they provide. Students who are pulled from core subjects will never be able to catch up to their counterparts who remain in class for the entire time.

Education Analysis

All students are capable of learning, if they are given the opportunity and support they need to succeed. Not all students learn the same way or at the same rate. Research shows that early childhood education is very important to schooling readiness and can reduce the very damaging learning gap starting in the primary grades (Rouse, Brooks-Gunn, & McLanaha, 2005). Research also shows that students who go to pre-kindergarten have less of a probability of being retained (Early Education for All, 2005.).

A 20 year research study indicated that the most critical aspect of the cortex development in is mental stimulation around the age of 4 (Jha, 2012). A child's

education essentially begins right when they are born. According to an analysis on the development of nerve tissues, the critical period of development and growth of the nerve tissues is between the ages of 4 to 6 years. During that time, the nerves travel at rapid speeds and the progress will slow down as children reach 75% of their growth (Jha, 2012).

Since the prime time for a child to learn is during their pre-school and primary years, the best strategy in closing the achievement gap is to provide them with the skills they need to be proficient as early as possible. As they start elementary school, there should be a lesser gap to address. However, we cannot wait for those results to come through the educational pipe line because the gaps that exist now still need to be targeted. Attacking the gap in elementary school requires TOT for all subjects. Push-in strategies show promise for doing that and pull-out has the opposite effect.

<center>**Social Analysis**</center>

When trying to make any type of public policy or program change, it is important to have clear communication with all the stakeholders involved. Stakeholders must see the urgency in making this change for the greater good and take ownership for the transition to work properly. For example, to make the above happen in relation to my proposed policy, establishing a committee with parents, teachers, administrators, business members, and community members would be ideal so everyone can be involved in the process and decision making. The impact of such involvement would be the social benefits of all working together to address an issue of great importance to the education of all students in all subjects. The policy work could lead to a greater probability of

young people having future learning and occupational success. This is the ultimate societal gain.

While my topic is about pulling students for reading or the problem involves other areas as well, including ESE students. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1993) stated that if students are provided with the appropriate support within the inclusive classroom setting, those individual students can achieve academically. Therefore, if disabled students are able to make academic achievement gains in an inclusive environment, all students with or without a disability should also gain academically and avoid the "felt" emotional stigma of being taken out of class for special services of any kind. Many of these students who are being pulled-out feel embarrassed because their peers are aware that they are receiving remediation. Additionally, these same students return to class feeling lost as they do not understand what their classmates are working on and the new material that was taught. When students remain in the same classroom and receive remediation integrated with what is being taught in a small group with a resource teacher, the feelings of belonging can remain intact. These students would begin to feel they are learning more in the general education classroom and have a sense of belonging.

Maximizing opportunities to participate in society is greatly enhanced when children are provided with a quality education (Hehir, 2005). All learners require respectful, powerful, and engaging schoolwork to develop their individual capacities so they can become fulfilled and productive members of society (Tomlinson, 1999). Full inclusion, where a child is able to remain with their classmates, has shown to have a more

positive impact on children's learning and lives as they become active members of society.

Political Analysis

Over the past 30 years there have been multiple educational policies from the federal, state, and local levels that have been enacted and implemented designed to help all students succeed. These policies were all derived from public debate and ultimately, political action. All students have the ability to learn some things if they are given the right tools and strategies to do so. The belief reflected in these federal policies, like NCLB and IDEA, have as their focus the support of providing an equal and fair education to all students. In Florida, we have incorporated the MTSS process to help identify students in need and aid them before their academic gaps are too wide. At my school, the district, and across Florida, the shift was not received with open arms. The problem was that many districts were not enthusiastic about the changes in part because they were faced with making one more system change among the others handed down by the state and federal governments to implement across an entire district.

When creating changes, it is vital that all stakeholders are involved in the process and are able to see the reasons behind the needed change. When more support for a policy is given, it is much easier for policy makers to approve and sign something into law, or at the local level, adopt policies, rules, and regulations. During the past couple of years, there has been a change in how citizens and schools must work together. The traditional approach of engaging our community members has left citizens with a feeling of disconnect and detachment. The message they received is, "trust us and leave us alone to do our job of educating your children" (Johnson, 2008, p. 2). As Cunningham (2002)

noted, "School districts, more than ever, are realizing that they are dependent upon community support to meet the mandated state and national performance standards, develop innovative programs, and secure financial resources" (p. 157).

The policy change I am suggesting will affect the range of choices designed to serve students' needs. In addition to receiving push-in instruction that would be at a tier 2 or 3 or other optional strategies I mentioned earlier, students could receive other special assistance they may need.   If they needed ESE or ESOL support, this could be provided along with reading. This is particularly true if schools used the previously described collaborative specialization model I studied and recommended. The time could be scheduled by collaborative teams of teachers on an as need basis, utilizing the core course content.

That being noted, my emphasis is on reading because it currently is demanding most of the pull-out time. If students need additional remedial work, they would have another option. They could take a reading remediation program instead of the regular specials (science and math labs) they have at their school. Currently, students at my school have an 8-day rotation where they go to music, art, science lab, math lab, and physical education classes every other day. To stay in compliance with Florida statutes, there must be some communication with our parents and the community to inform them about the suggested choices they have in determining how remediation must and can be scheduled.

The 2011 Florida statue, 1003.455, subsection three states,

Each district school board shall provide 150 minutes of physical education each

week for students in kindergarten through grade 5 and for students in grade 6 who

are enrolled in a school that contains one or more elementary grades so that on

any day during which physical education instruction is conducted there are at least

30 consecutive minutes per day. (The Florida Senate, 2014)

Therefore, if students are getting pulled for tier 3 intervention from their physical

education classes, the required minutes would not be met. However, Chapter 1003

section 455 of the Florida Statutes states that students can be exempt from physical

education classes. Subsection four reads as follows:

The requirement in subsection (3) shall be waived for a student who meets one of

the following criteria: (a) The student is enrolled or required to enroll in a

remedial course. (b) The student's parent indicates in writing to the school that:

1. The parent requests that the student enroll in another course from among those

courses offered as options by the school district; or 2. The student is participating

in physical activities outside the school day which are equal to or in excess of the

mandated requirement. (The Florida Senate, 2014)

As a result, parents may sign a waiver to exempt their child from taking physical

education in in order to take a remedial course.

Even with the above options, my policy change of implementing the push-in

model of instruction will likely be met with much resistance. Staff members tend to

resist someone coming into their classroom to assist students as would happen under the

push-in strategy. They feel that both teachers would be competing for the student's

attention. However, some staff members, the ones who have experienced the positive

impact of my push-in model, would prefer it. Currently, the district has no set model and

as a result, principals are given the choice to decide which model works best for their

individual school sites. I believe that by creating a clear plan that permits both the push-in and pull-out model, but only discourages the latter without using my collaborative specialization model or similar student schedule, would cause less concern about my proposal.

Economic Analysis

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 is entitled, Title I-Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantage (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The purpose of Title I is, "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (U.S. Department of Education, 2014, Section 1001. Statement of Purpose). Using Title I funds, my school has had the flexibility it needs to develop the programs our students require in order to close the achievement gap. As stated before, students who are minorities and or economically disadvantaged, usually struggle throughout their educational careers (Early Education for All, 2005 & Nelson, 2006). Therefore, funds are provided to ensure a more equal playing field for all students. For example, the school in my community where I live does not have a great need for resource teachers compared to the school where I teach that has a greater need. In fact, my local school does not have any resource teachers. Additionally, the MTSS framework is funded by the State of Florida, Department of Education, Division of Public Schools, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS). The funds come to the state and district from federal discretionary dollars under the auspices of IDEA and can be used to

help schools fund my proposed policy and program changes to acquire the staff and resources needed to support the push-in program.

The policy that I am envisioning would not require more classroom teachers. It would require six new resource teacher positions. However, there would be a shift in the current roles that some staff members currently play. Therefore, the implementation would require additional funds, perhaps Title I, to pay for some of these positions needed for this implementation. The number of staff members needed to make this policy a reality would be a total of six resource teachers who would push-in to various classrooms throughout the day and help struggling students. However, this is the need for only one school. Those dollars would be significantly greater for all the other schools in the district to implement the policy without reducing such costs by utilizing as much as possible current staff positions and then dedicating Title I dollars to support any new positions required. I am uncertain whether my policy can be implemented with no additional cost by reallocating current resources. When a district can realize student academic gains without increasing costs, the public would welcome it. However, the financial implications will require more study to determine that.

Whatever the cost, there are some related cost avoidance economic considerations. Certainly if students are improving their learning skills and subject area knowledge, they are more likely to pass required tests and ultimately graduate from high school. High school graduates on average make considerably more in lifetime income than those that do not (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). They can continue their education in colleges, universities, and technical/vocational schools. Also they are less likely to end up unemployed, incarcerated, or in the public welfare system. All of these

results will end up having a positive impact on our national, state, and local economies. I

believe the cost-benefit ratio would be significantly positive.

SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

This section provides a definition of what my policy is advocating, which is increasing student achievement for all students by allowing struggling students the opportunity to have more TOT in core courses. My policy proposal is to minimize the use of pull-out programs for reading remediation to those situations where a principal seeks and receives district approval to use such a program and where provisions can be made to ensure students have adequate TOT in all core subjects.

The push-in program for reading is the preferred strategy for reading remediation. Elementary schools are encouraged in either case to develop schedules and strategies that support the maximum amount of TOT for all core subjects of math, science, and social studies, while accommodating non-reading remediation and other educational needs requiring students' time within the regular hours of the school day. Furthermore, students must be screened for reading deficiencies using the MTSS framework to identify students in need of remediation according to their tier.

Next, I will explain the policies' goals and objectives. I will ask the following: Whose needs, values, and preferences are addressed by my advocated policy? On what basis are the goals and objectives of my policy aims to achieve validation as being appropriate and good (Browder, 1995)?

Goals and Objectives of the Policy

The ultimate goal of my program change would be to enhance the learning of all students by providing them more TOT with remediation when students require it. When students become competent in reading, it increases their capacity to learn more in all other subject areas without sacrificing TOT in those other subjects. When students are

unable to read, there is an adverse effect on math, social studies, and science scores. Students must be able to read in order to succeed in school, career, and life. Student needs must be the top priority in all school districts and TOT in the latter academic areas is critical and must be protected or even expanded to address the special knowledge and skill needs of today's and tomorrow's world. Pulling out students to receive reading instruction reduces their TOT in other subject areas and can cause the current achievement gap to widen.

 The pull-out program is not a sound strategy for remediation as it diminishes the chances of students mastering content in those subjects where they are not present to learn the material. There are many strategies that school districts could choose to try to narrow the achievement gap between students. This is especially true for reading because of its essential need for learning in all other subject areas. Of the four strategies I have described, my preference is to implement a push-in program along with the collaborative specialization model of departmentalization in the intermediate grade levels.

Collaborative specialization is a form of departmentalization that would provide instruction at a more rigorous level as teachers are specialized in the two areas they teach. Using this new model of instruction has proven to have great success with students since teachers are able to provide deeper understanding of standards since they become "experts" in their content areas. My earlier program evaluation indicated that teachers using this model of instruction were able to focus on two subjects instead of all subjects and to spend more time developing plans with fewer time constraints. The evaluation also showed students would benefit from this structural change as teachers would be specialized and students would be given more TOT. Finally, I discovered in my research

that the collaborative specialist model also resulted in lessons being more engaging, relevant, and rigorous. I do not recommend the collaborative specialization model be mandated, but it should be an option for all schools to use along with a push-in strategy for remediation to deal with TOT needs.

Stakeholders Related to the Policy

The question to ask here is whose needs, values, and preferences are being represented by the policy advocated. All stakeholders can relate to this policy. First, students want to go to school and learn. When students are given a high quality education, they are able to continue their education, become active citizens within their communities, and have productive careers. Those students whose needs are met will be able to graduate with college readiness knowledge and skills and step into the 21st century ready to work and be engaged citizens. No longer would they have to take preparatory or remedial courses in universities in order to start taking college courses.

Parents and community members also would benefit. Parents send their children to school to learn. They want them to grow up with the knowledge and skills they need to become successful in learning and life. Parents and community members would hope that students would take advantage of their schooling opportunity.

Teachers also would see benefits from improved student achievement. They are now receiving merit pay, which is based on student performance. Therefore, when students have more TOT and are provided with the help they need in class, they can grow academically and perform better on assessments. As a result, teachers would see improved student performance. They will earn the respect of the students and parents while maintaining employment and earning increased compensation.

The school and school district's ultimate goal is to meet the needs of all of its students. By incorporating my policy, I believe school districts would see the achievement gap close. This would be all due to the increase in the amount of TOT in all subjects.

Rationale for the Validity of the Policy

The goals and objectives are validated as appropriate and good for all stakeholders. My policy would require that reading remediation be delivered through a push-in strategy. Pulling students out of core content classes for remediation would be discouraged. Remediation options for students should not take away needed instructional time from math, science, or social studies. Therefore, a push-in program would need to be implemented. Students generally want to succeed in life. However, when they get pulled out of a subject for remediation and often fail to learn the content in the subject missed and feel defeated by the system. If students are given the necessary resources to learn, including sufficient TOT in all subject areas, they will improve academically.

SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

In putting together my doctoral policy advocacy document, I learned that most

policies have supporters and detractors. This is certainly true when it comes to the use of

the push-in or pull-out programs used to remediate students in any subject area. Districts,

schools, schools leaders, teachers, students, and parents all have different perspectives

and opinions when it comes to how to narrow the achievement gap. Some want longer

school days, years, or both; others believe that adding more reading or math recovery

courses will suffice. However, one thing is sure, the current way of doing things is not

working fast enough and in all honesty, may not be working at all. Something needs to

be done and what I propose has pros and cons as well as supporters and detractors that

must be considered.

Pros

Attacking the achievement gap in elementary school requires TOT for all

subjects. By eliminating the pull-out program, schools will provide students with more

TOT in all cores subject areas. Students will have the opportunity to learn more if they

are in class. Push-in strategies show promise for doing just that. If students are able to

receive assistance when in their class, they would not miss critical content that is being

covered. When students are being pulled, they are missing grade level material which is

not being covered with the pull-out teachers. The pull-out program usually targets

reading strategies to help students learn how to read and comprehend. They do not

address the lessons being taught within the class. If grade level resource coaches would

be able to push-in throughout the day, they would be of more use to struggling students

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as they would be aiding them on grade level content that is being discussed in class as well.

Another pro is that parents are given a choice to enroll their struggling student into remedial courses. For example, if students need additional remedial work, they have the option to take a math and or reading program instead of the regular specials of art, music, physical education, math lab, or science lab that are offered at my school. Therefore, those students would have the opportunity to get additional assistance in the areas they are deficient in and not miss any grade level content since this remediation would be occurring during their specials rotation.

Cons

The cons regarding this policy is the district might be unprepared for the type of push-in schedule I am proposing and may lack the needed funds and resources. A con to reducing the pull-out program is that many people would be resistant to changing the current system. Many teachers believe that pushing in will cause disruption within their class and will be unsupportive of the change. Another issue is the current minutes for each course must be met by the district in order to be compliant with state laws. Students in elementary school are required to have 150 minutes of physical education weekly. Moreover, in order for students to receive pull-out services during their specials time, there would have to be an end-of-course exam tied to it as the state of Florida requires that all courses be tied to one. As a result, music, art, and physical education classes will be giving end-of-course exams to students. How would this impact the students who opted out of those classes? Would the state or district force them to take those tests anyway?

All in all, for the push-in program to work effectively there must be a seamless transition through integration with other subject areas in order to teach vocabulary and concepts to students to increase student comprehension in all subjects. As school leaders, it is our job to do the right thing for our students. It is not ethically or morally right to look the other way on issues that must be changed. It is not right to ignore the situation in hopes it will go away on its own. We have a problem with the current pull-out program that must be changed completely in order to maximize TOT for students in all core subjects.

SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The policy advocacy implementation plan would look similar to my Change Leadership Plan. I would first meet with school district and schools to inform them of my findings. If approved, I would work with any school or district in the implementation and set-up of the program. I would share data that has been collected so school leaders could review and consider what they may do as a result of the implementation. Schools that are looking to implement the change could form professional learning communities (PLCs) to develop a plan.

Kotter and Cohen (2002) described eight critical steps in the change process. The first calls for creating sense of urgency for change. I intend to focus on the first four steps through this study by (a) increasing the sense of staff urgency by focusing on student results in losing TOT in selected academic areas and developing staff interest in change to enhance instruction by (b) building a team of teachers to explore the pull-out program as well as the push-in through this study and beyond, (c) creating a joint compelling vision of a pull-in program alternative, and (d) developing a clear message of the needs and alternatives to all staff and beyond.

Wagner et al. (2006) stated that a successful leadership transformation requires sharpening capacities within individuals and the organization. Leaders need to understand why it is so hard for organizations and individuals to change. "Leaders must learn how to take action effectively to help our organizations actually become what they need and want to be" (Wagner et al., 2006, p. xvi). By using this framework, leaders would be able to develop a communication plan to help staff members see the problem,

understand the need, attain a sense of urgency, feel and be part of the solution, and understand the ultimate goal as attainable.

SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

If my policy is adopted, I recommend there be a implementation specialist placed in charge of the policy at the district level. This individual would be in charge of communicating the policy, its options, and how to work together as a staff to implement it. This person could work with each school on implementing the plan. They would work with school leaders to set up professional development plans for the reading push-in teachers on an individual basis since each school site may have different needs. Additionally, schools would need to work with their professional learning communities to review and alter the plan that was developed once they receive assessment data.

The implementation specialist would oversee the monitoring of each school implementing a plan. However, I also recommend that each school site have a coordinator in charge of collecting data on a weekly basis as well as overseeing the other push-in resource teachers at that location. Push-in teachers would work with students who have been classified on the MTSS as a tier 2 or 3. Monitoring the progress of these students is the key to success. Therefore, all push-in resource teachers must be provided with staff development on the integration of reading within all subjects so that students are given the best education possible without having to be pulled out. Professional development would be provided by the district specialist as well as the school site specialist.

The implementation specialist would work hand-in-hand with each school coordinator and the resource teachers to collect and analyze student data on a monthly basis. This would allow for the staff to make the necessary changes to improve instruction. During these data analysis meetings, the coordinator, resource teachers, and

specialist would assess whether or not the implementation of the program is effective and if it was organized and used with fidelity. Finally, it is important that the staff assess continually FCAT and other assessments for reading, science, and math (perhaps an End of Subject Area exam for social studies) in order to review the progress being made in achievement growth and the impact on the achievement gap.

While my recommendation includes the collaborative specialization plan I developed through my PEP, I want to make it clear that I will address the need later for a school-wide committee to work with me in determining how my school should proceed under the newly adopted policy. This will include looking at the four options and any others that might emerge from the process as well as assess staffing and other needs for the programs.

SECTION SEVEN: POLICY IMPACT STATEMENT

Students across the United States are falling behind and there is no clear vision on how to stop this from happening. Educators across the nation have tried different strategies to try and narrow their schools' achievement gaps. However, nothing has worked. We go into teaching thinking that if everyone does what they are supposed to do all students would do better in school. Sadly, that is not the case. What can we do to narrow the achievement gaps between students of various backgrounds? This was the driving question in the creation of my Program Evaluation Plan, Change Leadership Plan, and now my Policy Advocacy Document.

My policy would require that reading remediation be delivered primarily through a push-in strategy. Pulling students out of other classes for remediation would be minimized. Remediation options for students must not take needed instructional time from reading, math, science, or social studies. Therefore, the pull-out program must be secondary to a push-in program.

The ultimate goal of my program change would be to enhance the learning of all students by providing them more TOT with remediation when students require it. When students are unable to read, there is an adverse effect on math, social studies, and science scores. Students must be able to read to become academically competent enough to succeed in life. Student needs must be the top priority in all school districts. However, pulling students out of core classes to receive reading services reduces their TOT in other subject areas and causes the achievement gap to widen. The pull-out program is not acceptable as a sole strategy for remediation as it diminishes the chances of students mastering the content from the missed classes. There are many strategies that school

districts could choose to use to narrow the achievement gap. Of the four strategies I described, the option I recommend is a combination of a push-in program and the collaborative specialization model in the intermediate grade levels.

By implementing the collaborative specialization model of instruction in the intermediate grade levels, all students would be provided with instruction that is more rigorous and differentiated as teachers are specialized in the two areas they teach. My research indicated that this new model of instruction could be successful with students. One indicator is that teachers were able to provide deeper understanding of standards since they became "experts" in their content areas. Moreover, teachers using this model of instruction were able to focus on two subjects instead of all subjects, and were able to spend more time developing plans with fewer time constraints.

By incorporating the push-in program with the above model, teachers would be able to focus even more on the struggling students and support their individual needs. The grade level resource coach would be able to assist students who are classified at a tier 2 or 3 and offer these students assistance as the teacher is providing whole group instruction. Since the resource teacher would be planning along with the teacher, they would be able to prepare ahead in order to get the students where they need to be and become proficient. Therefore, these struggling students would not be missing TOT for remediation by getting pulled-out, but would be getting grade level content with the assistance needed at their fingertips.

In my opinion, diminishing the pull-out program would be the most effective and best policy to close the achievement gap and provide students with the best education possible. When students are given the time they need to learn, they will learn. Moreover,

if everyone does what is expected of them, students would be better served, achievement scores would be enhanced, and knowledge levels in all subjects would increase.

What and whose values are at the center of the policy? Simply, all stakeholders would benefit from my policy. However, the students are at the center of this policy change. Students go to school to learn. When students are given an adequate education, they are able to graduate and continue their educations in colleges, universities, and other post-secondary education institutions and become active citizens within the community, have productive careers, and enjoy a positive lifestyle.

Others who also are involved and would benefit from this policy change would be parents and community members. Parents send their children to school to learn and get an education. They want them to grow up with the skills they need in order to become successful in life and living. For example, parents and community members would hope that students, when given access to high quality education, would be able to carry on an effective conversation and discussion, and become collaborative and independent lifelong learners.

Finally, schools also would see benefits to educating more effectively students. Teachers today are getting merit pay, which is based on student performance. Therefore, if students are provided more TOT and the help they need in class, they would learn more and perform better on assessments. As a result, teachers would see their students' performance increase. My school district's ultimate goal is to meet the needs of all of its students. Through my policy, I believe the school district would see the achievement gap close due to the increase in the amount of TOT for all subjects.

The implementation of the policy is consistent with the vision behind it. Teachers and school leaders must first see the urgency for the change in order for the change to happen. Then, the slow process of the change must occur. The buy-in from the staff and school community will make the implementation a success.

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