

Mandated Learning:
Administrators' Perceptions of Unfunded Mandates in Online Education

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ABSTRACT

Online education has become a solution for many states to facilitate the growing requests from state legislatures to lower educational costs while meeting the academic needs of students. Legislation from Florida provided the impetus for this study, after Florida CS/CS/HB 7197 mandated that all students enroll in an online class for 1 credit as a graduation requirement. While the rationale for such legislation may be cost savings, for most school districts, implementation may be viewed as an unfunded state mandate. The purpose of this study was to examine administrator's perceptions of mandated online teaching as an additional financial burden on school districts. This quantitative study explored administrator's perceptions of online learning and the relationship of these perceptions to unfunded mandates requiring online coursework. While no significant relationship was found in administrator perceptions of online learning and perceptions of unfunded mandates, administrators generally agreed that unfunded mandates impact almost every aspect of their professional role and responsibilities as an administrator, including work conditions, and work satisfaction. This study took place during the global pandemic; however, the intent of this study was not to research the effects of the COVID -19 pandemic on education. Recommendations for future study and implications are included.

Keywords: online learning, unfunded mandates, administrator perception, policy, survey research, education

PREFACE

The research for this study, terms, and conceptualization began prior to the COVID - 19 pandemic. The idea of online education has been a topic of interest in education as more technology has been incorporated into the classroom. Several states have mandated online educational requirements, with unfunded mandates, as early as ten years prior to the pandemic. The state of Florida implemented the Digital Learning Now Act in 2011. Aspects of the bill were of interest as it required school districts to develop online learning platforms, mandated online course requirements for graduation, and through policy created significant educational reform.

As a result of COVID -19 pandemic, the data presented in this study may be limited by the experiences and perceptions of administrators regarding online learning as teaching and pedagogy via online platforms was, in some cases, the only way for school districts to facilitate education during the 2020 – 2021 school year. As we transitioned into the 2021 – 2022 school year, school districts continue to face new challenges as Coronavirus (COVID) cases rose, vaccines for younger students not approved, and parents and school districts concerned about mask mandates during the school year. Nonetheless, the perceptions of the administrators provided useful data as education continues to move forward making virtual education an essential and mainstream aspect of education as we know it.

DEDICATION

This body of work is dedicated to my two daughters Sophia and Juliana. I started down this journey to prove a point to myself and to show the two of you, that you can do anything you want to do, but it will take hard work and perseverance. There have been so many late nights, I've lost count. When you were dreaming, I was working. While hope, laughter, and love filled your eyes contemplating what surprises tomorrow may bring, my thoughts were focused on the realities of life as a dad, husband, student, and leader. Times weren't always easy and sometimes I thought it would be easier to walk away from this, live life like the rest of the world, but then what would I have proven to the two of you? Work hard, play hard, live life, love life with everyone that surrounds you. You won't change the world, but if you love what you do, the world will change around you.

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There have been many people that have supported me through this journey. Most have no idea exactly what I am doing, and that's ok. Some days I've questioned myself. Can I do this, am I stretched too thin, how am I going to complete this?

To anyone that has questioned themselves, I remember speaking with an individual without his PhD, all but dissertation (ABD). He told me, "make sure to finish your dissertation, that's the one thing I regret."

My wife Kerri. We've been married for 16 years and half of that was spent on completing my dissertation. Always questioning, but silently cheering.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The U.S. Constitution leaves the responsibility for K - 12 public education to the state level as outlined by the U.S Department of Education (2005) “the federal government, through legislative process, provides assistance to states and schools in an effort to supplement, not supplant, state support” (p. 3). States have argued that programs such as Title I, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA), create a disproportionate financial burden from the federal government, viewing these requirements as unfunded mandates. Congress introduced legislation to address concerns voiced by states known as the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 (UMRA), yet problems continue to grow with the introduction of more sophisticated technology in education.

An example of the consequences of unfunded mandates can be found in New Jersey. In 2014 – 2015, the New Jersey School Board Association indicated the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment, contracted to measure core curriculum requirements, allocated an additional \$10 per student of federal assistance for counties but, in reality, spent \$236 on average per student (New Jersey School Board Association, 2016). According to the New Jersey School Board Association (2016) some districts reported they “created a new position to help support our greatly increased level of instructional technology...we obviously had to prepare technology, train staff, and staff testing stations, which were greater in both amount and duration when compared to the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) testing” (p. 10).

With increased regulatory mandates by the U.S Department of Education from ESSA for college and career readiness, high academic standards, and increased graduation rates, states have turned to online education to comply with federal demands. In an effort to comply with federal mandates, the State of Virginia established VA House Bill 895, which outlined in Standard Four of the Student Achievement and Graduation requirements that every student shall be required to take one virtual course to graduate. In response to the new legislation and budget recommendations, the Spotsylvania School Board indicated that the graduation mandate, which was unfunded, would require the district to design virtual courses, and decrease the number of electives a student could take (Spotsylvania School Board, 2018). The Spotsylvania School Board (2018) responded “when mandates are unfunded in the state budget the cost is passed to the locality and the law remains and the school division must find a way to comply if that means sacrificing other programs, curriculum, or human resource” (p. 218).

Ross (2017) argued that “in the United States, unfunded mandates exist at every node of the federal-state-local nexus of government” (p. 2). The voice of administrators and school leaders are often left out of the legislative process, but they must ultimately decide how these decisions will impact their school. Mathis and Trujillo (2016) stated “where we sit determines what we see. What we have learned differs by individual, organizational affiliation, and ideology” (p. 8). Individuals implementing a law must consider the impact a law may have on a group and how that may have an impact on policy implementation (Hodge & Welch, 2016). While a large part of NCLB included unfunded mandates, opposition to the law may have been reduced if more district leaders, teachers, and administrators with knowledge of the groups they support were involved in the policy-making process (Hodge & Welch, 2016). The perception

still exists that feedback from administrators is not part of the policy making process. Some states and schools were not able to comply with the law. It was perceived by many under NCLB that we cannot close the achievement gap until we address other aspects of society, such as high accountability testing does not equal higher learning scores, and privatization does not create learning gains, but can lead to social segregation (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). Hodge and Welch (2016) stated “it was statistically impossible to have 100% of students above average as NCLB suggested” (p. 5). States were desperate to get rid of NCLB and as of 2014, the majority of states were requesting NCLB waivers (McGuinn, 2016).

One recent intrusion of the federal government in unfunded education reform was ESSA, which was implemented into law in 2015, as part of and replaced the NCLB Act of 2001. ESSA was signed into law on December 10, 2015 and was the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The United States Department of Education delayed the implementation of ESSA to allow for further questions until March 21, 2017. At that time there was a joint resolution of disapproval under the Congressional Review Act (CRA) and a majority of the provisions on accountability were appealed, which allowed for the current administration to issue new regulations until authorizing legislation had been passed (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Despite the intrusion of the federal government into state education, school administrators continued to look for innovative ideas to improve schools. Schools have improved dramatically in many areas such as graduation rates, state test scores, and technology acquisition, but when an individual is so far removed from the day-to-day operations of a school, it is hard to understand the impacts on schools and their faculty, students, and the communities

they support. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) indicated that in 2014 - 2015 the adjusted growth cohort rate for high school students was at 83%, the highest since 2010 - 2011 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

One area of education that has seen significant growth is online education. Technology that facilitates online education has seen rapid growth for educational pedagogy used in many aspects of K - 12 education. Over the past 10 years, online education has been incorporated in almost every state in the United States (US) and the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) indicated 41 states reported virtual school enrollments in 2013 – 2014. Technology has transformed classroom strategies with hands on learning, while the use of digital based assessments continue to replace standard paper and pencil tests. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), in coordination with the NCES, has worked to ensure that students are taking math, writing, and reading on devices such as tablets and ensuring that students and test administrators have access to them (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2018). States also incorporate state assessment through technology as an educational requirement. The NCES reported there were 199,815 enrollments in 2013 – 2014, while the University of Colorado indicated that in 2015 – 2016 virtual school enrollment totaled 278,511 enrollments, an increase of 39.3% in one year (Miron et al., 2017).

While questions of access to technology have centered around equity and equal access across all populations, one of the basic foundations of the International Society of Technology Education (ISTE) is that students receive digital citizenship education (International Society of Technology Education, 2018). The Digital Learning Equity Act (DLEA) of 2015, H.R. 3582, was introduced to the United States House of Representatives on September 18, by

Representative Peter Welch. The purpose of the bill was to increase access to technology during the school day and access out-of-school hours, increase the ability to achieve employment and postsecondary education through the use of digital learning and educational technology, and complete homework and increase student participation through digital learning systems (United States House of Representatives, 2016).

Section three of the DLEA established a reporting structure to evaluate the status of digital equality and learning by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and relevant reporting agencies (United States House of Representatives, 2016). The legislation outlined the methods for the report in detail, but no data were available to support the legislative requirements. Thus, while recent educational policy has introduced unfunded mandates, legislators have put additional requirements on K - 12 schools. These resources require the cost of technology, resources, infrastructure, teacher training, and reporting models that have yet to be designed. At the same time, the call for online learning and the combination of cost to school districts and lack of reporting models have created a “rock and a hard place” situation for K - 12 schools.

Statement of the Problem

Online education has become a solution for many states to facilitate the growing requests from state legislatures to lower educational costs while meeting the needs of students. However, problems have arisen regarding capabilities of school leadership and their knowledge of online education. Garza-Mitchell (2009) noted:

in acting as advocates for online courses and programs, administrators found themselves having to learn more about how this type of education worked and what the implications

were for the faculty; they perceived that they needed a deeper understanding of this type of education. (p. 93)

Another barrier was that exact costs of online learning as well as extent of money saved has been difficult to calculate. Miron et al. (2017) recommended that “research is needed to determine the actual costs for providing a quality K - 12 online and blended learning experience” (p. 39).

Furthermore, Basham et al. (2016) indicated that “there is strong need for more federal guidance, research, and technical assistance in the area of online learning” (p. 76). Administrators need to have a clear understanding of how online education has impacted their decision making.

Higher demand on administrators for increased technology, due to government-imposed mandates, has increased the school’s need for money spent towards technology acquisition.

Garza Michell (2009) found:

in acting as advocates for online courses and programs, administrators found themselves having to learn more about how this type of education worked and what the implications were for the faculty; they perceived that they needed a deeper understanding of this type of education. (p. 93)

Beckett-Camarata et al. (2009) added that “local governments are searching for an answer to revenue shortfalls created by decreasing levels of LGF and increasing unfunded mandates, especially related to education” (p. 546). Furthermore, Beckett-Camarata et al. (2009) stated:

unfunded mandates (federal and state) have significantly increased the costs to local governments of educating a student. These increased costs, coupled with decreases in Local Government Funding (LGF), have resulted in local government’s searching for

additional own-source revenue to make up the shortfall through economic development.

(p. 543)

Whether an attempt at lowering costs or a mandate given to schools to implement, demand for online learning will continue to increase. Adding administrator voice to this discussion will allow for perspectives in the field and how to cope with this added accountability component. Clements et al. (2015) recommended that “as states and districts implement policies and programs to expand student access to online courses to improve student learning, rigorous research is needed to inform decisions” (p. 17). Moreover, ensuring that students receive quality online learning and teaching is essential to meet the accountability requirements of schools.

This study will address the recommendations of Beckett-Camarata et al. (2009), Miron et al., (2017), and Clements et al. (2015) by examining administrator perceptions of one state’s unfunded mandate and the ensuing barriers faced by schools in implementing these mandates. Specifically, this study will investigate Florida Statute 1002.32, the Digital Learning Now Act, and the challenges of unfunded mandates as voiced by the Florida administrators who embarked in online learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine administrators’ perceptions of unfunded mandates that involved online education. The intent was to explore the ideas and beliefs held by administrators and to determine if there were any obstacles and barriers presented, as found through a quantitative study. The study focused on the State of Florida where a significant number of online educational policies has been implemented and to examine views held by administrators to understand the impact of online education.

Research Questions

1. What are administrator perceptions of state unfunded mandates in online learning?
2. Is there a relationship between administrator perceptions of online learning and perceptions of unfunded mandates in online learning in their schools?
3. Are there school demographic differences in administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates?

Significance

New technology has been integrated into school curriculum at a rapid pace which creates a dilemma for school leaders. As a result, district leaders are searching for answers to solve the burden of unfunded mandates associated with online education. The research from this study will provide a current view of online learning and the mediums of technology used for online education. As more students and districts invest in online learning the number of unfunded mandates will increase and therefore educational leaders will find this study beneficial. The study aspires to provide guidance to policy makers and understand the use of school resources to fully comprehend the long-term continuity and fidelity of policy development and implementation for future consideration. This study will allow administrators to understand perceived obstacles and barriers in online education and develop a game plan for faculty and students to streamline organizational effectiveness.

This study aspires to support district and educational leaders in understanding how online education can be used effectively, efficiently, and to plan for financial costs associated with per pupil costs, infrastructure development, and reoccurring maintenance costs. The study aspires to promote awareness of online education where significant growth in this area of education has

been observed. To date, many states have not captured consistent data regarding online education and prior research has been limited to the data states have reported. As a result, the findings in this study will enable states to coordinate with district leaders to ensure the fidelity of data integrity and interdepartmental coordination to ensure student success and growth. Findings from this study will provide a more recent and timely contribution to the literature and will provide a roadmap for future consideration for stakeholders considering online educational initiatives.

Definitions

To further understand the study, the terms have been defined for clarity for the reader:

1. *Online Learning*: Lamb and Callison (2005) defined online learning as “Information, instruction, and/or interaction through the Internet or an Intranet using instructional materials and tools such as Web-based resources, e-mail, discussion boards, blogs, chats, and video.” (p. 29).
2. *Virtual Schools*: Gemin et al. (2016) described virtual schools:

as being full-time online schools, sometimes referred to as cyber schools, which do not serve students at a physical facility. Teachers and students are geographically remote from one another, and all or most of the instruction is provided online. These may be virtual charter schools or non-charter virtual schools. Online schools typically are responsible for ensuring their students take state assessments, and for their student’s scores on those assessments. (p. 6)
3. *Blended Learning*: Ferdig and Kennedy (2014) noted:

a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace; at least in part in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home; and the modalities along each student's learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience. (p. 27)

4. *Unfunded Mandates*: Dilger (2017) defined unfunded mandates as “the direct cost to affected entities of meeting these obligations are referred to as “mandate costs,” and when the federal government does not provide funding to cover these costs, the mandate is termed unfunded” (p. 1). Unfunded mandates are outlined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (UMRA) (United States General Services Administration, 1995). As defined by the United States General Services Administration (1995) “Federal Intergovernmental Mandate means any provision in legislation, statute, or regulation that would impose an enforceable duty upon State, local, or tribal governments and reduce or eliminate the amount of authorization of appropriations” (p. 5). Any portion of an intergovernmental mandate that is unfunded in part or entirely is subject to a statement by the committee and the intent of the decided reason.

5. *Technology*: As it pertains to the study, technology is an over-arching term that encompasses computers, tablets, web-based platforms, learning management systems, iPads, computer stations, and the internet.

6. *Principal*: An individual assigned to oversee all aspects of school. A principal is typically assigned to one school and oversees the operations and academic success for the students that are enrolled at the school.

7. *School Administrator*: A school administrator can serve as part of a larger group such as the school administration, which may include the principal, assistant principals, IT department, and guidance counselors. These individuals play a role in the decision-making process at the school level.

8. *District Administrator*: A district administrator may serve multiple schools and typically resides in a central office or district office. A district administrator oversees the larger school operations and is typically involved in decisions that involved the entire school district.

9. *Policy Maker*: A policy maker may serve at the state or federal level. A policy maker may be specialized in a certain area such as education and works with legislative organizations to serve, analyze, and create legislation.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to the State of Florida which may not capture all aspects of online education for other regions or states. The perceptions of administrators may be influenced by policies or laws respective to the state and may not convey the views of administrators in other states. The choice of the study involved K - 12 public schools and did not research aspects of online education associated with post-secondary education or private education. Policy initiatives in online education for funded and unfunded mandates in the State of Florida may have a different impact on administrators, therefore any generalization to other states and emerging perceptions may not be valid.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 briefly described unfunded mandates and how it is interconnected to online education, along with the recent influx of online education across the country. The chapter encompassed the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. The chapter described the significance of the study, gave context to the definitions of the study, and indicate areas of delimitations for the study.

Chapter 2 will seek to describe online education. The chapter will describe the benefits and barriers of online education and a detailed analysis of the literature surrounding online education. The chapter will also look at research studies regarding funded and unfunded mandates in K - 12 education and the impacts of these polices. The chapter will end with an analysis of the literature regarding the barriers of implementation involved in state mandated online education.

Chapter 3 describes the design and the methodology used in the study. The chapter outlines how the data involved in the research were collected and how the research process was outlined. Chapter 4 will discuss the data involved and the results of analysis will describe how the data relates to the research questions. Chapter 5 concludes the research study with an overview of the study, the findings, and the implications for future research. The chapter will discuss the study of the current state of online education, perceived effects, and implications. The chapter will make recommendations and suggestions on current online educational processes to inform stake holders who are involved or considering the use of online education. The study will conclude with my final thoughts.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter 1 provided an introduction of the research study, beginning with an overview of the nuances associated with online learning. Chapter 1 included the significance, research questions, purpose of the study, definitions, and delimitations. To better understand unfunded mandates and barriers in online education, a review of the foundational literature is provided here. This research is guided by the following questions:

1. What are administrator perceptions of state unfunded mandates in online learning?
2. Is there a relationship between administrator perceptions of online learning and perceptions of unfunded mandates in online learning in their schools?
3. Are there school demographic differences in administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates?

This chapter begins with an overview of the search process. Following that, a review of the literature will provide context about the historical background of online learning based on research and concepts from the professional community involved in online learning and from research surrounding online education. The historical background will present a foundation for understanding the development of the online learning concept. After presenting the historical context, a review of bodies of literature related to online learning will follow. Included will be an in-depth review of the landscape of online education, studies of funded and unfunded educational mandates, and literature involving obstacles and barriers to implementation of state mandated online learning will be discussed.

The Search Process

The literature that will be discussed was retrieved from a number of sources. An initial search of the University of Tennessee Library for the Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) by selecting peer reviewed articles published after the year 2000 using the term *online education* produced a number of articles. From the reference lists of these articles, additional sources of dissertations, articles, policy reports, and educational research reports were recovered. Finally, Google Scholar, the National Center for Education Statistics, the United States Department of Education, and the Sage Research Methods were utilized to find literature and content that provided an extensive analysis of the research available to date on the topic of online learning.

A large portion of the literature involving online education was divided between quantitative policy reports and qualitative educational research. Due to the variety of terms that were used to discuss the same phenomenon, *online education* was used to determine the research-based literature and theoretical nature of the literature. Searching for each of these terms independently proved to be less valuable than searching for the overarching topic of online education. Thus, the review that is provided represents a combination of these works rather than several independent reviews on each aspect of online education.

The Landscape of Online Education

History

The roots of online learning were formed from distance education. Sumner (2000) noted that “the history of distance education has been divided into three generations: correspondence study, multimedia distance education, and computer-mediated distance education” (p. 271).

Correspondence courses have existed through postal mail, education through television, the radio, and has been a traditional feature in education for decades (Glass, 2009). With the ability to purchase computers that are networked and connect to the internet, a significant number of new opportunities have been created that were never thought possible years ago (Glass, 2009).

Following correspondence courses, online learning is a relatively new medium of education.

Online learning is a medium in which communication is facilitated via the Internet that allows for multiple opportunities for interaction between student and teacher (Bourne et al., 2005).

Over the past decade, education in the traditional form has moved towards an asynchronous setting where interaction between the student and teacher is online (Glass, 2009). The Internet has grown from an idea and established a method of education where one in fifty students in the United States have participated in some form of online education (Glass, 2009). The number of children accessing the internet has significantly increased to 59% since 2000 (Howell et al., 2003). The number of students taking at least one online course continues to expand at a rate greater than the growth of higher education. In one estimate, there were 3.9 million online students in the fall of 2007, an increase of 12.9% percent over the previous year (Allen & Seamen, 2008). Data from the NCES found that in the Fall of 2021 there were 49.5 million students enrolled in public schools. In the Spring of 2022, 33% of public school districts offered remote instruction and 10% offered hybrid instruction (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023).

State Benefits

While policies associated with online education may vary from state-to-state, Wang et al. (2021) stated “policymakers, advocates, and practitioners alike argue that infusing schooling

with educational technology furthers academic access, equality, and efficiency” (p.1). Various states offer students a loaner computer, the ability to have free Internet access, with the school sending supplies and books to the student’s homes (Hassel & Terrell, 2004). In a 2007 survey of school districts, approximately three out of four K - 12 school districts responded that they offered full or partial courses online (Glass, 2009). Wang et al. (2021) added “today, even in the most remote communities, students increasingly use educational technology to gain access to online networks of information” (p. 1). Despite the increases in use and access, online coursework still faces barriers.

Fluctuating Standards

There are many barriers associated with virtual education. Concerns with the quality of virtual K - 12 schools involve accreditation status and assessment of student work. Several online education schools have developed basic drill tutorials to help students practice in core areas; however, this does little to develop group learning abilities and collaborative efforts. Lamb and Callsion (2005) stated “often cited as a shortcoming for online education are social activities that normally aren't available to the same degree as in a traditional educational setting” (p. 30). Glass (2009) suggested that “whenever a teacher is not in a face to face relationship with the student their suspicion that the work being assessed may be not taken by the learner’s themselves” (p. 10), surfaces as another legitimate concern. These issues are a serious concern from an educational and parental perspective.

Virtual schools and online learning face many issues such as incorporating online students in adequate traditional activities, access to support and resources for remote students, competition between districts and schools, and quality assurance (Lamb & Callison, 2005).

Hodge and Welch (2016) opined that “as scholars, it is our responsibility to not only identify the policies that effectively improve schooling for all children, but to also illuminate the conditions that are most likely to lead to successful implementation of those policies” (p. 15). In a survey of School District Administrators about the barriers and issues of online education, respondents pointed out that there were concerns about course quality, the need for teacher training courses, receiving funding based on student attendance, online and hybrid education courses, and course development or purchase cost (Picciano & Seaman, 2009).

Policy Trends

State online learning policy clarity and implementation have led to problems of quality in some contexts. Rather than the quality of the courses, policy has created both confusing and, in some instances, financial burdens on local education agencies. According to Glass (2009) “the variation of virtual education programs speaks less to the different circumstances across the country than it does to accurately define the policies as to why some states have been confronted with problems” (p. 12). Bloymer (2009) stated “technology leaders in the e-learning movement and state education policy leaders have not established a basis of communication for critical policy issues relating to the K - 12 learning environment” (p. 8). The closing of the Educational Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) is a recent example where policy issues have raised concern regarding online education. The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) reviews public schools on a five year cycle. In 2016, ECOT reported 15,000 enrolled students, received \$106 million in funding, which prompted the ODE to demonstrate student participation data from ECOT. The Ohio Supreme Court decision of ECOT v. ODE (2018) stated:

In response to ODE's request, ECOT provided log-on/log-off records showing that, on average, its students spent approximately one hour a day logged on to ECOT's online educational platform. ODE continued to request data from ECOT showing the duration of a student's participation for the final FTE review. However, ECOT did not comply with ODE's request. (p. 3)

ECOT agreed with the state that the funding model for enrollment was clear; however, disagreed with the Tenth District that funding for enrollment was not based on student participation (Supreme Court of Ohio, 2018). The result was the ODE requested \$60 million of state issued funds back from ECOT which resulted in the closure of ECOT. Issues need to be addressed during the policy design process that are not simply the responsibility of districts and schools while cities, departments of education, school systems, and the federal government play a role in quality of K - 12 programs (Picciano & Seaman, 2009).

A growing trend in the landscape of online education is a state requirement to complete a class through online education. State legislation in Michigan, Alabama, Florida, Arkansas, and Virginia have adopted policies that require K - 12 students in public education to complete at least one virtual class as a graduation requirement. In 2011, the Florida Senate passed House Bill (HB) 7197 creating the Digital Learning Now Act. HB 7197 required all districts to offer some form of online learning, by either the district or another vendor, for all K - 12 students with a requirement of one digital course for credit to graduate (Digital Learning Collaborative, 2018). Many states have quickly adopted legislation to incorporate online education into current educational policies.

Virtual Locations

Online education has incorporated attributes of a traditional school environment for learning with a majority of the educational learning experiences taught online. Thus, the school may not have a physical location or may be used in a blended model capacity. Ferdig and Kennedy (2014) stated “a virtual school can be among schools to which eligible students are offered the opportunity to transfer as long as that school is a public elementary or secondary school as defined by state law” (p. 55). Virtual schools are operated by a variety of entities that may include states, school districts, charter schools, consortia, higher education institutions, for-profit companies, or nonprofit organizations (Rice, 2006). These options create better access for high school students, but also is growing in grades K – 8.

Several elements have made online schools difficult to observe such as confusion between schools and entities; (a) enrollment providers; (b) suppliers of online courses to schools; (c) misunderstanding of how public agencies, companies, nonprofit organizations are organized; (d) how these entities use verbiage such as academy or school; (e) and districts that supply enrollment to students that are not enrolled in their district (Gemin et al., 2016). In many states there has been difficulty determining if a virtual school has been developed by the State Department of Education or a for-profit organization. Differences in accreditation, NCAA eligibility, and post-secondary acceptance of high school credits from virtual schools have negatively impacted a student’s ability to be enrolled in post-secondary institutions.

Student Benefits

There are many benefits to online education. Students can be internally motivated by interactive platforms which, in turn, will allow for socialization, increased memory, and problem

solving (Gulz, 2004). For a number of reasons, students may wish to enrich their education with the ability to move at their own pace or experience learning benefits that are conducive to their style of learning (Rice, 2006). The ability to work at an individualized pace has been a key selling point for online education. Online learning can provide both required and advanced courses, reduced dropout rates, and lead to increased graduation rates (Blomeyer, 2002).

Online schools have participated in studies to examine reasons why students choose online schools to offer insight into the relationship between student success and motivation. Studies conducted in online schools show there are some common reasons for students across studies that appear to have enrolled in courses for the same reason such as, convenience, accelerated learning opportunities, credit recovery, conflict avoidance, ease in schedule, and the ability to take courses not offered by their district (Rice, 2006).

Flexibility

Virtual Education programs have served populations of students in traditional classrooms by providing an increased opportunity, tutoring choice, and supplemental services to students in remote areas (Rice, 2006). One of the benefits of online learning is the ability for students to take a course from any location. Online education has allowed students to complete their work at home rather than going to a school location every day (Lamb & Callison, 2005). Completing work at home can be an advantage to some students who may have experienced bullying, anxiety, and unfavorable public school conditions.

The most common student response to the question of the benefits of a virtual school course was appreciation of the autonomy and freedom (Rice, 2006). While most students identified the teacher as their source of information, many students enjoyed the ability to work on

their own and to determine information for themselves without having a gap in instruction (Rice, 2006).

Learning

Schools may offer learning in several different formats. These formats include face-to-face instruction, web facilitated instruction, blended or hybrid courses, or classes that are completely online (Allen & Seaman, 2008). Online instructional delivery of these classes have been frequently used across the United States. Researchers have attempted to delineate between the various methods in which virtual education programs have been organized at the state and local level (Glass, 2009). Classroom instruction can be completed through self-directed study, a subject matter expert, or through collaborative exploration (Hassel & Terrell, 2004).

Furthermore, Torre (2013) stated:

It is unlikely that virtual schools will become anything but more popular and widely accepted, therefore, it is crucial that educators and researchers continue to question the future impact that these schools will have on the lives and learning trajectories of children, adolescents, and young adults. (p. 43)

Instruction can also be made possible through a learning coach who could be a parent or, in some cases, a lab personnel in K - 8 settings that provided a face-to-face assistant for virtual teachers (Hassel & Terrell, 2004). Online instruction can be utilized in different formats. McFarlane (2011) described synchronous learning as “real-time, instructor-led event in which all participants are virtually “in class” at the same time” and asynchronous learning by an “interaction between instructors and students occurs intermittently with a time delay” (p. 85).

Both methods of delivery can be used in the same course or be the singular delivery across courses.

Principal Perceptions of Technology

Technology has become more pervasive in society and is being used more frequently by people from all ages (Howell et al., 2003). Perkins-Jacobs (2015) stated “in fact, one of the most powerful factors in increasing the use of technology in teaching, learning, and student achievement is societal pressure on administrators to use technology as an implementation tool” (p. 1). Waxman et al. (2013) noted that “surveys of principals on their perceptions regarding technology found principals who employed technology for pedagogical and technical purposes found it easier to incorporate technology in new instructional methods ... perceived that information technology would play a more important educational role in the future” (p. 188). Waxman et al. (2013) indicated that “technology leadership by the principals increased technology literacy for the teachers” (p. 189), further adding that “principal technology leadership and technology literacy improved teaching effectiveness” (p. 189). Conversely, Leonard and Leonard (2006) found that “principal’s perception of technology integration remains problematic, and many administrators do not feel they are prepared to be technology leaders” (Leonard & Leonard, 2006, as cited in Waxman et al., 2013, p. 190).

Picciano and Seamon (2009) found that administrators’ perceptions of the importance of online learning were meeting the needs of students, offering additional courses, allowing students to retake classes, and reducing scheduling conflicts. Picciano and Seamon (2009) also indicated that perceived barriers were concerns about quality, course quality, funding based on student attendance, teacher training and adding administrator voice stating, “as an administrator I

am interested in fully embracing online learning; however, our community (including teachers) are critical of the quality, content, etc.” (p. 15). A’mar and Eleyan (2021) found that:

principals through their understanding of the best practices, apply to ensure technology integration in their schools besides, their awareness of the importance of professional development in the technology field, which helps them in the effective implementation of technology in their schools. (p. 782)

While principals perceptions of technology may vary, Metcalf and LaFrance (2013) found that “for educational technology to become an integral part of a school, technology leadership is even more necessary” (p. 3). Researchers have attempted to identify technology leadership skills; however, technology is a tool used to facilitate education. Principals need guidance and development for technology leadership skills to be effective (Metcalf & LaFrance, 2013).

Educator Concerns

Positive influences from online learning has been acknowledged by teachers, but there are also many negative characteristics that have been reported by teachers when asked about online learning. One concern is the speed of development required from students (Borup & Stevens, 2015). Students learning in traditional methods of teaching have shown that students complete their studies due to additional oversight in a brick-and-mortar school.

Another concern are the boundaries between professional and personal life, as the flexibility regarding online education makes it difficult to differentiate (Borup & Stevens, 2015). As online education has grown, a student might require time that would be considered personal

time for the teacher. Conversely, this may also affect student's instructional time with their teachers, limiting the amount of one-on-one time together (Archambault & Larson, 2015).

Teachers complain that their relationship with students in online education is explained as cold and not sincere... feeling a lack of synergy that a face-to-face class would provide, which is not currently present in online education (Borup & Stevens, 2015). Martinez and Partin (2023) found that "educational leaders who consider previous and current student opinions about their experiences are more apt to endorse student-centered learning strategies in their schools" (p. 92). Inside a classroom, students are able to interact with the teacher personally, and work in groups with the rest of the class. Online education, however, may limit children to certain interactions and hinder learning social skills; however, Wargo et. al (2021) noted that "social distancing measures and campus closures in light of the COVID - 19 pandemic also provide a stark reminder that schooling, and technology are intertwined" (p. 140).

There have been many concerns that have led educators to think twice before teaching in an online education platform. The preference of traditional education may be due to the lack of familiarity of the teachers with the new technology (Mitchell, 2009). Teachers who are inexperienced with newer technologies may lack understanding, creating a digital divide between students and teachers. Deschaine (2013) stated:

It seems likely that children from most, if not all, social and economic strata will ultimately come to have reasonable levels of access to communications and information technologies in their schools. ... less clear, however, is the likelihood that they will have access to teachers who know how to use that technology well to support 21st century learning and teaching. (p. 81)

The amount of work may be disproportionate by the teacher compared to the level of participation by students who may take advantage of the flexibility associated with virtual learning. Some teachers may be attracted to the online platforms motivated by rewards that benefit themselves, such as monetary incentives and self-gratification (Mitchell, 2009).

Educator Satisfaction

While negatives aspects of online learning have been viewed by educators, there have also been positive attributes of online learning. The main concern of teachers in regard to online teaching is meeting the student's needs (Allen & Seaman, 2008). Through online education, teachers have been able to take care of each student's individual concerns and difficulties, delivering exactly what was needed to grow as a student. Other factors for online education such as what, how, when, and where they teach have been viewed positively.

Although online teaching has been viewed as more time-consuming, teaching online has offered a type of flexibility explored by many teachers. The teacher's satisfaction has been tied to the academic development of their students, as they have observed it student by student, deciding how to educate students in each case (Borup & Stevens, 2015). While online education may have some personal limitations, the visual and verbal cues found with online education have been considered a good way of gaining the attention of the student and building better relationships. Students in online education platforms indicate they have found this model of education more interactive than traditional classes.

Unfunded Mandates

This section will review literature on mandates, funded, unfunded, and the observations made at state and local levels. Nobles and Brookes (2000) stated "some government officials

and scholars define a mandate narrowly as a mandatory requirement that dictates what local governments must do” (p. 4). An unfunded mandate is a policy that does not require monetary funding by a governing body, but the associated costs may be accrued by another entity.

Mandates are implemented at every level of government policy. Federal policy can impose financial impacts, both on state and local administrations, which may include mandates, grant-in-aid conditions, tax policy provisions, federal implications of state and local governments to legal requirements, and financial accountability (US Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relation, 1994). Unfunded mandates have been a highly debated topic due to the limitations unfunded mandates impose when implemented. An unfunded mandate occurs when a state or local government must provide a service through policy and the executing government body does not award financial support. Unfunded mandates in the United States have existed at every node of the federal-state-local system of government, being an important component of federalism (Ross, 2017).

Officially there is no universally accepted definition of unfunded mandates and little consensus regarding the subject. Definitions of unfunded mandates may vary to some degree; however, the main concerns have been the costs imposed, the lack of financial support associated with the unfunded mandate, and the decision-making authority, which is limited for the officials operating below the mandating level of government to voice concern for the need of change (Rajagopal & Osterburg, 1995). The lack of consensus on unfunded mandates have generated larger issues for policy implementation. According to Ross (2017) “a significant advancement could be made with large systematic investigations of the fiscal cost of mandates across states” (p. 23). States have had difficulty determining policy requirements and restraints. Until they do,

states will continue to have difficulty identifying policy issues raised by unfunded mandates. For example, some states require police departments to process transfer permits for guns but have restricted their ability to charge fees for related activities and material costs (Nobles & Brookes, 2000). The scenario underscores the lack of understanding between governing authorities, local agencies, and the uncertainty associated with a clear understanding of unfunded mandates.

Issues associated with unfunded mandates have had an economic impact around the country. The ACIR (1994) noted “in New York City, in the late 1970s, Mayor Ed Koch characterized the sizable increase of federal regulations as a “mandate millstone” which threatened the financial and political health of the country” (p. 4). Federal mandates impact the operating costs of state and county government agencies, implementing regulations that have limited their ability to operate through statutory law or federal processes. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations are cited most often, in research, as an unfunded mandate for many counties. The use of regulations by the EPA such as the Clean Water Act to issue storm water regulations has impacted many counties across the country. Other EPA regulations have negatively affected local economies relying heavily on mining. Land Use Regulations have excluded 2.8 million acres in some counties that were proper for future mineral extraction, which would generate a considerable profit for the state economy (Griffith et al., 2016).

State and federal unfunded mandates have increased rapidly over the past decade in a wide range of policy implementation. Counties in more than half of all states have experienced a greater burden of unfunded mandates from state governments. Increasingly, states have required counties to use the resources available, leaving unfunded mandates that will not support their

requirements while decreasing the state and county financial economy. Public safety is an example of shared responsibility between federal, state, and county funding, where smaller governmental entities have incurred the largest financial impact (Griffith et al., 2016).

Counties have become overloaded with the unforeseen responsibilities of unfunded mandates, raising concerns for the constituents who have been impacted. It has become apparent that counties are faced with a daunting problem. State and federal governments have required counties to provide a growing scope of services and have not supported them financially to meet the unfunded requirements. The mandates imposed to counties are often unfunded either entirely or partially. The tax revenue dispersed by federal and state funding for county services alleviate some of these costs, but these supplementary resources have become smaller over time (Griffith et al., 2016).

In most states, restrictions and limitations on revenue sources have restricted the ability of counties to successfully achieve the demands of unfunded mandates to support economic growth across the country. County government roles and responsibilities have increased due to shifting economies, aging populations, and overburdened infrastructures, a consequence of the lack of financial support (Griffith et al., 2016). Increased county autonomy regarding profit generation and service provisions would relieve the issues brought up by the mandates. Mandates endorsed by state and federal entities have advanced important public interests; however, there is a need for unfunded mandates to be accompanied by financial resources for implementation. In many instances, governing entities have issued mandates but failed to provide the necessary resources for implementation, leaving counties to resort to general revenues raised from property taxes (Griffith et al., 2016). Having the legal authority to

mandate does not alleviate governing entities from considering fair and equitable practices and the unintended implications unfunded mandates have created (Nobles & Brookes, 2000).

Costs

The financial issues regarding unfunded mandates have displaced the priorities from local and state governments for the use of their own funds. Rather than spending funds on local improvements and investments, local and state governments had been forced to spend revenue on the requirements of meeting the unfunded mandate. An example of increased costs to state budgets has been an increase of Medicaid costs, which by a combination of federal mandate expansions have increased health care costs unnecessarily. The displacement in such investments also made it difficult for state and local elected officials to deliver on their campaign promises, damaging their political image across the country (US Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relation, 1994). These facts show that the unfunded mandates, considering them to be an obligation that do not come with economic aid, have become an obstacle for the operations of governing of counties.

State and federal governments must be more cognizant of the financial pressures created by unfunded mandates. The functionality of an unfunded mandate cannot be acknowledged only by the constitutional characteristics of its nature, but also by the balance between positive and negative impacts that will come as a consequence. Counties need the state and the federal governments to provide full funding to cover the costs of the mandates they impose (Griffith et al., 2016).

Negative aspects have shown that one fact has become evident: the costs associated with unfunded mandates have not been studied enough. There is a need for more research between the

costs of the regulations from states and the costs and benefits of the policy implementation. State and local governments have to supply increased revenue for economic, social, and environmental benefits to comply with the costly nature of the unfunded mandates. Determining benefits is no less difficult than determining costs, especially when indirect costs and benefits are included; however, it is necessary for the popular approval and the proper functioning of the unfunded mandates (US Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relation, 1994).

State Issues

Issues related to unfunded mandates have been voiced by state authorities. In many cases, state governments have imposed mandates on local governments similar to federal initiatives. State mandates have frustrated local officials, as they have restricted local ability to raise funds to suffice the counties own needs (Rajagopal & Osterburg, 1995). While counties in most states collected property taxes, most often they kept less than a quarter of the property taxes collected. The majority of property taxes in a state went to education (Griffith et al., 2016). Education and unfunded mandates have been intertwined with financial issues. The demands of unfunded mandates placed on local education services have made the costs around education increase significantly in conjunction with other policy problems. The costs associated with education have increased with the boost of unfunded mandates, which in turn, have increased the cost of education. Unfortunately, most states have not concomitantly increased education funding (US Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relation, 1994).

The costs associated with health and human services have affected local governments as unfunded mandates have made it difficult to properly divide the investments in different segments of society. Studies have shown that there are concerns about health care and little

about education and infrastructure. The cumulative effect of multiple federal mandates created a particularly complex problem for state governments and perceived as unequitable by state governments (US Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relation, 1994). Unfunded mandates create a burden for states and counties with little intervention by the federal government. While the intent of mandates were designed to be helpful, the lack of communication has proven to be problematic for lower levels of government (Rajagopal & Osterburg, 1995).

Political Perceptions

Political perceptions regarding unfunded mandates have had a resounding impact around the country, state, and local governments. Local officials have been concerned about the cumulative effect of state mandates more than any single state-imposed requirement or restriction (Nobles & Brookes, 2000). As opposed to being able to solve the current problems associated with unfunded mandates, often they have found themselves with concerns that have turned into unintended consequences. Many local officials considered the mandate problem as flawed. In their view, the state made decisions about program policy and funding without an adequate study of compliance with the state and local government (Nobles & Brookes, 2000).

Many estimates of federally induced costs were neither reliable nor particularly helpful in the process of enacting legislation or making administrative rules (US Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relation, 1994). The US Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relation (ACIR) (1994) stated:

Many lack an adequate governmental infrastructure for managing the fiscal, administrative, and technical requirements of federal mandates. There may be no way to

determine accurately the costs and benefits of federal mandates on these particular communities, as no federal agency is equipped to communicate regularly and individually with these local governments to help them resolve compliance problems. (p. 16)

Estimates by the ACIR of federally induced costs were not consistent in the legislative process and hindered the ability to enact legislation and the formulation of administrative rule (US Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relation, 1994). The ACIR (1994) indicated the reasons for deficient costs included:

They were prepared quickly without the use of generally accepted methods that could not be audited. They did not reflect secondary effects (such as federal displacement of state and local priorities). They were not recalculated to reflect changes made in the bill or the proposed rule. They were made too late in the process to help identify and authorize less costly means of achieving federal objectives. They were seldom considered by the Congress in relation to the benefits they create (to assist in calculating the net effect). They rarely showed how federally induced costs affect different types of state and local governments. (p. 6)

Throughout the literature, research reported that establishing and operating a workable refund process would be difficult. The ACIR (1994) found that “state experience with mandate reimbursement programs for local governments suggested that federal policymakers would need to address a series of complex issues before reimbursement programs could be effective” (p. 2). These reoccurring issues have been brought up, but have seen resistance, tension, or disagreement between state and local officials about the efficacy of mandates. State and local officials brought different perspectives to the discussions about mandates, as both have different

priorities (Nobles & Brookes, 2000). What may be politically expedient for the Congress or Senate endorsing unfunded mandates, may also be a financial burden for state and local elected officials who must raise taxes to implement the policy due to the lack of funding. While mandates lead to uniform national standards, they fail to allow for regional differences and flexibility in solutions (Rajagopal & Osterburg, 1995).

There has been a lack of agreement over what constitutes an unfunded mandate, making discussing mandate issues and responding to them difficult. Some policymakers define mandates as mandatory requirements that dictates not what local government should do, but to pre-make choices (Nobles & Brookes, 2000). Some definitions may include mandates for the existence of conditional requirements that local governments must meet if they want to receive support to achieve the goals of the mandates. Individuals implementing a law must consider the impact a law may have on a group and how that may have an impact on policy implementation (Hodge & Welch, 2016). While large parts of NLCB were unfunded mandates, opposition to the law may have been reduced if more district leaders, teachers, and administrators with knowledge of the groups they support were involved in the policy-making process (Hodge & Welch, 2016). The perception still exists that feedback from decision-makers is not part of the policy making process. While local officials may support increased funding, researchers suggested that broad statutory or constitutional provisions requiring financial aid rarely brought relief to local governments because it is unnecessary or simply not sufficient (Nobles & Brookes, 2000).

The State of Florida's Digital Learning Now Act

With the increased growth of online education, politicians have started to rethink the possibilities of education. In August 2010, Florida Governor Jeb Bush and West Virginia

Governor Bob Wise convened the Digital Learning Council (DLC), aiming for a future in which technological innovations and educational advances would be developed through policy to reach local, state, and federal levels. Such a measure was supported by a diverse group of leaders, associated with education, politics, philanthropy, and technology (The Digital Learning Council, 2011). The vision was focused on the future of education and how they needed to advance the current educational system.

The Digital Learning Now initiative was a national campaign launched by the Foundation for Excellence in Education, aimed to raise policies for high quality in digital educational environments, preparing students for the technological world they saw coming ahead. The Foundation for Excellence in Education, a non-profit charitable organization, identified the 10 Elements of High-Quality Digital Learning, which included student eligibility (a) student access; (b) personalization; (c) competency demonstration high quality content; (d) proper instruction; (e) methods of evaluation; (e) and funding (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). Their initiative for funding these governmental components has been important for the proper evolution of online educational policy in the United States.

The educational initiatives that Governors Jeb Bush and Bob Wise, who outlined the vision of the 10 Elements of High-Quality Digital Learning, convened with leaders who would define the goal of their actions to become laws and policies and to bring a revolution to digital learning through thought and development. Their visions were to reform education from print to digital (The Digital Learning Council, 2011). Their planned process of adaptation was well-thought, aimed at taking small steps, following the natural course of the growth in the technological realm.

The DLC aimed to maximize children's potential of learning through the integration of digital technologies by preparing them with the knowledge and skills used in college and their professional life. They believed online learning was a transformational factor for a deep change in education, being able to solve many challenges within the current educational system. Online learning has been a tool for making students from myriad areas reach a high-quality education, making them strong competitors in the professional market, and allowing teachers to be able to improve their skills and adapt to changing educational technology (The Digital Learning Council, 2011).

The 10 Elements of High-Quality Digital Learning are recommendations for a better virtual environment for all students, and not only those who meet certain requirements, making digital learning a reality for all. Alongside this, it was focused on the student's option of a customized education, allowing the ability to have a flexible schedule, blended learning opportunities, in which they can choose to spend part of the study period online and another part in a classroom. The flexibility allowed students to learn towards mastery and created the ability to move on to study areas in need of learning. Legislation called for courses to be evaluated and based in a realistic manner, in which the standards meet the reality of the students in digital platforms; likewise, the educational content should not be more difficult than content in current classes (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). These goals demonstrated that the construction of the 10 Elements of High-Quality Digital Learning had been developed with the focus on student learning.

The process of designing the 10 Elements of High-Quality Digital Learning involved five months of deliberation, discussions over student eligibility, high-quality access, customization,

personalization, assessments, and accountability. As a result, the measure was launched on December 1, 2010, at the National Summit on Education Reform, in Washington, D.C. (The Digital Learning Council, 2011). These educational elements were designed to have positive results for policy and educational initiatives, to rethink the current educational structure.

Roadmap to Reform

The development of the 10 Elements of High-Quality Digital Learning was designed in a detailed manner, divided in three general areas customization for student success, high-quality options, and infrastructure (The Digital Learning Council, 2011). The concept was considered the best way to reform current educational infrastructures. Customization and success for students were the main priorities, indicating that students must be able to customize their education to achieve academic success and their goals (The Digital Learning Council, 2011). The emphasis was designed on the direct interaction between digital platforms and student learning.

The Roadmap to Reform initiative was formed to ensure that all students should have access to high quality digital learning, by being provided with knowledge useful for their education, quality technological devices, and having a variety of choices of study. Additionally, students were taught how to work with the online realm and to understand technology, while this connects to customization and success for students, it is related to high-quality options, as it ensures that learning meets a high standard and students are provided a competitive profile (The Digital Learning Council, 2011). The infrastructure of the learning puts standards on how the technology should be presented with the accessibility for the student, and the metric for evaluation of the content, courses, schools, while guaranteeing access to online learning.

Adequate funding was called for to ensure such infrastructure is in place and must be incentivized to provide for continuous growth (The Digital Learning Council, 2011).

To guide Governors and state school officials through these changes, the Roadmap to Reform utilized three founding principles called nuts-and-bolts policies; (a) building a bold agenda; (b) and state digital learning report card (The Digital Learning Council, 2011). The nuts-and-bolts policies is a section that outlines specific policies to achieve each element of the 10 Elements of High-Quality Digital Learning. Building a bold agenda is a section directed to outline complementary measures that can be used for a better performance. Lastly, the State Digital Learning Report Card aims to identify the level each state achieved (The Digital Learning Council, 2011).

Digital learning is also divided into modalities, having the possibility of being full-time online, part-time online, and blended. Full-time online learning must offer high quality education to students who are not able to attend physical location because of medical issues, either biological or psychological, considering the differing location of student and teachers. Part-time online learning combines online learning with outside physical activities directed for education, having the highest customization possible. Blended online learning allows students and teachers to be in the same location, but also enroll in online activities, having a variety of knowledge and deep contact with digital education (The Digital Learning Council, 2011).

The 72 increments from the Foundation for Excellence in Education document are essential for a high-quality education. Policy combo-packs are a combination of essential and complementary policies that may result in an acceleration and amplification of positive results. The intent was to assist governors, lawmakers, and policymakers to develop a clear path for the

development and transformation of online education (The Digital Learning Council, 2011). States should adopt certain policy areas, such as ensuring the student mastery of the subject taught, diversity, prioritizing attendance, and innovation through online education. States should keep track of the results and measure what they decide to implement, such as academic results, types of digital platforms, and activities completed (The Digital Learning Council, 2011). These items are important for the implementation of online learning for all students, ensuring its implementation is positive, or better, than the traditional means of teaching and learning.

Digital Learning Now Bill Analysis

The Florida education system primarily utilized virtual instruction programs for online education. The virtual instruction programs provided an interactive educational virtual environment, in which students are separated from their teachers by time, space, or both (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). This has demonstrated an advancement in education looking for a future with more intertwining between technology and education. On May 2011, CS/CS/HB 7197, known as Digital Learning Now (DLN), passed the House and the Senate; following that, DLN was approved on June 2, 2011, chapter 2011 - 137, Laws of Florida, increasing the availability of digital learning options by authorizing virtual charter schools to provide full-time online instruction to kindergarten. DLN offer blended learning courses to full-time students; alongside these measures, students who are entering grade nine are obligated to complete at least one online course (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). This would allow online learning in Florida to demonstrate that complementing the existing competences would improve the digital education system in the state.

DLN authorized school districts to have their own digital classes for instruction programs and modified the eligibility criteria for taking part in virtual instruction programs for kindergarten. Additionally, requirements for the issuance of adjunct teaching certificates, encouraging individuals to provide online instruction, authorizing students to take online courses from other districts, with the requirement for the Department of Education to report the best methods for online education (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). DLN also increased accountability by requiring charter school governing boards to appoint a representative to resolve disputes; (a) conduct public meetings; (b) aim for the discussion of public schools receiving instruction for online learning and its modalities; (c) constructing an evaluation method for part-time programs; (d) and clarifying that the funding for such measures must be through the Florida Education Finance Program without consideration of class size (Florida House of Representatives, 2011).

DLN further instructed that online instructors should have the ability to receive certification through alternate routes; (a) suitable for their roles; (b) and driven by performance (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). Students should also be given access to all of the high-quality providers that may be available to them, be it public, private, or non-profit providers. The approval must be transparent and in no way biased. The quality of the content for online learning must be continuously provided by the evaluation of the student's performance on the online platforms and courses (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). The Florida House of Representatives (2011) stated:

Digital assessments were recommended because of the distinct advantages they offer, including unique evaluation models, faster results, instant feedback for students, and

personalized analytics for teachers. Student performance was recommended as the basis for quality measurement because of the advantages of outcome-based accountability frameworks. (p. 4)

The details regarding teachers, access, and feedback are equally important to the bill, as it provides students with teachers who are prepared for the online realm. For the subject chosen, it will ensure that students had the highest number of options possible, as well as keeping track of changes of technology.

In Florida, there are options for school districts that want to provide students with the opportunity to take part in a virtual instruction program, which includes a contract with the FLVS, a contract with a provider approved by the Department of Education, a contract with a community college, agreements with another school district, and contracts that include multidistrict contractual arrangements executed by a regional consortium (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). A variety of relevant options is important, as some may be more fitting for specific districts than the others, and thus, options improve access for technological advancements.

District Virtual Instruction Program

Although virtual instruction programs are not obligatory, the choice of students using this modality has increased since the 2011 - 2012 school year as legislation required that each school district provide virtual instruction, whether part-time or full-time, with at least three program options (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). This is one measure of many that the educational system of Florida has taken to raise learning gains of students that adopt virtual learning as a method of education.

School districts eligible for sparsity supplements, fewer than 24,000 students, are required to provide only one option of virtual instruction. The two options are part-time or full-time virtual instruction (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). Districts are obligated to notify parents of the option of instruction at least 90 days before the first day of the school year (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). Concerns regarding accessibility to online providers along with the limited availability of required instructional providers for digital learning has been viewed in some districts as one step back, as increased access would provide additional learning opportunities.

Virtual Charter Schools

The 2011 - 2012 Florida school year also saw an expansion of virtual instruction options by allowing charter schools to operate as a virtual charter school. These schools provide full-time online instruction to eligible K - 12 students, and the ability to contract approved providers, including the FLVS (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). This is one more example of how the political realm has attempted to insert digital learning in schools by incentivizing the use of online instruction.

The requirements for students to be able to attend virtual charter school in their respective districts were enrollment in a public school and the financial reporting by the entity to receive funding from the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) from the prior school year (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). Additionally, the funding model required that all students enroll in a school district which operated a virtual instruction program or K - 8 virtual school program in the prior school year, were a sibling of a student currently enrolled a virtual instruction program, or eligible to enter kindergarten or first grade (Florida House of

Representatives, 2011). The Public School Enrollment Estimating Conference (PSEEC), held on April 12, 2011, adopted estimates for full-time equivalent enrollment impacts for several provisions of the bill. The various options were added to the FEFP for funding in the General Appropriations Act (Florida House of Representatives, 2011). The PSEEC outlined a general view of what the near future holds for education, having a greater integration of online learning for Florida's educational system.

The State of Florida provides an example of the scope of policy development and implementation associated with digital learning. Florida was the first state to have full-time and part-time virtual options, operated the Florida Virtual School (FLVS), was the largest virtual school found in the United States, and which accounted for over 2 million enrollments since its inception in 1997. As an example, FLVS had over 520,000 course completions in the 2014 - 2015 school year (Watson et al., 2015). The State of Florida has demonstrated that it has been leading in the implementation of digital learning in the United States. Florida has made progress in online education for students through close collaboration between school districts and the state. The State of Florida has been a leader in the United States for online education. Watson et al. (2015) stated:

Florida has an active state education agency that has been responsible for implementing a long history of legislation affecting online learning and was the first state in the country to legislate that all K–12 public school students have full-time and part-time virtual options, and funding that follows each student down to the course level. (p. 102)

Educator concerns regarding online education were addressed by the State of Florida through facilitating advancements of online education and prioritized the state's educational system with technology for the development of education and teaching pedagogy.

Summary

The review of the literature began with a discussion of the history of online education. The literature provides evidence that there has been significant growth and policy development that has been concurrent with the growth and use of technology. While the use of online education has been integrated with brick-and-mortar schools, there are also many advantages and obstacles surrounding the topic which centered around teaching and student learning. The literature has shown that online education has been an area of educational reform which focused on the State of Florida through educational policy.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine administrators' perceptions of unfunded mandates in online education for all public K - 12 educational levels. The intent was to examine the ideas and beliefs held by administrators of unfunded mandates, obstacles in online education, and advantages in online education for their schools. The study focused on the State of Florida where a substantial degree of online educational policy have been implemented by law. The research attempted to examine perceptions held by administrators regarding unfunded mandates and to understand online education in their respective districts. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are administrator perceptions of state unfunded mandates in online learning?
2. Is there a relationship between administrator perceptions of online learning and perceptions of unfunded mandates in online learning in their schools?
3. Are there school demographic differences in administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates?

Chapter 3 explains the design used in this study, the data collection methods, and the data analysis conducted for the research. The discussion of the methodology will begin with the research design and rationale. The site and participants will then be described followed by the data collection in the next section. Next, the unfunded mandate survey construction and pilot will be outlined. The remaining sections will review the data analysis, plan for analysis, methods of analysis, ethical safeguards, methods of verification, and conclude with the role of the researcher.

Research Design and Rationale

The design of this study was quantitative, using a survey method. A survey gives the researcher the ability to describe attitudes, opinions, and beliefs across a population through sampling (Creswell, 2014). The design was chosen to provide insight and value through the inspection of a large data set to answer the research questions. The primary function of the survey used was to produce a sample description of a population by using a Likert scale to analyze responses from the participants (Fowler, 2014). There are benefits to using quantitative research, such as the ability to analyze relationships, explore cause and effect of data, make an inference on large data sets, and regulate researcher bias (Creswell, 2015).

As the researcher, I acknowledge that the worldview employed was a postpositivist approach. The foundation of this view is based on the collection and use of data with the belief that there is no absolute truth, but that a reality exists to identify and assess the cause, objectivity, and development of rational questions (Creswell, 2014). A postpositivist philosophy in research and science can provide reasonable knowledge to the educational research community (Phillips & Barbour, 2000). Two objections regarding this view have been that it is not possible to eliminate error through the collection of data and the approach is not objective in whole as the collection of data can be subjective (Phillip, 1998). Furthermore, a quantitative approach allows the research to question *what* but does not allow for *why*. This worldview shaped my approach to the research by using quantitative components to objectively guide the study.

The survey enables quantitative measurements for precision, credibility, and accuracy (Fowler, 2014). A survey method will allow for better understanding of a wide range of participants. Concerns of quantitative research by Mies (1983) stated “criticism of quantifying

methods focus on the claim to have a monopoly on the truth, not on the users of numbers, nor on the use of numbers” (as cited by Phillip, 1998, p. 266). The intent of the quantitative design for the study was that the resulting data would support the research questions in an unbiased manner. A quantitative survey method was utilized for a large collection of data quickly, a shorter turnaround time from the start of data collection to data analysis, and guided the analysis for the research questions presented in this study. These factors will contribute to the research involving Florida administrators’ voice and perceptions regarding obstacles and advantages in online learning in addition to administrators’ perception associated with unfunded mandates.

Site and Participants

The following section will describe the site and participants. The site will describe the location of where the survey research took place. The participants’ section will outline the qualifying characteristics of the participants who chose to participate in this study.

Site

The State of Florida was chosen as the site to answer the research questions. Several factors were considered in selecting the sample. As a result of a larger sample size of administrators, the research design increased the ability to achieve a higher response rate for the survey. The State of Florida has an extensive history of online education. Florida was one of the first states in the nation to establish regulations for K - 12 online education with 520,000 enrollments in 2014 – 2015 (Watson et al., 2015). Additionally, the State of Florida’s virtual school program policy is available to all students statewide, and Florida is the third largest state in the U.S. in terms of population.

Participants

Participants in this study were public school K – 12 administrators in the State of Florida. The participants were stratified to only survey school principals as these individuals play a role in the decision-making process at the school level and their perceptions help to best answer the research questions. District Superintendents were notified via email before surveys were emailed to the participants. The email included an attachment which provided an overview of the study; (a) attempted to obtain permission to survey administrators in their district; (b) provided an opportunity for Superintendents to voice concerns; (c) and proactively mediate any questions to direct reports who would receive the survey. In total, there were 7,622 administrators in the State of Florida, with a goal to attain a 10% response rate. All those recruited to participate were not required to take or submit the survey.

Methods

Next, I will discuss the methods used for the survey research. The methods will include instrumentation, the Unfunded Mandates in Online Education Survey construction and pilot, and data collection.

Instrumentation

One survey was administered to the participants virtually. The survey was administered through Question Pro, a cloud-based tool for survey collection housed on the University of Tennessee (UT) computer servers. The survey instrument was accessed via a URL link from Question Pro. On the initial page of the survey, participants were provided the “Consent for Research Participation”, which outlined the research being conducted and the rights of the participants. When the participant clicked on the radial button, “I agree to participate”, the

participant acknowledged informed consent and continued with the survey. If the respondent selected “I do not agree to participate”, the survey was terminated, and the participant was not involved in the research.

Unfunded Mandates in Online Education Survey Construction and Pilot

Prior to being sent to the participants, the Unfunded Mandates in Online Education Survey (UMIOES) was piloted and designed to understand administrator’s perceptions of unfunded mandates in online education. The UMIOES design began with a web search of literature associated with unfunded mandates. A search query was conducted using the key words *unfunded mandate* and *unfunded mandate perception* using Google Scholar, which resulted in the selection of 24 peer reviewed articles used in the pilot design.

The following steps were taken to develop the survey questions by constructing a matrix of the 24 articles in an excel spreadsheet which included the citation information; (a) column A referenced the article numbers 1 – 24; (b) column B referenced the page number of the article; (c) column C referenced the theme number; (d) column D referenced the quote from the peer reviewed articles; (e) and 240 quotes from the articles were used to develop 16 themes to meet the criteria for saturation. Saunders et al. (2017) defined the point of saturation by “the criterion for judging when to stop sampling the different groups pertinent to a category is the category’s theoretical saturation” (p. 1895).

Survey questions were developed based on the themes resulting from the 24 peer reviewed articles. Once the survey questions were constructed, an expert panel was formed to ensure integrity and content validity for the survey design. The survey was reviewed by individuals with areas of expertise in data science, survey research, market research, leadership,

and educational research. All members of the expert panel had experience in K - 12 public education, post-secondary higher education, or online education. The expert panel provided specific feedback, suggestions, and potential edits based on their professional expertise. Table 1 outlines the Expert Panel Credentials

The survey targeted 73 school districts in the State of Florida and consisted of 7,622 school administrators. The UMIOES was developed with four survey sections which included demographics of the respondents (questions 1 - 12); (a) perceptions of unfunded mandates (questions 13 - 32); (b) perceptions of online education (questions 32 - 51); (c) and one open ended response (question 52). The UMIOES utilized a five point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (see Appendix A). The UMIOES was then edited, with consideration of the panel's recommendations, then tested on a final group. Based on the feedback, a final survey was ready to administer.

Data Collection

All Florida district Superintendents were emailed an overview of the research, confidentially, and purpose of the study to provide insight regarding the survey research. In order to administer the survey, Florida public school administrator emails were requested via an open records request from the State of Florida. The survey was conducted via Question Pro and remained open for 35 days. The process for conducting the survey to administrator's is outlined by administrator's received the initial email notification (Day 1) which notified administrators regarding the start of the survey; (a) the second email (Day 7) included a link to the survey on Question Pro and was sent one week later; (b) the third email notification (Day 14) was sent seven days after the initial survey to thank all participants for their participation and to

Table 1

Expert Panel Credentials

Panel Members		Expertise	Experience
1.	Member 1	Data Analysis and Analytics.	Business and Online Education.
2.	Member 2	Market Research and Survey Research.	Business and Online Education.
3.	Member 3	Leadership and Politics.	Business and Online Education.
4.	Member 4	Market Intelligence and Survey Analysis.	Business and Online Education.
5.	Member 5	School Leadership and Research.	Business, Education, and Higher Education

request participation; (c) the fourth email notification (Day 28) was sent three weeks after the initial survey and was sent to all members who did not respond with the survey link included; (d) a fifth and final email (Day 35) was sent to the remaining administrators as a final reminder with the survey link included and an acknowledgment of consideration.

The timeframe for the data collection was a five week timeframe for the completion of each survey. All data were collected electronically. The survey data was downloaded to an Excel comma delimited file and secured by UT server computers to protect from any computer limitations in an effort to secure the integrity of the data.

Data Analysis

The following section will discuss the types of analysis utilized for this study. I will detail the plan for analysis which included the use of descriptive statistics; (a) the use of Cronbach's Alpha; (b) recoding negatively worded survey responses; (c) the use of correlation to determine the relationship of the two constructs; (d) the use of an Independent t-Test; (e) and the use of a one-way ANOVA to examine the differences in administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates. Then, I will outline the methods used for the analysis of the data.

Plan for Analysis

Descriptive statistics provided insight into the survey responses by presenting the central tendency and variation for participant responses on items. The survey questions were categorized in two constructs. Survey questions 13 – 32 focused on unfunded mandates perception, while survey questions 33 – 51 focused on online learning perceptions. Cronbach's alpha was used to test the inter-relatedness of the two categories. Tavakol and Dennick (2011) noted that “calculating alpha has become a common practice in medical educational research when

multiple-item measures of a concept or construct are employed....to provide a measure of internal consistency of a test or scale” (p. 1). All perception questions utilized a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Descriptive statistics were used to answer research question one. Fisher and Marshall (2008) described descriptive statistics as the “numerical and graphical techniques used to organize, present, and analyze data” (p. 95).

Next, all survey questions were reviewed to minimize the fluctuation of respondent’s answers to the survey questions. Zaller and Feldman (1992) found that “if the same people are asked the same question in repeated interviews, only about half give the same answer...the amount of response instability differs from one issue to another” (p. 580). To ensure meaningful comparability within the survey constructs, negatively worded survey responses were recoded. Survey research from Smith et al. (2017) stated that “this is a practice frequently employed in the assessment of psychological measures to combat response sets...the values for negatively worded items need to be reversed to obtain a positive composite score” (p. 11).

Then, a Pearson correlation was used to understand the relationship between unfunded mandate perceptions and online learning perceptions. Gogtay (2017) indicated that “a correlation, also called a correlation analysis, is a term used to denote the association or relationship between two (or more) quantitative variables” (p. 78). A correlation analysis of the two quantitative variables was used to answer research question two.

Finally, a means analysis was utilized to determine the differences between the unfunded mandate perception as the dependent variable, and administrator demographics as the independent factors. An Independent t-Test was used to compare the means between two groups and a one-way ANOVA for groups of three or more. Mishra et al. (2017) stated a “t-test is used

to compare the means between two groups and there is no need of multiple comparisons as unique P value is observed, whereas ANOVA is used to compare the means among three or more groups” (p. 407). Furthermore, Mishra et al. (2017) indicated that an “independent t test, also called unpaired t test, is an inferential statistical test that determines whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means in two unrelated (independent) groups...to apply this test, a continuous normally distributed variable (Test variable) and a categorical variable with two categories (Grouping variable) are used” (p. 408). Anesthesiol (2017) noted the “analysis of variance (ANOVA) is one of the most frequently used statistical methods to determine whether differences exist in the means of 3 or more groups” (p. 1). An Independent t-Test was used to compare two grouping variables and a one-way ANOVA was used on groups of three or more for school demographic differences in administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates to answer research question three.

Methods for Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Program (SPSS) was the primary tool that was utilized for the data analysis. The survey data from Question Pro was downloaded and reviewed for discrepancies. Data were analyzed and reported through descriptive statistics for both administrator unfunded mandate perceptions as well as the online learning perceptions. Negative worded items were recoded before further testing. Correlations were computed to examine the relationship between the unfunded mandates variable and the online learning variable. Further, an independent t-test was run to analyze the differences between administrator demographics and perceptions of administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates. Finally, a one-way ANOVA was calculated to examine differences between administrator demographics

and administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates. Report of findings from these analyses are found in Chapter Four.

Ethical Safeguards

The proposed study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and reviewed prior to data collection. The survey processes in place provided minimal risk for participants. All participants were provided an online consent form with the survey to meet the foundation of ethical survey research. The consent form incorporated the organization, sponsorship, a description of the research, a confidentiality statement, an assurance statement of voluntary participation without consequence, and that respondents can skip questions they choose not to answer.

To protect respondents confidentiality, access to data and data collection was limited to myself. The survey program Question Pro did not track email addresses of the participants and kept the original survey results on the UT server computers ensuring confidentiality. The results were downloaded on a password protected personal computer where only I had access. No survey information was printed. All participants were provided a consent agreement on the first page of the survey. In order to proceed, the participants clicked on the consent agreement link, acknowledging that the participant gave consent as the survey was conducted online.

Methods of Verification

In this research process, a post-positivist worldview was employed, which emphasized careful observation and objective analysis of the research questions. Pilot testing played a crucial role in the development of the survey instrument. An expert panel, consisting of individuals with diverse backgrounds and expertise, were selected to assist in the survey's

development. Through triangulation, the expert panel validated the survey questions. They focused on establishing content validity, ensuring that the questions were coherent and applicable. Internal consistency of the survey questions was also established through dialogues within the panel. The next step involved testing the survey design on a final group of individuals. They were provided with the survey questions and interviewed to gather their feedback. This iterative process helped refine the survey instrument and ensure its effectiveness.

Content validity was used to assess the results of the descriptive data, while construct validity was employed to measure the data for the statistical analysis. To ensure consistency and reliability in the survey, recommendations from Fowler (2014) were implemented. This involved scripting all survey questions, ensuring consistency in the wording of questions, and removing any inadequate or incomplete wording. To address potential threats to validity and reliability, members from the Office of Information and Technology (OIT) at UT were involved in validating the quantitative results. Their expertise and knowledge in the field would contribute to the research by ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the research findings. By engaging experts from OIT, the study aims to overcome potential challenges to validity and reliability, thus strengthening the overall quality of the research.

Role of the Researcher

Two events in my life influenced me in the decision of the topic. The first event was shortly after moving to Tennessee in 2010. I applied to Walden University in 2011 for my master's degree in education. The intent was to work towards being an administrator in K - 12 education. At the time, I was informed that there would be no issue with obtaining the certification needed for administration. After graduating in 2013 and attempting to complete the

administrator certification process, I was notified by the Tennessee Department of Education (TDE) that the state did not recognize Walden University as a state approved school for principal certification. It was disheartening as I felt that the practices were unclear by both the TDE and Walden University. Neither institution had a clear answer, while in other states I was clearly certified, but not in Tennessee.

In my Doctoral research studies, I learned that during 2011 - 2013 the Symposium on Implementation of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) and The Commission of Regulation of Postsecondary Distance Education (CRPDE) implemented policies and government oversight to enforce and regulate state laws associated with interstate reciprocity and physical presence, a regional approach to governing interstate reciprocity, accreditation, instructional quality, consumer protection, and institutional fiscal responsibility (Commission on the Regulation of Postsecondary Distance Education, 2013). The TDE changed their principal licensure requirements as a result of SARA and the CRPDE in 2013.

The second event is my current role which involves online education. There are many great attributes, qualities of my job, and responsibilities that facilitate online education for students through the US. I have viewed areas of possible instructional limitations, misuse of public funds by other online organizations, and policy concerns from the capacity in which I serve. These examples provide relevance and provokes the question of whether sound policy has been in place for online education. As an educator for 10 years, I spent most of my career educating students in and beyond the classroom.

Through my experiences, I have viewed that online education is not fully understood in its application, policy implementation, and evaluation. The topic of online education has become

more prevalent due to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. As a result of the COVID - 19 pandemic, school districts around the United States relied on online education and hybrid learning to facilitate student learning with little time to fully evaluate teacher expectations and student learning in the 2020 – 2021 school year.

Thus, as my experiences have given additional insight about online education for this research, I will overcome any bias in reporting through unbiased observations of analysis of data through validity and reliability. Through triangulation the unfunded mandate survey was designed, blind to the individuals participating in the survey, and used member checking from the OIT at UT to validate the quantitative results.

Conclusion

In this section, the methodology, the research design, and rationale were discussed. The site and participants were described with the data collection in the next section. The unfunded mandate survey construction and pilot was outlined with the remaining sections reviewing the data analysis, ethical safeguards, and methods of verification. Following the implementation and conclusion of the surveys, the researcher will examine the data from the survey processes outlined in the methodology. As a result of the research design, rationale, and analysis described in Chapter 3, the research findings will be discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The study focused on the State of Florida where a significant number of online educational policies have been implemented and to examine views held by administrator's to understand the impact of unfunded mandates in online education. This chapter presents findings to the research questions:

1. What are administrator perceptions of state unfunded mandates in online learning?
2. Is there a relationship between administrator perceptions of online learning and perceptions of unfunded mandates in online learning in their schools?
3. Are there school demographic differences in administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates?

First, I will discuss the descriptive analysis of the Unfunded Mandates in Online Education Survey and survey constructs. The descriptive findings were used to answer research question one. After the descriptive analysis, I discuss the use of Cronbach's alpha and the Pearson correlation analysis used to answer research question two. Next, I will discuss the use of a means analysis using an Independent t-test and a one-way ANOVA to answer research question three. Finally, I will conclude the chapter by discussing the descriptive and statistical findings for the research questions of this study.

Descriptive Analysis

The UMIOES was piloted and designed to understand administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates in online learning. The survey targeted 73 school districts in the State of Florida and 7,622 school administrators. Approximately 81% of the school districts allowed

dissemination of the survey to 3,209 public school administrators. Of these, 14 school districts in Florida required documentation for district approval in addition to the University of Tennessee ethics approval. One school district approved the district ethics submission ($n = 134$) (see Appendix E). Following notification of permission, the survey was sent to 59 Florida school districts and a total of 3,343 public school administrators. A 2.2% ($n = 73$) overall response rate was achieved in the school districts surveyed.

Next, I will discuss the descriptive results and the survey constructs which included the demographics of the respondents (questions 1 - 12); (a) perceptions of unfunded mandates (questions 13 - 32); (b) perceptions of online education (questions 32 - 51); (c) and one open ended response (question 52).

Survey Demographics of Respondents

Demographic data were collected from the 73 participants. The majority of the respondents, 91.7%, identified as either a principal or assistant principal. Nearly all of the respondents, 86.1%, indicated they had 10 or more years of experience in education. The majority of respondents, 53.4%, reported that their current degree was a master's degree, followed by a doctorate, 30.1%, followed by a specialist degree 13.7%, and only 2.7% had a bachelor's degree. The majority of respondents specified that their knowledge of technology was either above average or proficient, approximately 79.4%, and 20.5% reported average knowledge in this category. No respondents indicated that they needed improvement in this category and the majority of respondents, 49.3%, utilized workshops, conferences, or trainings for technology-based professional development. Demographic data of the participants for Florida public administrators are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Data of Participants for Florida Public Administrators

Demographic Data	Total	Percent
Role		
Principal	32	41.6
Head of School	2	2.6
Assistant Principal	35	45.5
District Administrator	4	5.2
Years of Experience		
Less than 2 years	1	1.3
2 - 3 years	1	1.3
4 - 9 years	8	10.4
10 years or more	62	80.5
Educational Degree		
Bachelor's degree	2	2.6
Master's degree	39	50.6
Specialist's degree	10	13.0
Doctorate	22	28.6
Technology Knowledge		
Needs Improvement	0	0
Average	15	19.5
Above average	25	32.5
Proficient	33	42.9
Technology Based Professional Development		
University course(s)	7	9.1
Professional development to improve your role as a principal	15	19.5
Mentoring, peer observation, or coaching of principals	6	7.8
Participating in a principal network	8	10.4
Workshops, conferences, or trainings	35	45.5
Grade Level		
Elementary School	23	29.9
Middle School	14	18.2
High School	17	22.1
Combined	19	24.7
Student Enrollment		
1 to 99	2	2.6
100 - 299	5	6.5
300 - 749	24	31.2
750 - 1,499	22	28.6
1,500 and Above	19	24.7

Table 2 Continued

Demographic Data	Total	Percent
School Locale		
City	23	29.9
Suburban	28	36.4
Town	10	13.0
Rural	11	14.3
Children of Poverty		
0 - 25%	12	15.6
26% - 50%	15	19.5
51% - 75%	18	23.4
More than 75%	28	36.4
Student Population		
Hispanic, regardless of race	11	14.3
White, non-Hispanic	40	51.9
Black or African American, non-Hispanic	17	22.1
Other	4	5.2
Gender		
Male	28	36.4
Female	44	57.1
Race		
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0
Asian	2	2.6
Black or African American	14	18.2
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0
White	56	72.7

In summary, most respondents had at least 10 years of experience, had a master's degree or higher, were proficient with technology, and utilized technology for professional development.

The grade levels that the respondents worked with were distributed evenly amongst the respondents with elementary school at 31.5%, middle school at 19.2%, high school at 23.3% and combined grade levels at 26%. The number of students enrolled at the respondents school varied with the majority, 300 - 749 students enrolled at 33.3%, followed by 750 – 1,499 at 28.6%, 1,500 or more students at 26.6%, and 1 – 299 enrolled students at 9.7%. Respondents indicated that the largest school locale was suburban at 38.9%, city at 31.9%, rural at 15.3%, and town at 13.9%. Therefore, the majority of respondents worked in schools with larger student populations, consistent between grade levels, and likely worked in a city or suburban school district. Respondents indicated that the majority of students at their schools come from low-income families, with 63.1% of administrators having 51% or more of their students categorized as children of poverty. The remaining respondents specified that more than 75% of their students were children of poverty at 38.4%, with 26% - 50% at 20.5%, and 0 - 12% at 15.6%. District student populations were white, non-Hispanic at 55.6%, followed by Black or African American, non-Hispanic at 23.6%, Hispanic regardless of race at 15.3% and other at 5.6%. Finally, the majority of respondents indicated they were female at 61.9%, with male at 38.9%, and identified their race as white, 77.8%, Black or African American at 19.4% and Asian at 2.8%. The data suggest that a that a majority of principals were white females, a majority with white student populations, and a majority of their students were in a high SES category.

Florida Administrator UMIOES Perceptions: Research Question 1

The next section will discuss the analysis of the UMIOES design associated with the state and federal government; (a) perceptions of unfunded mandates specific to their school and district; (b) views of unfunded mandates associated with job satisfaction; (c) school resources; (d) school operations; (e) instruction; (f) and student learning. Questions 13 through 32 were categorized as unfunded mandate perceptions.

Unfunded Mandate Perceptions

Administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates were measured on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Administrators indicated a tendency to agree in their perceptions of unfunded mandates ($M = 3.91$). Administrators agreed unfunded mandates were at times difficult to understand ($M = 3.84$), felt that mandates are designed as a “one-size-fits-all” policy ($M = 4.19$), and mandates by the state or federal government were unfunded and had not met the districts funding needs ($M = 4.32$). Administrator views of technology mandates ($M = 3.94$), school facility modifications ($M = 3.89$), and state-based testing requirements were underfunded or unfunded ($M = 4.19$). Administrators agreed that at times they were caught in a dilemma of trying to do what is right for the child and adhere to state policies and procedures ($M = 4.21$). Survey data of the participants for unfunded mandate perceptions of administrators are presented in Table 3.

Administrators agreed that unfunded mandates have impacted their schools and did not align with their school’s needs. Administrators indicated that unfunded mandates have resulted in dissatisfaction in their work conditions as a result of the size of their district ($M = 4.06$), as well as increased accountability measures ($M = 4.13$). Administrators agreed that unfunded

Table 3

Survey Data of Participants for Florida Public Administrators

Unfunded Mandate Perceptions	M	SD
13. At times it is difficult to understand the origin of unfunded mandates.	3.84	1.01
14. Inadequate funding for mandates by the state legislature does not meet our district funding needs.	4.32	0.83
15. Mandates from the federal government are designed as a "one-size-fits-all" policy.	4.19	0.85
16. In our district we have had to modify facilities to meet underfunded/unfunded state mandates.	3.89	0.98
17. More time and resources are used to meet Annual Yearly Progress as mandated by the state than the resources allocated by the state.	4.19	0.82
18. Technology mandates by the state are often unfunded mandates.	3.94	0.99
19. With increased graduation requirements often from unfunded mandates, administrators are caught between doing what is right for the child and abiding to state policies and procedures.	4.21	0.76
20. In the past three years, our district has seen an increase in unfunded mandates.	3.97	0.99
21. Due to the size of our district, unfunded mandates have resulted in dissatisfaction for administrator's work conditions.	4.06	0.87
22. Mandates required by the state and federal government for students with disabilities require our district to provide more services with fewer resources to meet compliance policies.	4.27	0.72
23. As a result of increased unfunded mandates, accountability requirements have decreased administrator's job satisfaction.	4.13	0.79
24. Mandates for highly qualified teachers have impacted our district's ability to maintain qualified personnel.	4.30	0.90
25. Unfunded mandates have resulted in the elimination of instructional programs in our district.	3.59	0.99
26. Our district has spent beyond what the state has allocated in order to comply with unfunded mandates.	3.84	1.02
27. Unfunded mandates by the state and federal government do not address our district's school culture.	3.97	0.87
28. Our district invests more resources in college and career readiness mandates than what the state allocates.	3.66	0.88
29. Mandates that do not address student success undermine the autonomy of our district's ability for curriculum implementation.	3.93	0.70

Table 3 Continued

Unfunded Mandate Perceptions	M	SD
30. The state mandates decisions about funding without adequate consultation from those who are responsible for the programs in our district.	4.29	0.77
31. In general, unfunded mandates align with goals associated with our district's vision/mission.	2.93	1.01
32. Mandates involving education have improved student learning in our district.	2.70	1.02
Grand Mean	3.91	0.89

mandates have impacted their districts ability to maintain qualified personnel ($M = 4.30$), required more services than resources for students with disabilities ($M = 4.27$) and have resulted in the elimination of instructional programs ($M = 3.59$).

Furthermore, administrators indicated that they felt that their district spent beyond what the state allocated to the district to be compliant with state mandates ($M = 3.89$), that the district's ability for curriculum implementation of student success was undermined ($M = 3.93$), and often feel that state mandates are implemented without feedback or adequate consultation about programs in their district ($M = 4.29$). Administrators agreed that unfunded mandates were not aligned with their districts vision or mission ($M = 2.93$) and that mandates did not improve student learning in their district ($M = 2.70$).

Online Learning Perceptions

The next section will discuss the descriptive results for online learning perceptions associated with student benefits; (a) financial implications; (b) implementation; (c) instructional practices; (d) access to technology; (e) and ability to implement and support online learning. Questions 33 through 51 were categorized as online learning perceptions. Administrator perceptions of online learning were measured on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Administrators indicated a tendency to be neutral in their perceptions of online learning ($M = 3.45$). Administrators perceptions of online education reported the largest standard deviation for the survey ($SD = 1.00$). The majority of administrators indicated that they were neutral in the perception that online learning has benefited their district ($M = 3.32$). Administrators' perceptions of online education were neutral regarding the benefits of growing populations ($M = 3.13$), the financial benefits ($M = 3.05$), and the availability of synchronous

instruction ($M = 2.87$). Administrators were somewhat neutral regarding course availability ($M = 3.38$), AP college level courses ($M = 3.32$), but indicated a tendency to agree on meeting the needs of specific groups of student needs ($M = 3.53$). Administrators indicated a tendency to agree that online education reduced scheduling conflicts ($M = 3.53$) and allowed students who failed to retake a course ($M = 4.00$). Table 4 presents the survey responses of administrator perceptions of online learning.

Administrators were, on average, neutral on course development costs ($M = 3.03$) and disagreed that their schools had the infrastructure to support online education in their district ($M = 2.90$). Administrators indicated they agreed that students in their district had access to technology ($M = 4.35$), had access to the internet while at school ($M = 4.61$), indicated a tendency to agree that students in their district had access to technology outside of school ($M = 3.48$), but were neutral on their access to the internet outside of school ($M = 3.08$).

Administrators indicated they were neutral on restrictive policies in online education ($M = 3.00$); however, agreed that online education requires addition teacher training ($M = 4.03$), with concerns about funding based on student attendance for online education in their district ($M = 3.88$). Administrators had the highest level of agreement that students in their district had access to the internet in school, with 31.2% that agreed and 49.8% that strongly agreed.

Open Ended Responses

Responses to the open ended question, question 52, were optional. Only eight participants gave responses. Of those, only four addressed topics relevant to the study. The others commented on survey content, the time of the year the survey was implemented, and school specific issues such as moving to 1-on-1 instruction and how well their school does with

Table 4

Online Learning Perceptions	M	SD
32. Mandates involving education have improved student learning in our district.	2.70	1.07
33. Online education courses are beneficial for instructional learning in our district.	3.32	1.08
34. Online education facilitates growing populations and limited space in our district.	3.18	1.07
35. Online education courses are financially beneficial in our district.	3.05	1.11
36. Online education is available for synchronous instruction in our district.	2.87	1.33
37. Online education offers courses not otherwise available in our district.	3.38	1.22
38. Online education offers Advanced Placement or college level courses in our district.	3.32	1.23
39. Online education meets the needs of specific groups of students at my school.	3.35	1.28
40. Online education reduces scheduling conflicts for students.	3.53	1.00
41. Online education allows students who failed a course to take it again in our district	4.00	0.85
42. Course development costs for online education is an obstacle in our district.	3.03	0.82
43. Our schools have limited technological infrastructure to support online education in our district.	2.90	1.25
44. Students in our district have access to technology use in school.	4.35	0.67
45. Students in our district have access to technology use out of school.	3.48	1.07
46. Students in our district have access to the internet in school.	4.61	0.49
47. Students in our district have access to the internet out of school.	3.08	1.05
Grand Mean	3.45	1.00

mandates. Given that there were only four responses, a full qualitative analysis was not possible. Instead, the full text of each relevant response can be found in Appendix F.

Statistical Analysis

Next, I will discuss the statistical analysis. The analysis will include the use of Cronbach's alpha for the survey constructs of unfunded mandate perceptions (questions 13 – 32) and online learning perceptions (questions 33 – 51); (a) a Pearson correlation analysis of unfunded mandate perceptions and online learning perceptions; (b) and a means comparison analysis of the unfunded mandate perception construct and administrator demographics.

To answer research question two and research question three, the survey questions were categorized into two constructs, questions 13 through 32 were labeled as “unfunded mandate perception”, and survey questions 33 through 51 were labeled as “online learning perception.” A reliability scale was used to evaluate the unfunded mandate perception construct. The case processing summary resulted in valid cases equaled ($n = 59, 76.6\%$), excluded cases equaled ($n = 18, 23.4\%$), total cases equaled ($n = 77, 100\%$). Cronbach's Alpha reliability resulted in .85 ($n = 20$). The alpha coefficient indicated that the questions have a high internal consistency and are acceptable for the study, noted by Tavakol and Dennick (2011).

The same process for measuring reliability was measured on the online learning perception questions. The case processing summary resulted in valid cases equaled ($n = 57, 74\%$), excluded cases equaled ($n = 20, 26\%$), total cases equaled ($n = 77, 100\%$). Cronbach's Alpha reliability resulted in .82 ($n = 20$). The alpha coefficient indicated that the questions have a high internal consistency and acceptable for the study, noted by Tavakol and Dennick (2011).

Negatively keyed survey questions were recoded for the statistical analysis to ensure meaningful comparisons and analyses.

Correlation: Research Question 2

A Pearson correlation was utilized to answer the second research question to examine the relationship between administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates and perceptions of online learning and perceptions. The analysis between the two constructs found that there was a no correlation between the two constructs, $r(63) = -.05, p = .68$). Therefore, no significant relationship was found between administrator perceptions of online learning and administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates in online learning in their schools.

Means Analysis: Research Question 3

First, an analysis of school demographics in administrators revealed that characteristics of current role, years of experience, administrator gender, and administrator race were normally distributed and that there was homogeneity of variance as assessed by Levene's Test for Equality of Variances. Table 5 presents the means analysis of administrator characteristics.

Therefore, an independent t-test was run with a 95% confidence interval to examine mean differences in demographics and administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates. Analyses found that perceptions of unfunded mandates and school demographics related to current role $t(61) = 0.26, p = 0.79$, years of experience, $t(61) = 0.62, p = 0.53$, administrator gender, $t(60) = 0.19, p = 0.84$, and administrator race, $t(2, 60) = 1.03, p = 0.30$, found no degree of significance. Next, an analysis of school demographics in administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates utilized a one-way ANOVA to examine the differences between administrator highest degree, $F(2, 60) = .087, p = 0.42$, administrator's knowledge of technology, $F(2, 60) = 0.20, p =$

Table 5

Means Analysis of Administrator Characteristics

Characteristic		M	SD
Current Role	Principal, Head of School, or District Administrator	2.03	0.44
	Assistant Principal	2.06	0.48
Years of Experience	1 - 9 years	2.13	0.47
	10 years or more	2.03	0.45
Highest Degree	Bachelor's or Master's Degree	1.97	0.43
	Specialist's Degree	2.14	0.50
	Doctorate	2.12	0.47
Technology Knowledge	Average	1.98	0.32
	Above average	2.09	0.48
	Proficient	2.04	0.48
Technology Based Professional Development	University course(s)	2.32	0.51
	Professional development to improve your role as a principal	1.99	0.33
	Mentoring, peer observation, or coaching of principals	2.00	0.57
	Participating in a principal network	1.97	0.59
	Workshops, conferences, or trainings	2.03	0.45
Grade Level	Elementary School	1.99	0.47
	Middle School	2.10	0.49
	High School	2.02	0.49
	Combined	2.09	0.41
Enrolled Students	1 - 749	2.15	0.45
	750 - 1,499	2.00	0.42
	1,500 and Above	1.94	0.49
School Locale	City	2.06	0.46
	Suburban	2.00	0.44
	Town	2.23	0.35
	Rural	1.98	0.59
Children of Poverty	0 - 25%	2.11	0.48
	26% - 50%	2.16	0.48
	51% - 75%	1.98	0.43
	More than 75%	2.01	0.47

Table 5 Continued

Characteristic		M	SD
Student Population	Hispanic, regardless of race	1.96	0.38
	White, non-Hispanic	2.14	0.49
	Black or African American, non-Hispanic	1.87	0.46
	Other	2.03	0.15
Administrator Gender	Male	2.02	0.46
	Female	2.05	0.46
Administrator Race	Non-White	2.16	0.49
	White	2.01	0.45

degree, $F(2, 60) = .087, p = 0.42$, administrator's knowledge of technology, $F(2, 60) = 0.20, p = 0.81$, technology-based professional development, $F(4, 56) = 0.73, p = 0.57$, grade levels in school, $F(3, 59) = .20, p = 0.89$, number of enrolled students, $F(2, 59) = 1.27, p = 0.28$, school locale, $F(3, 58) = 0.61, p = 0.61$, children of poverty, $F(3, 59) = 0.43, p = 0.82$, and student population $F(3, 58) = 1.32, p = 0.27$, found no statistical differences between groups. Due to the smaller effect sizes, it is likely that there were fewer differences between administrator's perceptions of unfunded mandates and the demographics of the administrators.

In conclusion, a means analysis was utilized to answer research question three; are there school demographic differences in administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates.

The resulting data found no significant differences between administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates and demographic variables.

Summary of Findings

Next, I will summarize the findings of the study. The findings will include the use of descriptive statistics to answer research question one; (a) a Pearson correlation analysis of unfunded mandate perceptions and online learning perceptions to answer research question two; (b) and a means analysis of the unfunded mandate perception construct and administrator demographics to answer research question three.

The first research question was designed to understand administrator perceptions of state unfunded mandates and perceptions of online learning. The descriptive data from the UMIOES indicated that Administrators indicated greater agreement with items addressing unfunded mandates ($M = 3.91, SD = 0.89$) than for items addressing online education ($M = 3.31, SD = 1.00$). Turning to individual items, administrators agreed that technology mandates by the state

were often unfunded, but disagreed that mandates involving online education improved student learning which had the highest level of disagreement. Administrators agreed that mandates are difficult to understand, are designed as a one-size-fits-all policy, and are inadequately funded by the state and federal policies.

Additionally, administrators agreed that in the last three years their district has seen an increase of unfunded mandates, but disagreed that mandates involving online education have increased student learning in their district. Administrators agreed that online education allowed students in their district to retake a course which they failed and also agreed that online education requires additional teacher training. Administrator's expressed concerns about funding based on attendance for online education. Furthermore, administrators expressed concern that the district spent beyond what the state allocated to comply with unfunded mandates.

The second research question was designed to examine the relationship between administrator perceptions of unfunded mandates and perceptions of online learning. The two variables were quantified from the survey constructs. Cronbach's alpha reliability resulted in .85 ($n = 20$) and .82 ($n = 20$) respectively. The Pearson correlation between the two variables resulted in $r(63) = -.05, p = .68$. The analysis indicated the two perceptions have no statistical significance.

The third research question utilized factors from the demographic data of administrators and perceptions of unfunded mandates, using an Independent t-Test and a one-way ANOVA. The means analyses examined the differences of administrator demographics and perceptions of unfunded mandates. I examined the following administrator demographics such as role at school; (a) years of experience; (b) educational degree; (c) technological knowledge; (d)

technology-based professional development; (e) gender; (f) race; (g) grade level; (h) student enrollment; (i) school locale; (j) poverty level of students; (k) student race; (l) and ethnicity.

The means analysis found that none of the examined predictor variables affected attitudes toward perceptions of unfunded mandates and no significant relationships with perceptions of unfunded mandates. Post hoc analyses were not needed as there were no statistically significant p-values in the ANOVA analysis. Additionally, the lower effect size may indicate fewer differences in administrator's perceptions of unfunded mandates. The findings suggest that, overall, school administrators demonstrated similar attitudes toward unfunded mandates across both unfunded mandate perceptions and administrator demographics.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 presented findings from this study based on a quantitative analysis of the of Florida Administrator's perceptions of unfunded mandates and online learning. Chapter 5 will present the discussion, implications, recommendations for future study and conclude with closing remarks.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine administrators' perceptions of unfunded mandates that involved online education. The intent of this study was to examine the perceptions held by Florida public school administrators. This was accomplished through a quantitative study, based on a survey that was designed and implemented to address the research question in the study.

This chapter includes the limitations of the study, a discussion on the findings of the perceptions Florida public school administrators, how they view unfunded mandates implemented by the state and federal government, the implications on their profession, their schools, how online learning has been perceived in their schools, and recommendations for future studies that emerged from the research. Below I discuss additional issues regarding unfunded mandates and the challenges associated with conducting research during the COVID - 19 pandemic.

Discussion

Next, I will provide an overview of the discussion of the study. The discussion will include perceptions of unfunded mandates during a pandemic; (a) the effects of technology on education; (b) and a lack of consistency of implementation.

Perceptions of Unfunded Mandates During a Pandemic

The overarching findings indicated that administrators agreed that unfunded mandates impacted almost every aspect of their professional role and responsibilities as an administrator, including work conditions and an increased dissatisfaction of their role. This aligns with Hodge

and Welch (2016) suggesting administrators are often left out the of legislative process and policy makers must consider the impact of legislation. The findings from this study add context to the research of Hodge and Welch (2016), illustrating the degree and scope of the impact of unfunded mandates on administrators in this study.

As a beginning teacher in Florida in 2004, online education was gaining momentum and organizations were capitalizing on it. As I transitioned out of teaching in 2014, I started working for an organization associated with online learning. The lens in which I viewed education quickly changed from a local perspective to a national view. While considering the concept of this study, my initial view of Florida's unfunded mandate centered around the requirement of students taking one online class as a graduation requirement. The ideas for the study were contemplated several years prior to the COVID -19 pandemic. As students have restarted school after the COVID -19 pandemic, the level of requirements for administrators, teachers, and staff were at an all-time high and changed the way education was viewed and taught. Students lost valuable instructional time, in addition to traditional school gatherings, sports, graduations, and ceremonies which for many, were a rite of passage and milestone that cannot be replaced.

Prior to the pandemic, online education was being utilized by some school districts, had broad policy implementation, and in some states had little or no policy requirements. As noted in the chapter 4 demographic discussion, the majority of Florida administrators had 10 or more years of experience, suggesting that while administrators would have had some interaction with online education, overall, the full implementation of online education was perceived as an unfunded mandate resulting from the pandemic.

Waxman et al. (2013) and Picciano and Seamon (2009) discussed the benefits of online education with positive administrator views, while the concerns of administrators, noted by Borup and Stevens (2015), Deschaine (2013) and policy limitations stated by Glass (2009), Hodge and Welch (2016), were all exacerbated by the pandemic. In a short period of time, required online learning was a reality for the majority of the nation. Technology and online platforms were utilized as the primary means of education, while administrators and staff were not prepared and lacked training and resources for their schools, staff, and students to be successful. While the intent of the study was viewed and researched with a pre-pandemic mindset, the timing, implementation, and feedback in conjunction with the pandemic, in addition to a presidential declaration of a national emergency in 2020, allowed valuable insight into the perceptions of administrators regarding unfunded mandates during a national crisis.

The Effects of Technology on Education

Technology initiatives have been a primary focus for schools and states for decades. Administrator perceptions in this study agreed that technology mandates were often unfunded, and Perkins-Jacobs (2015) noted the societal pressures on administrators to use technology as a learning tool. While the concern of accessibility, quality, and equity for all students were noted by Lamb and Callison (2005), technology has redesigned the way students are being educated. Student use of technology has rapidly increased and is now being used by more people from all ages and aligns with Howell et al. (2003).

Legislative policy for technology mandates range from student equity of technology use, state testing improvements, to educational reform as noted by the DLC (2011) in the State of Florida. Waxman et al. (2013) noted that principals who perceived technology favorably were

more likely to incorporate technology into new pedagogical and instructional methods to help develop their staff. The majority of administrators in this study perceived their knowledge of technology as above average to proficient, but were neutral on the benefits of online learning, and agreed that online learning requires additional training. Garza-Mitchell (2009) noted that a lack of technological familiarity, in addition to inexperienced teachers with newer technologies, may create a digital divide between students and teachers.

The findings from this study align with Picciano and Seaman (2009) that administrator's perceived barriers with online education regarding the need for teacher training and reveal a gap in the teacher technology training process and policy limitations. The speed with which a new instructional method was implemented, left administrators struggling to adequately train teachers and required administrators to be technology leaders to improve technology literacy. While the majority of schools have returned to some degree of pre-pandemic conditions, the use of technology from districts, administrators, and teachers has increased as a result. While the COVID -19 pandemic created a hardship throughout the nation, technology allowed communication in ways many never considered.

Administrators in this study were neutral regarding the benefits of online learning, but the timing of the survey in conjunction with the COVID -19 pandemic, may have been a contributing factor. While there are wide ranges of these services in geographic areas, more students of all ages now have a school issued electronic device, districts have partnered with businesses to help students access the internet from home, and administrators utilize technology for contingency planning allowing education to continue through medical and weather related emergencies. The findings from this study suggest that technology facilitated educational

instruction and developed new educational practices resulting from the pandemic. Parents now have more visibility in their child's education and many districts, administrators, and teachers are using a hybrid approach to education, utilizing technology and online platforms to post assignments, grades, resources, and discussion boards.

A Lack of Consistency of Implementation

Administrators in this study slightly disagreed that their schools had limited technology infrastructure to support online education. Additionally, administrators in this study slightly disagreed that synchronous learning was available for instruction in their district. The two perceptions are conflicting views given that the infrastructure should have supported synchronous and asynchronous learning. Gulz (2004) and Rice (2006) highlighted the benefits of online education and the different instructional formats in which online learning can be delivered, but illustrates that lack of consistency about which format is the most effective for student learning.

While administrators in this study may have had some knowledge of online policy requirements in Florida, there was no legislation on how to fully implement online learning for all students in a short period of time. Nobles and Brookes (2000) noted that mandates are narrowly defined as a requirement to which entities must adhere. Furthermore, Griffith et al. (2016) noted that mandates with high public interest from the state and federal government need adequate funding, but in many cases, governing entities fail to provide the resources needed for implementation. Respondents in this study expressed the benefits and concerns of online education and voiced that the integration of online learning requires a larger level of participation by educators, not just legislators.

Implications

Next, I will discuss the implications of the study. The implications will include policy implementation and school capabilities; (a) voice of administrators and districts for policy implementation; (b) district level implications of administrators; (c) and policies associated with attendance and parental responsibility.

Policy Implementation and School Capabilities

Policy makers from both the state and federal government should consider the findings from this study as it will increase understanding of what administrators need and the capabilities that schools have. While administrators in this study were neutral about the benefits of online learning, administrators were in slight disagreement that mandates involving education have improved student learning. These two views may be a result of the pandemic, though findings noted that required online learning was delivered without preparation or professional development. This suggests that online learning was viewed as an unfunded mandate resulting from the pandemic.

Federal mandates such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), protect the rights of students with disabilities and related services for a public education. IDEA also includes the Least Restrictive Environment policy (LRE). LRE requires students with disabilities to be immersed and educated in regular education classrooms.

Policy makers should understand the impact that legislation and mandates have on administrators, teachers, and school districts. The timing of this research shows the effect of significant mandates, funded and unfunded, resulting from the COVID -19 pandemic, and how this has impacted administrators, teachers, and student learning. Policy makers and school

leaders should utilize the findings from this research to change and inform new policy initiative to facilitate equitable learning for all students using online learning.

Voice of Administrators and Districts for Policy Implementation

Policy makers need to take into consideration administrators feedback and insight when considering legislation and polices to make new and existing mandates more effective. Hodge and Welch (2016) noted that NCLB may have been more effective with educator feedback and buy-in. Collaboration between policymakers and educators will help improve policy implementation and help administrators understand the impact of mandates, not only for the impact on student learning, but to ensure that administrator's enjoy their job, and can make sound decisions without repercussions.

The lack of funding resulting from unfunded mandates and legislative policies noted by Griffith et al. (2016), has left many districts to use their own resources to comply with mandates. This concern of unfunded mandates was attempted through policy by the United States Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (1994) and the United States General Services Administration (1995), however; almost 30 years later, the problem still continues. Ross (2017) stated that unfunded mandates exists at every level of government and Rajagopal and Osterburg (1995) found that the lack of financial support associated with the unfunded mandates limits the officials below the mandating level to voice concern for the need for change. The political and organizational structures in place leave little or no voice for administrators in decisions made about and for their student's and district. Thus, leading to further skepticism regarding views of unfunded mandates, student learning, and adequate consultation of policy implementation.

Ross (2017) indicated that significant financial investigations could solve this problem; while possible in theory, it would take an act of congress to eliminate unfunded mandates. This could not be accomplished by educators alone, but from individuals and organizations united in opposition, and advocating with the congressional representative in their respective states. The finding from this study underscore the need to include the voice of administrators and stakeholders for effective and beneficial policy implementation for education and against unfunded mandates.

District Level Implications of Administrators

Staff perceptions and teacher training has been a concern of administrators. The literature outlined concerns regarding teacher training for online learning, however best instructional practices have not been outlined in the legislative process and has been echoed from by Miron et al. (2017) prior to the pandemic. A'mar and Eleyan (2021) noted the importance of professional development of technology for effective implementation within schools. While expressing the need of legislative intervention may appear contradictory, thoroughly developed policy initiatives provide guidance, direction, and consistency. A recent example of unclear policy processes were implemented by the TN DOE. The Tennessee Literacy Success Act and the Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act of 2021 required school districts to retest thousands of third grade students in less than a week; (a) during the last week of school; (b) resulting in the confusion; (c) and misinformation for schools districts and parents.

Garza-Mitchell (2009) discussed the preference towards traditional education may be the result of experience with newer technologies, adding that the lack of inexperience with new technology creates a digital divide between students and teachers. Without clear instructional

guidelines in place for a different teaching pedagogy, administrators and teachers were left to “figure it out” and learn how to make the best of the resources at hand to implement online learning for their schools. Additionally, teaching shortages impacted many administrators’ ability to recruit highly qualified teachers and maintain qualified personnel. These factors added to the complexity administrators experienced in their schools while implementing a new learning process.

Concurrently with staffing shortages, teachers need training on how to use and teach with a new platform for online learning. Teaching virtually is not the same experience as teaching in the classroom. This is illustrated by Allen and Seaman (2008) regarding the benefits and concerns of educators teaching in a virtual environment. There is no standard or rule as to whether students should have their camera on or off. On one hand, one could argue the privacy concerns that an individual or group may have allowing other students and teachers to have a view inside a student’s home. On the other hand, a student may feel uncomfortable exposing their house, situation, or socioeconomic status. The lack of clarity and consistency left administrators to decide on what they believed was best given the situation. There is a need for clear policy to be in place that outlines process for implementing and teaching online education that is unified at either the state or federal level through policy initiatives.

Policies Associated with Attendance and Parental Responsibility

The funding formulas for student enrollment for online learning is outlined in Florida Statute by the Florida House of Representatives (2011); however, concerns about funding based on student attendance for online courses are still relevant. While policies are available as are online funding models for online education, in many cases the policy is unclear and has allowed

for interpretation and misuse of public funding. It is unclear in the literature exactly what constitutes attendance in an online environment and who is responsible for tracking attendance.

Ultimately, the school is responsible for the student and the consequences for improperly tracking attendance can be detrimental for a school or district. In some instances, the teacher is responsible, the parent may also be responsible for logging attendance, while more advanced platforms track the time of the student while they are logged into a course. Furthermore, there is no universal approach for tracking attendance while teaching synchronously or asynchronously. Finally, Glass (2009) noted the inability to physically see the student raised concerns for administrators and teachers and highlights the need for clarity in the legislative process.

Future Research

Next, I will discuss the topics for future research of the study. The topics of future research will include students with disabilities; (a) technology services for educators; (b) fidelity and consistency of online learning implementation; (c) the impact on learning during a pandemic; (d) and the UMIOES research instrument for future applications.

Students with Disabilities

Future research needs to consider best instructional practices and pedagogy for students with disabilities. As a result of the COVID -19 pandemic and research from this study, the rapid change of instructional methods and instructional delivery revealed gaps in the literature, in addition to legislative limitations of federal and state requirements. Future research should consider the degree of the disabilities and how learning in a virtual environment can facilitate learning. Furthermore, the technical tools and services that are needed for students with disabilities should be evaluated to ensure fidelity and equity for this population of students.

While many forms of technology are available, in many cases the cost can be too expensive for parents and school districts.

While schools are open and students return to school, there are still concerns of COVID - 19 variants and other health concerns. In some cases, prior to the pandemic, schools may have had the ability to offer alternative resources or methods of instruction as opposed to online learning for students with disabilities. This was not the case however, and as educators and leaders we need to ensure that research drives beneficial legislation and policy implementation.

Future research needs to inform legislative policy, collaborate with educators, groups that work with students with disabilities, and educate families to ensure that no student is truly left behind and schools are receiving the necessary funding to support learning for these students. Mandates for students with disabilities at the federal and state levels need to be reviewed for consistency. Mandates for students with disabilities in traditional brick and mortar schools may be able to meet compliancy requirements; however, many mandated requirements for students with disabilities were implemented prior to the COVID -19 pandemic. The learning environment is at home and the majority of assisted learning is facilitated by the parent or legal guardian. While the student is enrolled in a public school, the ambiguity of responsibility is unclear and is in need of future research and policy development for students with disabilities in online education.

Technology Services for Educators

Future research needs to examine best practices, service level agreements (SLA), and technical requirements to ensure that administrators and teachers can adequately teach. In most brick-and-mortar schools there is a school level technical point of contact (POC). These

individuals may teach technology courses in addition to repairing and troubleshooting technical problems and some districts have started to implement help desks, not mandated, but needed to support students in a virtual learning environment. Research needs to inform policy decisions and ensure that all students receive that same instructional time and that students and teachers in all districts receive the same services, regardless of school size and locale.

To date, little or no mandates and policies address or delineate Instructional Technology (IT) services for schools and districts. As technology continues to redefine education, in many cases the mandate is for accessibility to technology for the student, not support for the educator or administrator. The 2022 Florida Education Statutes use the term technology 23 times, but do not address any requirement that mandates a technology center for support, but broadly suggest that districts may establish, may adopt, shall develop, and are authorized to be consistent with the FL DOE. Conversely, the Tennessee 2022 DOE rules for District and School Operations, have no guidelines or mandates for technology support and designate Library Information Centers as the district and school point of operations for technology and accessibility. This discrepancy highlights the need for mandates and policies for technology services to be in place. While states continue to mandate technology acquisition, technology development, and technology for learning, this creates an unfunded or underfunded mandate for schools and districts.

Fidelity and Consistency of Online Learning Implementation

Future research needs to examine the fidelity of online learning to guide policy and direction for school districts. Administrators in this study were required to have online learning available to their students, it is unclear that administrators and school districts had the instructional knowledge for best practices to support student learning at their school. There is a lack of

consistency and knowledge of synchronous and asynchronous learning for online instruction. Martinez and Partin (2023) noted that educational leaders who consider student opinions and experiences, are more likely to consider student-centered learning strategies. Furthermore, there is a gap in the literature regarding research of online learning for students with disabilities and low SES populations and what method of delivery promotes higher student learning and positive outcomes.

As a result of COVID -19 pandemic, states implemented online learning programs rapidly to facilitate education, enabling millions of students across the nation to utilize some form of online learning. As online learning continues to become more integrated with educational practices, research needs to inform educators and policy makers on best instructional practices, pedagogy, and delivery.

Research also needs to examine the differences between teaching online learning and a tradition classroom setting. The two methods of instruction are significantly different methods of learning. Borup and Stevens (2015), found that online learning requires additional teacher training. Future research needs to examine how to properly train teachers for online instructional practices to help administrators and teachers. Future research should evaluate teacher certification programs to formulate state policy to determine the need for additional licensure requirements or endorsements to ensure teachers have the proper training to effectively teach in a virtual setting.

Based on research and policy development, mandates for teacher licensure would do well to include Online Education Teaching and Learning, in addition to IT licensure with a temporary, professional, and administrative certificate. The lack development of these professional roles in

education, have unintentionally created unfunded mandates for schools and districts as teachers and administrators are serving in roles in which they are not specifically licensed, including the roles and duties they implement for which they are responsible.

The Impact on Learning During a Pandemic

Future research needs to consider the findings from this study, the perceptions of administrators, and how to mitigate the impact on learning and education. There has been recent discussion about the learning loss, students who have disappeared from districts, and the impact the COVID -19 pandemic has had on students during their most crucial years of their K - 12 life. Wargo et. al (2021) noted that the COVID -19 pandemic was a reminder of the relationship between technology and education. While the intent of this study was not intended to research the effects of a pandemic on education, the resulting data from administrator perceptions regarding unfunded mandates illustrates the level of concern associated with massive and swift legislatives requirements and the impact on education. Future research can build upon this study to understand the degree of impact on learning, educator satisfaction, and best practices regarding contingency planning for the future.

The COVID -19 pandemic has provided a recent example of how global systems and organizations under pressure, react to a national disaster. Most of America has not seen this degree of policy implementation with mandates since the September 11, 2001 disaster, referred to as 9/11. As a result, schools across the United States increased and reduced mandates resulting from the COVID -19 pandemic. Based on personal experience I am, however, not fully confident that educators and leaders are reflecting and considering how to learn and grow as a result of the pandemic, but trying to return to what was considered normal. In situations such as

a natural disaster, more assistance and direction should come from the federal government. Contingency planning for education should be mandated by the federal government and supported with adequate funding to help and facilitate with emergency planning and preparation.

UMIOES Research Instrument for Future Applications

Future research can utilize, modify, and adopt the UMIOES instrument in other districts and states to understand administrators perceptions of unfunded mandates and online learning. The UMIOES instrument provided additional insight and data for students with disabilities; (a) technology services for educators; (b) fidelity and consistency of online learning implementation; (c) and the impact on learning during a pandemic. A variety of organizations utilize surveys to improve customer service and satisfaction, but often in education, decisions are left up to a vote by School Boards, states, and the federal government. Administrator concerns regarding educational decisions and work conditions, can be mitigated with tools such as the UMIOES and allow for more frequent communication, voice of administrators, and examine areas for improvement of student learning.

While the UMIOES instrument design accomplished the initial goal to examine administrator perceptions, there is an opportunity to add additional open-ended responses or specific questions that could offer additional context and descriptive robust feedback from potential respondents. These changes may allow for additional research methods and designs for future research. Furthermore, school districts may consider the utilization of the UMIOES instrument to proactively engage in employee morale and feedback, in an effort to build on the voice of administrators and educators to inform governing entities.

Limitations

Next, I will discuss the limitations of the study. The limitations of the study will include research with an online survey method and challenges conducting research during a pandemic.

Research with an Online Survey Method

A survey instrument was chosen to provide insight and value amongst a large data set in an effort to answer the research questions. A survey gives the researcher the ability to describe attitudes, opinions, and beliefs across a population through sampling (Creswell, 2014). The primary function of a survey is to produce a sample description of a population by using a Likert scale to analyze responses from the participants (Fowler, 2014). There are benefits to using quantitative research such as the ability to analyze relationships, explore cause and effect of data, make an inference on large data sets, and regulate researcher bias (Creswell, 2015). As a former teacher and currently working in the field of online education, I felt that a quantitative study would best represent the data associated with this study. The benefits of the quantitative research allowed me to generalize from the sample data while inferring specific values and relationships to the data analysis.

The research for this study utilized email as the medium to conduct the survey and was designed to reach a large target audience. A survey enables quantitative measurements for precision, credibility, and accuracy (Fowler, 2014). One limitation I encountered while conducting the survey online was the level of cyber security in place while attempting to administer the survey. A respondent may have received a message such as “CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.” I was unable to validate the degree to

which this may have been a deterrent or caused fear of a scam for a respondent considering the survey. Furthermore, in some instances I received the following message:

Your message wasn't delivered. Despite repeated attempts to deliver your message, the recipient's email system refused to accept a connection from your email system. Contact the recipient by some other means (by phone, for example) and ask them to tell their email admin that it appears that their email system is refusing connections from your email server. Give them the error details shown below. It's likely that the recipient's email admin is the only one who can fix this problem.

As the researcher, I wanted a better understanding of how this may have impacted the response rate for this study. After conducting the research, I needed a better understanding of how these technical obstacles could have limited the research. A phenomenon known as security fatigue may have been a variable in the decision process of respondents before clicking on an unknown link. Stanton et al. (2016) stated “security fatigue, like decision fatigue, occurs when individuals are asked to make more decisions than they can process, depleting their resources and resulting in the behaviors and emotions just listed” (p. 29). Stanton et al. (2016) further stated that “when people are fatigued, they are prone to fall back on heuristics and cognitive biases when making decisions. Our data show that, based on their experience, users have several cognitive biases that result from security fatigue” (p. 29). As the researcher, I felt this was worth noting as a limitation. Additionally, schools, organizations, and businesses increased their cybersecurity efforts after the COVID -19 pandemic as hackers targeted institutions with ransomware as many were not prepared and lacked the infrastructure to work securely in a remote environment.

Challenges Conducting Research During a Pandemic

The State of Florida was chosen due to the large sample size and the extensive policy associated with online learning. I administered a pilot survey that was reviewed and developed by an expert panel, approved by the UT IRB, and sent electronically to Florida public school administrators. Designing the survey took more time than anticipated. While the process of implementation went as described, every meeting was conducted virtually and communicated through email due to the limited contact restrictions resulting from the pandemic. More time was used to describe the process, ideas, and thoughts to ensure clarity and fidelity in the process.

From potential respondents, I received automatic replies, in addition to undeliverable emails ranging from delivery failure of unknown address and network policy violation. I received some responses from administrators indicating they did not work there anymore and feedback indicating this is the wrong time of year to conduct a survey. The COVID -19 pandemic also resulted in national teacher and staffing shortages. In August 2021, Florida had nearly 9,000 vacancies for teachers and support staff due to work conditions. Finally, while email is a convenient and efficient means of communication, as more people have moved to a work-from-home or hybrid model, the volume of email communication can become overwhelming and may lead to prioritizing communications based on importance and need. While the response rate from the survey was 2.2%, lower than I anticipated, multiple factors stemming from the COVID -19 pandemic contributed to the participation of respondents. However, the resulting data illustrates views and perceptions during a pandemic that will provide insight for future research.

Final Thoughts

Unfunded mandates have been an invasive concern for administrators, districts, and teachers for decades. While mandates in education come in many different forms from governing entities, the findings from this study reveals that mandates, funded and unfunded, are a concern for administrators and impact almost every aspect of their school, district, personal, and professional roles. Ten years ago, online education had limited application and influence in the educational biosphere relative to the millions of students attending traditional brick-and-mortar schools. Fast forward ten years to 2023, online learning has now transformed the way students are learning as a result of swift policy initiatives resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. As for the future of online learning, educators should not let legislation drive education, educators need to come together to create real change.

The literature in chapter two provided beneficial insights regarding the benefits and concerns associated with online learning. It will be interesting to see how education continues to transform, and if the administrator's perceptions of online learning change over time with less stress and uncertainty. The research from this study provided additional evidence that the expedited implementation of online learning was perceived as an unfunded mandate. Furthermore, an analysis of the average annual costs for school districts prior to the COVID -19 pandemic and the difference from the 2023 school year, would be beneficial to explore the costs districts incurred as a result of the COVID -19 pandemic. There is federal assistance for districts regarding pandemic related items, the question is do all districts know how to access those resources and allocate them accordingly?

Given the perceptions and level of disagreement among administrators, educators should consider the development of a collaborative group to act as a liaison to their state legislators, to advocate and inform policy makers to facilitate informed educational policy and implementation, reduce the level of dissatisfaction among administrators, and pave the way for future teachers, administrators, and districts to have a unified voice for effective policy and legislation at all levels of education. Unfunded mandates have, and if no action is taken, will continue to be an indirect result of inadequate policy implementation. Administrators and educators alike, are passionate about their roles and the education of and for their students; however, it is imperative that, administrators have a voice within the policy process to mitigate the impacts of unfunded mandates.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Unfunded Mandates in Online Education Survey

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: Mandated Learning: Administrator's Perceptions of Unfunded Mandates in Online Education

Researchers: Ronald Aaron Hennen, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Dr. Pamela Angelle, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

We are asking you to be in this research study because you are a principal that has been involved in online education at your school. You must be age 18 or older to participate in the study. The information in this consent form is to help you decide if you want to be in this research study. Please take your time reading this form and contact the researchers to ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

Why is the research being done?

The purpose of the research study is to identify administrator's perceptions of funded and unfunded mandates that involved online education.

This study is being conducted by researchers at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

I am giving you this information so you can decide if this relationship will affect your decision to be in this study.

What will I do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will complete an online survey. The survey includes questions about perceptions of unfunded mandates in online education, school demographics, professional demographics, and should take you about 20 minutes to complete. You can skip questions that you do not want to answer.

Can I say "No"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can stop up until you submit the survey. After you submit the survey, we cannot remove your responses because we will not know which responses came from you.

Are there any risks to me?

I don't know of any risks to you from being in the study that are greater than the risks you encounter in everyday life.

Are there any benefits to me?

I do not expect you to benefit from being in this study. Your participation may help us to learn more about administrator's perception of unfunded mandates in online education. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

What will happen with the information collected for this study?

The survey is anonymous, and no one will be able to link your responses back to you. Your responses to the survey will not be linked to your computer, email address or other electronic identifiers. Please do not include your name or other information that could be used to identify you in your survey

responses. Information provided in this survey can only be kept as secure as any other online communication.

Information collected for this study will be published and possibly presented at scientific meetings.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers:

Ronald Hennen, rhennen@vols.utk.edu, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 865-686-2208

Dr. Pamela Angelle, pangelle.utk.edu, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 865-974-4139

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

1534 White Avenue

Blount Hall, Room 408

Knoxville, TN 37996-1529

Phone: 865-974-7697

Email: utkirb@utk.edu

Statement of Consent

I have read this form, been given the chance to ask questions and have my questions answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By selecting "I Agree" below, I am providing my signature by electronic means and agree to be in this study. I can print or save a copy of this consent information for future reference. If I do not want to be in this study, I can select "I Do Not Agree" to exit out of the survey.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Directions: Please respond the following questions.

What is your current role?

1. Principal
2. Head of School
3. Assistant Principal
4. District Administrator

How many years of experience do you have in education?

1. Less than 2 years
2. 2 - 3 years
3. 4 - 9 years
4. 10 years or more

What is your highest degree?

1. Bachelor's degree
2. Master's degree
3. Specialist's degree
4. Doctorate

How would you describe the extent of your technology knowledge?

1. Needs Improvement
2. Average
3. Above average
4. Proficient

What technology based Professional development have you participated in during the last calendar year?

1. University course(s)
2. professional development to improve your role as a principal
3. Mentoring, peer observation, or coaching of principals
4. Participating in a principal network
5. Workshops, conferences, or trainings

What grade level do you currently work with?

1. Elementary School
2. Middle School
3. High School
4. Combined

How many students are enrolled in your school?

1. 1 to 99
2. 100 - 299
3. 300 - 749
4. 750 - 1,499
5. 1,500 and Above

How would you describe your schools locale?

1. City
2. Suburban
3. Town
4. Rural

What percent of your students are children of poverty?

1. 0 - 25%
2. 26% - 50%
3. 51% - 75%
4. More than 75%

How would you describe the majority of your student population?

1. Hispanic, regardless of race
2. White, non-Hispanic
3. Black or African American, non-Hispanic
4. Other

With what gender do you identify?

1. Male
2. Female

With what race do you identify?

1. American Indian or Alaska Native
2. Asian
3. Black or African American
4. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

5. White

Directions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the statements below in relation to your district from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). All information will remain confidential.

At times it is difficult to understand the origin of unfunded mandates.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Inadequate funding for mandates by the state legislature does not meet our district funding needs.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Mandates from the federal government are designed as a "one-size-fits-all" policy.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In our district we have had to modify facilities to meet underfunded/unfunded state mandates.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

More time and resources are used to meet Annual Yearly Progress as mandated by the state than the resources allocated by the state.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Technology mandates by the state are often unfunded mandates.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

With increased graduation requirements often from unfunded mandates, administrators are caught between doing

what is right for the child and abiding to state policies and procedures.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In the past three years, our district has seen an increase in unfunded mandates.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Due to the size of our district, unfunded mandates have resulted in dissatisfaction for administrator’s work conditions.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Mandates required by the state and federal government for students with disabilities require our district to provide more services with fewer resources to meet compliance policies.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Directions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the statements below in relation to your district from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). All information will remain confidential.

As a result of increased unfunded mandates, accountability requirements have decreased administrator’s job satisfaction.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Mandates for highly qualified teachers have impacted our district’s ability to maintain qualified personnel.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Unfunded mandates have resulted in the elimination of instructional programs in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
---	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

Our district has spent beyond what the state has allocated in order to comply with unfunded mandates.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Unfunded mandates by the state and federal government do not address our district's school culture.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Our district invests more resources in college and career readiness mandates than what the state allocates.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Mandates that do not address student success undermine the autonomy of our district's ability for curriculum implementation.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The state mandates decisions about funding without adequate consultation from those who are responsible for the programs in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In general, unfunded mandates align with goals associated with our districts's vision/mission.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Mandates involving education have improved student learning in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
--	-------------------	----------	---------	-------	----------------

Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
---	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

Directions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the statements below in relation to your district from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). All information will remain confidential.

Online education courses are beneficial for instructional learning in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Online education facilitates growing populations and limited space in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Online education courses are financially beneficial in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Online education is available for synchronous instruction in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Online education offers courses not otherwise available in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Online education offers Advanced Placement or college level courses in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Online education meets the needs of specific groups of students at my school.

	Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly

	disagree				agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Online education reduces scheduling conflicts for students.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Online education allows students who failed a course to take it again in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Course development costs for online education is an obstacle in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Directions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the statements below in relation to your district from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). All information will remain confidential.

Our schools have limited technological infrastructure to support online education in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Students in our district have access to technology use in school.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Students in our district have access to technology use out of school.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Students in our district have access to the internet in school.

	Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly
--	----------	----------	---------	-------	----------

	disagree				agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Students in our district have access to the internet out of school.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

There are concerns about online educational course quality in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Online education has restrictive policies for my school.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Online education requires additional teacher training in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

There are concerns about funding based on student attendance for online education courses in our district.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please indicate your level of agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please feel free to express your thoughts about unfunded mandates in online education as it relates to your district in the space below.

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval Letter



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

January 14, 2022

Ronald Aaron Hennen

UTK - Coll of Education, Hlth, & Human - Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Re: UTK IRB-21-06740-XM

Study Title: Mandated Learning:

Administrator's Perceptions of Unfunded Mandates in Online Education

Dear Ronald Aaron Hennen:

The Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) reviewed your application for the above referenced project and determined that your application is eligible for **exempt** review under 45 CFR 46.101, Category 2: Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

Your application has been determined to comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects.

Therefore, this letter constitutes full approval of your application (version 1.2) as submitted, including the following documents that have been dated and stamped IRB approved:

- Consent Principal Seeking Study Participation v 2.0
- Consent Superintendent Recruitment Email v 1.0
- Main Online Consent Form v 1.0
- QuestionPr-Survey-9209549-Word-Export-11-10-2021-T202437 v 1.0

You are approved to enroll a maximum of 3000 participants. Approval of this study will be valid from 01/14/2022.

Any revisions in the approved application, consent forms, instruments, recruitment materials, etc., must be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Approval of this study is valid for three years. If a Study Update Form is not submitted in iMedRIS and approved by the IRB prior to 01/13/2025, the study will be automatically closed by the IRB and no

further study activity will be permitted until a Study Update Form is received. Please be sure to also submit a Study Closure Request (Form 7) when all research activity, including data analysis, has been completed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "L Beebe".

Lora Beebe, Ph.D., PMHNP-BC, FAAN
Chair

APPENDIX C

Email to Florida Superintendents

Dear Superintendent,

I am Aaron Hennen, a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee. I am seeking your assistance as I complete my dissertation study. My research study is:

Research Project: Mandated Learning: Administrator's Perceptions of Unfunded Mandates in Online Education

The objectives for this study are to:

- Examine the perceptions of principals involving unfunded mandates.
- Examine the perceptions of principals involving online education.
- Examine relationships of perceptions involving unfunded mandates in online education.

Design of the research:

- Administer an online survey that measures the extent of administrator's perceptions of unfunded mandates in online education.
 - Links will be sent to principals with a code for access.
- The survey that will be administered to your principals will be brief, expected completion times should take less than 20 minutes, and their responses will be completely anonymous.
- Your principals can only take the survey once and are not required to answer any questions; however, their participation is greatly appreciated. The survey platform that will be used is called QuestionPro, a product provided by the University of Tennessee to facilitate with survey research. Their responses will be confidential.
- The survey can be viewed at: **Mandated Learning: Administrator's Perceptions of Unfunded Mandates in Online Education**

Summary of results

- A summary of the results obtained from the study may be requested when the research has been completed and approved by the University of Tennessee.

What do we need from you?

- An email reply with your consent for research project.
- Important note: I will not contact any principals until the research project has been approved by The University of Tennessee. We anticipate a start date in 1/3/2022.

Contact Information:

Ronald Aaron Hennen, Principal Investigator
 1424 Yarnell Station Boulevard, Knoxville TN
 rhennen@vols.utk.edu
 865-686-2208

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-21-06740-XM
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 01/14/2022
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 01/13/2025

APPENDIX D

Email to Florida Principals

Dear Principal,

From: Aaron Hennen

Re: Mandated Learning: Administrator's Perceptions of Unfunded Mandates in Online Education

I am conducting research on unfunded mandates in online education as part of my doctoral dissertation. Your participation will help to guide policy development and research in this field of education. The survey is brief, expected completion times should take less than 20 minutes, and your responses will be completely anonymous.

In the context of this survey, Dilger (2017) defined unfunded mandates as “The direct cost to affected entities of meeting these obligations are referred to as mandate costs, and when the federal government does not provide funding to cover these costs, the mandate is termed unfunded” (p. 1).

You can only take the survey once and are not required to answer any questions; however, your participation is greatly appreciated. The survey platform that will be used is called QuestionPro, a product provided by the University of Tennessee to facilitate with survey research. Your responses will be confidential. By clicking on the link below, you will be directed to the beginning of the survey. This page will outline the consent for research participation. By selecting the radial button “I agree to participate” and then selecting the “start button”, you are consenting to be a participant and will be able to complete the survey at your discretion. Your time and participation is greatly appreciated.

https://utk.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/preview/SV_eJSU9pAdxSxaCnY?Q_CHL=preview&Q_SurveyVersionID=current

Best Regards,

Aaron Hennen
Doctoral Candidate, University of Tennessee

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-21-06740-XM
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 01/14/2022
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 01/13/2025

APPENDIX E

Approval Letter for Marion County School District



www.marionschools.net
 512 SE 3rd Street • Ocala FL 34471-2212
 PO Box 670 • Ocala FL 34478-0670
 352.671.7700 • Fax 352.671.7581
 FRS 800.955.8770 (voice) • 800.955.8771 (TTY)

May 6, 2022

Ronald A. Hennen
 1424 Yarnell Station Boulevard
 Knoxville, TN 37932

Dear Mr. Hennen,

I have received your application to conduct research entitled *Mandated Learning: Administrator's Perceptions of Unfunded Mandates in Online Education*. Your proposal takes into consideration the standard safeguards associated with a request to conduct scholarly research and it complies with our district criteria for a research request.

Please consider this letter as **approval** for you to conduct your project within the Marion County Public Schools as you have proposed with the following considerations:

- Approval from this office does not obligate principals of the selected schools to participate in the proposed research
- This document **MUST** be attached to **ALL** correspondence in its entirety **AND** presented during any electronic communications, face-to-face meetings and reviewed prior to any research
- All information obtained for the purpose of your research must be dealt with the highest level of confidentiality
- Upon completion of your research, please provide this office with a copy of the results

Please notify me if you need to make any substantial changes to your research project as it is implemented in our district. You have my best wishes for a successful project.

Regards,

Ben Whitehouse
 Director, Student Pathways & Assessment

Dr. Diane Gullett
 Superintendent

Allison Campbell
 District 1

Don Browning
 District 2

Eric Cummings
 District 3

Nancy Thrower
 District 4

Kelly King
 District 5

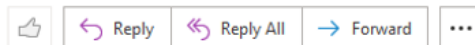
APPENDIX F

Survey Permission from Picciano and Seaman

RE: K-12 Online Learning Survey Request



Picciano, Anthony <APicciano@gc.cuny.edu>
 To: Hennen, Ronald Aaron; 'anthony.picciano@hunter.cuny.edu'
 Cc: Angelle, Pamela Ann; jseaman@seagullhaven.com



Sun 9/13/2020 10:29 AM

[External Email]

Dear Ronald,

Please accept this as my approval for you to use the survey described in the email below for your dissertation. Please be sure to cite the source.

Also you need to secure the approval of my colleague and co-author, Jeff Seaman. His email is: jseaman@seagullhaven.com

If you wish to discuss this further, I am happy to have a phone conversation with you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Anthony G. Picciano
 Professor
 Hunter College and CUNY Graduate Center
 School of Education
 Office: Hunter West 922
 Phone: 212-772-5726
 Website: anthonypicciano.com

From: Hennen, Ronald Aaron [rhennen@vols.utk.edu]
 Sent: Saturday, September 12, 2020 11:38 PM
 To: 'anthony.picciano@hunter.cuny.edu'; Picciano, Anthony
 Cc: Angelle, Pamela Ann
 Subject: K-12 Online Learning Survey Request

Good Evening Dr Picciano,

My name is Aaron Hennen. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Tennessee. I am researching administrators perceptions of online learning in public education grades K-12 in the state of Florida. Currently, I am working on my dissertation and the methodology regarding surveys. I am very interested in your work that was completed in 2008 and the survey of school district administrators. I would like to ask for your permission to use your survey as part of my research. I would of course quote and cite any items needed to ensure your work is properly

documented. Please let me know if this is acceptable and if you approve. Additionally, I am not able to locate an email address for Dr. Jeff Seaman. Would you by chance happen to have it so I could contact him as well? I have also included my Chair Dr. Pam Angelle as well on the email if you have any questions.

Your help would be greatly appreciated and any insights you might have gained through your experience. I can also call if you prefer. Just let me know if there is a time that is suitable for you. Thanks,

Best Regards,

Aaron Hennen


Re: K-12 Online Learning Survey Request

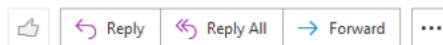


Jeff Seaman <jseaman@seagullhaven.com>

To: Picciano, Anthony

Cc: Hennen, Ronald Aaron; 'anthony.picciano@hunter.cuny.edu'; Angelle, Pamela Ann

 You replied to this message on 9/13/2020 9:36 PM.



Sun 9/13/2020 12:26 PM

Dear Ronald,

I echo Tony's comments - I am pleased to have you use the survey for your dissertation. It is not a requirement, but I'd love to get a copy of your finished product. I expect you will have some very interesting results.

Please let me know if I can be of any other assistance.

-jeff

--

Dr. Jeff Seaman

Director, Bay View Analytics

Picciano, Anthony wrote on 9/13/20 7:28 AM:

Dear Ronald,

Please accept this as my approval for you to use the survey described in the email below for your dissertation. Please be sure to cite the source.

Also you need to secure the approval of my colleague and co-author, Jeff Seaman. His email is: jseaman@seagullhaven.com

If you wish to discuss this further, I am happy to have a phone conversation with you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Anthony G. Picciano
Professor
Hunter College and CUNY Graduate Center
School of Education
Office: Hunter West 922
Phone: 212-772-5726
Website: anthonypicciano.com

APPENDIX G

Open Ended Responses

Response from Administrator 1:

As an administrator and when I was a classroom teacher, mandates take up time. When you add up all the things required of you there is not enough time in a 40 - 50 hour work week.

Response from Administrator 2:

AYP does not exist anymore, so should not be in your survey.

Response from Administrator 3:

Based on recent events this is not an issue. Our district will be going one-to-one in the fall.

Response from Administrator 4:

This is the wrong time of year to administer a survey.

Response from Administrator 5:

Required online education was delivered to our teachers without preparation or professional development. Within the past two years, this trend has continued. Teachers and administrators are left to "figure it out" without clear guidance for best practice, or an understanding of how to best leverage the online learning approach. As a result, our district, along with the others in our state, experienced significant learning losses and decreased student engagement. Conversely, it did reveal a more effective way to support students on suspension, sick, or otherwise unable to attend school. Online education fulfills a missing piece for students who are accelerating, making up lost credits, or exploring personal interests beyond the limits of the district choices. I agree with the premise of online education, and understand it has strengths to offer students and education professionals. How we approach the integration requires a larger level of participation by educators, not solely legislators.

Response from Administrator 6:

My largest issue with online education is the inequity for students with severe disabilities. For example, when returning to brick and mortar after COVID, our students (some of whom are medically fragile and immune compromised) did not have an equitable and easy to access option for online because they do a modified curriculum. The general education population had access to either "X" virtual or "Y" virtual if they were not ready to come back to brick and mortar. Parents of students with disabilities that also have significant cognitive disabilities either were expected to return to brick and mortar or had to jump through timely hoops to get into hospital

homebound or a distance learning plan. No options in place! I felt as a principal for a school for all students on an alternative curriculum, that this was a violation of FAPE. I feel that if the general students had an option to go online or remain online that the special education population should have had one as well. An equitable option without having to jump through hoops.

Response from Administrator 7:

There are pockets within our district where internet service is unavailable or provides an inconsistent signal. Trying to provide hot spots for students in these situations is financially taxing. In our district, middle and high school students transport their school provided laptops back and forth between home and school, however elementary students do not which means the family must supply a computer for the students to utilize online learning. Additionally, students in grades Kg - 2 are only provided iPads, not laptops for the one-to-one technology initiative which began implementation this year. Providing quality instruction via an online format requires targeted teacher training rather than the global "one size fits all" training currently offered to be able to meet the needs of all students. Many students cannot learn effectively to reach mastery of content through watching videos and completing assigned tasks. This becomes an even greater issue when some of these students are not skillful with self-advocating so will not request "office time" with the instructor to receive additional instruction. In our district, we have an on-line school choice, but limited instructional funds result in the teachers of on-line having an average of 90 students which makes it difficult to provide small group or individual instruction when needed.

Response from Administrator 8:

Please consider I represent a charter school that does change with innovative practices without large district issues. Our charter district with 5 schools did better with mandates unlike traditional schools due to mandates are what we have been doing as best practices. I chose many online program questions as neutral because we are not certification virtual school to do online programs.

VITA

Aaron was born and raised in Massillon, Ohio where he grew up. Aaron played the saxophone with the help and support of his parents, Ron and Ann, and his grandfather, Don Crawford Hennen. Aaron is married to his wife of 16 years, Kerri, and has two daughters Sophia, and Juliana. Aaron started his career as an educator at Broward County Florida in 2004. Aaron facilitated in the opening of a new school, taught middle school band, physical education, and was a coach for both boys and girls track, soccer, flag-football, and volleyball. Aaron moved to Tennessee in 2010 and taught high school band and music to various schools in Cumberland County. Aaron is a Senior Director of Enrollment and Operations for an national online educational organization and has served as a Corporate Trainer, Operations Manager, Workforce Manager, Director of Operations, and his current position for the last nine years.