Perceptions of Student Engagement: Understanding Knowledge and Policy Implications among K-12 District Leaders

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Ann Marie Cisney-Booth
May 2017

Copyright © 2017 by Ann Marie Cisney-Booth
All rights reserved.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to the men and women impacted by domestic violence who I worked with early in my career as a domestic violence advocate. Your experiences have inspired me personally and served as a driving force to continue my education and to become a researcher. You are strong and courageous. Thank you for letting me be part of your journey.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who have provided support and guidance throughout my graduate career that deserve recognition. First, I would like to say thank you to my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Jennifer Ann Morrow. Your encouragement to apply to the doctoral program and mentorship along the way have been invaluable. Thank you for your continued support. I am proud to be part of the Evaluation, Statistics, and Measurement (ESM) program family. To my committee members, Dr. Gary Skolits, Dr. Lauren Moret, and Dr. Todd Moore, I could not thank you enough for your thoughtful feedback. Each of you have brought something unique to my dissertation for which I am grateful. Thank you for being part of my committee and sharing your expertise. I would also like to thank Dr. Lisa Yamagta-Lynch for providing direction as I learned about qualitative research and support through my comprehensive exam.

My husband, Bobby, deserves special thanks for his loving support, understanding, and encouragement, but most importantly, for his comic relief that brought a smile to my face during stressful times. I can now remove all of the chart paper from the walls throughout our house—even the blank ones! To my family—Mom, Dad, Christina, Jake, Dana, and Jon—thank you for your love and believing in me. Christina and Dana, you provided a source of strength that I will never forget. To my nephew and niece, Braxton and Lyla, may you always be motivated to learn, find it rewarding, and fun! I am happy to share this journey with all of you.

I would also like to thank my friends Brittany, Jason, Jennifer, and Michelle. You have encouraged me through some of the most difficult times. I also appreciate how you challenged me to think more deeply about my work. Thank you to the ESM students, past and present, who have been part of this journey. Finally, thank you to the many administrators at the large urban school district who supported and participated in this study.

Abstract

Student engagement is widely documented from the perspectives of students, teachers, and school-level administrators (Bazenas, 2014; Marks, 2000; Rosenquist, 2015; Sutherland, 2010; van Uden, Ritzen, & Pieters, 2013). At this time, understanding student engagement from the perspective of district leaders, including members of the school board, represents an untapped area of research. Engaged students are more likely to learn, find the learning experience rewarding, as well as are more likely to graduate and pursue higher education (Marks, 2000). In this regard, student achievement is contingent upon the development of a sense of efficacy and confidence in their ability to be successful in school.

Educators in positions with formal or informal authority have more opportunity to leverage, regulate, and guide reform efforts (Park, Daly, & Guerra, 2012). Thus, linking the perspective of district leadership to decision-making can improve how student engagement is conceptualized, encouraged, and measured. Further, McMahon and Portelli (2004) stressed "the term [student engagement] has become a popular, but at times, an empty and superficial, catch-phrase or slogan" (p. 60). This exploratory qualitative study (Robson & McCartan, 2016) was designed to examine the concept of student engagement from the perspective of K-12 district leaders at a large urban school district located in the southern United States in 2016. Using systems theory as a theoretical framework, this exploratory qualitative study sought to understand student engagement as it relates to district leadership at multiple levels in the central office, how it was defined and assessed, and how district leaders used student engagement to influence policy decisions. One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were completed with 32 district leaders representing 12 levels of leadership within a large urban school district. Findings were described by research question and participant group (i.e., school board members, cabinet-

level administrators, and non-cabinet level administrators). Future researcher and implications for practice were provided.

Keywords: student engagement, systems theory, k-12 education, k-12 school district policy, district leadership

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction and General Information 1
Introduction to the Study 1
Statement of the Problem 1
Purpose of the Study 3
Significance of the Study 4
Research Questions 5
Theoretical Framework 5
Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations 6
Overview of the Study 10
Chapter Summary 11
Chapter 2 Literature Review 12
Rise of Accountability 12
Theoretical Framework 14
What is Student Engagement? 15
Research on Student Engagement 17
Student Engagement in K-12 Schools 21
The Role of District Leaders 23
Purpose of the Study 24
Research Questions 26
Chapter Summary 27
Chapter 3 Method 28
Rationale for Qualitative Study Design 28
Research Design 29
Sampling Methodology 32
Participants 35
Data Sources 40
Overview of Initial Coding and Analysis 45
Trustworthiness 51
Chapter Summary 53
Chapter 4 Presentation of the Findings 54
Introduction 54
Overview of Data Analysis 54
How Student Engagement is Defined (RQ1) 55
Group A: School Board 57
Group B: Cabinet-Level District Administrators 58
Group C: Non-Cabinet Level District Administrators 60
Cross-Group Analysis 64
How Student Engagement (SE) is Assessed (RQ2) 66
Group A: School Board 68
Group B: Cabinet-Level District Administrators 70
Group C: Non-Cabinet Level District Administrators 77
Cross-Group Analysis 82
How Student Engagement Information is Used for Policy Decisions (RQ3) 82

Group A: School Board 87
Group B: Cabinet-Level District Administrators 88
Group C: Non-Cabinet Level District Administrators 90
Cross-Group Analysis 92
Chapter Summary 92
Chapter 5 Discussion and Limitations of Findings 97
Explanation and Comparison of Findings 97
Limitations 103
Implications and Future Research 105
Implications for Practice 105
Recommendations for Future Research 107
Conclusions 109
References 110
Appendices 123
Appendix A 124
Appendix B 125
Appendix C 127
Appendix D 129
Appendix E 131
Appendix F 133
Vita 134

List of Tables

Table 1. Criterion Specific Requirments 33
Table 2. Number of District Leaders by Position Level 34
Table 3. Participant Race, Ethnicity, or Origin.....38
Table 4. Participant Age 38
Table 5. Participant Gender 38
Table 6. Participant Experience in Education.....39
Table 7. Participant Breakdown.....42
Table 8. Semi-Structured Interview Questions by Research Question.....43
Table 9. Phases of Thematic Analysis 50
Table 10. RQ1 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Board Members.....58
Table 11. RQ1 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Cabinet-Level Administrators.....61
Table 12. RQ1 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Non-Cabinet Level Administrators.....63
Table 13. RQ2 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Board Members.....71
Table 14. RQ2 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Cabinet-Level Administrators.....78
Table 15. RQ2 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Non-Cabinet Level Administrators.....83
Table 16. RQ3 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Board Members.....89
Table 17. RQ3 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Cabinet-Level Administrators.....91
Table 18. RQ3 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Non-Cabinet Level Administrators.....93

List of Figures

Figure 1. Sampling Quota Level by Group Reporting Levels 41
Figure 2. Research Question 1 (RQ1) Sub-Themes by Reporting Group 65
Figure 3. Research Question 2 (RQ2) Sub-Themes by Reporting Group 85
Figure 4. Research Question 3 (RQ3) Sub-Themes by Reporting Group 94

Chapter 1

Introduction and General Information

This chapter provides an overview of the present study by describing the problem, the purpose, the significance, and research questions guiding the study, as well as the assumptions, delimitations and limitations. An overview of the study is also provided.

Introduction to the Study

Engaged students are more likely to learn, find the learning experience rewarding, and are more likely to graduate and pursue higher education (Marks, 2000). Akey (2006) suggested "students who see themselves as academically competent become more engaged over time," as well as "students who are engaged early become more confident of their ability to be academically successful" (p. 26). From this perspective, student achievement is contingent upon the development of a sense of efficacy and confidence in one's ability to be successful in school. Furthermore, student engagement is not a fixed attribute, but "an alterable state of being that is highly influenced by the capacity of school, family, and peers to provide consistent expectations and supports for learning" (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012, p. v).

Statement of the Problem

School district leaders seek to support student learning indirectly by formulating, "strategies and support practices that enable principals, teachers, and students to thrive" (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010, p. 32). Thus, the long established role of a district central office in supporting and bringing about change in education highlights the implications of decision-making by district leaders (Farley-Ripple, 2012). Wahlstrom and colleagues (2010) contend that district-level priorities and actions have an effect at the school level. Accordingly, district leaders are faced with how to use their position of authority to

improve student learning through the development and support of policy and practice (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Although the focus on the need for research-based evidence in decision-making continues to escalate, research on the decision-making process by district leaders is only beginning to emerge (Farley-Ripple). Likewise, connecting research use, decision-making, and the potential for educational change requires examining factors that lead to policy and practice (Farley-Ripple, 2012). With this, understanding student engagement from the perspective of district leaders represents an untapped area of research. There are no known studies represented in the literature regarding student engagement that incorporate the voices of administrators and school board members who are in the position to initiate and authorize policy as key decision makers within a school system (Asen, Gurke, Conners, Solomon, & Gumm, 2013).

Over the years, accountability policies have evolved to include student performance at the core of elaborate systems for judging schools and teachers, thus changing the organization of teaching and learning within districts (McDonnell, 2012). Changes in accountability have created pressure to use evidence of student learning to assess policies and practices (Coburn & Talbert, 2006). Furthermore, accountability policies have cultivated an environment in public education where the focus is on becoming the leader in the number of students "who graduate from baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, community colleges, and adult career-technical institutes," subsequently underscoring the importance of student engagement research, policy, and practice (Lawson & Lawson, 2013, p. 432). Although, student achievement is the cornerstone in which educational programs, curriculum, and schools are assessed, student engagement is viewed as a vital component of achievement (Reyes, Brackett, Riers, White, & Salovey, 2012). Engaged students are more likely to graduate and experience a greater degree of

overall student success (Marks, 2000). Also worth merit, engaged students persist more in the face of challenges than their less engaged counterparts (Klem & Connell, 2004). Student engagement is also important for reducing behaviors that are linked to dropout rates (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003). As a result, research on the influence of student engagement has increased (van Uden, Ritzen, & Pieters, 2013).

Research on student engagement is widely documented from the perspectives of students and teachers (Bazenas, 2014; Marks, 2000; Rosenquist, 2015; Sutherland, 2010; van Uden, Ritzen, & Pieters, 2013). It is also noted as "one of the most widely misused and overgeneralized constructs" in education (Azevedo, 2015, p. 84). However, research must document the contextual influences of school policies and practices to expand understanding in this area (Christenson et al., 2012). Understanding how student engagement is defined and its potential impact on policy has implications for both centralized and decentralized decision-making models for school districts. Educators in positions of formal or informal authority have more opportunity to leverage, regulate, and guide reform efforts (Park et al., 2012). Park and colleagues (2012) found the way leaders frame reform efforts can impact the degree to which others find new ideas to be salient and credible. They concluded policymakers must recognize that, "schools are ultimately political and social systems where people's interactions, preexisting knowledge, and assumptions come into play when new policies are introduced" (Park et al., p. 670). Thus, linking the perspective of district leadership to decision-making can improve how student engagement is conceptualized, encouraged, and measured.

Purpose of the Study

There is still much to learn about student engagement, therefore the purpose of this exploratory qualitative study (Robson & McCartan, 2016) was to examine the perceptions and

application of student engagement by K-12 district leaders at a large urban school district in the southern United States in 2016. Correspondingly, this exploratory qualitative study investigated perceptions of student engagement as it relates to district leadership at multiple levels in the central office. This study gathered information to build upon existing research for a better understanding of the definition, measurement, and utilization of student engagement from leaders situated in a large, multilevel district system. Findings from this study could lead to more informed policy through the formal examination of perceptions of student engagement and the potential impact on policy (Cooper, Levin, & Campbell, 2009). Outcomes from this exploratory qualitative study may provide school districts with a starting point for discourse around this particular component of student success.

Significance of the Study

As an untapped area of research, investigating the perspective of both district-level administrators and school board members allowed for a better understanding of the decision-making processes related to this particular component of student success. Ultimately, student engagement is relevant for all learners and underlies school reform efforts (Christenson et al., 2012). Districts that operationalize success more broadly with multiple indicators (i.e., going beyond standardized test scores to include other measures such as student engagement) can influence the discourse on other desirable outcomes (e.g., graduation rate) for teaching and learning (Trujillo, 2012).

There is a weak connection between research and policymaking in education (Lubienski, Scott, & Debray, 2014). Lubienski, Scott, and Debray (2014) seek a greater connection and utilization of social science research to inform policy. They concluded, “with so many non-educators involved in educational policy and politics, it is worth considering whether there are

ways of improving policy augmentation and its reliance on the social sciences" (p. 141). This exploratory qualitative study fosters a deeper understanding of student engagement within a specified context. Furthermore, research must document the contextual influences of school policies and practices to expand understanding in this area (Christenson et al., 2012). Student engagement, as a multidimensional construct, should be viewed from the lens of district leaders and at this time represents an untapped area of research. Again, understanding how district leaders conceptualize student engagement could lead to better measurement within the context of a single district.

Research Questions

The present study sought to gain insight into the understanding and application of student engagement by district leaders through an exploratory qualitative design. This study included one-on-one, semi-structured interviews that elicited information from leaders regarding how they conceptualized and utilized student engagement to inform policy. Reflective field notes and member checks also provided some insight into the understanding and application of student engagement by district leaders. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. How do district leaders within a large urban school district define student engagement?
2. What do district leaders know about how student engagement is assessed in their school district?
3. In what ways do school district leaders use student engagement when making policy decisions?

Theoretical Framework

Taking a systems-based thinking approach (Davis, Dent, & Wharff, 2015; Gharajedaghi & Ackoff, 1985; Mette & Bengston, 2015; Patton, 2015; Senge, 2006), the present study focused

on the centralized role of district leaders to impact policy. School districts operate with personnel at multiple levels who are situated in a multilevel district system. Borrowing from research in higher education, Davis, Dent, and Wharff (2015) concluded systems-based thinking can aid in understanding complex environments when "pluralistic and often competing goals of myriad constituents, the changing demographics of students, the uncertainty of funding, and the growing demands for accountability from stakeholders have increased the complexity of systems" (p. 333).

Using a systems-based approach is suitable within a multilevel K-12 school district context. Systems-based thinking, systems thinking, or systems dynamics can clarify responsibilities and requirements within a system to create buy-in and shared understanding across a school district (Mette & Bengston, 2015). Using a systems viewpoint emphasizes the long-term viewpoint (Senge, 2006). The essence of systems thinking lies in shifting mindsets from linear cause and effect relationships to interrelationships and change as a process (Senge).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Throughout this study the researcher brought an internal perspective as an administrator within the organization. Although, this perspective could provide credibility for the researcher through prolonged engagement (Patton, 2015), this also influenced the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations for the study.

Assumptions. Participants in the study may have increased levels of comfort when interviewed by someone internal to the organization. District leaders, including members of the school board, in their positions of authority and decision-making capabilities are considered among the elite (Morris, 2009). Although there is not a clear defintion for those classified as elite, for the purposes of this study elite refers to those in positions of power with authority such

as senior managers and board members (Harvey, 2011; Petkov & Kaoullas, 2016). Including such personnel introduced important methodological considerations when conducting elite interviews (Mikecz, 2012; Morris, 2009). A central consideration for mitigating challenges with conducting elite interviews is building trust, which can be reduced through the researcher's ability to build trust (Mikecz, 2012; Morris, 2009). Having internal working knowledge of the organization and relationships could have created inherent buy-in to the study. It was also assumed that the interview questions were important for furthering research on student engagement, as well as relevant to the participating district due to recent legislative changes under the Every Student Success Act (ESSA).

Finally, as a mixed methods researcher, this study was influenced by post-positivism (quantitative) and constructivism (qualitative) paradigms (Creswell, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). More specifically, quantitative and qualitative studies tend to be based upon contrasting research paradigms (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Quantitative research operates more traditionally under the premise that knowledge is preexisting and waiting to be discovered. The positivist/postpositive orientation, aligned more closely with quantitative research, seeks to predict, control, or generalize knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reality in this orientation is objective—it is observable, stable, and measurable. Alternatively, qualitative research is characterized by the belief that knowledge is constructed by people as they make meaning of the activity, experience, or phenomenon under study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Constructivism, considered the most common paradigm used in qualitative research, assumes that multiple realities exist which are socially constructed (i.e., no single, observable reality exists; Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). Finding balance between these orientations was done through reflective journaling.

Delimitations. As an exploratory qualitative study, the transferability of findings may be limited to the single context in which the study was conducted (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). In addition, only including district-level leaders could limit the findings by excluding the insight and expertise of school-based administrators.

Limitations. Data collected through interviews rely solely on the perceptions of the interviewee (Creswell, 2003). Similarly, all participants may not have described their views and perceptions adequately (Creswell). Although, the focus of this study was not a sensitive topic, participants may have felt uncomfortable being completely candid with responses as the researcher works as an internal program evaluator within the organization. Other limitations specific to education include (a) changes to the organizational structure over the summer and (b) the potential for heightened awareness regarding school accountability systems due to changes at the state and federal levels. During the study, only federal expectations for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) were outlined, as it does not take full effect until the 2017-18 school year. The implications for implementation at the state and district levels were not finalized, potentially impacting the findings in this study. In addition, this study focused on one school district in one state. Although generalizability (i.e., with statistical significance) is not the goal of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), consideration should be paid to the context in which the findings are applied in other settings. Finally, the study employed an exploratory design (Robson & McCartan, 2016). As such, the study may not fully speak to the application and understanding of student engagement within this school district.

Terms and Definitions

The following are key terms and definitions that were used and should be understood when reviewing this study:

Dimensions of student engagement. The way student engagement is operationalized and conceptualized differs greatly among researchers (Klem & Connell, 2004; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Rosenquist, 2015). For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used to guide the research:

Behavioral engagement. Behavioral engagement encompasses participation (e.g., student attendance or homework completion). It was further characterized by actions such as being attentive in class, responsive to instruction (e.g., rules), and the extent that students were actively participating (Mahatmya, Lohman, Matjasko, & Farb, 2012).

Cognitive engagement. According to Chi and Wylie (2014), cognitive engagement refers to "smaller grained behavioral activities" (p. 219) that can be observed overtly while students learn.

Emotional engagement. Emotional engagement included the positive or negative response to educational materials, tools, and people (e.g., teachers, classmates, academics).

Motivational engagement. Motivational engagement was referred to as the precursor to becoming involved with educational material. It was the attitude toward or interest in the curricular material.

Student engagement. For the purpose of this study, student engagement was defined using the overarching definition provided by Christenson and colleagues (2012):

> Student engagement refers to the students' active participation in academic and co-curricular or school-related activities, and commitment to educational goals and learning.

> Engaged students find learning meaningful, and are invested in their learning and future. It is a multidimensional construct that consists of behavioral (including academic), cognitive, and affective subtypes. Student engagement drives learning; requires energy and effort; is affected by multiple contextual influences; and can be achieved for all learners. (p. 817)

District leader. For the purpose of this study, the term district leader referred to the following key decision makers as defined by Asen et al. (2013): district-level administrators and members of the school board. Throughout this study participants were referred to as district leaders, which specifically included district-level administrators overseeing curriculum and instruction that were classified as school board members, cabinet-level, and non-cabinet level administrators. Although, school-based administrators are also vital in carrying out the mission, vision, and goals of a school district, they were not the focus of this study.

District office. In this study, the terms district office and central office were used interchangeably and refer to the main office within a school district that provides support and oversees all schools within the system.

Systems thinking. For the purposes of this study, systems thinking will be used to describe the theoretical framework which encompasses terms such as systems-based thinking, systems dynamics, and systems theory (Mette & Bengston, 2015; Patton, 2015; Senge, 2006).

Overview of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the study and provides context. Chapter Two describes literature in the areas of accountability, student engagement, the role of district leaders, and identifies the research questions. The methodology is outlined in Chapter Three. Chapter Four describes the study's findings for each research question by

participant group. Implications and recommendations for future research are provided in Chapter Five.

Chapter Summary

This chapter serves as the introduction to the present study. More specifically, the chapter described the problem, purpose, and significance of this study. The chapter also provided detail regarding the theoretical framework and key definitions. Chapter Two introduces key literature and research on student engagement.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The present exploratory qualitative study (Robson & McCartan, 2016) focused on the perspective of K-12 district leaders understanding of student engagement. Implications for decision-making were examined to better understand how student engagement impacts a large urban school district in the southern United States. This chapter introduces key literature on student engagement, how it is defined, and why it is important in the age of accountability.

Rise of Accountability

The gradual shift toward performance monitoring and increased accountability provisions began as early as 1965 with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title I (Mills, 2008). The reauthorization of ESEA in 2001, more commonly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), radically changed accountability for public schools in the United States (Jacobson & Young, 2013). Periodically adjusting achievement goals to higher standards for increasing levels of student achievement fosters continuous improvement of school performance (Jacobson, Saultz, & Synder, 2013). Legislative mandates place teachers on the receiving end of reform efforts by states or the federal government (Mehta, 2014). Jacobson and Young concluded, "performance-based accountability requires the measurement, monitoring, evaluation, training, and dissemination of outcome data" (p. 164). Federal and state mandates have positioned educational accountability and educational evaluation as the core factors influencing most public school districts and educational evaluations (Mills). As a result, program evaluation is used as a tool for achieving legislative goals such as stronger accountability for results and the use of proven educational methods (Berry & Eddy, 2008). Program evaluation is used as a method for measuring school and/or district academic progress, setting performance standards, informing

instructional practice, and monitoring learning outcomes. In addition, such changes in accountability have created pressure to use evidence of student learning to assess policies and practices (Coburn & Talbert, 2006).

Legislative mandates such as ESEA and NCLB can impact the way evaluations are designed as well as the purpose and overall practice of evaluation (Berry & Eddy, 2008). These legislative changes, according to Berry and Eddy, have neither a positive nor negative impact on evaluation, but rather bring complexity with scientifically based research (SBR) requirements. Although schools are the foci of accountability systems and can be subject to reconstitution or other sanctions by not meeting performance standards, districts (i.e., composed of school boards, superintendents, and central office staff) are the legal and fiscal agents overseeing and guiding schools (Massell, 2000). Districts serve as the gatekeepers in understanding federal and state policy by translating, interpreting, supporting, and even blocking policy on behalf of their schools (Massell). In a review of 22 districts across eight states, Massell reported four major capacity building strategies that influence choices made by schools for the improvement of teaching and learning: (a) interpreting and using data, (b) building teacher knowledge and skills, (c) aligning curriculum and instruction, and (d) targeting interventions on low-performing students and/or schools.

The Common Core State Standards (CSS), released in 2010, represented another shift in education toward accountability by bringing disparate content in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics toward consistency in expectations for student knowledge and skills (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). Potentially the most significant effort shaping accountability policy, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) sought to prepare students for the global economy and to address fragmented centralization of curriculum aimed at reducing the

variability of content and performance standards across the United States (McDonnell, 2012) Over the years, accountability policies have evolved to include student performance at the core of elaborate systems for judging schools and teachers; thus changing the organization of teaching and learning within districts (McDonnell). These changes broadened the scope of accountability and deepened the elements in which districts are held accountable across the educational enterprise (McDonnell). In addition, differences in pre-existing beliefs, organizational location, professional connections, and disciplinary backgrounds can impact how policy is enacted in different parts of a school district system (Coburn & Talbert, 2006).

Accountability and student engagement. Student engagement is relevant for all leaners and underlies school reform efforts (Christenson et al., 2012). A high priority is placed on student achievement by school boards (Johnson, 2012). Klem and Connell (2004) reasoned that high expectations in a high stakes environment will increase the demand for evidence regarding what works or may not work in education. However, this transparency requires indicators of performance to be measurable as well as easily understood (McDonnell, 2012). Urban school districts face pressure to maintain test results to avoid restrictions in their autonomy (Trujillo, 2012). However, districts that operationalize success more broadly with multiple indicators (i.e., going beyond standardized test scores and include other measures such as increased student engagement) can influence the discourse on other desirable outcomes (e.g. graduation rate) for teaching and learning (Trujillo).

Theoretical Framework

Systems thinking is characterized by holistic thinking (Patton, 2015). Patton further depicts this holistic perspective by saying, “A system is a whole that is both greater than and different from its parts” (p. 140). Systems-based thinking, systems thinking, or systems dynamics

can clarify responsibilities and requirements within a system to create buy-in and shared understanding across a school district (Mette & Bengston, 2015). A systems approach can guide a qualitative study examining programs, organizations, and societies (Patton). Using a systems viewpoint emphasizes the long-term viewpoint (Senge, 2006). The essence of systems thinking lies in shifting mindsets from linear cause and effect relationships to interrelationships and change as a process (Senge). According to Patton, systems theory allows for the exploration of the system's boundaries and interrelationships and how these impact perspectives regarding a particular phenomenon.

Taking a systems-based thinking approach (Davis, Dent, & Wharff, 2015; Gharajedaghi & Ackoff, 1985; Mette & Bengston, 2015; Patton, 2015; Senge, 2006), the present study focused on the centralized role of district leaders to impact policy. School districts operate with personnel at multiple levels who are situated in a multilevel district system. Borrowing from research in higher education, Davis, Dent, and Wharff (2015) concluded systems-based thinking can aid in understanding complex environments when "pluralistic and often competing goals of myriad constituents, the changing demographics of students, the uncertainty of funding, and the growing demands for accountability from stakeholders have increased the complexity of systems" (p. 333). Therefore, using a systems-based approach to research is suitable within a multilevel K-12 school district context.

What is Student Engagement?

Student engagement is a construct with multiple dimensions (Christenson et al., 2012; Sinatra, Heddy, & Lombardi, 2015). Studies have associated student engagement with theoretical and philosophical perspectives found in psychology (Rosenquist, 2015) and sociology (Newmann, 1989). In reviewing research on student engagement, McMahon and Portelli (2004)

asserted that, “the term [student engagement] has become a popular, but at times, an empty and superficial, catch-phrase or slogan” (p. 60). Researchers have identified the components of engagement (Rosenquist) and the numerous ways in which it can be defined (Christenson et al., 2012; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rosenquist, 2015; UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools, n.d.; van Uden et al., 2013). For example, the way student engagement is operationalized and conceptualized differs greatly among researchers (Klem & Connell, 2004; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Rosenquist, 2015). Definitions of student engagement include student motivation, time-on-task, passive/active engagement, and a variety of other components that can make understanding and measuring student engagement difficult. Researchers commonly recognize three types of student engagement: (a) motivational, (b) behavioral, and (c) emotional (Klem & Connell, 2004; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Rosenquist, 2015). Motivational engagement is referred to as the precursor to becoming involved with educational material. It is the attitude toward or interest in the curricular material. Student motivation is connected to specific subject areas and may vary from subject to subject (Fernet, 2011). Behavioral engagement, more generally, encompasses participation (e.g., student attendance, homework completion). Alternatively, emotional engagement includes the positive or negative response to educational materials, tools, and people (e.g., teachers, classmates, academics). Emotional engagement has also been linked to sense of belonging (Lee, 2014). In addition, Chi and Wylie (2014) introduced a fourth type of engagement: cognitive engagement. Cognitive engagement, as they described, refers to "smaller grained behavioral activities" (p. 219) that can be observed overtly while students learn (Chi & Wylie, 2014). Some research has suggested there are five areas that may act as a stimulus for student engagement: (a) high energy for both teachers and students, (b) missing information that taps into student curiosity and anticipation, (c) the self (e.g., personal interests, efficacy), (d)

mild pressure for a specified duration of time and intensity, and (e) mild controversy and competition (Marzano, 2007). For the purpose of this study, student engagement was defined using the definition provided by Christenson and colleagues (2012),

> Student engagement refers to the students' active participation in academic and co-curricular or school-related activities, and commitment to educational goals and learning. Engaged students find learning meaningful, and are invested in their learning and future. It is a multidimensional construct that consists of behavioral (including academic), cognitive, and affective subtypes. Student engagement drives learning; requires energy and effort; is affected by multiple contextual influences; and can be achieved for all learners. (p. 817)

Research on Student Engagement

In the mid-1980s, a growing concern emerged over the disengagement among students in high school as researchers shared findings of despondent teachers and disengaged students with fragmented curriculum (Marks, 2000). Research on motivation and cognitive engagement began later in the 1990s (Greene, 2015). Currently, student engagement is viewed as a significant component of the academic success of students (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). "Learning and succeeding in school requires active engagement… The core principles that underlie engagement are applicable to all schools–whether they are urban, suburban, or rural communities" (National Research Council Institute of Medicine, 2004, p. 1). Engaged students are more likely to learn, find the learning experience rewarding, as well as more likely to graduate and pursue higher education (Marks). Also worth merit, engaged students persist more in the face of challenges than their less engaged counterparts (Klem & Connell, 2004). Student engagement is also

important for reducing behaviors that are linked to dropout rates (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003).

Student engagement and sense of belonging. Sense of belonging, linked to emotional engagement (Lee, 2014), can be defined as the feeling, belief and expectation of connectedness to the group that is associated with feelings of fitting in, acceptance, and attachment within a group (Libby, 2004; McMillan & Chavis, 1996). Martin and Dowson (2009) demonstrated that the greater the connectedness on personal and emotional levels in academics, the greater the potential for students to experience academic motivation, engagement, and achievement. McNeely and Falci (2004) examined school connectedness and adolescent health risk behaviors longitudinally. They noted that student engagement, as a dimension of connectedness, may be the most important element of connectedness for reducing risk behaviors among students. Students with higher sense of belonging do better than students reporting lower levels of connectedness (Libby, 2004). Likewise, students with greater levels of belonging are likely to have higher levels of achievement (Lee, 2014).

Student engagement and student achievement. Higher levels of student engagement have been associated with increased student performance (Klem & Connelly, 2004). In historical studies, a strong positive relationship between engagement and student performance existed (Finn, 1989, 1993; Finn & Rock, 1997; Marks, 2000). Students with higher levels of teacher support have higher levels of engagement which leads to better attendance and test scores (Klem & Connell, 2004). Student motivation, a component of engagement, influences the cognitive strategies used by students to learn (Greene, Miller, Crowson, Duke, & Akey, 2004). In addition, self-efficacy, achievement goals, and perceived instrumentality (i.e., the extent to which tasks are perceived to be instrumental in achieving personally valued future goals) have been linked to

student motivation (Greene et al.). According to Miller and Brickman (2004) perceived instrumentality is a predictor for cognitive engagement through self-regulation and the use of meaningful strategies.

In a study of a large-scale high school reform effort including 449 students, Akey (2006) examined the influence of student engagement and perceived academic competence on student achievement in reading and mathematics. Results illustrated how competent a student feels predicts how well s/he will perform in future reading and mathematics tests. Additionally, student engagement plays a secondary role in determining the level of success in mathematics. For reading, student engagement showed less of an influence on student success. Students who reported higher levels of support from teachers, as well as greater understanding of teacher expectations, reported higher levels of student engagement in school. Akey also found current levels of student engagement are influenced by past experiences and is the strongest predictor of engagement. Students reporting high levels of engagement in one year were more likely to report higher levels of engagement in subsequent years (Akey). Likewise, students with higher levels of achievement in one year were more likely to report higher levels of student engagement in subsequent years. However, the construct of perceived academic competence preceded the importance of student engagement in school. The models studied by Akey suggested "students who see themselves as academically competent become more engaged over time," as well as "students who are engaged early become more confident of their ability to be academically successful" (p. 26). In this regard, student achievement is contingent upon the development of a sense of efficacy and confidence in their ability to be successful in school.

Once students are confident of their ability to succeed, they become more engaged and learn more. On the other hand, students are not likely to attempt educational tasks when

> they feel they cannot succeed. And they are not likely to feel that they can succeed unless they have previously experienced success, along with the support needed to achieve that success. (Akey, p. 31)

Student achievement is the cornerstone in which educational programs, curriculum, and schools are assessed (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). Reyes and colleagues concluded that a vital component of achievement is student engagement (Reyes et al., 2012), which has led to an increase in research on its influence (van Uden, Ritzen, & Pieters, 2013).

Student engagement and performance has been linked to how classroom interactions are promoted by teachers (Reyes et al., 2012). In a study of 63 teachers and 2,000 students in 90 fifth and sixth grade English language arts (ELA) classrooms from 44 schools, Reyes and colleagues found both direct and indirect links between classroom emotional climate (CEC) and academic achievement. Students are more successful academically when teachers were considered responsive to their academic needs as well as their social and emotional needs.

Measuring student engagement. Although, considered the hottest research topic in educational psychology and the holy grail of learning, understanding student engagement is surrounded by challenges in conceptualizing and measuring the construct (Sinatra, Heddy, & Lombardi, 2015). “The construct is widely used by researchers, students, teachers, parents, school administrators, and government officials without proper and accurate definitions” (Azevedo, 2015, p. 11). The term has lost meaning and precision due to a lack of agreement regarding the definition and effective measurement of engagement (Azevedo; Sinatra, Heddy, & Lombardi). Ryu and Lombardi (2015) further suggested that views on learning influence how student engagement is conceptualized as well as the methodology used to measure the construct; making it hard to distinguish between the components of a multidimensional construct.

Ultimately, the dimensions of engagement overlap making it difficult to fully understand the complex phenomenon (Sinatra, Heddy, & Lombardi). Such challenges with the measurement of student engagement has led to a divide in engagement theory and research (Lawson & Lawson, 2013). Consequently, more attention should be given to issues regarding the way student engagement is conceptualized as well as theoretical, methodological, and analytical underpinnings (Azevedo).

Student Engagement in K-12 Schools

Student engagement is addressed conceptually and empirically in research and policy due to its impact on student behavior (van Uden, Ritzen, & Pieters, 2013). Most research on the concept of student engagement focuses on three types of engagement: (a) motivational, (b) behavioral, and (c) emotional (Chi & Wylie, 2014). These components of student engagement are studied from a variety of perspectives (e.g., teachers, administrators, and students).

Teacher perceptions. Rosenquist (2015) interviewed 123 middle school mathematics teachers across two large urban school districts about their instructional practices and school context, and found that teachers mentioned *engag-* word stems (e.g., engaging, engagement, engaged) approximately 4 times more per teacher as they mentioned *motiv-* word stems. These findings indicated that overall engagement is a more salient concept for teachers compared to motivation. The concepts related to motivation and engagement were used to describe different types of interactions. Engagement was used to describe observations, teacher evaluations, expectations and feedback, whereas motivation was used for descriptions of internal or more private interactions; consistent with research that suggests engagement is observable and external. While behavioral engagement can be observed, other forms of engagement, such as cognitive engagement, are not and must be inferred from observation. Rosenquist (2015)

suggested engagement can be influenced by teachers' instructional choices, whereas motivation is influenced by complex external factors outside of a teacher's control. Alternatively, van Uden, Ritzen, and Pieters (2013) noted that teachers perceive student engagement based upon their varied experiences with their students. They further explained that teacher perceptions of their interpersonal behavior, self-efficacy, and competency are related to perceived student engagement (van Uden, Ritzen, & Pieters).

School-based administrators. In this study, the selected school district employs site-based management. This is characterized by school-based administrators who are empowered to make certain site-based decisions in order to meet the needs of the unique population in which they serve (Mette & Bengston, 2015). For example, district leadership empowers school-based administrators to make decisions concerning school budgets, student schedules, and human resource allocations for instruction (Mette & Bengston). Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) found leadership effects mediated through student engagement to be greater for principals compared to teachers. Ultimately, their study indicated teacher leadership has smaller effects than principal leadership effects on school conditions. Urick and Bowers (2011) further explained that school-based administrators create the academic climate at a school through vision, mission, and goals, as well as leadership style and instructional support. Principals influence student learning through positive academic climates (Urick & Bowers). Changes at the instructional or school levels should be supported by district-level administrators as the cooperative relationship between the district and school-based leadership can increase the academic climate of schools (Urick & Bowers).

The Role of District Leaders

District leaders support student learning indirectly by formulating, "strategies and support practices that enable principals, teachers, and students to thrive" (Wahlstrom et al., 2010, p. 32). Wahlstrom and colleagues concluded that district level priorities and actions have an effect at the school level. Accordingly, district leaders are faced with how to use their position of authority to improve student learning through the development and support of policy and practice (Wahlstrom et al.). Although the need for research-based evidence in decision-making continues to escalate, research on the decision-making process by district leaders is only beginning to emerge (Farley-Ripple, 2012).

Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) explored the connection between leadership and student learning. Efficacy has been used as a variable by organizations to understand personal and organizational outcomes and included as their key variable in the study. They sought to understand the impact of leader efficacy and collective efficacy (i.e., collective capacity of colleagues) on district leadership and ultimately, student learning. Successful leadership, as characterized by Leithwood and Jantzi (2008), included setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization and managing the instructional program. Their framework suggested that, "for district leaders, these practices contribute to school leader efficacy; school leader efficacy, in turn, will influence school leader practices" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008, p. 506). Their findings suggested the effects of district leadership are indirect. They found all four characteristics of successful leadership were moderately to strongly related to collective efficacy (i.e., "beliefs about the collective capacity of colleagues across schools in the district to improve student learning," Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008, p. 498). To achieve organizational outcomes (e.g., improve student learning), district leaders must skillfully engage in all four characteristics of

successful leaders (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Thus, the established role of a district central office in supporting and bringing about change in education highlights the implications of decision-making by district leaders (Farley-Ripple, 2012).

The current accountability policy cultivates an environment that focuses on becoming the leader in the number of students "who graduate from baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, community colleges, and adult career-technical institutes," thus further underscoring the importance of student engagement research, policy, and practice (Lawson & Lawson, 2013, p. 432). Likewise, connecting research use, decision-making, and the potential for education change requires examining factors that lead to policy and practice (Farley-Ripple, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The use of data by policymakers and educators has been debated, however, the pressure to use data for accountability is increasing (Mandinach, 2012). Standardized assessments, often the data source for examining student achievement, is only tangentially linked to instructional practice (Mandinach). Data-driven decision-making calls for a balance between rigor and relevance (Mandinach). According to Johnson (2012) the superintendent and school board members should be viewed as, "leadership partners working in a complementary fashion toward a shared vision and goal" (p. 84). In addition, an effective school board is responsible for (a) creating a vision, (b) using data, (c) setting goals, (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action, (e) creating awareness and urgency, (f) engaging the community, (g) connecting with district leadership, (h) creating climate, (i) providing staff development, (j) developing policy with a focus on student learning, (k) demonstrating commitment, and (l) practicing unified governance (Johnson, 2012). Through these activities, the school board as a governing body can impact the conditions that enable successful teaching and learning (Johnson). Taking a systems-

based thinking approach, the current study will focus on the centralized role of district leaders to impact policy.

Gaps in Literature. There is a weak connection between research and policymaking in education (Lubienski et al., 2014). Lubienski et al. (2014) called for greater connection and utilization of social science research to inform policy. They concluded, "with so many non-educators involved in educational policy and politics, it is worth considering whether there are ways of improving policy augmentation and its reliance on the social sciences" (p. 141). Cooper, Levin, and Campbell (2009) also emphasized the importance of learning more about effective education policy and practice. This study fosters a deeper understanding of student engagement within a specified context. Fullan (2002) noted learning in this manner (i.e., in context) is related to sustainability in that conditions conducive to continuous improvement can be established.

Limited research has been conducted on the concept of student engagement from the perspective of district leadership. Student engagement is widely documented from the perspectives of students and teachers, however, less attention has been paid to the role of student engagement in policy making and implementation by district leaders. It is also noted as "one of the most widely misused and overgeneralized constructs" in education (Azevedo, 2015, p. 84). Research must document the contextual influences of school policies and practices to expand understanding in this area (Christenson et al., 2012). Understanding how it is defined and the potential impact on policy has implications for both centralized and decentralized decision-making models for school districts. Furthermore, "engagement is not conceptualized as an attribute of the student but rather as an alterable state of being that is highly influenced by the capacity of school, family, and peers to provide consistent expectations and supports for learning" (Christenson et al., 2012, p. v). Educators in positions with formal or informal

authority have more opportunity to leverage, regulate, and guide reform efforts (Park et al., 2012). Park and colleagues, found the way leaders frame reform efforts can impact the degree to which others find new ideas to be salient and credible. They suggested policymakers must recognize that, "schools are ultimately political and social systems where people's interactions, preexisting knowledge, and assumptions come into play when new policies are introduced" (Park et al., p. 670). Thus, linking the perspective of district leadership to decision-making can improve how student engagement is conceptualized, encouraged, and measured. Christenson and colleagues concluded,

> Establishing construct validity for student engagement requires common agreement regarding what comprises the engagement construct – or what engagement is and what it is not… The constancy of the construct across researchers – in conceptualization and measurement – is a worthy endeavor, one with practical, scientific, and policy implications. (p. vii)

Therefore, the purpose of the present exploratory qualitative study was to examine the perceptions and application of student engagement by K-12 district leaders at a large urban school district in the southern United States in 2016. Correspondingly, this exploratory qualitative study investigated student engagement as it relates to district leadership at multiple levels in the central office, how it was defined and assessed, and how district leaders used student engagement to influence policy decisions.

Research Questions

Fullan (2002) recommended information, in this case the understanding of student engagement, only becomes knowledge (i.e., the transfer of information to be part of organizational schema) when it is socially processed through knowledge building, creation,

sharing, and management. This exploratory qualitative study attempts to gather information and build on existing knowledge for a better understanding of the definition, measurement, and utilization of student engagement from leaders situated in a large, multilevel district system. Findings from the proposed study could lead to more informed policy through the formal examination of perceptions of student engagement and the potential impact on policy (Cooper, Levin, & Campbell, 2009). The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. How do district leaders within a large urban school district define student engagement?
2. What do district leaders know about how student engagement is assessed in their school district?
3. In what ways do school district leaders use student engagement when making policy decisions?

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced relevant literature conceptualizing and defining student engagement. In addition, a brief history of accountability illustrated the impact of policy in education. Student engagement, as a multidimensional construct, should be viewed from the lens of district leaders as an untapped area of research. Understanding how district leaders conceptualize student engagement could lead to better measurement within the context of a single district. Chapter Three describes the study methodology and research site as well as study population.

Chapter 3

Method

This exploratory qualitative study (Robson & McCartan, 2016) was designed to examine the concept of student engagement from the perspective of K-12 district leaders in a large urban school district located in the southern United States through the lens of systems-based thinking. The present study included one-on-one, semi-structured interviews that elicited information from district-level administrators and members of the school board regarding how they consider student engagement to inform policy. Three research questions guided this study:

1. How do district leaders within a large urban school district define student engagement?
2. What do district leaders know about how student engagement is assessed in their school district?
3. In what ways do school district leaders use student engagement when making policy decisions?

The present chapter describes the study design and the procedures as well as the methods utilized.

Rationale for Qualitative Study Design

Qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon—in this case, student engagement—from the perspective of those involved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In his introductory text, Yin (2011) concluded that one of the five features of qualitative research is to produce new insights and concepts regarding a phenomenon. Understanding student engagement from the perspective of district leaders represents an untapped area of research. At this time, there were no known studies in literature regarding student engagement that incorporate the voices of administrators and school board members who are in the position to initiate and

authorize policy. Student engagement is widely documented from the perspectives of students, teachers, and school-level administrators (Bazenas, 2014; Marks, 2000; Rosenquist, 2015; Sutherland, 2010; van Uden et al., 2013). Along these lines, investigating the perspective of both district-level administrators and school board members through an exploratory qualitative study allowed for a better understanding of the decision-making processes related to student engagement as a component of student success.

Research Design

An exploratory qualitative study design was chosen because this approach enabled the investigator to develop new insights and understand student engagement from the perspective of district leaders (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Robson & McCartan, 2016). The nature of qualitative research is to uncover meaning (Glesne, 2011; Hatch, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2011). An exploratory study, also known as a basic qualitative study, is primarily focused on extending knowledge, may eventually inform practice, and is commonly used in applied fields such as education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Robson and McCarten (2016), exploratory research focuses on exploration of a phenomenon in which little previous research exists. This study explored how district leaders understand and make sense of student engagement as an untapped area of research. While the goal of all qualitative research is to uncover and interpret meaning, basic qualitative studies do not go beyond this level of understanding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Other types of qualitative research (e.g., phenomenology, narrative analysis, grounded theory, and ethnography) each add another dimension to a study, which is not present in an exploratory study. For this research, an exploratory qualitative study is viewed as an opportunity to begin research around the influence of student engagement on decision-making and policy in education.

Constructivism is central to the qualitative approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). In addition, constructivism is considered the most commonly applied paradigm in qualitative research and is often used interchangeably with interpretism (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This paradigm assumes that multiple realities exist which are socially constructed (i.e., no single, observable reality exists). In essence, this means reality is a matter of consensus and shared understanding. Furthermore, reality is actively constructed in and through social action (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011). A basic exploratory study focuses on meaning, understanding, and process (Merriam & Tisdell). Researchers are primarily interested in further discovery. However, this design stops short of grounded theory, which would include the additional elements of building a substantive theory, incorporating theoretical sampling and the use of constant comparative methods for analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As a starting point for further research, the present qualitative study sought to build upon existing knowledge of student engagement while adding the perspectives of district leaders through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Through interviews, researchers can understand how participants "describe their experiences or articulate their reasons for action" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 3). Accordingly, this inductive study provides an in-depth description of student engagement, as it relates to policy and decision-making at the district central office within the context of the sample.

Research site and population. The present exploratory qualitative study took place within a large urban school district located in the southern United States. The school district, divided into smaller regions for administrative oversight, serves well-over 150,000 students representing numerous countries/regions around the world. The student population includes highly diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. With nearly 200 traditional schools (i.e.,

elementary, K-8, middle, high) and nearly 20,000 employees, the school district is among one of the largest in the nation. The school district also includes a number of charter schools and a virtual school that are not considered traditional in nature. Administrators include 3% of the total employees. Administrative positions are further broken into district-level instructional (85%, n = 57), district-level non-instructional (20%, n = 76), and school-level (80%, n = 535). District-level instructional administrators include personnel under the division focused on curriculum and instruction. Alternatively, district-level non-instructional administrators include personnel under the operations division (e.g., facilities and transportation departments).

Other district leaders include the superintendent, deputy superintendent, and the school board. The school board includes eight elected members. The school board is comprised of a chairperson (elected county-wide) and seven additional members. Each additional member represents one of the seven district zones in which they reside for a total of eight school board members. The superintendent, appointed by the school board, oversees the direction and operation of the school system in accordance with policies approved by the school board. Finally, the deputy superintendent is responsible for the oversight of departments connected to teaching and learning.

The school district under study uses the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model as a component of an elaborate teacher evaluation structure. The Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model includes four domains (i.e., classroom strategies and behaviors; planning and preparing; reflecting on teaching; and collegiality and professionalism) that are used in a variety of states, districts, and schools in part or as a whole as the prescribed teacher evaluation system (Marzano, 2013). In addition, school-based and district-level administrators are evaluated based on the Marzano School Leader Evaluation Model and the Marzano District Leader Evaluation Model,

respectively. Recognizing the system in which teachers are evaluated is important for understanding the context in which the study occurred.

Sampling Methodology

Upon receiving approval from the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board (IRB) and approval through the district's internal research review process, the study used criterion specific, purposive sampling based on group characteristics to select district leaders to participate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), sampling in qualitative research is purposeful, typically not random, and small. Purposeful sampling, also commonly referred to as purposive sampling (Patton, 2015), is the most appropriate option for qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell). Participants were selected based on attributes that were considered crucial (e.g., length of time in the organization, and level of leadership within the hierarchy) and in line with the purpose of the study (Merriam & Tisdell; see Table 1).

Both school board members and district-level administrators were included due to their role as key decision makers (Asen et al., 2013). For the purpose of this study, school-level administrators and district-level non-instructional administrators were not included as they did not meet the inclusion criteria. District leaders who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate in the study.

To further define the population, the researcher used criterion specific, purposive sampling with an established quota for each level within the organizational chart (Patton, 2015). A quota allowed for a predetermined number of cases for inclusion to fill important categories or groups within a study (Patton). The number of participants (the quota) is determined based upon

Table 1

Criterion Specific Requirements

Criteria Level	Criteria Description
Level A	District leaders who are district-level administrators or members of the school board
Level B	District-level administrators overseeing an area within curriculum and instruction
Level C	District-level administrators at the director-level or higher
Level D	District-level administrators who have worked a minimum of two years within the organization, in any capacity or role

logistical and budgetary constraints (Patton). The specific quota is set by the researcher with consideration of the study's purpose and serves as a starting point for the sample size.

Perceptions of policy can vary across multiple divisions within a school district or system (Coburn & Talbert, 2006). According to Asen and colleagues (2013), "no single person can generate all potentially relevant perspectives on a policy question" (p. 36); thus, this study sought to include five leadership or position levels to represent all relevant perspectives from the district level. The school district's organizational chart (as of August 2016) was used as a guide in determining the position level for district leaders. District leaders were divided into five groups based on their position in the organizational structure to ensure representation at the various levels of leadership (see Table 2).

It is important to stress the benefits for using criterion specific, purposeful sampling with a minimum quota. Selecting a sample that included these five levels of district leadership allowed for the data to be analyzed overall, as well as more closely for patterns among the levels of leadership represented (Patton, 2015). It was vital that all five leadership groups were

represented to better understand the district leadership system as it relates to student engagement through systems thinking. Table 2 outlines the sampling level with the minimum quota. In addition, the table indicates the total number of eligible administrators by position level. A 25% minimum quota was selected after examining each of the five district leader categories in which participants would be classified, as well as the researcher's capacity to conduct interviews as the sole researcher for the project.

Table 2

Number of District Leaders by Position Level

Sampling Level Quota (*n*)	**Position Level**	**# of District Leaders in Position**	**% of Total Eligible District Leaders**
Level A (*n* = 2)	School Board	8	12.3
Level B (*n* = 1)	Superintendent	1	1.5
	Deputy Superintendent	1	1.5
Level C (*n* = 3)	Chief	2	3.1
	Area Superintendent	5	7.7
	Associate Superintendent	3	4.6
Level D (*n* = 4)	Senior Executive Director	2	3.1
	Executive Director	1	1.5
	Executive Area Director	12	18.5
Level E (*n* = 8)	Senior Director	4	6.2
	Process Specialist	3	4.6
	Director	23	35.4

Note. All sampling level quotas were met or exceed. In total, 32 interviews were conducted.

Patton (2015) explains "the emergent nature of qualitative inquiry applies especially powerful to sample size" (p. 313). The sample size in qualitative research can grow or be reduced based upon the inquiry; even with the application of a quota (Patton). The quota served as a starting point that could be flexible (Patton). In addition, applying a quota ensured groups—

in this case leadership/position level—were filled regardless of size and distribution; thus ensuring all groups were represented in the final analysis (Patton). In addition, “sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources” (Patton, p. 311). The final sample was determined once the point of saturation was achieved; that is, no new insights were emerging (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The point of saturation served as a guide to determine whether interviews should continue once minimum quota levels were attained (Patton). The level of saturation or new insights gleaned varied by interview question. For some questions, consistency was achieved among district leaders more quickly compared to other interview questions. Therefore, interviews continued beyond the quota in cases where new perspectives were being shared.

Participants

District-level administrators. District-level administrators are administrators who are not assigned to a school or technical center location. This study focused on administrators within one division of the district that focuses on curriculum and instruction. This division includes offices such as: Academics; Advanced Studies; Career and Technical Education; Curriculum Services; Multilingual Services; Exceptional Student Education (ESE); Guidance Services; Professional Development Services; Research, Accountability, and Grants; School Transformation; and School Choice Services.

The eligibility (or inclusion criteria) for administrators to participate in this study was limited by position level (i.e., must be at a minimum level of director) and administrators who have worked at least two years, in any capacity, for the selected school district. Years of experience was determined based upon the individuals start date compared to the date in which

data collection began. The minimum position level criterion focused the study on administrators who are in a position with greater responsibility to make decisions and who may potentially inform policy within the district. Furthermore, administrators with less than two years' experience working within the selected district may not have the historical knowledge or experience necessary to answer questions related to policy and decision-making within the district. These administrators were invited to participate in this study through email (Appendix A). The email outlined the research project, including the approximate length of their participation. Administrators who elected to participate were asked to provide possible times in which they could be interviewed. Interviews took place in a private conference room or office so that participants would feel more comfortable during data collection. Following introductions, the researcher used a script within the interview protocol inviting the administrator to participate (Appendix C). Participants were asked for permission to audio record interviews. In addition, steps were be taken to increase the comfort of participants (i.e., no identifying information were requested during the interviews) and to protect confidentiality. Any information that could link a participant to their interview feedback was removed from their transcript.

School board members. School board members, in their role, identify issues requiring policy development (Asen et al, 2013). In addition, they are considered citizen-policy makers, as they operate from the perspectives of government and public life (i.e., they make policy within their communities). All sitting school board members were invited to participate in one-on-one interviews with the principal investigator. The study was introduced to school board members by the Associate Superintendent for Research, Accountability, and Grants to help generate buy-in for the study. Such communication from the Associate Superintendent showed the districts support and provided an avenue to introduce the researcher. The school board assistants were

responsible for scheduling a 45-minute interview window in accordance with board members' schedules. Following introductions, the researcher used a script within the interview protocol that invited the school board member to participate (Appendix C). In addition, no identifying information were requested during the interviews. This may have increased participant comfort and confidentiality for their feedback.

Study participants. Participants in this study included 32 district leaders who completed one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with the researcher. Interviews were between 30 and 90 minutes in length. Initially, demographic data (e.g., age, gender, and ethnicity) were not collected from participants. The participants' standing within the organization seemed to be the most important characteristic at the time. The initial review of interview transcripts confirmed that length of time in the organization and experience in education played a more important role in understanding the data than age, gender, and ethnicity. However, once all interviews had been completed, a brief demographic questionnaire was disseminated to participants to gather further contextual information about the sample for future exploration of differences among participants. Demographic data were provided by 30 participants (93.8%). Of these participants, 50% identified as female (n = 15), 73.3% as White/Caucasian (n = 22), 13.3% as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin (n = 4), and 16.7% as Black or African American (n = 5). Their ages were reported between 34 years old and 64 years or older, with the majority of participants at least 46 years old (n = 23, 76.7%). In addition, most participants (n = 22, 73.3%) indicated that they were in their current position within the school district for less than 5 years. However, many have worked for the school district for at least 9 years (n = 20, 66.7%) and have spent at least 15 years in the field of education (n = 23, 76.7%). Table 3 through Table 6 provide more detail regarding participant experience in education and demographic information.

Table 3

Participant Race, Ethnicity, or Origin (*n* = 30)

White/Caucasian	73.3%
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	13.3%
Black or African American	16.7%
Asian	0%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%
Middle Eastern or North African	0%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%
Some other race, ethnicity, or origin	0%

Note. Participants could choose more than one

Table 4

Participant Age (*n* = 30)

22-27	0%
28-33	0%
34-39	10.0%
40-45	13.3%
46-51	33.3%
52-57	26.7%
58-63	10.0%
64 or older	6.7%

Table 5

Participant Gender (*n* = 30)

Male	50.0%
Female	50.0%
Other	0%

Table 6

Participant Experience in Education

	Less than 1 year	1-2 years	3-4 years	5-6 years	7-8 years	9-10 years	11-12 years	13-14 years	15 years or more
Years of experience in field of education (n = 30)	0%	3.3%	0%	0%	6.7%	0%	6.7%	6.7%	76.7%
Years of experience for current school district (n = 29)	0%	7.0%	3.5%	17.2%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%	7.0%	55.5%
Length of time in current position (n = 30)	26.7%	13.3%	33.3%	6.7%	10.0%	3.3%	0%	3.3%	3.3%

All sampling quotas were met and in some cases the minimum quota was exceeded. However, given the smaller sample size among some groups, the sampling levels were further collapsed to protect the confidentiality of participants when reporting findings. These data were collapsed based on naturally occurring groups within the school district:

- Group A: School Board Members
- Group B: Cabinet Members
- Group C: Non-Cabinet Members

School board members are elected officials serving four-year terms that align with the presidential or the gubernatorial elections. Seven of the eight school board members are elected based upon where they reside within the district. The eighth board member is elected county-wide to serve as the chairman of the school board. This study focused exclusively on cabinet and

non-cabinet members within one division of the district focused on curriculum and instruction. Cabinet members represent the top level of leadership for each division of the school district who have decision-making power and are responsible for carrying out the district's strategic plan. Cabinet members include district leaders with the following job titles: superintendent, deputy superintendent, chief, and senior executive director. Non-cabinet members are classified as any position below the senior executive director level. However, for the purpose of this study, district leaders below the director level were not included. More specifically, non-cabinet members with titles of executive director, executive area director, senior director, process specialist, and director were invited to participate. These condensed reporting levels were chosen based on the naturally occurring levels of leadership and decision-making responsibilities. Figure 1 illustrates the sampling quota levels compared to the final group classification for reporting purposes. Table 7 outlines the number of interviews completed by group, as well as the percentage compared to the eligible population within the sample. All school board members (n = 8, 100%) participated in this study, representing one quarter of the entire sample. Overall, 50% of cabinet members within the curriculum and instruction division participated; thus, representing 21.9% of the final sample. Non-cabinet members represented the largest group within the study with nearly 42.5% of the eligible population included. Slightly more than half of the sample (53.1%) included non-cabinet members. This is consistent with the leadership structure within the district. There are fewer administrator positions in the organizational structure at the executive leadership levels.

Data Sources

All one-on-one interviews took place in a private conference room or office. Data were collected using a one-on-one, semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix C). The protocol included two introductory questions and seven targeted questions with probes that focused on

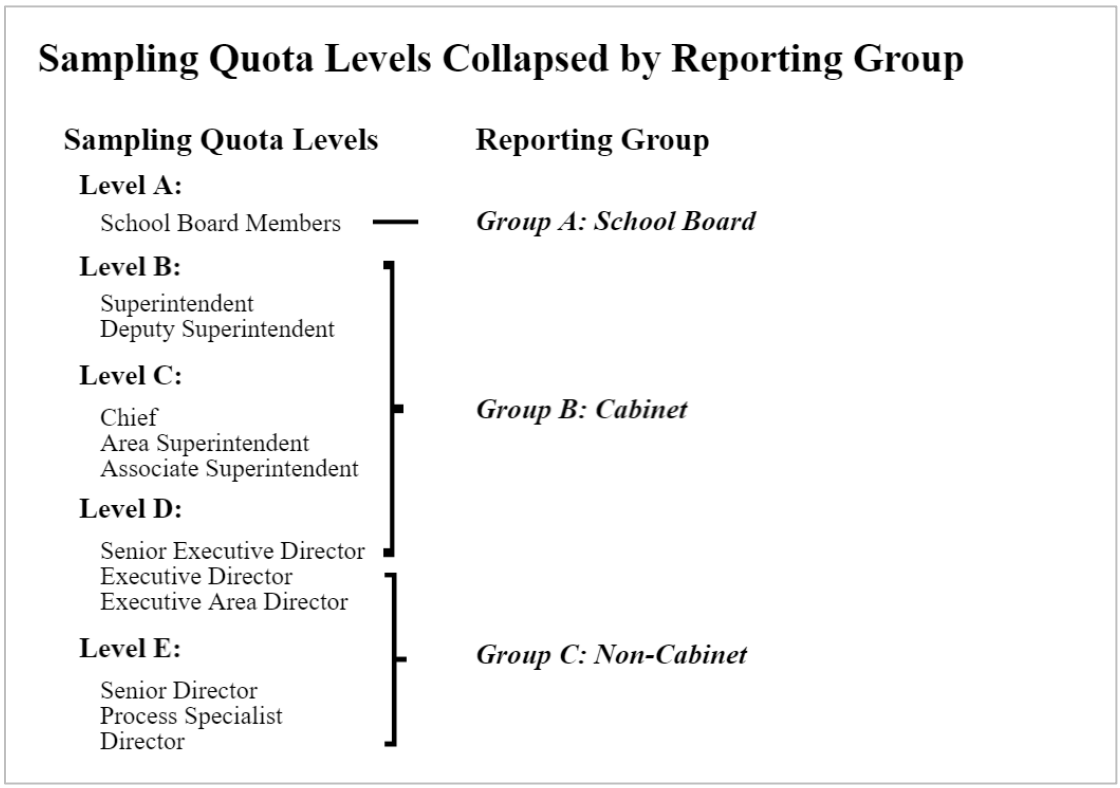


Figure 1

Sampling Quota Levels by Group Reporting Levels

Table 7

Participant Breakdown

Group Level for Reporting	# Interviews Completed	% of Population	% of Sample
School Board	8	100	25.0
Cabinet	7	50.0	21.9
Non-Cabinet	17	42.5	53.1

perceptions of student engagement and decision-making. Using a semi-structured interview protocol allowed the researcher to ask questions based on the flow of conversation and as topics emerged throughout the discussion (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Both school board members and district-level administrators were asked the same questions with slight modifications that allowed for adjustments when referencing their particular role. For example, school board members were asked, “How long have you served as a board member for [school district name]?” Alternatively, administrators were asked, “How long have you served as an administrator for [school district name]?” The semi-structured interview protocol served as a guide for answering the research questions (see Table 8).

In addition to one-on-one interviews, reflective field notes and member checks provided additional data sources for the present study. Field notes were used for self-reflection and awareness of potential biases, as well as to record insights gleaned during interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Member checks, discussed further below, provided another source of data once interviews concluded. Together, one-on-one interviews, field notes, and member checks provided in-depth information for understanding perceptions of student engagement and application among K-12 district leaders.

Table 8

Semi-Structured Interview Questions by Research Question

Interview Questions*	**Research Questions**		
	RQ1: How do district leaders within a large urban school district define student engagement?	RQ2: What do district leaders know about how student engagement is assessed in their school district?	RQ3: In what ways do school district leaders use student engagement when making policy decisions?
1. How do you define student engagement?	X		
2. Imagine you are viewing a classroom with high levels of student engagement. How would you describe what you see?	X		
3. What factors do you believe contribute to student engagement?		X	
4. What practices for assessing student engagement currently exist within your district?		X	
5. Are you aware of any current practices or policy for improving student engagement? If so, please describe.		X	

Table 8 Continued.

Interview Questions*	**Research Questions**		
	RQ1: How do district leaders within a large urban school district define student engagement?	RQ2: What do district leaders know about how student engagement is assessed in their school district?	RQ3: In what ways do school district leaders use student engagement when making policy decisions?
6. New legislation through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes student engagement as a potential indicator under the statewide accountability system. What do you believe should be considered for improving student engagement?			X
7. How does fostering student engagement play into your role as a [board member OR district-level administrator]?		X	X
8. What barriers exist, if any, to addressing student engagement through policy?			X
9. How can educational leaders improve student engagement?	X	X	X
10. We are at the end of the interview time. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your perception of student engagement before closing?	X	X	X

* See Appendix A for introductory and follow-up probing questions

Overview of Initial Coding and Analysis

Sampling strategies help determine the unit of analysis in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). Using a systems thinking theoretical framework ensures that certain categories (i.e., levels of leadership at the central office) were included in the study regardless of distribution among sampling categories (Patton). Therefore, the analysis could illuminate any patterns/themes within each group (i.e., school board, cabinet, and non-cabinet) as well as across groups to gain deeper insight of the perceptions of student engagement within a complex system—a large urban school district within the southern United States.

The majority of interviews were audio recorded (n = 29, 90.6%). The audio recording for each one-on-one, semi-structured interview was transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were then carefully sanitized of any identifying information before analysis began. The same precautions were taken for interviews where participants elected for only notes to be typed. One interview occurred over the phone and could not be recorded. Participants in two remaining interviews elected for notes to be taken without audio recording. All verbatim transcripts and notes were cleaned of grammatical errors for reporting purposes and ease of reading during the member checking process (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Carlson, 2010; Hagens, Dobrow, & Chafe, 2009).

Names of individuals, departments, and any reference to something that could link a participant to their data were removed from transcripts. Using verbatim transcripts (n = 29) and carefully taken notes (n = 3) were important for more accurately understanding participant perspectives. Patton (2015) affirmed that, “Nothing can substitute for these data—the actual things said by real people,” and further explained, “the purpose of each interview is to record as fully and fairly as possible that particular interviewee’s perspective” (p. 471). In this regard, verbatim transcripts increase the accuracy of data collection. Strategies were also in place to

increase the accuracy of notes for interviews in which audio recording was not permissible. During these interviews, the researcher took time to recap responses as the notes were the only source of retaining participant information.

Member checking. Member checking is a process aimed at increasing the trustworthiness of qualitative research by focusing on the credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). This practice enhances the researcher/participant relationship, reinforces the rights of the interviewee, and allows for missing details, as well as new insights to be added (Hagens, Dobrow, & Chafe, 2009). The process provides participants with the opportunity to review their data prior to analysis. In this study, all participants were invited during the interview to review their transcript or notes once data collection had concluded and before analysis began. By doing so, they were given an additional opportunity to provide clarification, more detail, and context to the information provided. In total, 19 out of 32 participants indicated that they were willing to participate in this phase of the study. These participants received instructions once all recorded interviews were transcribed (Appendix E). Instructions and the process for completing member checks were developed based on the work of Carlson (2010). She suggested that traps can easily and unknowingly be set during member checking that may threaten the participant/researcher relationship and further concludes, “if triggered, these traps may instill a participant with feelings of disappointment, uncertainty, or embarrassment, or squelch the willingness of a participant to continue the study” (Carlson, 2010, p. 1103). Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) iterate this point further, “Some subjects may experience a shock as a consequence of reading their own interviews. Oral language transcribed verbatim may appear incoherent and confused speech, even as indicating a lower level of intellectual functioning” (p. 213). Therefore, partial transcripts or notes were sent to participants for review (Carlson). The transcripts were

considered partial as filler words (e.g., um, like, uh-huh), false startes (e.g., when a person starts to say something, but never completes the thought), and long pauses were removed to make the transcripts easier to read. Further attention was paid to how the member checking process was framed for participants. For example, instructions outlined the type of feedback requested, what to look for in the transcript, reiterated the purpose of the study, described how data would be reported, and the potential use of quotes. These participants were asked to respond with a revised transcript only if they elected to (a) report areas where they might have more to say about student engagement and/or (b) report areas where they might wish to clarify context, thoughts, or suggestions provided. Participants who elected to complete this phase were given one week to return a modified transcript. Of these participants, only two provided additional feedback or confirmed that their transcript was approved. The participant who provided additional feedback revised the name in a citation provided during the interview that was incorrectly spelled when transcribed. In essence, the sentiment and information shared were unchanged. Hagens, Dobrow, and Chafe (2009) label this type of change as Category 1 (i.e., specific transcription errors/omissions corrected) in their study on the advantages and disadvantages of interviewee transcript review.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is a process whereby the researcher consults with a critical colleague to extensively review findings and the progression of the study (Spall, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested peer debriefing as a method for increasing the overall trustworthiness of findings. According to Spall (1998), “peer debriefing contributes to confirming that the findings and the interpretations are worthy, honest, and believable” (p. 280). The peer debriefer for this study was chosen given their similar training in research methodology at the doctoral level, the debriefer’s experience in designing and conducting qualitative program

evaluation studies, as well as their varied experience in qualitative analytic approaches. In addition, the majority of the debriefer's researcher experience beyond graduate school has been in the qualitative domain. The shared experiences between the researcher and the debriefer created a trusting collegial relationship in which findings, interpretation, as well as potential biases could be discussed openly and candidly.

Peer debriefing sessions took place both formally and informally. During formal debriefing sessions, three sanitized (i.e., identifying information removed) interview transcripts were read independently. The three interview transcripts represented each participant group (i.e., school board, cabinet, and non-cabinet). After each transcript was read, the researcher and debriefer completed a Participant Summary Form adapted from Bloomberg and Volpe (2016; Appendix F). The form allowed the researcher and debriefer to record initial thoughts, themes, and questions independently of one another. A detailed discussion regarding similarities and differences between the researcher's and debriefer's notes followed the independent review. A separate meeting occurred for each research question. Informal meetings occurred frequently over the phone and in person to go over initial themes and sub-themes for each research question. These informal meetings also provided time for critical reflection and support.

Analysis. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Roulston, 2010) to find repeated patterns of meaning or themes across the data set (i.e., interview questions associated with each research question). Data were analyzed inductively at the latent level in accordance with constructivism. In qualitative data analysis, the researcher plays an active role in identifying patterns/themes within the data and selecting which are of interest to report (Braun & Clarke). As an exploratory qualitative study, the research is not theoretically bounded, nor is the focus on generating a plausible theory around district leaders' understanding of student

engagement. Further, this method of analysis provided (a) flexibility in that is not tied to any particular theoretical framework in the same manner of other qualitative analytic methods, (b) the results are easily accessible to the general public, (c) it can be used to summarize key features of a large data corpus, (d) it can highlight similarities/differences across the data set, and (e) is suited for informing policy development (Braun & Clarke). The analysis occurred through a recursive process including six phases adapted from Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guide. Table 9 includes a description of the analytic phase and highlights the analysis process as it applies to this study.

Thematic analysis, one of the most commonly used approaches to qualitative data analysis (Roulston, 2010), was employed. Braun and Clark (2006) concluded that thematic analysis is the foundational method for analysis of qualitative data. Although applicable to all qualitative studies, thematic analysis allows categories to emerge that later produce themes that can be woven together through multiple, inductive, and iterative cycles of data analyses (Saldaña, 2013). An inductive analysis process was used to generate patterns and themes without using preconceived analytical categories (Patton, 2015). Accordingly, findings are typically descriptive and presented as themes and sub-themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Roulston, 2010) to find repeated patterns of meaning or themes across the data set (i.e., interview questions associated with each research question). In order to protect the confidentiality of participants, position levels used to determine the sampling quota and levels were further collapsed so that participants are not identifiable due to a low sample size at certain positions (e.g., sampling level B which only includes the superintendent and deputy superintendent).

Table 9

Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the Process
Phase 1: Familiarity with the Data	• In total, 32 one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher. • Of those, 29 interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were read while listening to the audio recordings to become further immersed in the data and to check for accuracy. • The interview notes were read and reread to become further immersed in the data. • The member checking process occurred during this phase of analysis. • Notes were taken in a reflective journal as field notes to record initial analytic interests and thoughts.
Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes	• Completed a peer debriefing with a trusted colleague where three sanitized interview transcripts were reviewed independently and discussed (Appendix F). • After the peer debriefing discussion, the researcher used QDA Miner to organize initial codes at the latent level (e.g., examined underlying ideas or assumptions within the data) that were data-driven as opposed to theory-driven. • This process resulted in an exhaustive list of codes (i.e., any data extract that could be potentially constituted as a theme was coded).
Phase 3: Searching for Themes	• Codes were reviewed and refined to begin analyzing potential themes and sub-themes. • This phase concluded in an initial draft of themes and sub-themes.
Phase 4: Reviewing Themes	• Reviewed and refined themes at two levels in order to determine congruence between coded data extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2). • Modified themes as necessary (i.e., combined, refined, separated, or discarded codes and sub-themes). • This phase was iterative until refinement did not add anything substantial to the conceptualization of themes and sub-themes.
Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes	• Generated clear definitions and names for each theme and sub-theme. • Considered decisions regarding prevalence of a sub-theme when writing Chapter 4 (i.e., which sub-themes should or should not be reported based on prevalence).
Phase 6: Producing the Report	• Finalized decision regarding how themes and sub-themes would be reported. A description of overall themes would be provided while sub-themes would be reported by group (school board, cabinet, and non-cabinet) and concluded with a cross-group analysis. Sub-themes were reported based upon prevalence within the data set (i.e., discussed by at least 50% of participants within a group).

The data analysis was organized using computer assisted qualitative analysis software (CAQDAS), QDA Miner. CAQDAS is suitable for research studies including multiple participant interviews (Saldaña, 2013). While CAQDAS programs do not analyze the data, that is the role of the researcher, the software stores, organizes, manages, and reconfigures the data enabling analytic reflection by the researcher. For this study, QDA Miner was selected as the most appropriate CAQDAS tool given the researcher's past experience coding manually and past use of the software.

Trustworthiness

"Evaluation research is a context-specific enterprise dependent on how (and where) values and standards are employed," (Saldaña, 2013, p. 122) making it increasingly important to be systematic during data collection and analysis for building trustworthy findings when assessing merit and worth. Trustworthiness in qualitative research speaks to the credibility of a study's findings and interpretations (Patton, 2015). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), this can be addressed "through careful attention to a study's conceptualization and the way in which data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented" (p. 238). Trustworthiness, a concept parallel with rigor, can be increased through the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Given the exploratory nature of this research, the study did not focus on issues related to transferability, as the goal was not to provide findings applicable in other contexts. Instead, this research focused on providing trustworthy data within the context of the participating school district.

Credibility. Credibility in qualitative research corresponds with internal validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Patton, 2015). In this regard, credibility refers to the believability of the research

results. In this study, the researcher employed reflective field notes, member checks, and peer debriefing to enhance the credibility of this study. During the interviews field notes were used to capture verbatim phrases that could give the researcher insight into the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2011). Field notes were also used for self-reflection and awareness of potential biases. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to verify their interview transcripts as a method for member checking and transparency. The member check served as an opportunity for participants to confirm that their interview transcript accurately reflected their response (Koelsch, 2013). Peer debriefing was completed as a means of enhancing the credibility of the study where a peer debriefer met with the researcher throughout the study to monitor progress, ask critical questions and provide support (Spall, 1998). During the peer debriefing process, the colleague reviewed three sanitized transcripts to protect confidentiality of research participants. Finally, prolonged engagement (e.g., time spent at research site and time spent building relationships with respondents) enhances trustworthiness (Patton, 2015). Prolonged engagement is achieved as the researcher is a district-level administrator within the selected organization.

Dependability and confirmability. Dependability and confirmability in qualitative research is analogous to reliability and objectivity in quantitative research, respectively (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Patton, 2015). According to Lincoln and Guba (1986), dependability looks at the research process—was the process logical, traceable, and well-documented? Confirmability focuses on clear links between findings and interpretations. In order to establish dependability and confirmability, the researcher completed an external audit with a colleague. This colleague, who assisted with peer debriefing, was given an opportunity to challenge the study findings (i.e., confirmability) and provide feedback on the research process (i.e., dependability; Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the methodology for this research study. The study purpose, rationale for study design, participants, sampling technique, and data analysis were included. In addition, tables highlighting the number of administrators by position level, as well as the interview items by research questions were provided. Finally, this chapter detailed how the researcher increased trustworthiness throughout this exploratory qualitative research study.

Chapter 4

Presentation of the Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand the knowledge of student engagement and application by K-12 district leaders within a large urban school district in the southern United States. One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were completed with 32 district leaders, including members of the school board, who shared their experiences in education and within their present school district. Data collection took place in June through September of 2016. The following research questions guided this exploratory study:

1. How do district leaders within a large urban school district define student engagement?
2. What do district leaders know about how student engagement is assessed in their school district?
3. In what ways do school district leaders use student engagement when making policy decisions?

This chapter provides an overview of analysis strategies and findings. The findings are presented by participant group (i.e., school board, cabinet, and non-cabinet) for each research question. In addition, findings are further described across groups to explore the overall understanding and application of student engagement in this particular school system for this subset of district leaders.

Overview of Data Analysis

Data were organized using QDA Miner and were reported in aggregate by participant group, as well as overall through a cross-group analysis for each research question. The research questions served as a framework for analyzing the interviews, as well as for reporting findings.

All data were coded based upon a “researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum,” in order to consolidate similarly coded data into categories (Saldaña, 2013, p. 4). For the purposes of this study, codes, sub-themes, and themes were applied based on the work of Saldaña (2013). Codes label and link data in the initial analysis through a cyclical process. Similar codes are grouped to form categories. In other words, categories represented similarly coded data that shared characteristics and suggest a pattern as a sub-theme. Ultimately, “a theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection…” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 14).

In addition, the “analytic goals are to winnow down the number of themes to explain in a report, and to develop an overarching theme from the data corpus, or an integrative theme that weaves various themes together in a coherent narrative” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 176). Thematic analysis also includes some form of data reduction (Roulston, 2010). As such, the researcher defined emergent as sub-themes representing at least 50% of participants. Therefore, the findings are described by group, based upon sub-themes that emerged, at a minimum, from 50% of respondents. It is important to note that the final two questions in the semi-structured interview protocol could be attributed to all three research questions depending on the direction of the discussion. These questions were more indirect: (a) how can educational leaders improve student engagement, and (b) is there anything else you would like me to know about your perception of student engagement before closing? The extracted data for these questions were only coded for themes relevant to the applicable research question.

How Student Engagement is Defined (RQ1)

The first research question sought to gather information from district leaders regarding their understanding of student engagement and how they conceptualized and defined the term.

Four interview questions were included to address this research question; two of which were directly connected (e.g., “How do you define student engagement?”). The last two questions were more general and only coded for themes relevant to RQ1. “What factors do you believe contribute to student engagement?” was asked to solicit indirect perceptions of student engagement. Overall, eight themes emerged in which codes were categorized for RQ1: *Contributing Factors*, *Defining Student Engagement*, *Environment*, *Learning*, *Not Engagement*, *Perceptions*, *Student Engagement Definitions*, and *Tools*. These themes are described in alphabetical order below.

Contributing factors. *Contributing Factors* was defined by components of the educational experience that could contribute to student engagement. For example, content, instructional strategies, teacher planning and preparation, relationships, as well as the teacher. Overall, nine sub-themes were included in this theme.

Defining student engagement. The theme *Defining Student Engagement* referred to participants’ perceptions regarding what may or may not need to occur in order to define student engagement. For example, some participants believed the definition would need to resonate with their lived experiences, that the term should be defined through a collaborative process with varied stakeholders, and included a practical application component. Overall, eight sub-themes were included in this theme.

Environment. The theme *Environment* was characterized by components of the school or classroom environment that were perceived to influence student engagement. For example, participants described a structured environment with clear expectations, student groupings, and a safe atmosphere without judgment from peers/teacher. Overall, five sub-themes were included in this theme.

Learning. *Learning* described what, when, where, and the ways in which learning was connected to student engagement (e.g., learning is challenging, includes discussion, and involves student choice). Overall, eight sub-themes were included in this theme.

Not engagement. Some participants described what student engagement is not. These codes were categorized under the theme *Not Engagement*. Overall, two sub-themes were included in this theme.

Perceptions. *Perceptions* included sub-themes where participants' described their beliefs regarding student engagement in addition to insight into their definition. For example, a few participants described being able to recognize student engagement when they saw it. Overall, five sub-themes were included in this theme.

Student engagement definitions. The theme *Student Engagement Definitions* referred to the numerous ways in which participants' defined the term, both directly and indirectly. Overall, 12 sub-themes were included in this theme.

Tools. *Tools* was defined by objects, resources, and technology used to aid in or increase student engagement. Overall, three sub-themes were included in this theme.

The findings are further described by group based upon sub-themes that emerged, at a minimum, from 50% of respondents.

Group A: School Board

When discussing how student engagement is defined, only 26 of the 52 total sub-themes for this research question were shared by school board members. Of those, only two emerged as prevalent sub-themes (i.e., discussed by at least 50% of participants): *Active* and *Teacher*. Active was used to describe student engagement by an overwhelming majority of the school board. One school board member commented, "[Students are] actively involved in some educational

activity....” The sub-theme *Teacher* described the impact of a teacher on student engagement. For example, one school board member shared, “Obviously, the teacher first and foremost because no matter how good or bad the content is, if you don’t have the right leadership in the classroom you can’t engage your students.” Table 10 provides the emergent theme, associated sub-theme, and sample quotes for all prevalent sub-themes related to RQ1 shared by the school board.

Table 10

RQ1 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Board Members

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Student Engagement Definitions	*Active*	Active focus on the topic being addressed in class that day. I think active participation. And that would be active participation on the assignments and in conversation.
Contributing Factors	*Teacher*	The teacher. The teacher being able to present a topic that—and that’s not easy. I mean, if you’re teaching a subject that’s, you know, is hard to present. Well, I think in this day and age, I think a compelling teacher who can actively engage their imaginations, and also command their respect, and also discover what their interests are and how to engage them in whatever is being taught in that classroom…

Note. Presented based upon frequency discussed by participants (in descending order)

Group B: Cabinet-Level District Administrators

When discussing how student engagement is defined, only 39 of the 52 total sub-themes for this research question were shared by cabinet-level administrators. Of those, seven emerged as prevalent sub-themes (i.e., discussed by at least 50% of participants): *Active*, *Discussion*,

Relevant, *Teacher*, *Clear Expectations*, *Groups*, and *Challenging*. Similar to the school board, many cabinet-level administrators described student engagement as active. One cabinet-level administrator concluded, "When I think about student engagement, I think about students truly being engaged in learning and in school. It's a very active process." Learning was described as relevant, challenging, and included discussion. A cabinet-level administrator described learning in this way, "…[students are] doing meaningful work, work that they've had a say in, work that they own for themselves, and as relevant as we can make that work. That's what I see." Another cabinet-level administrator shared, "And to really be meaningful, that task needs to be a task that is academically rigorous and stretches them." In addition, challenging or rigorous learning was considered as enhancing student engagement by a cabinet-level administrator,

> There's a high level of conversation amongst the students. They are asking questions, probing at a high level in response to a subject matter they're studying. They're trying to gain more information either by verifying or by probing more to maybe validate or explain some of the questions they have about what they've been doing. Again, I think it's the level of conversation and the level of questioning…

The class or school environment included clear expectations and contained student groupings as depicted by several cabinet-level administrators. One participant explained, "I think the teacher is very involved in setting the background for it so that there's a clear understanding of what we're going to do, and this is what you should know at the end of it." Groups were considered as an option for organizing students as described by one participant, "I see that there are students that are grouped, various groupings. Teacher [sic] is walking around." The teacher was also considered a contributing factor to student engagement by many cabinet-level administrators. A cabinet-level administrator commented, "Teacher expertise. Both subject matter knowledge and

the teacher's ability to create a culture where students feel welcome and expected to participate. Subject matter knowledge, pedagogy, good/inviting culture." Table 11 provides the emergent theme, associated sub-theme, and sample quotes for all prevalent sub-themes related to RQ1 shared by cabinet-level administrators.

Group C: Non-Cabinet Level District Administrators

When discussing how student engagement is defined, 46 of the 52 total sub-themes for this research question were shared by non-cabinet level administrators. Of those, six emerged as prevalent sub-themes (i.e., discussed by at least 50% of participants): *Active*; *Discussion*, *Relevant*, *Teacher as a Guide*, *Relationships*, and *Demonstration of Learning*. Similar to the school board and cabinet-level administrators, non-cabinet level administrators described student engagement as active. One non-cabinet level administrator explained,

> Student engagement occurs when a student is actively working at a task or topic. They are exploring, generating or hypothesizing. They are doing whatever is asked of them at the time. They are in tune. They are engaged. They are actively doing something with the material that is being taught. They are discovering and exploring. There are different levels of engagement. At the rudimentary level, student engagement includes the student working with and exploring or discovering the standard or cluster of standards, the topic, or the theme.

Additionally, one other prevalent sub-theme regarding student engagement emerged for non-cabinet level administrators—*Demonstration of Learning*. This sub-theme was defined by evidence of student learning as a component of student engagement. One non-cabinet level administrator commented, "It is also the product that they create. You know, the student evidence. Does the student evidence show that what they have been asked to do is obviously

Table 11

RQ1 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Cabinet-Level Administrators

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Student Engagement Definitions	*Active*	I just think it has to be active learning on the part of the student and active means not "sitting and getting." There is something happening. Students participating actively in their learning process.
Learning	*Discussion*	[Students] are consistently asking each other questions about their reasoning and the project that they are working on. Small groups or individual discussions with the teacher.
Learning	*Relevant*	Again, challenging tasks that are also relevant and authentic. Students need to understand why they're learning a material and how it makes sense in their world. It's for kids to understand not only what they're learning, why they're learning it, and what the outcomes have to be.
Contributing Factors	*Teacher*	I think the other piece is a teacher understanding student engagement and I think the other piece is picking activities or problems or questions or projects, God forbid, young people are interested in. Teacher expertise. Both subject matter knowledge and the teacher's ability to create a culture where students feel welcome and expected to participate.
Environment	*Clear Expectations*	Also, all students have defined roles for collaboration, and problem solving, and decision-making. They're problem solving, providing solutions to problems. I think there are routines. I think there is a teacher that clearly understands student engagement.

Table 11 Continued.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Environment	*Groups*	Kids are cooperating probably in groups of three to four to five… Student collaboration in small groups or with partners.
Learning	*Challenging*	Authentic relevant tasks that meet the rigor of the standard because that's the piece that is missing often. …They're doing something where there's multiple levels where they're having to think, they're having to participate, they're having to give feedback, they're having to take feedback. If it's all related to the standard or the subject that's being taught, then I'm pretty confident they're engaged.

Note. Presented based upon frequency discussed by participants (in descending order)

relevant and does it match the task?" This sub-theme was not prevalent for any other participant group. Similar to cabinet-level administrators, learning was described as relevant and included discussion for the non-cabinet level administrators included in this study. One participant shared, "[Students] also see a purpose in it. They know why they're doing it." Another non-cabinet level administrator commented, "To me it would be the conversations being held. Are students discussing the task? Are they engaging each other to find out how they can be helping each other and what others should know?" Relationships and the teacher serving as a guide or facilitator were considered as contributing factors to student engagement as explained in these comments, "I see a teacher posing a problem or a question allowing the students to struggle, allowing them to process with one another, to work through a variety of solutions." Furthermore, another participant concluded, "I think first and foremost, I think the relationships between the teacher

Table 12

RQ1 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Non-Cabinet Level Administrators

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Student Engagement Definitions	*Active*	I think for me it's when you walk into a classroom and you see students engaged in active participation so whether they are just playing with each other, interacting with peers or with the teacher. It's a physical observation, you can see something going on, so whether they are working in groups, in writing or responding. That to me is what engagement is. I think engagement also can mean, when you're visiting a classroom, you see students actively engaged in rigorous activities.
Learning	*Discussion*	…They're involved in deep conversations about what they are learning and creating. It's the whole interaction between the students themselves, but also the interaction with how they draw the teacher in. Do they ask clarifying questions? Are they probing the teacher for direction?
Learning	*Relevant*	I think student engagement piggybacks off of what these teachers deliver or schools deliver, but to me, it's intrinsic. You can answer a question, but if you're really engaged and you participate, you have more to offer in your responses. I think it's key, that it's something [that] makes the child want to participate and give answers. It's not just reciting what they think the answer is. They actually have some vested interest in it. …Student belief that what they're doing is valuable.
Contributing Factors	*Teacher as a Guide*	I see the teacher as a facilitator and/or targeted instructor… …The teacher serving as the guide and someone inspiring the students to learn more.

Table 12 Continued.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Contributing Factors	*Relationships*	…Good relationships with their peers and their teachers… Success also is the relationship with the teacher. Not just the structure, but did the students respect and value the teacher because that teacher has made them feel like they're loved and that they're valued? Students will work really hard for somebody if they know that that person care for them.
Student Engagement Definitions	*Demonstration of Learning*	It is also the product that they create. You know, the student evidence. Does the student evidence show that what they have been asked to do is obviously relevant and does it match the task? To me, it's the monitoring. To really tell if the students are engaged… if you are not checking to make sure the kid is writing about what he's supposed to be doing, then they may be writing something else.

Note. Presented based upon frequency discussed by participants (in descending order)

and the student and between the students should be evident. I think that's a huge factor in the classroom, just because of the fact that you have that mutual respect." Table 12 provides the emergent theme, associated sub-theme, and sample quotes for all prevalent sub-themes related to RQ1 shared by non-cabinet level administrators.

Cross-Group Analysis

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the prevalent sub-themes and the participant group level (i.e., school board members, cabinet-level administrators, and non-cabinet level administrators) through a Venn diagram. Of the ten prevalent sub-themes, only one was shared

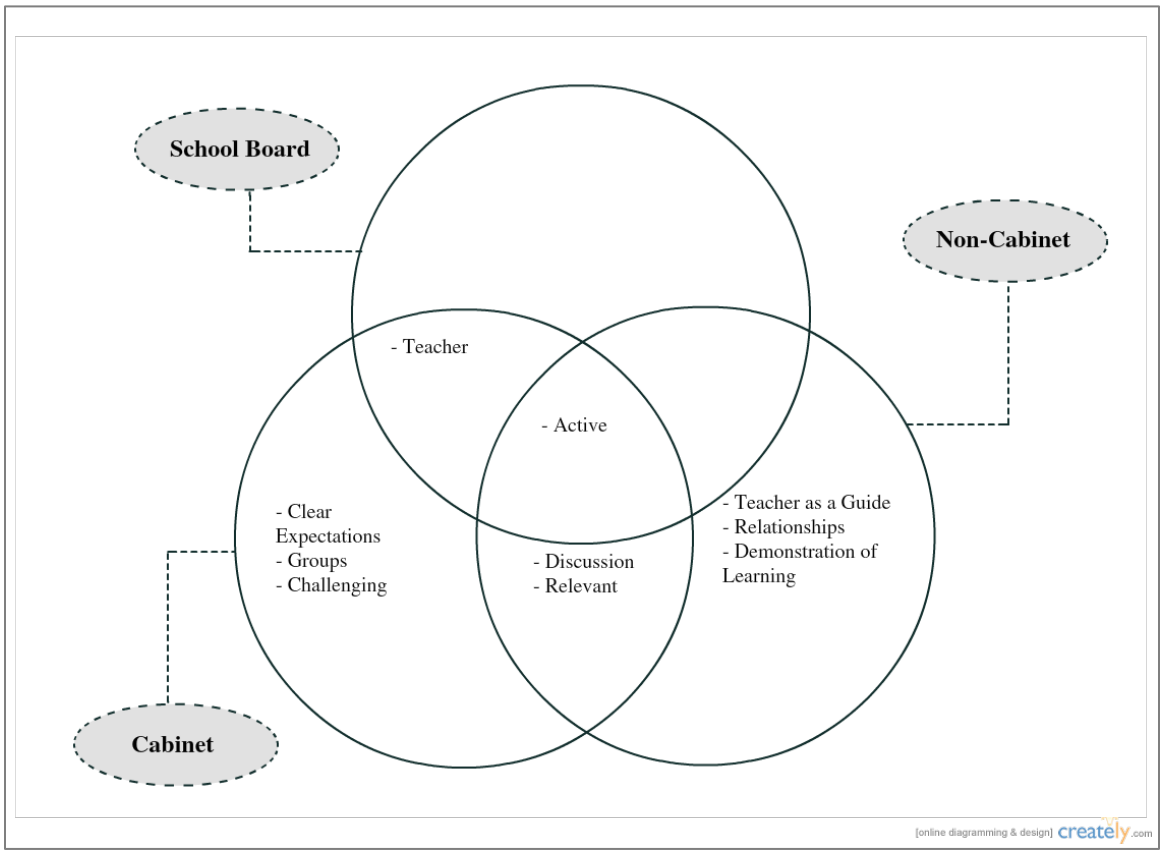


Figure 2

Research Question 1 (RQ1) Sub-Themes by Reporting Group

by all three groups—*Active*. Three other sub-themes were shared among more than one group: *Teacher, Discussion,* and *Relevant*. There were no prevalent sub-themes expressed uniquely by members of the school board.

How Student Engagement (SE) is Assessed (RQ2)

The second research question sought to gather information on district leaders understanding of how student engagement is assessed in their district. Six interview questions were included to address this research question, with three directly and three indirectly connected. For example, "What practices for assessing student engagement currently exist within your district?" addresses the research question more directly. The remaining three questions were more general. These questions were only coded for themes relevant to RQ2. Examples of more indirect questions included, "What factors do you believe contribute to student engagement?" and, "How can educational leaders improve student engagement?"

Overall, seven themes emerged in which codes were categorized for RQ2: *Barriers to Understanding Student Engagement*, *Existing Measures*, *Marzano*, *New Measures*, *Perceived Components of Student Engagement*, *Practice*, and *Uncertainty.* These themes are described in alphabetical order below.

Barriers to understanding student engagement. *Barriers to Understanding Student Engagement* was defined as something that is needed to understand student engagement and how it is assessed. For example, not having a common definition, the difficulty in measuring student engagement, challenges with monitoring student engagement at a district level, and not having an explicit vision for student engagement from district leadership were described as barriers to fully understanding student engagement by participants in this study. Overall, six sub-themes were included in this theme.

Existing measures. The theme *Existing Measures* was defined by practices that currently exist for assessing student engagement within the school district. For example, informal administrator walkthroughs, the instructional framework (i.e., Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model), assessing school culture/climate, and measures of student success such as standardized test scores. Overall, four sub-themes were included in this theme.

Marzano. *Marzano* was characterized by discussion related to the district's instructional framework and teacher evaluation system developed by Marzano. The discussion included barriers to using the tool, specific elements related to student engagement, as well as issues with inconsistency of monitoring and understanding of the elements when evaluating teachers. Overall, three sub-themes were included in this theme.

New measures. *New measures* was defined by new sources of data that could be connected to student engagement. For example, student activities, available programs, measuring disengagement, rubrics, and other opportunities for feedback could be used to measure student engagement. Overall, four sub-themes were included in this theme.

Perceived components of student engagement. The theme *Perceived Components of Student Engagement* included sub-themes where participants discussed elements they believed contributed or influenced student engagement. Overall, eight sub-themes were included in this theme.

Practice. *Practice* was characterized by participants' understanding of school or district level practices related to or enhancing student engagement. Overall, seven sub-themes were included in this theme.

Uncertainty. The theme *Uncertainty* was reflective of sub-themes where participants were unware of assessment methods, not familiar with a practice/policy, or felt unqualified to

identify measurement opportunities related to student engagement. Overall, three sub-themes were included in this theme.

The findings are further described by group based upon sub-themes that emerged, at a minimum, from 50% of respondents.

Group A: School Board

When discussing how student engagement is assessed in their district, 27 of the 35 sub-themes for this research question were shared by school board members. Of those, only seven emerged as prevalent sub-themes (i.e., discussed by at least 50% of participants): *Instructional Framework*, *Outside Factors*, *Student Work and Activities*, *District-Level Support Practices*, *Progress Monitoring*, *Feedback*, and *Student Success*. When discussing the instructional framework, the majority of school board members described the use of the Marzano teacher evaluation system within their district as an existing measure for assessing student engagement. For example, one school board member explained,

> Well, I think we assess it intensely already in [state name removed] through the Marzano evaluation model… I'm not all that well-versed in the intricacies of Marzano, but I know that student engagement is an important component of it and classroom observations are.

Outside Factors and *Student Work and Activities* were sub-themes grouped under the theme *Perceived Components of Student Engagement*. *Outside Factors* were considered factors outside of the classroom or school system (e.g., parental involvement and individual student characteristics). A school board member explained,

> Well, number one I think [students] have to come from a household structure where education is important. If you have a parent at home who's saying, 'you don't have to listen to that teacher,' it's going to be harder to engage that child because the parents

> aren't encouraging them. So I think part of it goes back to our families' need to understand why it is important and why their children are doing things different sometimes.

Student Work and Activities described activities, curriculum, and opportunities for students. One board member concluded, "We're doing more to try and make the content more interesting and give teachers tools to make it more interesting and by creating multimedia. By tying things like science and art together so that it becomes more hands on." *District-Level Support Practices* and *Progress Monitoring* were also mentioned by many school board members. These were practices carried out by the district, departments or through initiatives in support of schools. One school board member shared,

> Now I'm thinking as a school board member. I think it's who we choose to lead our schools. Who we choose to lead and what their qualifications are. For instance, having [superintendent's name removed]. [S/he's] all about student achievement… And I think as a board our value is helping our students achieve.

Another school board member explained, "I think everything we do through graduation rates and looking at how we're engaging… the superintendent and [deputy superintendent], I think that's what they're trying to do." New measures for assessing student engagement were discussed by most school board members. These new measures included gathering feedback from students, teachers, the community, and businesses through surveys, focus groups, or other informal avenues. One school board member shared,

> We do climate surveys, parent climate surveys. I don't know that we do student surveys. I think that would be interesting because often times I feel like the answer is just ask them.

> Just ask them what would make school more relevant? What would make school more fun?

School board members also reported data around student success as an existing measure for assessing student engagement. For example, one school board member simply stated, “Certainly the normal ones like testing,” when describing the ways in which the district currently assesses student engagement. Table 13 provides the emergent theme, associated sub-theme, and sample quotes for all prevalent sub-themes related to RQ2 shared by the school board.

Group B: Cabinet-Level District Administrators

When discussing how student engagement is assessed in their district, 32 of the 35 sub-themes for this research question were shared by cabinet-level administrators. Of those, only ten emerged as sub-themes (i.e., discussed by at least 50% of participants): *Overall School/Class Environment, Student Work and Activities, Instructional Framework, Vision for Student Engagement from the District, Training and Learning, Not Familiar with Practice/Policy, Visiting Schools/Classrooms, District-Level Support Practices, Progress Monitoring,* and *School-Level Support Practices*. *Overall School/Class Environment* and *Student Work and Activities* were sub-themes grouped under the theme *Perceived Components of Student Engagement*. The school and classroom environment were described as factors that contribute to student engagement. One cabinet-level administrator concluded,

> I think I mentioned earlier the culture in the school and in the school classroom is critical. I think we know things around social emotional needs of children. I think we know so much about non-cognitive issues that go on in schools. I don’t think those matters should be discounted when it comes to student engagement. Students are much more willing participants in a classroom environment where they feel respected, that they have some

Table 13

RQ2 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by School Board Members

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Existing Measures	*Instructional Framework*	Well I think the whole teacher evaluation now with Marzano and some of the other evaluation pieces look at the student while monitoring the teacher. They're looking at the engagement. Well, I think we assess it intensely already in [state name removed] through the Marzano Evaluation model… I'm not all that well-versed in the intricacies of Marzano, but I know that student engagement is an important component of it and classroom observations are.
Perceived Components of Student Engagement (SE)	*Outside Factors*	Parental involvement. How involved the parents are in their student's education. As simple as telling [students] on a regular basis that school is important. I'm going to put a lot of onus on the students themselves, how they've been brought up to view education. How they've been brought up to respect a teacher and to a person in authority.
Perceived Components of Student Engagement (SE)	*Student Work and Activities*	We're doing more to try and make the content more interesting and give teachers tools to make it more interesting and by creating multimedia. By tying things like science and art together so that it becomes more hands on. I think by just putting into practice things that do engage [students] and that increase their curiosity—science labs, reading labs, encouraging the arts.

Table 13 Continued.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Practice	*District-Level Support Practices*	I think through our Minority Achievement Office that is a way to get more of our minorities engaged. I think the Superintendent's student advisory council. I think that [s/he's] trying to bring the students more into it. I think those are two that come to mind right away. I think constantly learning and searching and looking for those great programs and those best practices. That's why a lot of us participate in organizations like [names removed], so that you are networking and talking to other leaders around the state. …We have to always be learning and looking for those best practices. What's working? What's innovative? Keeping up, whether it's the research that's going on out there or practices in other areas. I think we have to constantly be learners….

Table 13 Continued.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Practice	*Progress Monitoring*	Okay, so we monitor data all the time. We get reports—the number of children who are involved in career technical, the number of offerings that there is [sic] at the schools. We are placing career specialists at the schools. We are monitoring the number of children who are involved in advanced placement. We monitor the number of children who are in chess club or the number of children who are participating in battle of the books… so we look at all of the different things that are getting children excited about learning. There's a piece of software that they've been looking at that's going to track students. It would look at their end goals and it would track them all the way back to see what classes they need to take. I don't know if it has this factor, but I would also love to see incorporated in that what extracurricular activities could be suggested to them to help them meet that goal. We want to graduate every student with a plan, you know. Not just a piece of paper. But there is a lot to that. And I know we are trying to get more to guiding the students and this is the emphasis on guidance counselors. A lot of them haven't been able to guide because they have all these other responsibilities.

Table 13 Continued.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
New Measure	*Feedback*	I think we should survey students first of all. You know, they're smart. All of them. In one way or another. They're very smart and they have strong opinions about education. So I think that's certainly one way. I think that's not always the finite way we look at things in education. Certainly listening to our teachers, but also looking at what careers we need to be preparing for. We should be responding to what we need to be preparing our students for—the work environment they are going to be going into instead of fixed in time kind of goals that drive our education system now. So, you know, we need to listen to our students and we should be asking them because you could be getting an A and be bored out of your mind in a classroom and be getting a D and excited about the topic, but you just haven't mastered it yet.
Existing Measures	*Student Success*	I'm sure there is a way to put analytics to it, but certainly grades. What the grades are. How are [students] doing on those standardized tests? …Maybe graduation rate. I think it's a lot of the factors that we already monitor. Probably some of them are somewhat stagnant and if we could find a way to increase student engagement, I'm sure most of the factors that we already monitor would increase.

Note. Presented based upon frequency discussed by participants (in descending order)

> say around their learning and their future, and where they feel cared about. We can't take those needs too lightly if we want students to be active participants in the classroom.

Similar to school board members, student work and activities were discussed by a majority of cabinet-level administrators. For example, one cabinet-level administrator shared,

> I think driving a project-based learning system—and I don't mean go back to old phrases like cooperative learning and other things—how to structure groups. I think you can teach people how classrooms can be structured to increase student engagement. As an administrator, I think that's a responsibility.

Again, the instructional framework was described as an existing measure for assessing student engagement within their school district. One cabinet-level administrator explained, "Well, I think you have our Marzano model. When you think about our instructional model, our instructional model is Marzano."

In addition, barriers to understanding student engagement were also discussed. The majority of cabinet-level administrators included in this study described the need for a vision of student engagement from the district. One cabinet-level administrator stated, "It could be an expectation at the district. I'll start macro, you know, have that expectation." Many cabinet-level administrators also discussed several district practices related to or enhancing student engagement. *School-Level Support Practices*, *Progress Monitoring*, *District-Level Support Practices, Visiting Schools/Classrooms*, as well as *Training and Learning* emerged as key sub-themes for this group of participants under the theme *Practice*. *School-Level Support Practices* were described as methods for improving student engagement at a school, whereas *District-Level Support Practices* focused on district-level operations. *School-Level Support Practices* is exemplified in this statement by a cabinet-level administrator,

> Building leaders can do it by being present, again, in teacher planning to help make sure that tasks are where they need to be, the lessons that are going to be delivered to where they need to be. They also can be on the premise and [in] classrooms. They can set high expectations for learning in their building, and then continually inspect those expectations.

Conversely, the sub-theme *District-Level Support Practices* was exemplified in this statement,

> I think other things that can be done is looking at your hiring practices because honestly, I think the greatest thing that I ever earned as a leader was autonomy. Autonomy has to be earned, not just granted. When autonomy is earned, I think that that increases the level of job satisfaction higher than anything else can. Because of the current ratios and the current monitoring system that we have, due to supervisor ratios, hiring is crucial. If you have the right leaders in place then the ratio won't matter.

Similarly, administrators (i.e., both school and district-level administrators) having a presence in schools and/or classrooms was described as an existing practice enhancing student engagement. One cabinet-level administrator shared, "Well, being visible, visiting classrooms, being continually engaged in classroom instruction." In addition, progress monitoring of data was described by many cabinet-level administrators. However, one administrator asked, "What really happens with that data? Who looks at it at the district-level?"

Training and Learning was described as another practice, however, it was described as an area for growth. This sub-theme was defined by participating in professional development, continued education, and learning that could lead to better student engagement. One cabinet-level administrator shared, "I think we could do better [professional development] around the idea of engagement." Even still, many other cabinet-level administrators were unfamiliar with a

practice or policy related to student engagement; especially policies. One cabinet level administrator shared, “No policy, because when you say policy, we’re talking school board, so not a specific board policy.” Table 14 provides the emergent theme, associated sub-theme, and sample quotes for all prevalent sub-themes related to RQ2 shared by cabinet-level administrators.

Group C: Non-Cabinet Level District Administrators

When discussing how student engagement is assessed in their district, 34 of the 35 sub-themes for this research question were shared by non-cabinet level administrators. Of those, only four emerged as prevalent sub-themes (i.e., discussed by at least 50% of participants): *Instructional Framework*, *Student Work and Activities*, *Overall School/Class Environment*, and *Vision for Student Engagement from the District*. Similar to school board members and cabinet-level administrators, the instructional framework was discussed by a majority of non-cabinet level administrators. One non-cabinet level administrator explained,

> I think our practice for improving student engagement has always been looking at it from the lens of Marzano. In the classroom it is: What is the teacher doing? What is the student doing? What are we asking to [sic] students to do? We have always focused on the teacher behavior to translate into student behavior. By improving teacher practice it influences student engagement outcomes.

The remaining sub-themes for non-cabinet level administrators fell under the *Perceived Components of Student Engagement* theme. Non-cabinet level administrators described *Student Work and Activities*, the *Overall School/Class Environment*, and a *Vision for Student Engagement from the District* as *Components of Student Engagement*. One non-cabinet level administrator shared, “I think that we’re offering more options and types of ways to learn to

Table 14

RQ2 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Cabinet-Level Administrators

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Perceived Components of Student Engagement (SE)	*Overall School/Class Environment*	But it starts with leadership. Leadership has to be willing to trust their teachers to a high degree in the same way the teachers have to be willing to trust their students. Leadership can't just be telling you, "This is what you have to do." They have to give teachers options and give them the problem to solve and then let teachers work together. Culture. The culture of the school, the community, the parents. I would say the whole community of a school.
Perceived Components of Student Engagement (SE)	*Student Work and Activities*	Again, challenging tasks that are also relevant and authentic. …I think that technology can assist with that as well, as long as it's not supplanting direct instruction form the teacher, but used as a tool and a vehicle for enriching that. That can help student engagement. I think the student's ability to have input, the student choice, and the collaborative structures that are in place, which is also part of planning, but the ability to collaborate. …Those different elements that are under the engagement piece of Marzano. I do think that if teachers become very good at a couple of them that would help with student engagement.
Existing Measures	*Instructional Framework*	I know that a way to gauge that would be to take those elements that have to do with student engagement and how many teachers selected those elements as their deliberate practice, Marzano. How have they done with that deliberate practice? Did they actually grow? Just our instructional framework [Marzano].

Table 14 Continued.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Barriers to Understanding Student Engagement (SE)	*Vision for SE from District*	I think expectations for the school, for the school leader, definitely contribute to student engagement because if that's an expectation at that school, I think that impacts student engagement. I think parent expectations for their children when they go to school impact student engagement. I think they have to have a clear picture of it in their head. The top dog, the main leader has to be able to convey and present the vision of what a school needs to look like, and then they have to make decisions that align with that vision.
Practice	*Training and Learning*	I think providing professional development about a [sic] different learning styles. Everyone should be growing and advancing their knowledge. I think we could do better [professional development] around the idea of engagement.
Uncertainty	*Not Familiar with Practice/Policy*	Policy, no. I don't know that the school board has a particular policy outlining because we've reviewed just about every single one of them. Not policy or practice.
Practice	*Visiting Schools/Classrooms*	I think [administrators] can monitor the successfulness of that by being present in [their] classrooms. At the school level, it would be administrator engagement and visits to [professional learning communities] and participation. District—convey the expectation in meetings that is part of what they ought to be doing… visiting, asking, and discussing [student engagement] when they go out to schools.

Table 14 Continued.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Practice	*District-Level Support Practices*	I would want to make sure that the support we give… all lead to high or improved student engagement. Whether it's the resources, the lesson planning, the [professional development], that it would be tied to improving student engagement. …Teaching has become increasingly complex both in what needs to be taught, to the level that needs to be taught, resources that are available or not and then, of course, the children that you're working with. In order for teachers to really do the very best job that they can, I believe that at the district level we should be able to provide them a set, for a lack of a better word, outline.
Practice	*Progress Monitoring*	I always go to the extracurricular activities that engages kids into schools. To me, it's increase [sic] in some of these after school activities, after school clubs, sports. You can see just simple participation. That's easy. Classroom engagement, you would say attendance in the classroom. Look at school grades and how they're performing. I mean, that's at that level. Overall, the culture—they believe and they own the school and they have a real passion for whatever the school is. I also think that you can look at participation in professional development and see—is there a high level of participation? Again, just disaggregate that data to see by teacher, the number of years' experience, school, and then again, you want to look at student outcomes. I mean you can triangulate all that that and see how kids actually perform, that should give you a pattern.

Table 14 Continued.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Practice	*School-Level Support Practices.*	I think the other pieces in modeling. …We always taught at least one day a week. By doing that and being able to demonstrate for teachers, not just in the classroom with kids, but then even in your own professional development with them. What does the feedback look like that was given to [teachers]… was it actionable or was it more of, "Oh, I just picked this and for compliance we just completed this exercise and signed off on it." Or, really, was there meaningful feedback throughout the year and observations around that element?

Note. Presented based upon frequency discussed by participants (in descending order)

make the students more comfortable," when describing student work and activities. When talking about the overall school/class environment, one non-cabinet level administrator shared,

> I think it's mostly, the kind of relationships and trust [that] are the factors. The teacher trust and the student trust of the teacher that they're all trying to get to the same place. How comfortable everybody is with all facets, like are the students comfortable with failing? Which is something that's really difficult to get used to, but they all have to understand that at some point we don't know something. Creating an environment that it's okay to fail, as well as celebrating doing well, but understanding that you can't be perfect.

In addition, many non-cabinet level administrators described the need for a vision from the district related to student engagement. For example, one non-cabinet level administrator explained,

> I think educational leaders can really focus on knowing what [student engagement] looks like and setting the expectations that we are going to focus on student engagement and doing observations, having conversations, finding those people that believe in it, finding the people that are being successful and sharing their work, sharing student achievement results. I think that we can also let students have a voice and talk to their teachers. Even small, little activities that we've done in the past like, "I wish my teacher knew," and students having a chance to write that and share their voice, and the parents too. Bust also celebrating the impact that it has had and success.

Table 15 provides the emergent theme, associated sub-theme, and sample quotes for all prevalent sub-themes related to RQ2 shared by non-cabinet level administrators.

Cross-Group Analysis

Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between the prevalent sub-themes and the participant group level (i.e., school board members, cabinet-level administrators, and non-cabinet level administrators) through a Venn diagram. Of the 13 prevalent sub-themes among the groups, only two were shared across all three groups: *Instructional Framework* and *Student Work and Activities*. In addition, non-cabinet level administrators did not share a prevalent sub-theme unique to their perspective. The majority of the sub-themes were expressed by the cabinet-level administrators and shared with the school board, non-cabinet level administrators or both groups.

How Student Engagement Information is Used for Policy Decisions (RQ3)

The third research question sought to gather information regarding the ways in which district leaders' use or consider student engagement when making policy decisions. Five interview questions were included to address this research question with three directly connected. For example, participants were asked to reflect on the barriers, if any, to addressing

Table 15

RQ2 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Non-Cabinet Level Administrators

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Existing Measures	*Instructional Framework*	Well, our instructional framework, our evaluation system. Well, the Marzano walk-throughs have elements of engagement that they talk about. Can the students tell you what they're supposed to be learning, and if you ask them about it, can they tell you?
Perceived Components of Student Engagement (SE)	*Student Work and Activities*	The kid's interest level in whatever is being taught, I think, helps with the engagement. As a teacher I used to tell the kids when they first came in, write some of the topics that they were interested in and if I could tailor whatever I was teaching to one of their interest areas, I knew I would have better engagement by the kids. Then also relating things to real life current experiences that the kids go through… I think that we're offering more options and types of ways to learn to make the students more comfortable.

Table 15 Continued.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Perceived Components of Student Engagement (SE)	*Overall School/Class Environment*	I think that it is maybe the beliefs of the school leadership and the teacher. It might be the structure of everything from the school day to the classroom. It might be the physical layout. It might be the expectations of the classroom. Are there classroom expectations that are laid out and there's some agreed upon norms, if that what we want to call them. To me that's why that is so important because I have personally seen the impact of building relationships at the schools that I've been a principal at. When [students] know you believe in them, you get to do amazing things. Even if it's a little bit of stuff. That's all kids—at risk, that's kids you would consider lower socioeconomic, your high achievers—all they need is someone to believe in them and you can take them to unimaginable places.
Barriers to Understanding Student Engagement (SE)	*Vision for SE from District*	But it comes from our vision, you know, our mission. What are those beliefs? What are those expected behaviors? How do we expect our school leadership to act? Then equally important is administrators supporting engagement when they see it and sharing a vision for what they think engagement looks like inside their campus. And not only sharing that vision, but applauding teachers in classrooms that they see doing it and then I think from there, those administrators feeling like they have the support of the district… So I think it has to be a systemic thing where everyone along the way kind of understands that we have a vision of how kids are supposed to learn….

Note. Presented based upon frequency discussed by participants (in descending order)

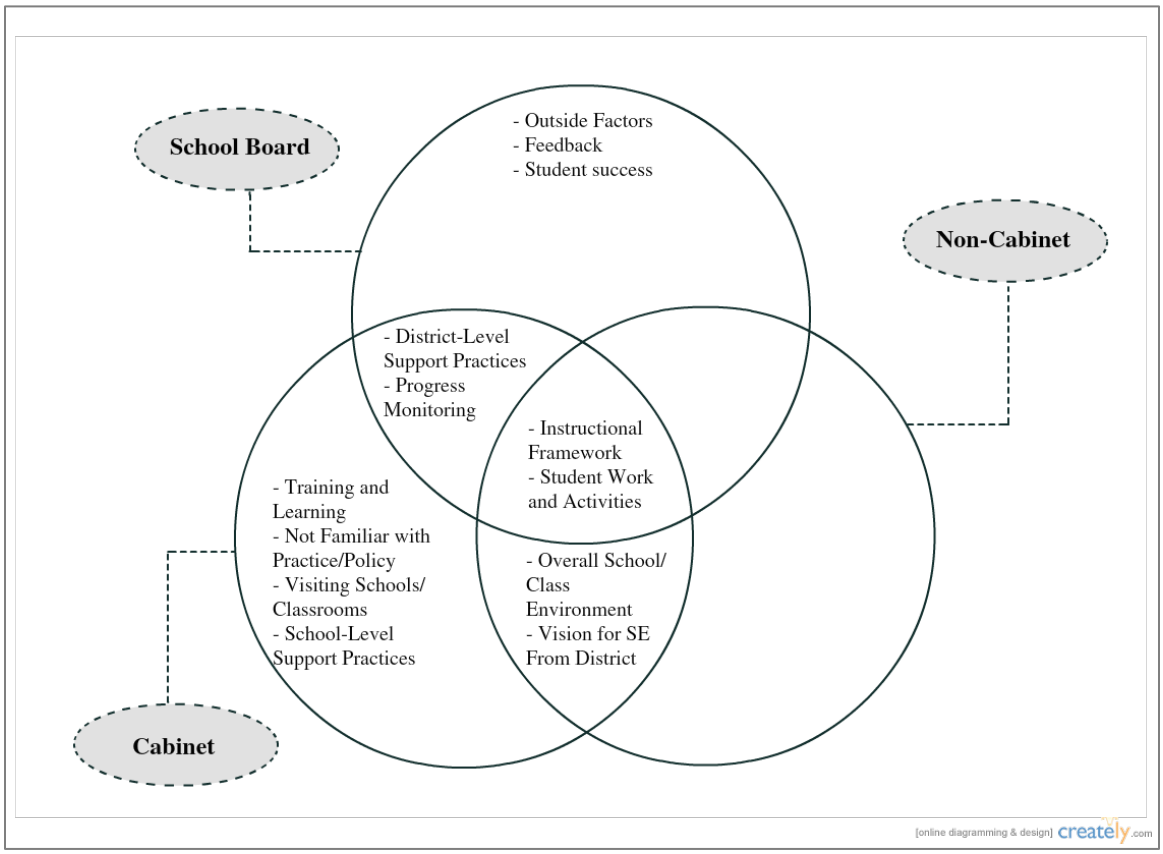


Figure 3

Research Question 2 (RQ2) Sub-Themes by Reporting Group

student engagement through policy. The remaining two questions were more general: (a) "How can educational leaders improve student engagement", and (b) "Is there anything else you would like me to know about your perception of student engagement before closing?" These questions were only coded for themes relevant to RQ3.

Overall, seven themes emerged in which codes were categorized for RQ3: *Active Use*, *Barriers to Using Student Engagement*, *Direct Connection to Policy*, *Indirect Connections to Policy*, *Perceptions of Student Engagement in Policy*, *Proposed Application*, and *Uncertainty Around Policy.* These themes are described in alphabetical order below.

Active use. *Active Use* was defined by implementation or use of a current practice that could inform policy. Overall, six sub-themes were included in this theme.

Barriers to using student engagement. *Barriers to Using Student Engagement* was defined as something that is needed to understand, apply, or measure when considering student engagement in policy. For example, not having a common definition, federal/state/district policies, challenges with measuring student engagement, the focus on school grades, and the teacher evaluation system were described as barriers to incorporating student engagement in policy by participants in this study. Overall, 13 sub-themes were included in this theme.

Direct connection to policy. A Direct Connection to Policy was characterized as something that is purposefully done to influence, develop, or apply on a larger scale to impact policy. Overall, one sub-theme was included in this theme.

Indirect connections to policy. *Indirect Connections to Policy* represented examples that could lead to policy, aid in development, or loosely tied to a current policy/practice related to student engagement. Overall, ten sub-themes were included in this theme.

Perceptions of student engagement in policy. *Perceptions of Student Engagement in Policy* was defined by the participants' beliefs regarding student engagement. Overall, five sub-themes were included in this theme.

Proposed application. *Proposed Application* was something that could be done in the future or applied on a larger scale to impact policy related to student engagement. Overall, six sub-themes were included in this theme.

Uncertainty around policy. *Uncertainty Around Policy* was defined by participant hesitation or doubt when addressing student engagement through policy or lack of awareness of existing policy. Overall, three sub-themes were included in this theme.

The findings are further described by group based upon sub-themes that emerged, at a minimum, from 50% of respondents.

Group A: School Board

When discussing the use of student engagement in policy, only 34 out of the 44 total sub-themes for this research question were shared by school board members. Of those, only two emerged as prevalent sub-themes (i.e., discussed by at least 50% of participants): *Focus on Student Achievement*, and *Assessing Student Engagement*. Focusing on student achievement was provided or discussed as an example of an indirect connection for incorporating student engagement into policy by the majority of school board members. One school board member shared, "Well obviously my main goal as a board member is achievement. Student engagement leads to student achievement." Similarly, another school board member explained, "You know, we seek student success, but in my mind engagement and success intertwine. So, for me, when I say student success that's always in my mind." In addition, many school board members described assessing student engagement as a proposed method for connecting student

engagement to policy. When discussing the application of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the inclusion of student engagement as a potential indicator under the state-wide accountability system, one school board member stated, “Just making sure we develop a mechanism, a proper, a valid and reliable procedure to measure [student engagement].” Another school board member further described methods for assessing student engagement in response to the same question, “When leaders are in assessing what’s going on in the classroom, are the students involved? Or, you know, is there a lecture going on and no one’s paying attention to it. I would hope we’ve moved past that.” Table 16 provides the emergent theme, associated sub-theme, and sample quotes for all prevalent sub-themes related to RQ3 shared by the school board.

Group B: Cabinet-Level District Administrators

When discussing the use of student engagement in policy decisions, only 28 out of the 44 total sub-themes for this research question were shared by district leaders at the cabinet-level. Of those, only four emerged as prevalent sub-themes (i.e., discussed by at least 50% of participants): *Modeling*, *Focus on Student Achievement*, *Unique Student Qualities*, *Not a Factor* (i.e., the idea that student engagement does not factor into policy). *Modeling*, described as modeling expectations or practice, was discussed by the majority of cabinet-level administrators as an indirect connection between student engagement and policy. One cabinet-level administrator described the importance of modeling in this way, “I think we improve student engagement by demonstrating in the way we work with our principals and the way we teach.” Similar to the school board, focusing on student achievement was discussed by many cabinet-level administrators as an example of an indirect method for addressing student engagement through policy. Cabinet-level administrators consistently described this indirect connection between

Table 16

RQ3 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by School Board Members

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Indirect Connection to Policy	*Focus on Student Achievement*	Well obviously my main goal as a board member is achievement. Student engagement leads to student achievement… You know, we seek student success, but in my mind engagement and success intertwine. So, for me, when I say student success that's always in my mind.
Proposed Application	*Assessing Student Engagement*	Just making sure we develop a mechanism, a proper, a valid and reliable procedure to measure [student engagement]. Like I said, asking the students. Ask them what they think. Ask them what they think will happen if we put in to place this policy. Talking to teachers. Talking to parents. Even talking to other districts around the state or the county when we are considering a policy, to find out what their experience is because a lot of times something that sounds good in theory may have other problems.

Note. Presented based upon frequency discussed by participants (in descending order)

student engagement and policy through modeling and the focus on student achievement. Another cabinet-level administrator shared, "We know that student engagement is how you get results, but I don't think they're making policies around student engagement. They're making policies around results. It's our job to figure out how to get those results." At times, cabinet-level administrators were more explicit when describing the lack of connection to policy. For example, a cabinet-level administrator concluded, "I don't think it factors in very much at all." Another cabinet-level administrator shared a similar sentiment in saying, "I'm not sure that it does [factor into policy]. I think it should, but I'm not sure that it does."

Barriers to using student engagement in policy were also discussed by many cabinet-level administrators while discussing unique student characteristics. This sub-theme entitled, *Unique Student Qualities*, was characterized by the notion that children are not the same therefore the definition should take student individuality into consideration. A cabinet-level administrator shared, "For teachers, because the work is so complex and their children are so diverse, you can't let one test be the measure. Even though we say it's not, it is." Another cabinet-level administrator used an analogy to describe the complexity,

> …it's different for every student. Just like we go out to eat dinner and my wife likes everything on a pizza with a thick crust. I like pepperoni with a thin crust, so we can't even do half and half because I don't like thick crust and she doesn't like thin crust. So everybody is uniquely different and engagement is different for everybody.

Table 17 provides the emergent theme, associated sub-theme, and sample quotes for all prevalent sub-themes related to RQ3 shared by cabinet-level administrators.

Group C: Non-Cabinet Level District Administrators

For non-cabinet level district administrators, only 36 out of the 44 total sub-themes for this research question emerged when discussing the use of student engagement in policy. Of those, only two emerged as prevalent sub-themes (i.e., discussed by at least 50% of participants): *Assessing Student Engagement* and *Indirect in Nature* (i.e., the indirect connection of student engagement to policy). Similar to school board members, assessing student engagement was discussed by many non-cabinet level administrators. A non-cabinet level administrator shared,

Table 17

RQ3 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Cabinet-Level Administrators

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Indirect connection to Policy	*Modeling*	I just think you have got to model it with your adult learners in your building. I think we improve student engagement by demonstrating in the way we work with our principals and the way we teach.
Indirect Connection to Policy	*Focus on Student Achievement*	Well, I mean it's vital because if students are not engaged, students are not going to learn. It's the essence of what we do. We know that student engagement is how you get results, but I don't think they're making policies around student engagement. They're making policies around results. It's our job to figure out how to get those results.
Barriers to Using Student Engagement	*Unique Student Qualities*	…It's different for every student. Just like we go out to eat dinner and my wife likes everything on a pizza with thick crust. I like pepperoni with a thin crust, so we can't even do half and half because I don't like thick crust and she doesn't like thin crust. So everybody is uniquely different and engagement is different for everybody. I think we touched on it, but I think one of the things I want you to know is the individuality of it. I think that's where teachers struggle. I think teachers believed that—some teachers, really committed teachers believed that what we're asking them to do is find out what engages every single student, every single period, and somehow do that every single day, and I don't think that's what we're asking them to do.
Uncertainty Around Policy	*Not a Factor*	I don't think it factors in very much at all. Well, I would like to think that all of our policies are made to help students. I don't think policy has gone to talking about engagement at all.

Note. Presented based upon frequency discussed by participants (in descending order)

> For the sense of support, this is where I feel we need to actively engage the students in feedback, we have to find out from them what is working, and what is not working, and what is going to help them want to do more.

In addition, many non-cabinet level administrators described the relationship between student engagement and policy indirectly. Another non-cabinet member concluded, “I would like it to be a little more linked, but it’s not.” Table 18 provides the emergent theme, associated sub-theme, and sample quotes for all prevalent sub-themes related to RQ3 shared by the non-cabinet level administrators.

Cross-Group Analysis

Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between the prevalent sub-themes and the participant group level (i.e., school board members, cabinet-level administrators, and non-cabinet level administrators) through a Venn diagram. Of the six prevalent sub-themes, none of them were discussed by all three groups. In addition, the school board did not share a prevalent sub-theme unique to their perspective. Only two sub-themes were commonly shared by more than one group: *Focus on Student Achie*vement and *Assessing Student Engagement*.

Chapter Summary

Student engagement was viewed universally by district leaders as active. Ultimately, this group of district leaders described student engagement as an active process whereby students can demonstrate their learning in environment with clear expectations and includes an opportunity for collaboration in groups or through discussion. Learning was considered to be relevant to students and challenging. The relationships between students and peers as well as the student-teacher relationship was described as a contributing factor to student engagement. Overall, the

Table 18

RQ3 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Discussed by Non-Cabinet Level Administrators

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quotes
Proposed Application	*Assessing Student Engagement*	Again, listening to the students. They have a voice and they are basically the ones that are being directly affected by this engagement or lack of. For the sense of support, this is where I feel we need to actively engage the students in feedback, we have to find out from them what is working, what is not working, and what is going to help them to want to do more.
Perceptions of Student Engagement in Policy	*Indirect in Nature*	Well, I guess in a roundabout way, some of the policy decisions or discussions you hear at the board or the cabinet level is if the end goal is graduation, if the end goal is closing the achievement gap, if the end goal is reducing discipline referrals, if the end goal is keeping kids in school, if the end goal is increase the attendance, then all the decisions that we make along the way, whether it's policy decision about justice, looking at your discipline policy to make sure that we're not over suspending kids because of minor infractions. I think all of those pieces are policies that assist in student engagement which is keeping them in school, keeping them in the classroom, giving them equal access, all those kind of things. So I'm not sure if I can quote an actual policy, but I look at what those end targets are. And you've got to have kids engaged to get to that end goal. I would like it to be a little more linked, but it's not.

Note. Presented based upon frequency discussed by participants (in descending order)

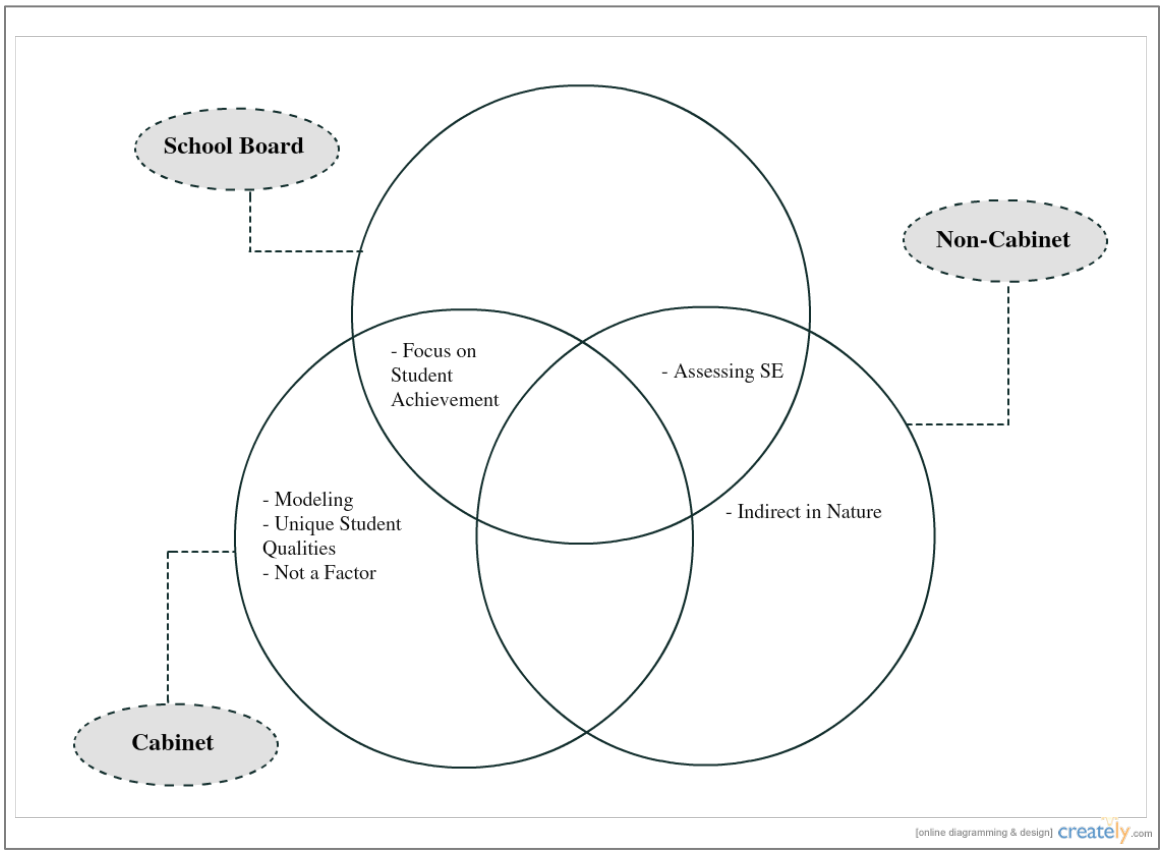


Figure 4

Research Question 3 (RQ3) Sub-Themes by Reporting Group

teacher was viewed as the primary influence on student engagement and someone who facilitates learning to enable student choice.

The majority of district leaders indicated that the Marzano Instructional Framework was the method for assessing student engagement within this district. Indicators of student success (e.g., grades, state assessments) were offered as other existing measures that could also be tied to student engagement. Some district leaders described feedback from teachers and students, for example, as a potential method for assessing student engagement. Student work and activities, the overall school/classroom environment, and outside factors such as parents/guardians were thought to be elements contributing or influencing student engagement. Examples of practices across the district were also described by participants as related to or enhancing student engagement. Even still, some district leaders were unable to identify practices or policies related to student engagement within the district.

When describing the connection to policy, no single sub-theme was universally discussed by all groups. In addition, very little overlap between groups existed. The connection to policy was considered to be indirect by many district leaders. The district's focus on student achievement was depicted as an indirect connection to policy as well as district administrators modeling expectations of student engagement for school-based administrators. Assessing student engagement was described by the majority of district leaders as something that could be done in the future as a potential connection to policy. Barriers to using student engagement in policy were also discussed. For example, recognizing the unique characteristics of students could make student engagement more difficult to measure. Finally, some district leaders did not believe student engagement had factored into policy at all.

This chapter provided an overview of initial coding and analysis. Finally, findings were explored by research question and by participant group. Gharajedaghi and Ackoff (1985), suggested that a system is taken apart through analysis and aggregated through synthetic thinking. They further explained, “Analysis and synthesis are complementary: neither replaces the other. Systems thinking incorporates both” (p. 23). By examining the levels of leadership in this chapter, the role or function of leadership with regard to student engagement was explored. The final synthesis will be described in Chapter 5 overall rather than by research question or participant group.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Limitations of Findings

Qualitative research involves moving from a holistic perspective to a review of the individual parts and back to the holistic context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Bloomberg and Volpe suggested that the individual parts represent the analysis phase, whereas the holistic perspective is indicative of the synthesis of findings. In this study, the analysis sought to look at the individual parts by research question and by participant group. In this chapter, the final synthesis will be explored in aggregate to answer such questions as, "What do these data tell us about administrator perceptions of student engagement?", "What can be learned here?", and "Why is this important?" This method to synthesis also reflects the systems framework used throughout this study. As the systems theorists Gharajedaghi and Ackoff (1985) explained, “The performance of a system is not the sum of independent effects of its parts; it is the product of their interactions. Therefore, effective management of a system requires managing the interactions of its parts, not the actions of its parts taken separately” (p. 24). The present study included 12 levels of district administrators who inform practice and set policy for this large urban school district. As a district (i.e., a system), decision-making is carried out at a system level through the central office. Thus, examining the interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations overall, rather than by research question and participant group, is analogous to the way policy is implemented systemically.

Explanation and Comparison of Findings

The present study revealed a great deal of information regarding participants’ connections to student engagement from various levels within the district hierarchy. District leaders were asked to contribute to a definition of student engagement by sharing their initial

understandings of the concept. They were also asked to provide insight into how student engagement is presently assessed within their district. Finally, participants were asked to make connections to the use of student engagement in decision-making and policy.

Regarding the definition of student engagement, there was clear consensus from leaders at all levels that student engagement is an active process. For this group of district leaders, this means students are physically involved in their learning. For example, participants used phrases such as: “active focus”, “active participation”, “active learning”, “not sitting and getting”, as well as “something is happening”, when discussing their definitions of student engagement. This conceptualization of student engagement is consistent with the definition offered by Furrer and Skinner (2003), “Engagement refers to active, goal-directed, flexible, constructive, persistent, focused interactions with social and physical environments” (p. 149). It was also recognized that the term student engagement should reflect evidence of learning. More specifically, some form of learning must be occurring that can be demonstrated. This aligns with research on behavioral engagement, which is considered a distinct dimension of student engagement (Mahatmya, Lohman, Matjasko, & Farb, 2012). According to Mahatmya and colleagues, this dimension of student engagement is defined in three ways: (a) positive student conduct and the absence of disruptive behaviors, (b) involvement in learning and academic tasks, and (c) participation in school-related activities (e.g., social or extracurricular activities). District leaders in this study focused the most on involvement in learning and academic tasks. This is further depicted by Mahatmya and colleagues as, “…effort, persistence, concentration, attention, and asking questions…” (p. 47).

There was some variability in how leaders at various levels described the learning environment, factors that contribute to student engagement, and the manner in which learning

occurs to enhance student engagement. Specific information about the context and environment that leads to higher levels of engagement is an area in need of further research (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012). According to this sample of district leaders, teachers were considered a primary influence in engaging students. This is consistent with research on the role of teachers' impact on student learning, engagement, and social well-being (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie). Other contributing factors included relationships among students and the student-teacher relationship. Although, friends and peer relationships can motivate students to engage in schoolwork, it is important to recognize that the opposite can also be true (Juvonen, Espinoza, & Knifsend, 2012). For example, peers can have negative effects in the following ways: (a) students with disengaged friends are not as likely to excel academically, and (b) negative social experiences with peers may lead to lack of interest in school. Juvonen, Espinoza, and Knifsend further explained, "…peers are not always essential for student engagement and achievement… parent support and teacher support may be more important than peer support for student engagement" (p. 397).

As described by participants, teachers also served as a guide or facilitator of learning to give students space to construct portions of their own learning experiences. This is consistent with research on supporting students' need for autonomy (Assor, 2012). According to Assor, this can be achieved when teachers, parents, and school practices provide (a) students with a sense of respect; (b) a coherent, developmentally-appropriate rationale for expectations and activities; (c) support of student choice and initiation; (d) demonstration (i.e., modeling) of desired behaviors and attributes; and (e) activities, experiences, and discussions that allow students to examine their goals, values, and interests. This research mirrors how district leaders in the present study communicated the importance of clear expectations for students and an environment where

students could work collaboratively. Learning was articulated by district leaders as challenging, relevant, and included time for discussion in which students could go deeper in their learning.

There was an overwhelming consistency at all levels of leadership regarding the use of the district's instructional framework (i.e., the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model) for assessing student engagement. The Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model includes 60 elements grouped within four domains (Marzano, 2012). Domain 1 focuses on classroom strategies and behaviors and includes the majority of the evaluation model's elements (n = 41). The remaining domains focus on planning and preparing (Domain 2), reflecting on teaching (Domain 3), and collegiality and professionalism (Domain 4). In addition to the instructional framework, all levels of leadership described student work and activities as a vital component of student engagement. Gettinger and Walter (2012) reported, "A strong predictor of student achievement is the amount of time students are actively engaged in learning, or academic engaged time (AET)" (p. 653). They also suggested that students must be academically challenged and experience a high rate of success in order to be engaged. In this regard, instructional quality, incentives for learning, as well as multiple and diverse teaching methods must be present to enhance student engagement.

These participants also discussed other topics with some irregularity across the levels of leadership. Even though these topics were communicated with less consistency, they are still important for understanding assessment of student engagement from the perspective of district leaders. For instance, various district practices (e.g., *Training and Learning*, *Progress Monitoring*) were identified by some district leaders. Support efforts provided at the district and school levels were described as practices that enhanced student engagement. Other practices included administrators' presence in schools/classrooms, progress monitoring of data (e.g., the

strategic plan and student-level data) and continuing education opportunities (e.g., professional development, the district as a learning organization, and having a growth mindset) for personnel across the district to help increase student engagement.

In addition to the overall school/classroom environment (e.g., climate, relationships, respectful and trusting culture) and factors outside of this environment such as parents and the community were believed to be vital components of student engagement as well. As Pianta, Hamre, and Allen (2012) explained, student's spend a significant portion of their time in schools with the majority of it in the classroom (i.e., with their teacher). Teachers can produce or inhibit developmental change through their ability to engage, challenge, and support students, which makes the teacher-student relationship key to fostering and understanding student engagement (Pianta, Hamre & Allen). Parents, guardians, teachers are poised to foster motivation and engagement of students as they tend to have intimate understanding of students' needs and potential (Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012). Bempechat and Shernoff reviewed models of engagement, motivation, and parental involvement that confirm how factors outside of the classroom environment can greatly impact student engagement. They determined, "…healthy patterns of engagement and motivation are fostered in supportive networks including students, teachers, parents, and community members who share mutual interest and commitment in the future welfare of youth" (p. 336).

However, the absence of communication from the district regarding a vision of and expectations for student engagement was considered a barrier for understanding this phenomenon due its complexity. There is a need to act and think systemically to achieve organizational effectiveness (Smylie, 2016), which could lead to greater levels of student engagement with a shared vision. Other existing and new measures were brought up by some

district leaders as tools to assess student engagement. Gathering feedback from students, teachers, and the community, through various means (i.e., surveys, focus groups, and informal avenues) were considered new opportunities for assessing student engagement and a method for including others in defining student engagement for the district. Student success, broadly defined as assessments, grades, and other student achievement related indicators, was offered as another way to measure student engagement.

Although, many district leaders were able to identify district practices related to student engagement, it is important to recognize that for many others there was a lack of familiarity with practices and/or policies related to student engagement. This could represent a gap in understanding as there was very little overlap among district leaders regarding the ways in which they use student engagement when making policy decisions. Overall, only one direct connection to policy was shared (weighing pros and cons of a policy), which was only expressed by two participants. Alternatively, the district's focus on increasing student achievement was described by many, with some overlap across district leaders, as an indirect connection to policy. Even still, many district leaders conveyed assessing student engagement at the classroom, school, and/or district levels as something that could be done in the future or applied on larger scale to impact policy. Some district leaders considered student engagement as concept that is not factored into policy decisions. Others felt the connection to policy was more indirect. In addition, some described modeling expectations for student engagement as an indirect connection. This was articulated as modeling or demonstrating strategies for increasing engagement with teachers and administrators.

District leaders also discussed barriers to using student engagement in policy. Some felt that characteristics that make students unique can make it challenging to factor student

engagement into decision-making or when defining the term. More specifically, students are not the same, therefore the definition and application should take this into consideration. These barriers could be diminished by using evidence through research, which leads to informed policymaking, higher-quality decisions, and improved student outcomes through more effective practices (Cooper, Levin, and Campbell, 2009).

Limitations

The present study illustrates the knowledge and policy implications among K-12 district leaders at a large urban school district in the southern United States in 2016, however, there are several limitations of the study that should be noted.

Data collected through interviews rely solely on the perceptions of the interviewee (Creswell, 2003). Similarly, all participants may not have described their views and perceptions adequately (Creswell). Additionally, data gathered through interviews relies, in part, on the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In this regard, the researcher sets the stage for the quality of data gathered through the ability to create an environment in which participants can candidly speak. Brinkmann and Kvale further concluded, “The quality of interviewing is judged by the strength and value of the knowledge produced” (p. 20).

Other limitations specific to education include (a) changes to the organizational structure over the summer and (b) the potential for heightened awareness regarding school accountability systems due to changes at the state and federal levels. The majority of participants were in their current position for less than five years even though over half worked for the district more than 15 years. It is uncertain how limited time in any given role may impact perceptions of student engagement or understanding of application within the district. In addition, only federal

expectations for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) were outlined during the time of the study as it does not take full effect until the 2017-18 school year. The implications for implementation at the state and district levels were not finalized, potentially impacting the findings in this study.

In addition, this study focused on one school district in one state. Although generalizability (i.e., with statistical significance) is not the goal of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), consideration should be paid to the context in which the findings are applied in other settings. For example, this study took place within a large urban school district. Rural and smaller districts may have differing characteristics such as homogenous student and administrator populations that could change how their leaders perceive and apply student engagement. School districts are complex systems that vary greatly in size, characteristics, conditions, and contexts (Smylie, 2016).

Even though the focus of this study was not on a sensitive topic, participants may have felt uncomfortable being completely candid with responses as the researcher works as an internal program evaluator within the organization. However, existing relationships and length of time within the organization could serve as a buffer through prolonged engagement (Patton, 2015). In addition, the researcher incorporated strategies within the study to enhance the overall trustworthiness of findings.

Finally, the study employed an exploratory design (Robson & McCartan, 2016). As such, the study may not fully speak to the application and understanding of student engagement within this school district. Future research could employ grounded theory or narrative inquiry to produce deeper insights into the concept of student engagement as it relates to policy and understanding participant perspectives. Grounded theory and narrative inquiry include the same

features of a basic qualitative study, yet have an added dimension (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A study utilizing grounded theory would seek to produce a substantive theory regarding student engagement, whereas narrative inquiry would focus on the participants' stories and lived experiences with student engagement.

Implications and Future Research

Implications for Practice

Overwhelmingly, district leaders understood the importance and value of student engagement as a cathartic experience through participation in this study. Student engagement was viewed from different angles and avenues both directly and indirectly. This suggests a potential change in district leaders' focus and recognition of the role of student engagement in student success. However, it is important to keep in mind that these findings represent a group of district leaders within a larger school system. Other viewpoints may exist. For example, one participant shared a sharply contrasting sentiment when stating, "I'm going to throw you a lit bit of a curve… I do think that we are overly obsessed in our generation and this age with student engagement and with trying to figure out what we need to do to make sure the student is happy."

A consistent definition of student engagement that incorporates the perspectives of multiple stakeholders within school a system could aid in decision-making and in increasing student achievement. The quality for which something is measured is correlated with the quality of the definition for that construct (Samuelsen, 2012). As one participant noted, "This brings up one of the other central dangers of assessment and that is—we're often left measuring proxies. And the danger is the proxy becomes the goal, rather than what it was we were trying to get at." Two participants likened the complexity of the construct of student engagement to defining love. One participant commented, "I really think you're asking me a question like, 'What is love?'"

Furthermore, including students, parents, and educators in the process for defining student engagement has the potential for accounting for the complexity in which this phenomenon can be described. Defining the term within a specified context such as a school district may be helpful when developing resources around facilitating a highly engaged classroom, monitoring the extent to which it is occurring, and assessing levels of engagement, as well as the impact on student success. Such resources could and perhaps should be tailored to the context or district of interest.

Regardless of whether student engagement is selected as an indicator under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), work should be done to put practices in place for assessing student engagement given its vital connection to student achievement. According to Trujillo (2012), broadening the concept of student achievement beyond standardized test scores could increase district leaders' beliefs about student success and learning. Making student engagement a priority, as these participants have suggested, could lead to increased student achievement. As on participant remarked,

> It's difficult to monitor for something that you don't understand or don't have a clear picture or definition of. So, what happens is as administrators, we take our own definition into the classroom, our own definition into our faculties and principals and we monitor based upon what we perceive, correctly or incorrectly, to be student engagement. Tightening that up, I think, would be a very important thing for us to do.

In addition, the degree to which students are engaged could be enhanced by providing parents/guardians with resources on student engagement. Given their pivotal role in guiding students through education, this could serve as an opportunity for connecting parents/guardians with their students' educational experiences. When describing the influence of families on student engagement one participant offered, "…part of it goes back to our families, [they] need

to understand why [student engagement] is important and why their children are doing things different sometimes."

Recommendations for Future Research

An exploratory study can be the first step in understanding a phenomenon. Future studies could involve other stakeholders that also have a vested interest in student engagement (i.e., school-based administrators, teachers, students, parents). Doing so would ensure that results are not slanted in favor of those working at the district office (Trujillo, 2016). Future research could include analyses through grounded theory or narrative inquiry for a deeper understanding of the ways in which district leaders, school-based administrators, teachers, and students define student engagement. A grounded theory study could incorporate numerous stakeholders or a single perspective (e.g., students) with the purpose of generating a substantive theory or definition (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Alternatively, a narrative inquiry lens could be applied to stories from students about being engaged as well as teacher accounts of the classroom environment and aspects that may foster higher levels of engagement (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Understanding the context in which students become engaged or disengaged can lead to a more well-rounded understanding of the phenomenon of student engagement (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2002).

Defining student engagement is paramount to measuring the construct. This is consistent with findings from this study where district leaders described a need for a shared understanding. Some participants pointed to the importance of defining and measuring student engagement in order to make the connection to policy. A district leader explained the connection in this way

> In order for [student engagement] to factor into policy, you have to have a way to measure it. I think measurement comes first before you put it in policy because otherwise, it's just words on a paper, and they don't mean anything.

District leaders consistently mentioned use of the Marzano Instructional Framework. Future research could examine the Marzano domains and elements to identify those that are connected with student engagement. Once identified, teacher evaluation data could be analyzed to see how, on average, teachers scored for these elements, the connection with their deliberate practice, and the type of feedback provided by administrators. As one participant shared,

> Right now we have this great idea with [the Marzano evaluation system], but our monitoring is very inconsistent… So, I think we got to continue to improve what we're looking for and what teachers should be expecting us to look for.

Although a contested area of educational policy, improvements to the teacher evaluation (i.e., through classroom observations) is an important issue in education (Cohen & Goldhaber, 2016). Structured classroom observations have been in practice since the 1950s, yet very little is known about how teaching practices evolve in response to observation systems. A thorough examination of the elements related to student engagement and feedback provided through the system could (a) lead to a better understanding of how the instructional framework is used and (b) provide insight into how student engagement is conceptualized within a school district.

Finally, future research could explore the differences in how student engagement is perceived in public education settings compared to alternatives (e.g., charter, private, and virtual schools). School districts play an important role in forming instructional policy (Sykes & Wilson, 2016). Therefore, sharing information across educational settings and environments could lead to a better understanding of student engagement and its role in policy. Furthermore,

reviewing policy systemically can uncover how policy makes its way into the classroom (Hopkins, 2016).

Conclusions

The present study illustrated the perceptions of student engagement and application among K-12 district leaders in a large urban school district in the southern United States. The results of this study further call attention to the importance of a shared understanding of student engagement and a focus at a district-level. A shared understanding could lead to a consistent definition, better measurement practices, and ultimately higher student achievement. Finn and Zimmer (2012) assert, “It is well supported by empirical research that engagement is a precursor to academic achievement and attainment” (p. 123). Finally, Daly and Finnigan (2016), articulated an urgent need for using the system (i.e., the school district) as leverage for improvement rather than the traditional model of school-by-school change. They concluded by sharing three lessons required for sustainable, large-scale change: (a) attention to the role of school district, (b) partnerships between researchers and practitioners, and (c) strong and stable leadership.

References

Akey, T. (2006). *School context, student attitudes and behavior, and academic achievement: An exploratory analysis.* Retrieved from http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_519.pdf.

Asen, R., Gurke, D., Conners, P., Solomon, R., & Gumm, E. (2013). Research evidence and school board deliberations: Lessons from three Wisconsin school districts. *Educational Policy, 27*(1), 33-63. doi:10.1177/0895904811429291

Assor, A. (2012). Allowing choice for nurturing an inner compass: Educational practices supporting students' need for autonomy. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement* (421-439). New York, NY: Springer.

Azevedo, R. (2015). Defining and measuring engagement in learning in science: Conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and analytical issues. *Educational Psychologist, 50*(1), 84-94. doi:10.1080/00461520.2015.1004069

Bazenas, J. S. (2014). *Teacher and student perceptions of student engagement in the classroom.* Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (1710043329)

Bempecht, J., & Shernoff, D. J. (2012). Parental influences on achievement motivation and student engagement. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement* (315-342). New York, NY: Springer.

Berry, T., & Eddy, R. M. (2008, Spring). Editor's notes. *New Directions for Evaluation, 117*, 1-7. doi:10.1002/ev.247

Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2016). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Braun, V., & Clark, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Carlson, J. A. (2010). Avoiding traps in member checking. *The Qualitative Report, 15*(5), 1102-1113.

Chi, M. T. H., & Wyle, R. (2014). The ICAP framework: Linking cognitive engagement to active learning outcomes. *Educational Psychologist, 49*(4), 219-243. doi:1080/00461520.2014.965823

Christenson, S. L., Reschly, A. L., & Wylie, C. (Eds.). (2012). *Handbook of research on student engagement*. New York, NY: Springer.

Coburn, C. E., & Talbert, J. E. (2006). Conceptions of evidence use in school districts: Mapping the terrain. *American Journal of Education, 112*(4), 469-495.

Cohen, J., & Goldhaber, D. (2016). Building a more complete understanding of teacher evaluation using classroom observations. *Educational Researcher, 45*(6), 378-387. doi:10.3102/0013189X16659442

Cooper, A., Levin, B., & Campbell, C. (2009). The growing (but still limited) importance of evidence in education policy and practice. *Journal of Educational Change, 10*, 159-171. doi:10.1007/s10833-009-9107-0

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2011). Controversies in mixed methods research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 269-284). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Daly, A. J., & Finnigan, K. S. (Eds.). (2016). *Thinking and acting systemically: Improving school districts under pressure*. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Davis, A. P., Dent, E. B., & Wharff, D. M. (2015). A conceptual model of systems thinking leadership in community colleges. *Systemic Practice and Action Research, 28*, 333-353. doi:10.1007/s11213-015-9340-9

Farley-Ripple, E. N. (2012). Research use in school district central office decision making: A case study. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 40*(6), 786-806. doi:10.1177/1741143212456912

Fernet, C. (2011). Development and validation of the work role motivation scale for school principals (WRMS-SP). *Educational Administration Quarterly, 47*(2), 307-331. doi:10.1177/0013161X10385108

Finn, J. D. (1989). Withdrawing from school. *Review of Educational Research, 59*, 117-142.

Finn, J. D. (1993). *School engagement and students at risk.* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Finn, J. D., & Rock, D. A. (1997). Academic success among students at-risk. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 82*, 221-234.

Finn, J. D., & Zimmer, K. (2012). Student engagement: What is it? Why does it matter? In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement* (97-131). New York, NY: Springer.

Fullan, M. (2002). The role of leadership in the promotion of knowledge management in schools. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 8*(3/4), 409-419. doi:10.1080/135406002100000530

Furrer, C., & Skinner, E. (2003). Sense of relatedness as a factor in children's academic engagement and performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 95*(1), 148-162. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.95.1.148

Gettinger, M., & Walter, M. J. (2012). Classroom strategies to enhance academic engaged time. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement* (653-673). New York, NY: Springer.

Gharajedahi, J., & Ackoff, R. L. (1985). Toward system education of systems scientists. *Systems Research, 2*(1), 21-27. doi:10.10002/sres.3850020105

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.*

Greene, B. A. (2015). Measuring cognitive engagement with self-report scales: Reflections from over 20 years of research. *Educational Psychologist, 50*(1), 14-30. doi:10.1080/00461520.2014.989230

Greene, B. A., Miller, R. B., Crowson, M., Duke, B. L., & Akey, K. L. (2004). Predicting high school students' cognitive engagement and achievement: Contributions of classroom perceptions and motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 29*, 462-482. doi:10.1016/j.cedpsych.2004.01.066

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Hagens, V., Dobrow, M. J., & Chafe, R. (2009). Interviewee transcript review: Assessing the impact on qualitative research. *BMC Medical Research Methodology, 9*(47), 1-8. doi:10.1186/1471-2288-9-47

Harvey, W. S. (2011). Strategies for conducting elite interviews. *Qualitative research, 11*(4), 431-441. doi:10.1177/1468794111404329

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press

Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (2011). The constructionist analytics of interpretive practice. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 341-358). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Jacobson, R., & Young, T. V. (2013). The new politics of accountability in retrospect and prospect. *Educational Policy, 27*(2), 155-169. doi:10.1177/0895904813478164

Jacobson, R., Saultz, A., Snyder, J. W. (2013). When accountability strategies collide: Do policy changes that raise accountability standards also erode public satisfaction? *Educational Policy, 27*(2), 360-389. doi:10.1177/0895904813475712

Johnson, P. A. (2012). School board governance: The times they are a-changin'. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, 15*(2), 83-102. doi:10.1177/1555458911413887

Juvonen, J., Espinoza, G., & Knifsend. (2012). The role of peer relationships in student academic and extracurricular engagement. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement* (387-401). New York, NY: Springer.

Klem, A., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *Journal of School Health, 74*(4), 262-273.

Koelsch, L. E. (2013). Reconceptualizing the member check interview. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 12*, 168-179.

Lawson, M. A., & Lawson, H. A. (2013). New conceptual frameworks for student engagement research, policy and practice. *Review of Educational Research, 83*(3), 432-479. doi:10.3102/0034654313480891

Lee, J-S. (2014). The relationship between student engagement and academic performance: Is it a myth or reality? *The Journal of Educational Research, 107*(3), 177-185. doi:10.1080/00220671.2013.807491

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (1999). The relative effects of principal and teacher sources of leadership on student engagement with school. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 35*, 679-706.

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2008). Linking leadership to student learning: The contributions of leader efficacy. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 44*(4), 496-528.

Libby, H. P. (2004). Measuring student relationships to school: attachment, bonding, connectedness, and engagement. *Journal of School Health, 74*(7), 274-283.

Lincoln, Y., Guba, E. G. (1986, Summer). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation, 30*, 73-84.

Lubienski, C., Scott, J., & DeBray, E. (2014). The politics of research production, promotion, and utilization in educational policy. *Educational Policy, 28*(2), 131-144. doi:10.1177/0895904813515329

Mahatma, D., Lohman, B. J., Matjasko, J. L., & Farb, A. F. (2012). Engagement across developmental periods. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement* (45-63). New York, NY: Springer.

Mandinach, E. B. (2012). A perfect time for data use: Using data-driven decision making to inform practice. *Educational Psychologist, 47*(2), 71-85. doi:10.1080/00461520.2012.667064

Marks, H. M. (2000). Student engagement in instructional activity: Patterns in the elementary, middle, and high school years. *American Educational Research Journal, 37*(1), 153-184. doi:10.3102/00028312037001153

Martin, A. J., & Dowson, M. (2009). Interpersonal relationships, motivation, engagement, and achievement: Yields for theory, current issues, and educational practice. *Review of Educational Research, 79*(1), 327-365. doi:10.3102/0034654308325583

Marzano, R. J. (2013). *The Marzano teacher evaluation model.* Retrieved from Retrieved from http://tpep-wa.org/wp-content/uploads/Marzano_Teacher_Evaluation_Model.pdf

Marzano, R. J. (2012). *Marzano art and science of teaching framework learning map*. Retrieved from http://www.marzanocenter.com/files/LearningMap_AST_Framework_Evaluator_20120226.pdf.

Marzano, R. J. (2007). The art and science of teaching: A comprehensive framework for effective instruction. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

Massell, D. (2000). *The district role in building capacity: Four strategies.* Retrieved from http://www.cpre.org/sites/default/files/policybrief/873_rb32.pdf.

McDonnell, L. M. (2012). Educational accountability and policy feedback. *Educational Policy, 27*(2), 170-189. doi:10.1177/0895904812465119

McMahon, B., & Portelli, J. P. (2004). Engagement for what? Beyond popular discourses of student engagement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools 3*(1), 59-76. doi:10.1076/lpos.3.1.59.27841

McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Commun3ity Psychology, 14*(1), 6-23.

McNeely, C. & Falci, C. (2004). School connectedness and the transition into and out of health-risk behavior among adolescents: A comparison of social belonging and teacher support. *Journal of School Health, 74*(7), 284-292.

Mehta, J. (2014). When professions shape politics: The case of accountability in K-12 and higher education. *Educational Policy, 28*(6), 881-915. doi:10.1177/0895904813492380

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mette, I. M., & Bengston, E. (2015). Site-based management versus systems-based thinking: The impact of data-driven accountability and reform. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, 18*(1), 27-38. doi:10.1177/1555458914568314

Mikecz, R. (2012). Interviewing elites: Addressing methodological issues. *Qualitative Inquiry, 18*(6), 482-493. doi:10.1177/1077800412442818

Miller, R. B., Brickman, S. J. (2004). A model of future-oriented motivation and self-regulation. *Educational Psychology Review, 16*(1), 9-33.

Mills, J. I. (2008, Spring). A legislative overview of No Child Left Behind. *New Directions for Evaluation, 117*, 9-20. doi:10.1002/ev.248

Morris, Z. S. (2009). The truth about interviewing elites. *Politics, 29*(3), 209-217.

National Research Council Institute of Medicine. (2004) *Engaging schools: Fostering high school students' motivation to learn.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Newmann, F. M. (1989). Student engagement and high school reform. *Educational Leadership, 46*(5), 34-36.

Park, V., Daly, A. J., & Guerra, A. W. (2012). Strategic framing: How leaders craft the meaning of data use for equity and learning. *Educational Policy, 27*(4), 645-675. doi:10.1177/0895904811429295

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Petkov, M. P., & Kaoullas, L. G. (2016). Overcoming respondent resistance at elite interviews using an intermediary. *Qualitative Research, 16*(4), 411-429. doi:10. 1177/1468794115589646

Pianta, R. C., Hamre, B. K., & Allen, J. P. (2012). Teacher-student relationships and engagement: Conceptualizing, measuring, and improving the capacity of classroom interactions. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement* (365-386). New York, NY: Springer.

Porter, A., McMaken, J., Hwang, J., & Yang, R. (2011). Common core standards: The new U.S. intended curriculum. *Educational Researcher, 40*(3), 103-116. doi:10.3102/0013189X11405038

Reyes, M. R., Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., White, M., & Salovey, P. (2012, March). Classroom emotional climate, student engagement, and academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1-13. doi:10.1037/a0027268

Robson, C., & McCartan, K. (2016). *Real world research* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Rosenquist, B. A. (2015, April). Teachers' conceptions of student engagement and motivation: A view from the field. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in Chicago, IL.

Roulston, K. J. (2010). *Reflective interviewing: A guide to theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Ryu, S., & Lombardi, D. (2015). Coding classroom interactions for collective and individual engagement. *Educational Psychologist, 50*(1), 70-83. doi:10.1080/00461520.2014.1001891

Saldaña, J. (2013). The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Samuelsen, K. M. (2012). Part V commentary: Possible new directions in the measurement of student engagement. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement* (805-811). New York, NY: Springer.

Senge, P. (2006). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization.* New York, NY: Doubleday.

Shernoff, D. J., Csikszentmihalyi, M., Schneider, B., & Shernoff, E. S. (2003). Student engagement in high school classrooms from the perspective of flow theory. *School Psychology Quarterly, 13*(2), 158-176.

Sinatra, G. M., Heddy, B. C., & Lombardi, D. (2015). The challenges of defining and measuring student engagement in science. *Educational Psychologist, 50*(1), 1-13. doi:10.8080/00461520.2014.1002924.

Smylie, M. A. (2016). Commentary: Three organizational lessons for school district improvement. In A. J. Daly & K. A. Finnigan (Eds.), *Thinking and Acting Systemically: Improving School Districts Under Pressure* (209-219). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Spall, S. (1998). Peer debriefing in qualitative research: Emerging operational models. *Qualitative Inquiry, 4*(2), 280-292.

Sutherland, S. D. (2010). *Student and teacher perceptions of student engagement*. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (870038493)

Sykes, G., & Wilson, S. M. (2016). Can policy (re)form instruction? In D. H. Gitomer & C A. Bell (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (5th ed.; 851-916). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Trujillo, T. M. (2012). The disproportionate erosion of local control: Urban school boards, high-stakes accountability, and democracy. *Educational Policy, 27*(2), 334-359. doi:10.1177/0895904812465118

Trujillo, T. M. (2016). Learning from the past to chart new directions in the study of school district effectiveness. In A. J. Daly & K. A. Finnigan (Eds.), *Thinking and Acting Systemically: Improving School Districts Under Pressure* (11-47). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools. (n.d.). *School engagement, disengagement, learning supports, and school climate*. Retrieved from http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schooleng.pdf.

Urick, A., & Bowers, A. J. (2011). What influences principals' perceptions of academic climate? A nationally representative study of the direct effects of perception on climate. *Leadership and Policy in Schools 10*(3), 322-348. doi:10.1080/15700763.2011.577925

van Uden, J. M., Ritzen, H., Pieters, J. (2013). I think I can engage my students. Teachers' perceptions of student engagement and their beliefs about being a teacher. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 32,* 43-54. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2013.01.004

Wahlstom, K. L., Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning: Executive summary of research findings.* Retrieved from http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/key-research/Documents/Investigating-the-Links-to-Improved-Student-Learning-Executive-Summary.pdf.

Yin, R. K. (2011). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Appendices

Appendix A

INTERIVEW INVITATION EMAIL – DISTRICT-LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS
District Leaders Understanding of Student Engagement

Subject of Email:
Invitation to Participate in Doctoral Study Regarding Student Engagement

Body of Email:
Good morning/afternoon/evening,

My name is Ann Cisney-Booth. In addition to working as a Senior Administrator within [Department name] for [District name], I am a doctoral candidate in Evaluation, Statistics, and Measurement at the University of Tennessee. I am currently conducting my dissertation research and I am interested in learning more about student engagement from the perspective of district administrators.

I would like to schedule an interview with you to inquire about your perceptions of student engagement as a district leader. This interview will last approximately 30 minutes. The interview will take place in a private room in the district office at your convenience.

This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Tennessee. In addition, this study has been approved by [Department name] by going through the research request process within [District name]. In addition, [District name] will not be identified when reporting the results of this study.

Your responses to interview questions may help inform future understanding of student engagement from the perspective of district leaders. If you would like to participate in this research, please go to acisney-booth.youcanbook.me to select a time in which you are available to be interviewed. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ann Cisney-Booth, Doctoral Candidate
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Graduate Student in Evaluation, Statistics, and Measurement
Educational Psychology and Research
acisneyb@vols.utk.edu
(407) 701-3223

Jennifer Ann Morrow, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Evaluation, Statistics, and Measurement
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Educational Psychology and Counseling Department
jamorrow@utk.edu
(865) 974-6117

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT – SCHOOL BOARD & DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS
District Leaders Understanding of Student Engagement

INTRODUCTION
You are invited to participate in a doctoral dissertation research study about student engagement. We are examining district leaders' the perceptions of student engagement and impact on decision-making.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY
Your involvement in this study asks you to participate in a one-on-one interview for approximately 30 minutes. We would like to record this interview. This will help us gather your feedback accurately. In addition, you will be given the opportunity to verify your interview transcript for accuracy one it has been transcribed. Please note, all audio recordings will be destroyed after they have been transcribed. Data collection for this study is expected to conclude no later than December 2016.

RISKS
There will be minimal risks to the participants of the current study. Please note that all research carries risks. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. We will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of participants data obtained during this study.

BENEFITS
This research may assist in better understanding student engagement from the perspective of district leaders.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The information you provide during this interview will be kept confidential. Only the researchers will have access to your information and the data will be stored on a password protected computer in a secure location. Any identifying information will be removed from the transcripts for this interview. No references will be made in any reports that could link you as a participant to the study or the data. In addition, [District name] will not be identified when reporting the results of this study.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the lead researcher at the University of Tennessee, Ann Cisney-Booth (acisneyb@vols.utk.edu) or the co-principal investigator, Dr. Jennifer Ann Morrow (jamorrow@utk.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Tennessee IRB Compliance Officer at utkirb@utk.edu or (865) 974-7697.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your, data will be destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Please indicate if the interview can be audio recorded by placing a ☑ in the appropriate box:

☐ Yes, the interview can be audio recorded

☐ No, the interview cannot be audio recorded, but the researcher can take notes

Participant's Name (printed) _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
District Leaders Understanding of Student Engagement

Instructions and Introduction

My name is Ann Cisney-Booth. I am here today to learn more about your role as a [district administrator OR school board member] and your perceptions of student engagement as part of a doctoral dissertation study. This interview will last approximately 30 minutes.

I appreciate your honest and candid feedback. Your opinion is important and any feedback provided can help us understand how decisions are made in a large urban school district. Thank you in advance for your feedback.

Even though you have agreed to meet me today, you still have the option of declining to participate. This is purely voluntary. You can opt out at any point during this interview. Any information you choose to provide today will be kept confidential; I will not connect your responses with your identity.

I will be recording the interview today so that I can accurately summarize the information you provide. All audio recordings will be destroyed after the recording has been transcribed and sanitized for any identifying information. I will not identify any individual in the transcripts. Do you have any questions?

Is it okay that I record this interview? Please indicate whether the interview can be recorded on the informed consent by selecting the appropriate box? [If participant does not agree to have the interview recorded, take detailed notes].

----------Begin Recording----------

Before we begin, do you have any questions? Okay, let's get started.

Opening Questions:

- How long have you served as a [board member OR district-level administrator] for [school district name]?
- What roles or positions have you held in the field of education?

Student Engagement Questions:

1. How do you define student engagement?

2. Imagine you are viewing a classroom with high levels of student engagement. Can you describe what you see?

   a. What indicates students are engaged?
   b. What do you think contributes to the success of student engagement in this classroom?

3. What factors do you believe contribute to student engagement?
   a. How can educational leaders monitor these factors?
   b. Could monitoring these factors be improved? If so, how?

4. What practices for assessing student engagement currently exist within your district?
   a. How could student engagement be measured?

5. Are you aware of any current practices or policy for improving student engagement?
   a. If so, please describe.

6. New legislation through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes student engagement as a potential indicator under the statewide accountability system. At this time, only federal expectations have been outlined as it does not take full effect until the 2017-2018 school year. Therefore, the implications for implementation at the state and district levels have not been finalized.
   a. What do you believe should be considered for improving student engagement?

7. How does fostering student engagement play into your role as a [board member OR district-level administrator]?
   a. How does student engagement factor into policy decisions?

8. What barriers exist, if any, to addressing student engagement through policy?
   a. In what ways can these barriers be addressed?

9. How can educational leaders improve student engagement?

10. We are at the end of the interview time. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your perception of student engagement before closing?
   a. Do you have any questions for me?
   b. May I call or email you if I need to clarify information or ask additional questions?
   c. Would you like a copy of the results for this study when it is completed?

Conclusion:

This is the end of our time together. Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to participate in this interview. If you do not have anything else to share, that concludes this interview and I will end the recording. I appreciate your time and feedback. If you have additional information or documentation that you would like to share after today, feel free to contact me [give participant business card].

----------End Recording----------

Appendix D

INTERIVEW INVITATION EMAIL – SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS
District Leaders Understanding of Student Engagement

Email Recipient:
Assistants to the School Board Members

Subject of Email:
Invitation to Participate in Doctoral Study Regarding Student Engagement

Body of Email:
Good morning/afternoon/evening,

One of our program evaluators, Ann Cisney-Booth, is collecting dissertation data from administrators on student engagement. The school board members will be invited to participate. Ann will reach out to invite each board member to participate. In the meantime, please see her recruitment letter for the study below.

Sincerely,
[Name]
[Title]
[Office]

Study Recruitment Letter

Greetings,

My name is Ann Cisney-Booth. In addition to working as a Senior Administrator within [Department name] for [District name], I am a doctoral candidate in Evaluation, Statistics, and Measurement at the University of Tennessee. I am currently conducting my dissertation research and I am interested in learning more about student engagement from the perspective of district administrators.

I would like to schedule an interview with you to inquire about your perceptions of student engagement as a district leader. This interview will last approximately 30 minutes. The interview will take place in a private room in the district office at your convenience.

This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Tennessee. In addition, this study has been approved by [Internal department name] by going through the research request process within [District name]. In addition, [District name] will not be identified when reporting the results of this study.

Your responses to interview questions may help inform future understanding of student engagement from the perspective of district leaders. If you would like to participate in

this research, please go to acisney-booth.youcanbook.me to select a time in which you are available.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ann Cisney-Booth, Doctoral Candidate
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Graduate Student in Evaluation, Statistics, and Measurement
Educational Psychology and Research
acisneyb@vols.utk.edu
(407) 701-3223

Jennifer Ann Morrow, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Evaluation, Statistics, and Measurement
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Educational Psychology and Counseling Department
jamorrow@utk.edu
(865) 974-6117

Appendix E

MEMBER CHEK EMAILS
District Leaders Understanding of Student Engagement

To: Participants who consented to audio recording
Subject: Doctoral Study Regarding Student Engagement - Review Phase

Dear

Thank you for participating in my dissertation study on student engagement. At this time the audio file for your interview has been transcribed. I have included a partial transcript of your interview. This transcript is considered partial because filler words (e.g., um, like, uh-huh), false starts (e.g., when a person starts to say something, but never completes the thought), and long pauses have been removed. This makes your transcript easier to read. Reading our conversation in written form may seem awkward and mildly uncomfortable. Feelings such as self-consciousness, embarrassment, or a desire to say some things differently are completely normal. Keep in mind that transcripts are intended to document natural conversations that rarely consist of complete and grammatically correct sentences (Carlson, 2010). The purpose for reviewing your transcript is to provide you with an opportunity to expand on or clarify any thoughts or ideas you offered during our conversation. I hope to ensure that you have every opportunity to share your perspective on student engagement.

Before I begin analyzing the data from each interview, I ask that you look over the transcript for:

a) Areas where you might have more to say about student engagement
b) Areas where you might wish to clarify context, thoughts, or suggestions provided

Your contribution to this study is greatly valued and respected. I appreciate the candid nature of our conversation and the feedback you so generously provided. Keep in mind the purpose of this study is to explore the concept of student engagement across district-level leaders. Therefore, only data relevant to the study goals and objectives will be included in the final report. Only overall themes that emerge will be reported and may also include quotes. Great care will be taken to ensure that no participant can be identified through the use of a quote.

Should you elect to use this opportunity for review, please use the track changes feature in Microsoft Word and return your final transcript to me by Monday, August 29th at 8:00 am. If I do not receive any additional feedback by this time, I will proceed with an analysis of the data provided.

You may access your transcript by clicking or pasting the following link into your Internet browser: [link]. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Again, thank you for your time and participation in this study.

Sincerely,
Ann

To: Participants who consented to notes only
Subject: Doctoral Study Regarding Student Engagement - Review Phase

Dear

Thank you for participating in my dissertation study on student engagement. At this time the notes from your interview are complete. Reading the notes from our conversation may seem awkward and mildly uncomfortable. Feelings such as self-consciousness, embarrassment, or a desire to say some things differently are completely normal. These notes are intended to document the general themes and ideas expressed during the interview.

The purpose for reviewing these notes is to provide you with an opportunity to expand on or clarify any thoughts or ideas you offered during our conversation. I hope to ensure that you have every opportunity to share your perspective on student engagement.

Before I begin analyzing the data from each interview, I ask that you look over the notes for:

a) Areas where you might have more to say about student engagement
b) Areas where you might wish to clarify context, thoughts, or suggestions provided
c) Additional ideas that you feel were not captured in these notes

Your contribution to this study is greatly valued and respected. I appreciate the candid nature of our conversation and the feedback you so generously provided. Keep in mind the purpose of this study is to explore the concept of student engagement across district-level leaders. Therefore, only data relevant to the study goals and objectives will be included in the final report. Only overall themes that emerge will be reported and may also include quotes. Great care will be taken to ensure that no participant can be identified through the use of a quote.

Should you elect to use this opportunity for review, please use the track changes feature in Microsoft Word and return the document to me by Monday, August 29th at 8:00 am. If I do not receive any additional feedback by this time, I will proceed with an analysis of the data provided.

You may access the notes by clicking or pasting the following link into your Internet browser:

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Again, thank you for your time and participation in this study.

Sincerely,
Ann

Appendix F

PARTICIPANT SUMMARY FORM
District Leaders Understanding of Student Engagement

Participant Summary Form

(Adapted from Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016.)

Today's Date: _____

Participant: _____

Analyst: _____

Summary of Information for Each Research Question:

RQ1: How do district leaders within a large urban school district define student engagement? (IQ1, IQ2, IQ9, IQ10)

RQ2: What do district leaders know about how student engagement is assessed in their school district? (IQ3, IQ4, IQ5, IQ7, IQ10)

RQ3: In what ways to school district leaders use student engagement when making policy decisions? (IQ6, IQ7, IQ8, IQ9, IQ10)

Additional information needed: _____

_____

_____

Overall impressions, questions, concerns, issues still to be addressed: _____

_____

_____

Vita

Ann Cisney-Booth earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Lee University (Cleveland, TN) in 2009. In 2010 she joined the Evaluation, Statistics, and Measurement doctoral program at the University of Tennessee. During her time at the University of Tennessee, Ann worked as a graduate research assistant for departments internal and external to the university. These positions included evaluation work in higher education; Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines; post-secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities and/or autism; and community non-profit work focused on services for victims of domestic violence. Ann authored and coauthored multiple evaluation reports, regularly presented at national conferences, and gained skills in research methodology, both quantitative and qualitative data analyses, and best practices in survey research. Ann has worked as a Senior Administrator for Program Evaluation at a large urban school district in the southern United States since 2013. Ann Cisney-Booth graduated from the University of Tennessee in May 2017 with a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology and Research, with a concentration in Evaluation, Statistics, and Measurement.