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THE CURRENT STATE OF SCHOOL CULTURE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN
MISSISSIPPI DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education

The University of Mississippi

by

Rodney Hurt

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ABSTRACT

In the Spring of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic changed not only the way in which our daily lives were carried out, but it also drastically effected the way schools operated. Many if not all school districts in the state of Mississippi began operating in some type of remote fashion during the spring of 2020. Some school districts switched to an online format while others operated using a hybrid model which may have included work packets being completed at home or a combination of the two. The type of model by which each school operated often depended on the resources available to them. Regardless of the changes each individual school was forced to make, a profound impact was had on not only the students, but also the certified elementary school staff.

The purpose of this study is to explore different perceptions among demographic groups as it relates to the six elements of the School Culture Survey (SCS) and determine if a statistically significant difference exists between identified groups of certified elementary school staff relating to their views on the culture within their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. The groups which are being measured are certified elementary staff's years of experience, highest level of degree earned, race, and gender. The primary data for this study were obtained from 129 certified elementary school staff using the School Culture Survey (SCS). Two school districts in north Mississippi participated in the study. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine whether a statistically significant difference existed among the identified groups relating to their view on the current state of their school's culture during the Covid-19 pandemic.

DEDICATION

My dissertation is dedicated to my family who have not only supported me throughout this process, but also taught me the importance of not giving up and working hard for the things which are important to you. I will forever be indebted to my wife Erin Hurt who not only encouraged me but also provided me with time and space to complete this process. Tyner and Latham you two provided me with motivation to complete this journey and I will always be grateful for that.

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CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Introduction

School culture, and its effects on the success of schools, is not a new phenomenon (Dutta & Sahney, 2016). Gruenert (2008) stated “school culture provides the context in which the entire educational process occurs and assessing the type of culture that exists in a particular setting provides valuable insight for leaders who are looking to improve their school” (p.14). Regardless if a school is labeled at risk or high achieving, schools should always be continuously seeking ways to improve. As school administrators look for ways to improve their processes and outcomes, it would be advantageous for school leaders to have an accurate understanding of the possible effects school culture may have on their success. Gruenert defines school culture as the personality of a school which is influenced significantly by school administrators. Gruenert also points out school culture can be defined as the unwritten rules people abide by.

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted our schools in many ways and determining the current state of culture within assessed elementary schools in the state of Mississippi has the potential to benefit school administrators. Gaining a deeper understanding of the school’s culture during the Covid-19 pandemic will allow school leaders to make informed decisions, regarding school culture, in the future. While the Covid-19 pandemic is a once-in-a-lifetime event, or so we hope, gaining a deeper understanding of the current state of the culture of our schools will better prepare school leaders for future events should they occur.

Significance of the Problem

Schools will be, or already are, operating in a new reality due to the changes the Covid-19 pandemic has brought not only to our society, but also to our educational system. Pollock (2020) pointed out, the Covid-19 pandemic will force our school leaders to better understand the role of things such as online learning, 24/7 learning environments, and spurring innovations for more accessible, equitable, and personalized systems of education from pre-k to career and college readiness. These changes mentioned by Pollock not only have the potential to affect the overall operations of our schools, but they also have the potential, as with any change, to affect the way things are done withing our schools.

With things such as online learning, hybrid schedules, and increased health and safety protocols altering the way in which schools operate, school leaders must be open and receptive to embrace these changes in order to ensure the success of their respective schools. When significant changes occur within an organization, the way in which the culture is created, maintained, and viewed has the potential to change as well (Vutta & Sahney, 2016). With this said, the culture within our schools is no different. With potential changes such as online learning becoming an integrated component of our schools, it would be advantageous for school administrators to have a basic understanding of the culture of their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the current state of school culture in assessed elementary schools in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi during the Covid-19 pandemic. Differences among demographic groups perceptions as it relates to the six elements of the School Culture Survey (SCS) will also be examined. Research has shown the

type of culture within schools play a significant role in determining whether a school will maximize its full potential while educating its students (Tichnor-Wagner et al. 2016). As school districts, along with other organizations, determine the most appropriate way to move forward from the Covid-19 pandemic, understanding the current state of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic is important to school's future success.

The Covid-19 pandemic was an event which disrupted not only our educational systems, but also the way in which our schools, businesses, and, in some cases, our personal lives were carried out daily. The more information schools can gain from things such as the current state of the culture of assessed elementary schools during the Covid-19 pandemic, the more prepared school administrators will be to make decisions in the future. While there is no way to determine how the Covid-19 pandemic will affect our schools moving forward into the future, it seems logical to assume the more data and information school administrators have, the better decisions school administrators can make moving forward.

New Realities for Schools

Whether it be ways in which to improve instruction, ways which more accurately measure our student's success, or new ways of operating, change is something necessary for the success of organizations. According to Coviello and DeMatthews (2016), when changes occur in the way schools operate, the changes are felt most accurately in the daily lives of teachers and principals and often have lasting effects on the context of the school community. As Coviello and DeMatthews point out, the daily lives of the teachers and school administrators are most affected by change further emphasizing the need for school administrators to understand the culture within our schools during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

The research questions being asked are focused on the topic of the current state of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic on assessed elementary schools in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi. The research questions for this study seek to determine if a statistically significant difference exist between groups as relating to the current school culture of assessed elementary schools in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi the state of Mississippi. This question is one which can provide valuable information to school administrators. While the future is unpredictable and ever-changing, it will benefit school administrators to understand the current state of school culture within their schools. The exact research questions are listed below.

H1: There is a difference between the gender of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed using the SCS survey.

H1:◦ There is no difference between the gender of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed using the SCS survey.

H2: There is a difference between the educational levels of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed using the SCS survey.

H2:◦ There is no difference between the educational levels of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed using the SCS survey.

H3: There is a difference between the years of experience of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed by the SCS survey.

H3:◦ There is no difference between the years of experience of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed by the SCS survey.

H4: There is a difference between the race of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed by the SCS survey.

H4: ◦ There is no difference between the race of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed by the SCS survey.

Table 1

Definitions of School Culture Survey Elements

Element	Definition
Collaborative Leadership	The degree to which school leaders can not only develop but also maintain collaborative relationships with staff members throughout their respective schools.
Teacher Collaboration	The degree to which teachers engage in constructive dialogue that furthers the educational vision of the school.
Professional Development	The degree to which teachers value continuous personal development and school wide improvement.
Collegial Support	The degree to which teachers work together effectively.
Unity of Purpose	To what extent teachers work toward a common mission for their school.
Learning Partnerships	The degree to which teachers, parents, and students work together for the common good of the student.

Note: Gruenert, S. (1998). *Development of a school culture survey*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study include the fact that only two school districts in the state of Mississippi participated in the data collection. The study consists of schools in the same state, adjoining counties, and schools that are defined as elementary schools by the Mississippi Department of Education. The study only included two school districts within the state of Mississippi. All schools which participated in the study did so willingly and were able to opt out of participating at any time.

Assumptions

The assumption of this study is that all respondents answered the School Culture Survey (SCS) honestly and independently. Participants are assumed to have provide demographic

information that is correct and accurate. This study is potentially important as the data which is being collected can be used by school administrators to examine the culture of elementary school during the Covid-19 pandemic.

School Culture and the Unknown

With the uncertainty and everchanging landscape of the ways in which our schools will change, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, understanding the current state of school culture, is a topic which has the potential to be beneficial to school leaders. School administrators and school district staff should be aware of the effects on a school culture brought on by Covid-19 for the necessary adjustments can be made and raise awareness of the effects when planning and making decisions for the future. When decisions are made regarding changes within our schools, the more information which is available the better prepared those who are making the decisions may be. With the current situation, brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, decisions may have to be made with little to no past experiences to be considered.

School Culture and its Importance

Gruenert (1998) stated that one of the most influential variables of a school's success is the type of culture which exist. School culture not only has been shown to effect student success, it has also been shown to influence teacher satisfaction, overall student success, and teacher retention (Vutta & Sahney, 2016). With this said, school administrators would be wise not only to understand the broad reach school culture has within their schools, but they would be wise to gather as much information and data, concerning the Covid-19 pandemic, as they can. The data and information which is available should be used to make future decisions in order to promote a school culture which is positive and contributes to a school's success.

School administrators often have many tasks, responsibilities, and ever-changing policies in which they deal with. When they understand the importance of their school's culture and the way in which it can influence important variables within their school, they can then spend the necessary amount of time and effort to ensure they are cultivating a positive school culture. When this occurs, it is possible that some of the task and responsibilities will take care of themselves due to them being ingrained within the culture of their school. As Muhannad (2018), points out, school administrators are not only responsible for understanding the importance of the cultures within their schools, it is also their responsibility to realize they are the biggest influencers of the culture within their schools.

With the Covid-19 pandemic effecting the way schools operate it may be more important than ever to gain a better understanding of the current culture of elementary schools in the state of Mississippi. By assessing the culture of elementary schools in two school districts in the state of Mississippi, data will be obtained and analyzed in order to provide a snapshot of the current state of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic. Examining the differences among demographic groups responses regarding the six elements within the SCS will provide beneficial information to school leaders. With so many changes and external variables existing during this pandemic determining the culture of select elementary schools in the northern region of Mississippi will benefit school administrators in multiple ways. If indeed a statistically significant difference exist between the measured groups of the study school administrators will be better prepared to plan for the future and have more information regarding improving and changing the culture within their schools.

The school Culture Survey (SCS) is a tool which has been used many times in several different areas such as institutions of higher learning, private consulting, and K-12 schools who

want to gain a better understanding of the culture within their schools (J. Valentine Personal Communication). With its past use in mind the SCS has been determined to be an appropriate instrument to assist in determining the current culture of assessed elementary schools in the state of Mississippi. Groups such as certified elementary staff's years of experience, level of highest education obtained, race, and gender will be collected to determine if trends exist within these groups as related to their view on their school's current culture.

Schools during the Beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic

As the Covid-19 pandemic began to affect the 2019-2020 school year, education systems scrambled to meet the needs of students and families with little to no data as to the effects the school closures may have (Kuhfeld et al. 2020). The closing of K-12 schools was done out of necessity in order to help curb the spread of Covid-19. The unplanned and unprecedented disruption of schools changed the way teachers and school administrators operated. School buildings were physically closed, instruction was provided remotely, and schools administrators were forced to think about the schools' roles in ways they have never considered before. This paradigm shift caused ripple effects throughout schools and public education may have changed in ways yet to be determined (Kaden, 2016).

According to Waldron and McLeskey (2010) the field of education has a history of being slow to embrace change which has contributed to some schools not improving and keeping up with the ever-changing needs of students. If schools are slow to embrace change, one can only imagine how difficult it must have been being forced into a situation such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Learning how to lead during a global pandemic is not something school administrators are taught in their preparatory programs (Starr, 2020). It became clear early in the Covid-19 pandemic schools would be affected for an extended period and with this uncertainty

teachers, students, administrators, and stakeholders alike became increasingly concerned as to what these changes would mean to them.

Schooling During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Ladson-Billings (2021) stated, “The global pandemic known as Covid-19 gives us an opportunity to dig more deeply into our study and the use of culture as a way to re-set education” (p.76). Resetting education is something we needed more than ever. During the Post Covid-19 era, schools will likely continue to face uncertainties about operations and ways world operates around them. With this said, schools will continue to determine the best way to meet the needs of students and coexist with the new normal.

The future of education will likely include testing new ideas and models about the length of school days and the school year, flexible scheduling, the costs of the needed technology infrastructure, what can and what should not be taught in online environments, and what new pedagogy skills teachers may need (Kaden, 2020). While the aforementioned changes are focused on administrative and broad educational system decisions or issues, the cultures within schools will most certainly be affected by all the changes likely to come in the near and distant future. While the future is not certain or predictable, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic will most certainly be an event which will require educational leaders to examine new ways of doing things.

Six Elements of the School Culture Survey

The School Culture Survey (SCS) is comprised of six elements. These elements are collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose, and learning partnerships. Gruenert (1998) found these elements to be an

accurate representation of a collaborative positive school culture. While this list should not be considered all-encompassing, Gruenert has deemed the elements to be appropriately used to measure school culture. When developing the SCS Gruenert compared the elements of the School Climate Survey to elements of the SCS in order to determine whether each element was appropriate to be used in the SCS. The validity and reliability of the SCS are discussed in more detail in chapter three.

While the six elements are obviously unique to themselves and contain their own individual characteristics, one common characteristic they share is the fact that they all are rooted in collaboration. With this said Gruenert (1998) found collaboration to be the most appropriate way to measure the culture within one's school. Each element is discussed in greater detail in chapter two and the technical aspects of the SCS are provided in chapter three.

School Culture Survey

With all the upcoming changes schools may face due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important for school administrators to determine how the culture within their schools will be affected or altered. While change is often necessary and unavoidable, the more those affected by the change understand the reasons why the change occurred, the better-prepared school personnel will be in managing the change (Hesbol, 2019). This statement speaks to the importance of school administrators having as much information as possible while examining the current state of the culture within their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. With this said, school culture is a variable which may be difficult to understand.

The School Culture Survey (SCS) is an instrument which was developed by Gruenert (1998). The SCS was created to be an instrument measuring school culture quantitatively which provides a means to measure school culture in an easy-to-understand way. School culture is not a

variable which is concrete or as easy to measure as test scores and measures educators are accustomed to working with. Even though school culture is a variable which may be difficult to understand the need to understand or at least recognize the current state of school culture within our schools during the Covid-19 pandemic is important for the future success of our schools.

Use of the School Culture Survey

The School Culture Survey (SCS) has been used in many different situations by many researchers. The author of the (SCS) provided a partial list included in Appendix A. This list includes researchers who received permission to use the (SCS) from the years 2010 though 2017. This list includes researchers from over 10 countries and permission has been granted to use the (SCS) in over 10 states. (J. Valentine, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Permission has been granted, by the author of the SCS, to use the (SCS) in university settings, public school settings, and by independent consulting firms.

The wide range of uses, or at least the fact permission has been granted for use in such a variety of settings and ways, speaks to the fact the (SCS) is an instrument which has a history of assisting researchers to measure school culture. While all situations are unique the cultures which exist in the elementary schools in the state of Mississippi are ones which can be measured appropriately by the (SCS).

Groups of Support and Teachers

Elementary schools are made up of different personnel which all have a role to play in educating the students in which they are responsible for. While teachers seem to get the majority of the credit, other certified staff play an integral role in providing services for students. Staff members including Speech Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, and behavior coaches are integral parts of the culture within their respective schools. Including

all certified staff members within a school will ensure that a more accurate description of the culture within the schools are represented. Collecting data that includes more specific information such as gender, years of experience, educational levels, and race provides more details and a better understanding of the complex makeup of a school's culture.

Waldron and McLeskey (2010) point out school reform and the success of schools is rooted in a collaborative school culture. With the possibility of Covid-19 related changes within the cultures of schools the better understanding school administrators have of the changes, the better prepared they will be to manage the changes and ensure their schools are successful. This success may look may be unique to individual schools but with the success of our students at stake, having all the information possible to make informed decisions is an important task.

Educational Levels and Perceptions

Does the educational level of certified elementary school staff affect the perceptions of the current state of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic in assessed elementary schools in the northern part of the state of Mississippi? This is the second research question which is being asked. This may be important for multiple reasons. As mentioned previously, the more information school administrators have, the better able they may be to make future decisions. The educational levels of the certified staff in their schools can be used to provide trainings or targeted activities to assist with developing a collaborative culture within their schools.

For example, if it is found the certified instructional staff with advanced degrees felt the current culture of their school, was strong and positive there may not be a reason to spend extra time and effort with this group of staff. On the other hand, if certified school staff, who only have undergraduate degrees, feel the current culture in their school is not positive and strong, this group may need to be treated in a different manner. This has the potential to save school

administrators time and effort when making decisions as to how to strategically target staff members concerning interventions or activities concerning the culture of their schools in the future. This information also has the potential to be beneficial should another event or pandemic force schools to operate in non-traditional ways such as they currently are.

Years of Experience

The third research question examines whether the years of experience of certified elementary school staff affects their perception of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic in select elementary schools in the northern part of the state of Mississippi. As with the educational level of the certified elementary school staff, this information has the potential to provide school administrators with information which can assist in determining necessary actions throughout their schools. The more specific and detailed data school administrators have, the better-prepared leaders will be to make informed decisions.

Conclusion

This detailed information which is being collected can provide a glimpse into the way a particular group of certified elementary staff members feel. If it is found certified elementary school staff, with a relatively small number of years of experience believe the current nature of their schools 'culture needs to be improved, it then stands to reason the schools' administrators should approach teachers differently than say more experienced certified staff that did not believe the culture in their school needs to be improved. This example may seem insignificant, but as with any other situation the more information and data school administrators have when making decisions the more prepared, they potentially may be.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Introduction

McEwan (2003) pointed out school administrators often interact with staff, students, and stakeholders. Several things such as how they stand, shake people's hands, and even what they wear are part of the communication process. Communication can play a role in developing one's school culture and are typically done while those within the school are physically present. Communication and how school administrators communicate with everyone involved in the learning process is an essential component, which should be recognized and valued. As McEwan stated, successful principals communicate almost 100 percent of the time they are on the job by listening, speaking, writing, and reading. These communication methods often happen without much effort, and at times, school administrators may not realize they are communicating but indeed they are.

Deal and Peterson (1990) stated that bringing together a school and community to work towards a common goal of student learning is part of every school principal's job. Deal and Peterson further pointed out that research has shown effective schools are typically led by a principal who has the skill set to influence faculty, parents, students, and other stakeholders to commit themselves to high academic goals and educational excellence. Lee and Li (2015) stated, a school principal is the creator or re-shaper of a school's culture and has significant influence

over not only the actions of the school staff but all those involved in the learning process, including students and stakeholders alike. Regardless of the differences in describing school culture and the roles school administrators play, there is little doubt that school administrators play an integral role in the type of culture that exists within their schools.

“The culture of a school is the key to successful school improvement” (Gruenert, 1998, p. 1). Kitchenham (2010) stated the most important type of school culture is one that addresses student growth and ensures the success of the students within the school. The field of education seems to be everchanging, but one constant is the need for all students' success. Students' academic success is of the utmost importance and can be impactful for the students and the communities in which they live. School culture has a significant impact on many areas, including teacher morale, overall job satisfaction, and student achievement (Vutta & Sahney, 2016). If school administrators play a significant role in developing a school's culture, they must understand the potential influence the culture may have on those within the school.

A positive school culture can make an impact on schools in a positive way. When a school has a positive culture, there are fewer suspensions, increased attendance rates, and increased achievement on standardized test scores (Ohlson et al., 2016). Tichnor-Wagner et al., (2016) stated research indicates schools that have been found to foster academic achievement in all students are more likely to have a positive school culture which is supportive and inclusive of all students.

According to Mpella et al. (2019), school culture influences its members by providing models for their attitudes and actions. Suppose school leaders do not understand the importance of modeling the desired attitudes and activities throughout their schools. In that case, the teachers and staff members alike will be on their own to determine acceptable norms. This further brings

attention to the importance of school leaders understanding the importance of a positive school culture due to the possibility of teachers and those within a school being forced to develop their own norms and beliefs. When school leaders do not provide a model of norms and expectations, they run the risk of unacceptable norms and expectations being cultivated throughout their school (Muhannad, 2018).

Often, when school leaders provide decision-making opportunities for those around them, it makes them feel as though they have lost control, but in all actuality, they have taken a step toward creating a collaborative culture among those around them. Deal and Peterson (1990) found that 84 percent of urban principals say they want more authority in exchange for greater accountability results. While the vulnerability of leading with a collaborative leadership style can be difficult, the lack of autonomy has the potential to make this even more daunting. Kelly et al., (2018) stated that trust and the ability to make decisions independently are two components of the Finnish education system, which contribute to its success. When discussing charter schools, Rhim and Lancet (2018) pointed out that more autonomy can often lead to positive student outcomes.

The Covid-19 pandemic most certainly caused schools to undergo an enormous transformation. This changed how school administrators communicated, interacted, and possibly measured the teachers' success within their respective schools. Providing a deeper understanding of current and potential future events within any field of study are critical components that ensure meaningful preparation in order to meet future needs. Providing resources that will better prepare those faced with the challenges, which will most certainly present themselves in the future, is a critical responsibility of those within the field (Kelly et al., 2018). As LaFrance and Beck (2014) pointed out, the education system is regularly facing disruptive innovations that are

causing educational institutions to undergo massive transformations. “Educational sustainability is a transformative paradigm that nourishes learning and integrates behavioral and cognitive perspectives that allow adaptation to develop with the flexibility to face future changes, which may be full of ambiguity and surprises” (Şemin, 2019, p. 202).

Educational Change

According to Fullan (2001), educational reforms often fail due to a lack of focus on the development of innovations and the lack of attention paid to the culture of schools and districts in which the reforms are taking place. It appears one constant in the field of education is the revolving door of educational reforms, changes, and new ways of doing things. When changes or reforms are implemented the effect, the changes will have on the culture of the school should be not only considered but also made a priority (Muhammad, 2009).

When changes occur, teachers are often the ones who are affected the most and have a minimal amount of input concerning what type of changes will take place and the ways in which the changes will be implemented (Lafrance and Beck, 2014). Johnson and Johnson (1992) state it is only when we can develop others that we will reach a point where long-lasting success can be achieved. Developing others is an important component of a school’s success and ensuring teachers feel appreciated and a part of the decision-making process. School administrators would be wise to ensure those in their respective schools are part of the change process which will also have the potential to aid in the deployment of the teachers. When important and impactful decisions are made without teachers input or involvement, this would certainly not be advantageous to achieve long lasting success.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) point out that when people feel as though they are not appreciated, they are more likely to seek employment elsewhere and that external motivators

such as money and benefits are not enough to keep employees at their place of employment for long periods of time. One aspect of employment school administrators can impact are internal motivators such how much teachers feel appreciated and if they feel a part of the processes which have effects on their daily routines. Considering teacher attrition is a concern for many school administrators, ensuring teachers within their school feel appreciated and valued should be an important part of their leadership strategy.

School Change and Culture Issues Through a Covid Lens

According to Fullan (2001) during chaotic times leaders must be able to operate under uncertain and complex circumstances. While Fullan made this statement over two decades ago, his message seems appropriate for the times we are currently experiencing. With the added tasks brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, school administrators were put in a position which included operating their schools in ways which were new to everyone. Tasks such as how to best deliver instruction to students remotely, how to provide students with the resources such as computers and internet access are two examples of countless new tasks school administrators were faced with. While school culture is an important part of any school administrators' job, with all the extra responsibilities added due to the Covid-19 pandemic it stands to reason devoting, to monitor or develop the culture of their schools may have been something that wasn't made a priority.

Fullan (2001) pointed out teachers, administrators, and everyone involved within our schools are constantly embroiled in change which includes small-and large-scale change. Recently, school administrators have been faced with many different challenges which were presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. With little to no time to prepare, schools were forced to change the way they operated and delivered instruction. Many schools in the state of Mississippi

dismissed for Spring Break during the 2019-2020 school year and never returned to in person instruction until the following school year. This alone presented many challenges concerning school culture and it does not take into consideration the events which were affecting everyone's personal lives.

With all the changes and unknown realities schools and school administrators faced due to the Covid-19 pandemic, none had the potential to affect a school's culture more than the way communication was affected. School administrators were accustomed to teachers being physically present within the schools which given opportunities for formal and informal interactions which provided feedback as to the culture of their schools.

In order to achieve the needed gains for our students, those within our schools must expect and experience the pain which comes with change and redesigning of schools (Fullan, 1993). While the redesigning of our schools during the Covid-19 pandemic wasn't intentional or voluntary it is exactly what happened. The manner instruction was delivered was disrupted and most if not, all students spent the last two to three months of the 2019-2020 school year not being physically present in school. While each individual school found their own unique way of operating during this difficult time, it was most certainly a challenge for those who were involved from school administrators to parents and students alike.

Leading with empathy may have never been as important for school administrators during the past two years due to all the challenges the Covid-19 pandemic presented to those within our schools. According to Fullan (2011) leaders must possess two skills which are unwavering determination and the ability to show empathy towards others. These two skills must coexist and if leaders aren't intentional, they can present conflicts with how changes are carried out by school administrators. During the Covid-19 pandemic being empathetic towards others

may have been one of school administrators most important tasks as teachers and students alike were facing unprecedented changes in their personal and professional lives. School leaders faced the difficult challenge of balancing the necessary determination required to carry out the changes which were forced upon them, and the task of being aware of the need to be empathetic towards those who were affected by all the sudden changes.

School Culture and Change Issues pre Covid-19

A positive school culture has the potential to solve the problems of schools and serve as a way of building trust through the power of social interaction (Lesinger et al., 2018). Barkley et al., (2014) stated that building principals should be fully aware of the driving force behind the changes in schools and how this affects how problems are created and solved. While all schools have a distinct culture, whether one realizes this or not, how administrators use the culture within their schools is something that varies. When learning how to best leverage the culture within their schools, one familiar problem school administrators face is to accurately identify what type of culture currently exists. As Barkley et al. pointed out, school administrators should quickly and accurately identify the driving forces behind school culture changes. Identifying the driving forces behind the culture of their school is often something school administrators struggle with which may limit their ability to enact change and solve problems that exist within their schools.

Being able to identify the culture within a school accurately is one challenge that has been associated with school culture pre-Covid-19. Lee and Li (2015) stated the existence of unique school cultures allows schools to display their distinct advantages and has a significant impact on performance and on the school's effectiveness. One challenge associated with Lee and Li's statement is the fact that each school has a unique school culture, which makes the culture of each school distinctive to itself. School administrators must possess the ability to take advantage

of the unique culture within their schools and use this when driving change or maintaining the already established successful norms and values. Taking advantage of the culture of one's school has shown itself to be challenging for school administrators and something which can be improved upon.

The importance of a positive school culture is a topic which has been shown to affect many different areas of success within schools. Taking into consideration schools have historically operated exclusively in a face-to-face manner, few opportunities have presented themselves to examine school culture within schools operating remotely or in some type of online capacity. These lack of opportunities to examine remote or online learning, and how school culture exists within each, leaves a void in the literature and is an area which can be improved upon.

Exceptional leaders build trust and encourage communication with a high importance placed on communication (Kelly et al., 2018). A successful principal is often required to be an outstanding listener, taking the time to hear others' thoughts and ideas (Cullingford, 1995). Teachers consider communication one of the most essential roles of a school administrator, and they particularly find it useful when they are involved in making decisions that will affect them (Carlyon & Branson, 2018). Communicating in schools before the Covid-19 pandemic was a process which involved mainly face-to-face interactions. While these face-to-face interactions may have looked different from school to school, they all shared a common characteristic that consisted of interactions occurring while the school members were physically present.

School Culture and Change Issues During Covid-19

While a rich collection of work investigating online teaching and learning exists, there remains minimal research on teaching online and how to promote and maintain a collaborative

school culture remotely (Justis et al., 2020). When the Covid-19 pandemic forced schools to a remote or online learning model, most, if not all, teachers and administrators were faced with challenges they had never thought of before, let alone experienced. The Covid-19 pandemic forced most of our schools to go from face-to-face instruction to online instruction or some remote model in a matter of weeks. The short amount of preparation time alone had the potential to be overwhelming for all involved.

When one considers how monumental of a task this was, it becomes clear the challenges all school administrators were facing. Justis et al., (2020) stated, schools work together to plan and prepare curriculum to achieve the mission of the school but never to the level that occurred when the school shifted instruction delivery methods during the Covid-19 pandemic. As with most circumstances, in our personal and professional lives, when challenges present themselves for the first time, many obstacles exist. Promoting a positive school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic was not immune to this. One of our society's most basic assumptions, for many of us, is our children will be educated traditionally. This assumption disappeared quickly for a lot of parents and stakeholders alike.

The literature on school culture differs in many ways, but Kitchenham (2010) stated that one of the typical traits found revolves around the fact that school culture is likely to be at the center of school transformation and change. If school culture is an essential component of transformative change in schools, school administrators would be wise to understand further the importance of the cultures they cultivate within their schools. While understanding the culture which exists within their school is an important task for school administrators, framing the culture through the framework of the six elements of the School Culture Survey can be beneficial as well. "Culture is vital for an organization as it significantly affects every aspect of it, such as

stability, cohesion, unity and ability for adjustments and change in any organization” (Kythreotis et al., 2010, p. 222). With the importance of positive school outcomes, school culture should remain a necessary topic for administrators, considering it has significantly affected most aspects of schools.

Educational leaders will continue to be challenged to overcome new obstacles, take risks, and provide leadership in an ever-changing environment (Ridenour & Twale, 2002). School culture is a common term in the education literature. Still, little literature exists on how school administrators choose to maintain their schools' culture during the time schools operated in some remote capacity during the Covid-19 pandemic. While operating in a remote capacity, school administrators most definitely received additional tasks and duties which did not exist previously. While the added responsibilities were essential and necessary, the ways they chose to maintain their schools' culture was important as well.

Providing a better understanding of how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted school culture can provide a deeper understanding of how school culture was affected. While the Covid-19 pandemic has been labeled as a once in a lifetime event, examining its effects on school culture will better prepare school administrators should something similar occur in the future. Lee and Li (2015) have identified school culture as a slow and gradual process. With this said, school administrators would be wise to have a thorough understanding of the process, considering the slow and gradual nature of school culture and its possible effects. Time is a resource that is limited; therefore, being efficient and getting things done correctly the first time would be valuable for everyone involved. During the Covid-19 pandemic school administrators may or may not have had time to be intentional about maintaining a positive culture throughout

their schools; however, much can be learned about what was useful and what was not useful during the Covid-19 pandemic concerning school culture.

Challenges of Transition for School Culture and Change During Covid-19

One can imagine all the stress and worry, going through teachers and school administrators' minds early on during the Covid-19 pandemic. School administrators were expected to shift how instruction was delivered to their students in a matter of weeks, if not sooner. The following quote was taken from Justis et al., (2020),

I found my phone constantly buzzing. Teachers were calling, texting, and zooming all day. They needed someone to question, brainstorm with, and provide reassurance. This was unfamiliar territory and they could not, or did not want to, navigate it alone. Despite being separated we still needed a community of practice. (p.36)

This quote is one which appears to be representative of what was occurring all throughout our schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers and school administrators alike were feverishly searching for answers and ways of doing things, and often had nowhere to turn but to themselves. One of the significant obstacles which presented itself during the Covid-19 pandemic was how school culture was promoted, maintained, or created.

When discussing collaboration during the transition to online learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Justis et al., (2020) stated that maintaining and growing a culture of trust and frequent collaboration became the key focus of our leadership early on. Maintaining a culture of trust was a difficult thing to do while schools were not meeting in person. Teachers and school leaders were accustomed to being physically present and around those they work with, and almost instantly, remote video meetings were the way meetings were held. This situation presented a significant challenge due to many different factors such as lack of familiarity, lack of

resources, and distractions at home, to name a few. While collaboration among faculty and staff is a difficult enough task while school is meeting in person, adding a new way of doing things most certainly adds an extra layer of difficulties to the process.

Impact of Culture and Change on Teacher Support and Attrition

Several reasons have been attributed to teachers leaving the profession only after a few years of teaching. According to Buchanan (2010) a lack of support from their schools and an increasing workload have caused a shortage of qualified teachers in several countries. While increasing workloads may or may not be a variable which can be controlled, lack of support is a variable which can be controlled or at least minimized.

A growing problem within the field education is the number of teachers leaving the profession; approximately one third of new teachers leave in their first three years, with only 40% to 50% remaining at the end of 5 years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). With these high statistics in mind, it would be wise for educational leaders to consider the reasons why and determine what type of structures can be put into place in order to prevent or at least minimize the number of new teachers choosing to leave the profession.

Impact of Culture and Change on Teacher Attrition and School Culture

Retaining teachers is vitally important for improving schools because teacher quality, skill, and knowledge are among the most significant resources schools have in increasing student achievement (Torres, 2012). Schools regardless of their status or current rating should always be trying to improve student achievement. While Torres states the importance of teacher retention though the lens of student achievement, high teacher turnover also has the potential to make it more difficult to create or maintain a positive school culture. While school culture isn't

mentioned much relating to teacher retention, it can have an effect due to new teachers having to learn the norms and expectations of the schools.

High turnover has a detrimental impact on a school's ability to maintain a strong community (Ingersoll & Smith 2004). Maintaining a strong sense of community can be a vital part of a school's success. As mentioned previously, when a school experiences a high rate of teacher turnover the culture of the school may be affected. As Muhammad (2008) points out relationships are a vital part of a school's culture and when schools have a high teacher turnover rate this can affect the relationships which exists among the teachers. When a school has a lot of new staff, whether this be teachers or any type of non-certified staff members school administrators must recognize this and ensure the necessary relationship are developed throughout the school.

Teachers are faced with many responsibilities such as developing and maintaining healthy relationships with parents, colleagues, administrators, and stakeholders alike. The consequences of teacher's inability to handle the balancing act of the demands these relationships require can have a negative effect on a person's psychological and physical well-being (Muhammad, 2009). A strong positive school culture can support these teachers and better prepare them to have healthy relationships with those within and outside the school.

Impact of Culture and Change on Teacher Retention in Mississippi

Wright (2022) found teachers struggled or continue to struggle with the added burdens of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Everything that has come with COVID, it has just been an absolute nightmare. I have been so much more overwhelmed and exhausted and just beaten down," said McGee, 24.

“I thought I would retire when I was like 65 from teaching, and now I’m considering leaving within the next two years. (para, 2).

While this quote was taken from a teacher in South Carolina, it stands to reason school teachers across the country share similar experiences. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic Mississippi faced a critical shortage of teachers in certain areas of the state and as of spring of 2022 over 3000 teacher vacancies existed (Mississippi governor’s education human capital task force, 2021).

In 2018, the state of Mississippi reported over 2000 vacancies for teachers with a 40% decrease in enrollment in teacher preparation programs within the state (Wierman, 2019). While looking at these statistics it is worrying to think about the combination of the two. Not only is the state of Mississippi struggling to retain teachers but teacher preparation programs within the state are struggling to keep up with the demand as enrollment in their programs are declining. With all the challenges, brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, teacher retention is just another item which should be addressed and made a priority.

Leins (2019) stated that one in every three schools in the state currently suffers from a teacher shortage. There is little to know doubt that a statistic such as this should cause concern for parents and educators alike throughout the state. Mississippi is a rural state and in the past has been known to be behind most other states when it comes to the results the education system has produced. Limited opportunities often exist in rural areas and often make it difficult for rural schools to hire and retain qualified teachers as they are at a disadvantage to metropolitan areas which have more resources at their disposal (Monk, 2007).

When one-third of the schools within a state are struggling to find enough teachers to fill the classrooms this is taking away time and resources which could otherwise be devoted to ways

in which to improve student outcomes. Kaden et al. (2016) have found teacher retention and student success are connected; therefore, it makes sense to conclude school districts who struggle to retention teachers will be at risk to have lower student outcomes. This demonstrates the importance of teacher retention and its importance to the success of the students within our schools.

The Six Elements of a Positive School Culture

Gruenert (1998) stated that school educators need a quality measure of culture to understand the culture within their schools. Gruenert used a combination of qualitative and quantitative studies to create a survey that would provide accurate insights into a school's culture. To assess the validity of the School Culture Survey (SCS), Gruenert administered it to participants simultaneously as the School Climate Survey. Mitchell (2008) stated that each of the six elements of the school culture survey factors was significantly correlated with at least two of the four factors of the school climate survey. The School Climate Survey was an instrument that had already been developed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. The SCS six elements are collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose, and learning partnerships. Overall, 15 of the 24 correlations were significant at the .05 level, and another seven were significant at the .01 level. "This is direct evidence that the SCS correlated positively with the established School Climate Survey, which supports the validity of the instrument (Mitchell, 2008, p. 57). By comparing the SCS to the already established School Climate Survey, the validity of the SCS was confirmed.

The literature on school culture differs in many ways, but Kitchenham (2010) stated that one of the typical traits found is that school culture is likely to be at the center of school transformation and change. If school culture is an essential component of transformative change

in schools, school administrators would be wise to understand further the importance of the cultures they cultivate within their schools. "Culture is vital for an organization as it significantly affects every aspect of it, such as stability, cohesion, unity and ability for adjustments and change in any organization" (Kythreotis et al., 2010, p. 222). With the importance of positive school outcomes, school culture should remain an essential topic for administrators, considering it significantly affects many aspects of schools.

The following section will examine the six potential elements of a positive school culture used in the School Culture Survey (SCS). The six elements of a positive school culture described were used to develop an instrument called the SCS (Gruenert, 1998). The elements included were collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose, and learning partnership. Examining each element of the SCS will provide an opportunity to point out the importance of each element's contribution when developing a positive school culture. While the six described elements are not exclusive to positive school culture, they have been identified as potentially being important components when one determines what may or may not make up a positive school culture (Gruenert.).

Collaborative Leadership

"Collaborative leadership is the degree to which school leaders can not only develop but also maintain collaborative relationships with staff members throughout their respective schools" (Gruenert, 1998, p. iii). Waldron and McLeskey (2010) stated that school change that improves teacher practice and student outcomes may be achieved through comprehensive school reform, and critical aspects of this reform include the development of a collaborative school culture. For school administrators to lead collaboratively, they must not only understand the importance of cultivating a culture of collaboration, but they must also be willing and able to give those around

them influence, power, and decision-making opportunities. Delegating decision-making responsibilities may be a problematic component of a collaborative leadership style due to many school administrators feeling the pressure of the expectations placed upon them and they may feel as though they must have control over all areas of their schools (Waldron & McLeskey).

Waldron and McLeskey (2010) stated that successful school change efforts are often dependent upon a high level of collaboration among staff within a school and the responsibility usually lies with the building administrator to develop and maintain the collaborative relationships. Deal and Peterson (1990) reported that collaboration among teachers, during professional development is the most influential educational leadership behavior and that principals and administrators are needed to lead educational improvement, foster significant change efforts, lead the implementation of new standards, and are central to shaping strong, professional school cultures. LaFrance and Beck (2014) stated that school leaders must provide a collaborative environment, ensuring quality, integrity, and validity of information, regular ongoing planning for increased performance, and appropriate staffing and support. The aforementioned authors all discuss different aspects of a successful school, but the one commonality is the importance of collaboration among those within a school.

Kelly et al. (2018) stated collaboration can, and should, happen naturally and pointed out one-way collaboration can be encouraged in schools by creating a school culture with a welcoming environment where teachers want to come together and discuss what is happening in their classrooms. When teachers come together and work collaboratively, they are more likely to form a professional community, increase the odds that they will work collectively, and will ratchet up the quality of teaching and learning (Little, 2002). Teachers, administrators, and stakeholders alike would benefit from working together collaboratively. The ways in which these

stakeholder groups may work together will look different but there is little doubt that when people work collaboratively, they will be more efficient, more successful, and will take more ownership of their jobs in general. As Kouzes and Posner (2002) pointed out “when a leader makes people feel strong and capable, they are likely to exceed their expectations” (p.18).

Leading Collaboratively

Lee and Li (2015) pointed out that previous studies have demonstrated that school principals have a significant, direct or indirect impact on teachers' performance, job satisfaction, effectiveness, motivation, commitment to professional development, and collaboration. As Ohlson et al., (2016) reported, educational leaders should establish a partnership with teachers to collaboratively work towards the primary goal of improving the teaching and learning process. While teaching and learning are often identified as the most critical responsibility for school administrators, they should realize how they collaborate with those in their buildings will directly influence their success regardless of which metric they are judged. An example of this is the importance of a school administrator, realizing how much the collaboration among teachers will benefit or improve the teaching and learning process.

An effective school principal should possess the necessary skills to read the school's culture correctly, assess the culture appropriately, and make the needed changes as they see fit to ensure the school runs smoothly and effectively (Deal & Peterson 1990). One crucial component of school leaders assessing and identifying the cultures within their schools is to promote collaboration with those around them. When teachers and staff members alike feel that they are a vital part of the school's culture or operations, they will be more likely to bring forth problems or concerns to their leaders. Lesinger et al., (2018) found that developing leadership throughout

one's school often becomes a way to solve the problems within schools and a way of building trust through the power of social interaction and collaboration.

Challenges Facing Collaborative Leadership

Two of the challenges mentioned in the Wise (2015) survey, were teacher resistance and teacher morale, which may lead us to believe these principals have difficulties in leading with collaborative leadership styles. Deal and Peterson (1990) found that principals must attend to the trial and error, action, and reaction through which the school's culture will evolve. The principal must sometimes accept events being out of their control and allow experience itself to transform the shared meaning given to school activities. School leaders may often have difficulty accepting things being out of their control which may lead them to be less likely to lead collaboratively. For schools to provide an inclusive learning environment for students, a practice of collaboration must be the norm of their school's culture. Schools with a collaborative culture are successful and operate with a collaborative culture; a single individual does not make decisions; instead, decisions emerge from collaborative dialogues between many individuals engaged in mutually dependent activities (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, school administrators may have viewed giving up control or giving teachers decision-making authority as optional. Still, when schools were forced to change the way they operated, this became more of a necessity than an option. Pollock (2020) stated school leaders are now expected to draw on their current skills and knowledge to meet the challenges of schooling students during the pandemic and do so while developing new knowledge and skills while pivoting some of their current roles. While school administrators have always been busy with many different responsibilities, the Covid-19 pandemic has not only added additional responsibilities, but it has also forced schools to change how they operate.

These things considered, it may be more important than ever that school leaders cultivate a collaborative school culture and take advantage of the benefits which it may provide.

Supervisory and instructional leadership activities that are the principal's responsibility are too numerous for one person to adequately address (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). With this said, school leaders would be wise to incorporate a collaborative culture within their schools if for no other reason than to provide others with opportunities to share responsibilities in the decision-making process. While a collaborative school culture can provide others with decision-making opportunities, school administrators may struggle with giving up control for many reasons. School administrators are often held to a high standard and are accountable for their schools' innerworkings and results. With so much at stake, including their careers, giving others the responsibility to make important decisions may be easier said than done.

Arroyo et al., (2020) stated there is no quick fix to teaching. First-year teachers need focused, ongoing professional development through a closely controlled practice process, documented feedback, and reflection on their performance with mentors or coaches' help. When examining the role of mentors and coaches (Thipatdee, 2019) found that coaching is a short-term intervention aimed at performance improvement, while mentoring is to help and support people to manage their learning in order to maximize their potential, develop skills, improve performance, and become what they want to be. While new teachers are an integral part of a school's culture, the coaching and mentoring process may allow more experienced teachers to model and explain the norms, shared values, and all other vital components of the school's culture.

During a study focusing on teacher complexities, Strom, et al. (2018) found that there was a clear need for a support network with which teachers could connect with others to help

them address pressing problems of practice while also allowing them to participate in continuous cycles of inquiry into their practices. Strom et al. did not specifically mention how school culture plays into the support network, which they suggest is required. Still, the opportunity exists for schools to support teachers with their instructional and classroom management needs and the critical components of the school's culture that can be incorporated into the support network which should be provided.

Meredith et al. (2017) stated, collaboration can be regarded as a process in which teachers come together to discuss and share knowledge, coach each other, reflect on shared experiences and build the curriculum together when appropriate. While the components of teacher collaboration may appear to be common sense and easy to incorporate into a school's everyday operations, teachers are often reluctant to allow others into their classrooms and thus fail to experience authentic feedback which can lead to becoming more effective teachers.

Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017) found the implementation of mentoring programs between new and experienced teachers benefited new teachers and guided them to cope and face the anxieties during their first year in the classroom. One key component of a collaborative school culture is creating an environment where teachers are comfortable receiving feedback from others. First-year teachers and experienced teachers alike often face many obstacles and challenges during a typical year and the Covid-19 pandemic has only added to the stresses and challenges they are faced with in their classrooms and beyond. It may be more important than ever for teachers to come together and take advantage of others' experiences, which will benefit them in many ways.

Teacher Collaboration

Teacher collaboration describes the degree to which teachers engage in constructive dialogue that furthers the vision of the school (Gruenert, 1998). Community of Practice (CoP) is a theoretical framework about how professional practitioners come into grouping on an ongoing basis to learn to solve workplace problems (Zhao et al., 2019). According to Mitchell (2008), teachers are required to become progressively more prepared to develop, implement, and share practices, knowledge, and values to answer students' needs and enhance their teaching capabilities. School administrators would be wise to provide guidance and reinforce the importance of teachers working together to create a culture that involves everyone working together. When this occurs and teachers work together in a meaningful way, their professional needs and students' needs are more likely to be met.

Little (2002) pointed out that conditions for improving teaching and learning are strengthened when teachers are collectively questioning effective teaching routines, examining new conceptions of teaching, finding generative means to acknowledge and respond to differences and conflicts, and engage actively in supporting professional growth. Teacher interactions can provide teachers with valuable professional, social, and emotional support for grappling with problems and dilemmas they encounter in the course of their work, and they also shape teachers to collaborate with their colleagues (Lefstein et al., 2017). When determining the most appropriate way to create meaningful social interactions within the school's culture, school leaders should consider the importance of these interactions and how they may impact their success (Little).

Lee and Li (2015) pointed out, the key to success for schools is if they have a good quality school culture, because school culture influences what people pay attention to (focus),

how they identify with the school (commitment), how hard they work (motivation), and the degree to which they achieve their goals (productivity). When the faculty and staff, who make up the school, pay attention to the components mentioned above, they will be more likely to work together effectively in areas such as continuous improvement through meaningful professional development. Continuous improvement is a component of a school's culture, often identified through teachers working together to improve the teaching and learning process.

The field of education often involves high expectations along with decreasing resources to meet these expectations. One resource that is usually in need is time. Teachers may or may not have planning periods included in their schedules and this can prove to stretch their time and even cause them to spend many hours outside of the school hours working. One way to combat the lack of time, or planning time, is to ensure teachers are working together effectively. School leaders can provide opportunities, such as dedicated professional learning communities, for teachers to spend time together with collaboration in mind, but to what degree they are working together is a key component in the success of the school. As resources continue to decrease and expectations continue to increase, teachers' working together will only become more and more critical.

Professional Development

"Professional development describes the degree to which teachers' value continuous personal development and school-wide improvement" (Gruenert, 1998, p iii). Professional development has been described in multiple ways. One common characteristic of professional development is when incorporated into a school's culture in a meaningful way, it has the potential to influence the way in which instruction is delivered. Professional development is not a new practice within the field of education, but it is a topic that seems to be receiving much

more attention as of late. One reason for the added attention is the ever-changing landscape and how schools are being operated. Whether it be changing curriculum, increasing expectations, a change in demographics of a school's population, or lack of resources, a meaningful professional development program can help meet the challenges as they present themselves. When thinking of professional development and how it relates to a school's collaborative culture, it should be noted school administrators must ensure opportunities exist for those within their schools to provide input to ensure the topics and training provided are meaningful.

Mitchell (2008) stated that a positive school culture ensures that the school's climate, culture, and practices continually reinforce and support the professional growth of all staff and include effective and varied professional development opportunities. Teachers' professional development is a crucial factor in having more reflective educators capable of working on teams to find solutions to problems in their classrooms (Castro Garcés & Martínez Granada, 2016). Teachers, whether they are experienced teachers, first-year teachers, or fit somewhere in between, will inevitably be faced with problems they must solve within, or potentially outside of the classroom. These problems may range from classroom management challenges, identification of the needed supports for all students, or things such as struggling to communicate effectively with families and stakeholders within their community.

A positive school culture can reinforce the professional growth of those within a school community (Mitchell, 2008). This can be a positive sign not only for the teachers within the building but also for the success of the teaching and learning process. While this, more than likely, is not exclusive to certified teachers, it is worth mentioning that teachers who invest in their professional growth will be more likely to be successful. Ryan (2019) stated, the need for professional development is undeniable and well documented in the education literature, which

reaches back many years. As with our students who we often encourage to learn and grow as they continue along their paths through school, it is equally important for teachers to realize the importance of the professional development process and how it affects not only them but the students they are teaching.

Teacher Professional Development

Teachers' professional development is an ongoing process in which teachers engage to transform some of their conceptions and practices around pedagogy, methodology, and didactics to find new avenues that allow them to meet the needs and interests of their contexts (Castro Garcés & Martínez Granada, 2016). Zhao et al. (2019) stated, professional development is defined as any activity that is intended partly or primarily to prepare staff members for improved performance in the present or future roles in the school districts. Whether a teacher is in their first year or has over 20 years of experience, their ability and willingness to transform or alter their teaching style is of the utmost importance. While examining the components of positive school culture, school administrators must understand how crucial it is to include teacher professional development in their schools' shared values.

As Mitchell (2008) pointed out, teachers cannot be responsive to all the students' needs without the assistance and support of their colleagues, administrators, and community. When school administrators include a meaningful professional development program into the school's expectations, it can benefit not only the certified teachers but also the students they are responsible for teaching. As Zhao et al., (2019) reported, engaging in professional development can help teachers update their knowledge of a subject, considering recent advances, and exchange information with other teachers, experts, and academics. This statement should further

reinforce the importance of school administrators leading collaboratively and ensuring their professional development program is meaningful and beneficial.

Meaningful Professional Development

Professional learning activities engage our being as we use our minds and bodies, as often a wandering mind can cause us to become less engaged, or perhaps our bodies distract us intrinsically (Ryan 2019). While including professional development in the norms and culture of a school is undoubtedly beneficial, for professional development to increase teacher efficacy, it must be engaging and consist of things in which teachers are interested in or at least believe will benefit them in the classroom.

When thinking about providing meaningful professional development opportunities from a school culture perspective, how the topics are selected should be purposeful and done collaboratively by teachers and staff members (Guskey, 2002). When this is done correctly, everyone involved will feel they are part of the professional development process. When teachers within a school are involved in the entire professional development process, as opposed to attending a mandatory professional development session, they will be more likely to take ownership of the process. When this occurs, the likelihood increases that they will use the information presented in their classrooms. School administrators can benefit when this happens, but the results are more likely to be positive when teachers are a part of a collaborative school culture that emphasizes these types of collaborative activities.

Engaged individuals are typically highly connected with their tasks, are more efficient, and more likely to take on more responsibilities (Zhao et al., 2019). Osman and Warner (2020) stated, teachers' motivation plays a crucial role in determining what happens after teachers participate in professional development. School leaders should ensure their school consists of

collaboration while developing professional development opportunities, but they should also provide follow-up opportunities to determine the usefulness of the actual professional development.

Osman and Warner (2020) found that many of the strategy's teachers use while in the classroom were learned during a professional development session. These strategies are often learned after the session has concluded, during informal learning experiences such as in their planning time, or experimenting in their classrooms. This again speaks to the importance of school administrators not only being aware of the importance of how the professional development opportunities in their school are developed, but it would also serve them well to provide follow up opportunities afterward to accurately determine the success of the actual development of new skills or strategies.

Regardless of the challenges teachers may face, meaningful professional development will benefit all involved. Ohlson et al. (2016) claimed that promoting teacher professional development is the most influential educational leadership behavior, which may be one of many different variables of a school that has a positive school culture. Regardless of how it is viewed or defined, positive school culture can positively affect the teachers when meaningful professional development is embedded in their shared values, vision, and expectations.

Collegial Support

"Collegial support describes the degree to which teachers work together effectively" (Gruenert, 1998, p. iv). While unity of support examines how teachers work toward a common mission, collegial support is different because it examines how effectively those within the school are working together. Collegial support can be a problematic variable to measure for school leaders. While opportunities can be created for teachers to work together, determining

how successful their efforts have been may present many different challenges. In an ideal situation, teachers should be appreciative of each other's ideas and suggestions, trust each other's professional opinion, and work together to accomplish the school's collective goals (Gruenert). Unfortunately, the ideal situation rarely exists in today's schools without clear and consistent leadership. Leadership serves as a vehicle to solve the problems of schools and a way of building trust through the power of social interaction (Lesinger et al., 2018). The power of social interactions can serve as an essential tool a school administrator should use when attempting to build trust and ensure circumstances are conducive for those within their school to work together effectively.

Collegial support is not something that will be the same from school to school or even grade level to grade level. One example of collegial support may be teachers using their strengths to train other teachers in their respective buildings. While teachers are often well rounded in many different essential areas, typically, they have strengths in areas that they can use to help those around them. Regarding positive school culture, school administrators should use teachers' strengths to allow teachers to share and train others around them and promote a culture where everyone works together collaboratively and successfully.

Trust and leadership facilitate quality in fostering strategic policies, in establishing policy, and development (Lesinger et al., 2018). While establishing policies, school leaders would be wise to include the component of teachers working together. Once these policies have been established, they should then decide how they will determine if the teachers are working together successfully or just merely going through the motions to meet the school's requirements.

Unity of Purpose

While describing unity of purpose, regarding school culture, Gruenert (1998) pointed out that "unity of purpose is to what extent teachers work toward a common mission for their school" (p. iv). While this may seem like a commonsense approach, it is one of the things that makes school leadership such a difficult task. School culture requires a change in everyone's behavior and the ability to indicate a change to their subordinates and their surroundings (Hornáčková et al., 2014). While this speaks to the change of everyone's behavior within the school, it also brings up a point concerning school culture and the struggles school administrators potentially face.

Lee and Li (2015) stated that the school principal is the creator or re-shaper of a school's teacher culture and influences its actions and motivations and spirit. If school leaders face being the creators or re-shapers of school culture, they must realize the importance of those within their building all working together towards a common mission. Once school leaders have identified the importance of this, they must also determine the best strategies to make this happen within their school. Many different variables may determine how a school administrator should encourage teachers to work together toward a common mission. The faculty's makeup or experience level could serve as one variable that could affect how school administrators promote a culture of teachers working together toward a common mission. At times, teachers who have been teaching for more extended periods may be less likely to change their habits or beliefs, leading to challenges when looking at ways to get everyone to work together toward a common mission within a school.

Kelly et al. (2018) found that collaboration can happen in two different ways. When a positive school culture exists, teachers will naturally work together simply because they

understand its importance and how it will benefit them and the students they teach. Another way school leaders can encourage teachers to work together is to develop practices and programs, such as monthly cross-grade-level meetings, which enable teachers to work together for the shared vision and mission of the school (Kelly et al., 2018). Whether teachers are working together naturally, through purposeful opportunities, or through a combination of both, school leaders must be aware of the happenings and continue to monitor how successful or not successful they have been at creating opportunities to encourage everyone within their school to develop relationships and work towards the common mission and vision of their respective schools. As Ohlson et al. (2016) pointed out, school leadership plays a paramount role in influencing teacher-working conditions and working together toward common goals.

Mission Statements and Unity

A mission statement has the potential to serve as a communication device that reflects, affirms, and inspires while communicating the current reality of our practice (Keeling, 2013). A mission statement is a description of the mission that is intended to help leaders run the institution and to guide organizational change (Slate et al., 2008). Mission statements are common throughout our schools, and other organizations, but how many schools ensure their mission statement is a living part of their culture? As mentioned previously, school administrators should be aware of the importance of working collaboratively with those around them. Developing the school's mission statement should be one of the areas each member of a school faculty should be involved in and they should be involved when developing, reviewing, or revising. If mission statements are indeed a collective statement intended to help organizations and guide institutional change, school administrators must strategically develop them, reflecting

what is happening at their school (Slate et al, 2018). It seems all too often mission statements are simply a formality and they seem to check a box as opposed to serving the intended purpose.

While examining mission statements and school culture, it should be noted that school administrators would be wise to engrain the components of their mission statements in the everyday happenings of their school, as well as the culture of their school. With the many demands placed on school administrators already, this may not seem practical, but it has the potential to serve as another way in which leaders can work with those around them in a collaborative manner. Slate et al., (2008) found, for a mission statement to be effective, it must specify both the constituency that the organization serves and how this constituency benefits from the activities of the organization. When teachers and those involved in the everyday operations of the school understand how they will help if the mission statement is carried out, they will be more likely to buy in and live out the actions included as opposed to merely going through the motions.

School Administrators and Mission Statements

School leaders are tasked with promoting a school culture which includes a clear mission and vision. Along with promoting this vision and mission, school leaders are tasked with ensuring everyone works collaboratively. This may be an area that has the potential to cause problems within the school. When the vision and mission are not clear or all involved are not bought into the vision and mission, teachers may not feel as though they are a valuable piece of the process and therefore, their contributions to the school may not be utilized to its maximum potential.

With resources being limited and at times not adequate to meet the expectations, it is vital to a school's success for teachers to not only work together but to work together effectively. If

teachers within a school are not able to work together effectively, the likely result is opportunities for improvement will be missed, and this can negatively impact student's success. The demands of moving everything online and embracing the unknown compelled us to deepen our collaborative culture. "We were suddenly bound together facing a common and urgent problem" (Justis, et al., 2020, p.457). This quote referenced the situation an elementary school found themselves in while transitioning to online learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers and administrators alike were operating in a unique situation and were forced to come together to problem-solve and meet the needs of not only their students but also their own needs. In this situation, teachers came together and formed a collaborative network that was helpful to them in many ways. The staff at Edith Bowen Laboratory School worked together in new ways, which included working together toward the common goals of their school despite the unusual circumstances (Justis et al.). This situation has the potential to provide an example of the benefits of school administrators, encouraging teachers to work together during difficult circumstances such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Learning Partnerships

"Learning partnerships describe the degree to which teachers, parents, and students, work together for the common good of the student" (Gruenert, 1998, p. iv). Haron et al., (2017) found that learner engagement is an essential element to ensure frequent interaction and close relationship between course and learners to ensure learners' continuous participation in learning activities. Learner engagement has the potential to affect how successful learning partnerships may be within schools. One of the principal goals of recent school reform was to create a new culture of education focused on the cultivation of trust between education authorities, schools, and stakeholders (Kelly et al., 2018). While focusing on the best way to cultivate this trust

among everyone involved in the learning process, school administrators should ensure the stakeholders outside of their school are aware of the appropriate ways to contribute toward the common goals of the school.

To be successful, the principal in today's public schools must not only cope with the administration of a complex human organization in the rapidly evolving dynamics of schools and society, but they also must be an effective leader in a wide variety of areas (Klocko & Justis, 2019). One of the areas Klocko and Justis mention is including all those involved in the learning process, including stakeholders in the community. Often, when school culture is discussed, the focus is on the faculty, staff, and students in the building each day. While all three of these groups are undoubtedly essential parts of a school's culture and learning partnership, the stakeholders in the community are often overlooked in the process.

Decades of research point to the numerous benefits of parent involvement in education for students, parents, school, and the wider community (Smith et al., 2011). Even when schools are operating in traditional or normal times, parental involvement has been shown to benefit students' academic outcomes and their ability to regulate their behaviors (Meredith et al., 2017). These findings relating to the importance of parental involvement in schools may be amplified during difficult times such as the Covid-19 pandemic. With the sudden and unforeseen change in the way schools operated during the Covid-19 pandemic, school administrators found themselves in a situation where parental support was particularly important. Students were not only processing the change in the way they received instruction; they were potentially also faced with many other challenges in their personal lives as well.

While state and federal laws can encourage parent involvement; ultimately, the schools themselves must implement meaningful opportunities for parents to be involved in their child's

education. With school suddenly being forced to operate remotely, school administrators were forced to find new and innovative ways to ensure parental involvement was a part of their school culture (Smith et al.,2011).

Parent and student beliefs and values about what types of courses students should take, student participation in the school's educational program, students' attitudes about learning, student interactions with peers and teachers, and the school's overall academic climate are all believed to be influential factors of how successful a student will be (Marcoulides et al., 2005). While school administrators often understand the importance of creating positive perceptions within their schools, they would be wise to understand the influence perceptions in the community may have on the success of their schools. When discussing school reform Waldron and McLeskey (2010) pointed out that Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) should be a discussion among the entire school community regarding the importance of engaging in CSR to improve outcomes for all students. This statement by Waldron and McLeskey, is another example of the importance of school administrators creating cultures that not only influence those within their buildings, but they should also include all involved in the school community when making decisions that will affect the school.

Focus of This Research

Anytime an event or obstacle presents itself for the first time, there are lessons to be learned regarding how these obstacles were dealt with and the consequences of these actions. Collecting data during the Covid-19 pandemic will provide insight into the current state of school culture in assessed elementary schools in the state of Mississippi. When more information is gathered on the current state of the school culture, it will be beneficial for school leaders to access the information to gain a better understanding of where should be done moving forward.

Having access to information concerning the current state of school culture in elementary schools will better prepare school administrators to mitigate the impact should a similar event occur in the future. If the current state of school culture is found to be positive and healthy, during the Covid-19 pandemic, school leaders would also benefit from knowing this as they would be aware should another event force schools into a remote or virtual model in the future.

The purpose of this study is to examine the current state of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic within elementary schools in the state of Mississippi. When the Covid-19 pandemic forced many, if not all K-12, schools to operate remotely or virtually, it also changed the dynamics of how administrators, teachers, students, and stakeholders communicated and interacted with each other. Hasselquist et al., (2017) viewed school culture “as the interplay between three factors: the attitudes and beliefs of persons inside the school and the external environment; the cultural norms of the school; and the relationships between persons within the school” (p.267). Within a matter of weeks, the environments within our schools changed due to how they were operating. Examining how these changes affected schools' culture can provide school administrators with valuable information about what interventions or actions were effective before and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The School Culture Survey (SCS), developed by Gruenert (1998), will be administrated to current teachers to provide information that will examine the current state of the culture of their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about many changes and challenges for everyone and the field of education is no different. Collecting data during the Covid-19 pandemic will allow for a baseline that will provide information concerning the school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

When discussing school culture Deal and Peterson (1990) stated, “it is hard to define this something, to put your finger on it, but it is extremely powerful, often neglected, and usually absent from our discussions or assumptions of how to improve schools” (p.7). The term school culture, as conceptualized today, came from the corporate world. More specifically, it was derived from management theory (Sumarni, 2017). School culture has been known to those in the corporate world for many years, but comparatively speaking it is somewhat of a new concept to those within the field of education. One of the challenges or complexities of school culture is how each school takes on its own unique culture and can differ from year to year.

A critical aspect of school culture is for school administrators to be able to identify the culture within their school and make the necessary changes. If school leaders cannot change or maintain their school culture, their opportunity for success may suffer. As Engels et al. (2008) stated, studies demonstrate the crucial influence of school principals on school culture and school culture on teachers’ functioning and wellbeing. School administrators have many responsibilities that affect the overall success of the school, but school culture can arguably be one of the most important. School culture can affect not only teachers but everyone who is involved in the education process, whether this is inside or outside of the actual school building. Principals and administrators are needed to lead educational improvement, foster effective change efforts, promote healthy relationships with stakeholders, and are central to shaping strong, professional school cultures (Deal & Peterson, 1990).

When the Covid-19 pandemic forced schools to almost instantly change their way of operating, school culture became one of the many components of a school which was new and very little if any past experiences existed to lean on in these difficult times. School culture can be

a complicated topic and one which many school administrators struggle to understand entirely and effectively. School culture is an educational sociological construct that explains the social process within a school (Sumarni, 2017). As Sumarni pointed out, school culture often deals with the social aspects of schools and this changed instantly when schools were forced into remote learning models. The relative unknown of school culture, and how it exists within a non-traditional way of delivering instruction, leaves an opportunity for school culture to be examined in a way that provides information that can help school administrators in the future should another event force our schools to be closed from in-person instruction.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

Chapter three discusses the research method used while conducting this study to examine the current culture of assessed elementary schools in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi during the Covid-19 pandemic. The tool selected to determine the current culture of assessed elementary schools in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi is a Manova (Multivariate Analysis of Variance). A Manova is a tool which is used when two or more dependent variables are used in a statistical procedure. The six factors of the School Culture Survey (SCS) will be the dependent variables and the demographic information collected will be used as the independent variables.

Preliminary Procedures

This study was designed to determine the current culture of assessed elementary schools in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi during the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, data is being collected and analyzed to provide school administrators a better understanding of the current culture within assessed elementary schools so that they make the necessary modifications as needed. The study is designed to compare specific groups within schools to determine if a significant statistical difference exists between the measured means of their view toward the current culture within their schools. The participants results will also be examined relating to the individual elements within the SCS as part of the study. The groups

which are being measured are certified elementary school staff's year of experience, highest level of education obtained, gender, and race. One of the primary purposes of this study was to provide information as to the current school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic and add to the literature which already exists.

Population and Sampling

The population used in this study is comprised of qualifying certified elementary school staff in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi. The qualifying criteria for participating elementary schools are their schools must serve students in grades pre-kindergarten to fifth grade (Mississippi Department of Education, 2021). Sampling will be done by sending out mass communications and asking for certified elementary school staff's voluntary participation. Certified elementary school staff may withdraw their participation at any point during the study. The information collected during the study will be maintained in a confidential manner on a password protected computer.

Staff Population

Convenience sampling was used to determine potential participants in the study. Creswell (2003) defined convenience sampling as selecting participants due to them being willing and able to participate in a study. As Anderson and Martin (2009) state, convenience sampling is done when the researcher wants to discover and gain insight into a subject, therefore participants should be selected who can provide accurate information.

Before participants are asked to participate in the study the superintendent, or the appropriate school official, of their respective school district will be contacted to inquire about the possibility of their school districts willingness to participate. Written permission will be

received from participating school districts before any type of communication between the researcher and potential participants occurs.

School Population Sampling

Each school district electing to participate in the study, will be asked their preferred method of communication with the teachers who will potentially be included in the study. The School Culture Survey (SCS) will be sent to potential participants via email either from the researcher or potentially from school administrators depending on the preference of each school district. If applicable, or reasonable, the researcher may communicate with potential participants to further explain the research process and answer any questions potential participants may have. This may be done by either in person interactions, emails, or by some type of video conferencing. Regardless which type of interactions occur it will be done meeting all school district guidelines concerning Covid-19 or any other type of visitor policies and procedures. Schools qualifying to participate in the study will serve students in grades pre-kindergarten to fifth grade.

Basic demographic information will be collected such as participants education level, years of experience, race, and gender. This information will be examined to identify any trends or similarities among the participants. Similarly, collecting participant's education level, years of experience, race, and gender will allow opportunities to identify if one or more group has consistent responses which are like others. While basic demographic information will be collected the confidentiality of all participants will be protected throughout the study.

Participant Recruitment and Information

Potential participants will be recruited to participate in multiple ways. Before any communication occurs, written permission will have been obtained from each school district's'

central office. Participants will receive up to three emails asking them to complete the School Culture Survey (SCS) as part of the dissertation process. When possible, school administrators will discuss this potential opportunity during common meetings such as PLCs, common planning meetings, and other occasions school administrators feel to be appropriate. Participants will be provided with the researcher's email address should they have any questions.

Basic demographic information will be collected as part of the research process. When someone chooses to participate in the study, they will access the SCS via a link sent by email. Participants' years of experience, the highest level of education obtained, race, and gender, will be collected as part of the process. The data collected will remain confidential and will not be used to identify anyone who chooses to participate. The data which is collected will be stored on a password-protected computer and any documents which are printed will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The information being collected will provide the necessary data to answer the research questions the dissertation process is examining.

Methodology

The research design is quantitative in nature and data will be collected using the School Culture Survey (SCS). According to Creswell (2003) using a quantitative survey design allows a researcher to provide a numeric description of the attitudes and opinions of a sample within a particular population. Quantitative data will be collected measuring the opinions of teachers, concerning the culture of their schools, in selected schools in the State of Mississippi. Data will be collected using the SCS and Qualtrics will be used to administer the survey to the participants. A statistically significant difference will be determined to be found with a .05 level of significance or lower.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was chosen due to its appropriateness when two or more dependent variables are included in a statistical test. Groups which were compared in the study were years of experience, the highest level of education obtained, gender, and race. The six dependent variables which will be used are the six factors of the SCS. These factors include collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership. The data collected, using Qualtrics, an online survey tool, will be entered into a spreadsheet and then transferred to SPSS to run the statistical test. The results will then be interpreted to determine if a statistically significant difference exists among the groups exists.

In this research study certified school staff will be surveyed to determine their views on the state of the culture of their schools at the time the survey is completed. Certified school staff is defined as any staff who is certified in areas such as teaching, counseling, or some type of related service such as speech-language, occupational, or physical therapy. By including all instructional-related staff members who work within a school, it will allow for an appropriate sample and will also provide information about the culture of schools in multiple instructional areas of a school not exclusively in the classroom.

Tool

The survey instrument used in this study is the School Culture Survey (SCS). This survey was first developed by (Gruenert, 1998). The SCS consists of 35 items and is a Likert-type questionnaire. The SCS responses are based on a five-point scale, which ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree. According to Gruenert, the SCS measures the six elements of a school's culture essential for fostering a positive school culture. The six factors of the survey are

Collaborative Leadership, Teacher Collaboration, Professional Development, Unity of Purpose, Collegial Support, and Learning Partnerships.

Table 2

Past use of the School Culture Survey

Name of Author	University or Organization
Philip Pearson	The University of Southern Mississippi
Tim Wagner	Southern Illinois University
Abby Standerford	Central Michigan University
Ann O’Doherty, Ed.D	The University of Texas at Austin
Gracious Msuya	St Cloud State University, Minnesota
Jeff Noe	University of Virginia
Jann Macinnes, PhD	University of Florida

Note: (J. Valentine, personal communication, March 11, 2021).

Selection of the School Culture Survey

The School Culture Survey (SCS) was selected, due to its ability to measure the possible effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on school culture. When determining which tool would be used in the study, the SCS met the criteria the researcher was looking for. The criteria sought was to find an instrument proven to be valid and reliable, one which accurately measured the culture within a school, and a tool considered to be efficient in the number of items which are required for its completion. With only 35 items in the SCS it was determined to be a survey tool which was able to be completed in a reasonable amount of time by the participants of the study.

The SCS was developed with a purpose to provide school leaders with insight toward the collaborative nature of a school’s culture (Gruenert, 1998). Insight into a school’s culture is what

the researcher was looking for when determining which tool would be used to determine if the Covid-19 pandemic influenced school culture within elementary schools in the state of Mississippi. Kitchenham (2010) pointed out that school culture has been defined using many different terms and analogies, but collaboration is one common theme often found in many of the definitions. The Covid-19 pandemic most certainly changed the way in which teachers collaborated with each other and the SCS will provide insight to the overall culture of schools with collaboration in mind. The SCS provides information which directly relates to what effect the Covid-19 pandemic had on elementary schools an important part of why this tool was chosen.

How was Permission Granted for Use

The School Culture Survey (SCS) is a tool which was created during the dissertation process by Gruenert (1998), at the University of Missouri. In order to use the SCS permission must be granted by Dr. Jerry Valentine and Dr. Steve Gruenert. On February 19, 2021, an email was sent to Dr. Jerry Valentine to inquire about the process of being granted permission to use the SCS. A copy of this email is included in Appendix G. Dr. Valentine sent the researcher an outline of the process to be granted permission to use the SCS. The process involved the researcher providing information, to Dr. Valentine, in the form of a one-page summary providing general details concerning the research project the SCS will potentially be used in.

The information which was asked to be provided consisted of several items and was to be no longer than one page. The summary consisted of the full name of the researcher's graduate advisor, the name of university, and department of the student's program of study, and an explanation of the study design. Statements of affirmation were required to ensure that all responses gathered via the SCS will be anonymous or at least confidential, all respondent's

privacy rights will be anonymous or at least confidential, and that all respondent's privacy will be protected and that no data will be used in any manner for the purposes of personnel evaluation, supervision, or employment review. The permission-granting process also included information explaining whether or not the proposed study is quantitative or mixed methods in nature, stating the population, sample, variables of the study, and the statistical test which will be used.

The request to receive permission to use the SCS occurred on March 11, 2021, and Dr. Steve Valentine and Dr. Jerry Gruenert granted approval to use the SCS on March 11, 2021. A copy of that email is included in Appendix F. Along with written permission to use the SCS, a partial list of past studies which used the SCS were provided. This partial list is included in chapter three, and the entire list is included in Appendix A. A requirement of approval is that upon completion of this study a copy of the results will be provided to Dr. Valentine and Dr. Gruenert.

Factors of School Culture Survey

As mentioned in chapter two, the School Culture Survey (SCS) consists of six factors from which the 35 total questions are derived. The six factors are Collaborative leadership, Teacher Collaboration, Professional Development, Unity of Purpose, Collegial Support, and Learning Partnerships. The number of questions in each element differs and are in random order throughout the SCS. Collaborative Leadership contains 11 different questions, Teacher Collaboration contains six different questions, Professional Development contains five different questions, Unity of Purpose contains five different questions, Collegial Support contains four different questions, and Learning Partnerships contains four different questions.

SCS Measures of Technical Adequacy

The original authors of the School Culture Survey (SCS) provided all the measures of technical adequacy and this information is included in chapter three. The validity of the SCS was measured by administering the School Climate Survey to participants simultaneously as the SCS. The School Climate Survey is an instrument which was developed by the National association of Secondary School Principals with the hope to aid schools with things such as planning, budgeting, school accreditation reports, school improvement initiatives, and research (Gruenert, 1998). By comparing the SCS to an already existing, and valid survey, Gruenert hoped to determine if the SCS could be deemed a valid instrument which measures a school's culture. When comparing the two surveys it was determined each of the six school culture factors were highly correlated with a minimum of two of the four climate factors of the School Climate Survey (Gruenert, 1998). The culture factor Collaborative Leadership correlated with Teacher-Student Relations ($r=.633$), Administration ($r=.657$), and Instructional Management ($r=.488$). The culture factor Teacher Collaboration correlated significantly with Teacher-Student Relations ($r=.532$) and Student Academic Orientation ($r=.483$). Unity of Purpose correlated significantly with all four school climate factors: Teacher-Student relationships ($r=.387$), Student Academic Orientation ($r=.485$), Administration ($r=.384$), and Instructional Management ($r=.454$). Professional Development correlations were statistically significant with two climate factors, Teacher-Student Relations ($r=.436$) and Student Academic Orientation ($r=.475$); Collegial Support was statistically significant with teacher-Student Relations ($r=.506$) and Administration ($r=.544$). Learning Partnerships was statistically significant with Student Academic Orientation ($r=.416$) and Instructional Management ($r=.439$). In summary, 15 of 24 correlations were significant at the .05 level and seven of the correlations were found to be significant at the .01

level (Mitchell, 2008). Taking the correlations between the factors of each the two surveys in consideration, the (SCS) is an appropriate and valid tool in which school culture can be measured. Cronback’s alpha was used to establish the reliability of the SCS. The six subtests of the SCS are listed below in Table 3.

Table 3

Reliability of the School Culture Survey

Subscales	Cronbach’s alpha	N
Collaborative Leadership	a= .910	11
Teacher Collaboration	a= .834	6
Professional Development	a= .821	5
Unity of Purpose	a= .867	5
Collegial Support	a= .796	4
Learning Partnership	a= .658	4

Note: Subscales and Cronback alpha values were provided by authors of SCS

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research using the School Culture Survey (SCS) will attempt to determine what effect if any the Covid-19 pandemic had on the culture of elementary schools in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi. The participants’ responses relating to the individual element of the SCS will also be examined as part of the study. The SCS is an instrument which was created using the areas of Collaborative Leadership, Teacher Collaboration, Professional Development, Collegial Support, Unity of Purpose, and Learning Partnership. The SCS provides numeric values to measure the culture of participating schools. These values will be used to

determine if a statistically significant effect exist between the groups of certified elementary school staff which are being measured. The hypotheses for the study are as follows.

H1: There is a difference between the gender of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed using the SCS survey.

H1:◦ There is no difference between the gender of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed using the SCS survey.

H2: There is a difference between the educational levels of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed using the SCS survey.

H2:◦ There is no difference between the educational levels of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed using the SCS survey.

H3: There is a difference between the years of experience of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed by the SCS survey.

H3:◦ There is no difference between the years of experience of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed by the SCS survey.

H4: There is a difference between the race of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed by the SCS survey.

H4: ◦ There is no difference between the race of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed by the SCS survey.

Research Statistical Analysis

To determine if a statistically significant difference existed between demographic groups during the Covid-19 pandemic in elementary schools in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be used. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is appropriately used due to the School Culture Survey (SCS) consisting of six factors which will also be the dependent variables in the study. The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is used when two or more dependent variables are included in a statistical test (Balkin, 2008). The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) will be used to compare demographic information the six factors of the School Culture Survey (SCS) and this data will then be used to determine if a statistically significant difference exist.

Statistical Test

Statistical tests are designed to answer the question of whether you can generalize results from one sample under observation to another sample under similar observations (Troeger, 2019). The program that will be used to run the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is called Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A significance level (or alpha level) is a probability level which reflects the maximum risk you are willing to take that any observed differences are due to chance (Crewell, 2003). To state this another way, if a probability level is set at .05, 5 out of 100 times the results will be due to chance. In this study, the significance level will be set at .05. The researcher will determine whether to reject or fail to reject the null hypothesis depending on the statistical significance of the p-value.

The groups which will be measured will be certified education staff's years of experience, the highest level of degree obtained, race, and gender. Each of these groups can provide beneficial information to school administrators concerning the culture within their schools. School administrators may be able to take the data provided by the groups and take a detailed look into how the culture of their school is perceived. By looking into these specific groups plans can be made as to how to address any issues which may arise when determining if the culture within their school is acceptable or needs to be modified.

Data collected from these groups will be transferred from Qualtrics to a spreadsheet. Once the information has been transferred into a spreadsheet the data will be then entered into SPSS and groups will be compared on an individual basis. For example, Teachers with five years or less of teaching experience will be compared to teachers who have more than five years of teaching experience. Using the results from running a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) it will then be determined whether a statistically significant difference exists between each group. This information will be maintained on a password-protected computer in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

The participants' identities will be kept confidential throughout the research process. No identifiable information will be shared with anyone who was not included in the University of Mississippi IRB application and screening process. Those who were included in the application and screening process will have completed the Collaborative IRB Training Initiative or the Abbreviated Human Subjects Training. These two pieces of training are required for all faculty, students, and staff who participate in research which involves interacting with human subjects or data that human subjects have provided.

Data, which is to be collected, will be stored on a password-protected computer in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The researcher will be the only person who has access to the password. Members of the researcher's dissertation committee may request access to the information as needed. The information gathered will be kept on a password-protected computer throughout the entirety of the study and if at any time data is printed out it will be kept in a file cabinet which will remain locked. The researcher will ensure no one has access to the printed information outside of the dissertation committee members.

Institutional Review Board Approval

The Institutional Review Board, (IRB) at the University of Mississippi is made up of faculty members from many different areas of research. The IRB's purpose and responsibility are to ensure human subjects, in research, are treated ethically and fairly. In order to gain approval from the IRB an application will be submitted. The first part of the application consists of a brief screening which determines whether you must fill out a full IRB application as opposed to an abbreviated review according to the University of Mississippi policy. When filling out the abbreviated IRB application detailed information will be provided concerning the proposed study. The abbreviated application is four pages in length and asked for information such as project title, name of the research advisor, research methodology/procedures, project summary, and assurances that no conflict of interest exists.

Once the screening form and abbreviated IRB application are completed, they will then be sent to the IRB via e-mail. The IRB reviews the information provided and makes the final determination as to whether the full application must be completed. The IRB application is included in Appendix C. Once a decision is made the IRB will then provide, in writing, their approval, or if a full application must be completed further instructions will be provided. When

full approval is granted from the IRB, the researcher will keep and make available the document, providing written permission, to answer any questions anyone may have regarding the study or whether or not it has been approved by the IRB at the University of Mississippi.

The proposed study, in the author's opinion should be exempt from The University of Mississippi's full IRB review. Taking into consideration the proposed study does not include any type of treatment study, exercise, x-rays, collection of bodily fluids, use of drugs, videotaping subjects, and the participation of pregnant women, prisoners, or children. These criteria were on the IRB screening tool in order to help applicants determine if their proposal will be required to go through the full IRB application process.

Chapter three explained the process data will be collected and analyzed for the research project. The School Culture Survey (SCS) was discussed as well as the population and sampling procedures of the research process. Information which will be collected from participants was provided along with how permission was granted to use the SCS. Measures of technical adequacy were provided along with Cronbach Alpha levels for all six of the SCS factors. The research questions which will guide the research process were provided along with the statistical test which will be used to determine the results of the research process. Chapter three provided a summary of the research process along with the process of gaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Mississippi.

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the culture of elementary schools in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has altered many of the ways in which our schools operate not only in the state of Mississippi, but across the United States. These changes have the potential to affect the culture within elementary schools in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi. Chapter four provides the results derived from the analysis of data received from the participants via an online survey called the School Culture Survey (SCS). Data was analyzed using an analysis of variance (MANOVA) and descriptive statistics were used to report the results. The statistical program which was used to perform the MANOVA was Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

A total of 129 surveys were completed by certified elementary school staff from two different school districts, both in North Mississippi. Demographic information was collected and used as the independent variables during this study. Demographic information which was collected consisted of gender, race, years of experience, and educational levels of the certified elementary school staff. The dependent variable in this study is the way certified elementary school staff feel about the culture of elementary schools in the state of Mississippi during the Covid-19 pandemic. All information which was collected was done so in a confidential manner.

No identifiable information was collected during the survey, ensuring the participants' confidentiality was protected.

Data Analysis

The research questions in this study examine selected demographic groups and their perceptions regarding the six elements of the SCS and their schools culture during the Covid-19 pandemic. The selected demographic groups are gender, educational levels, years of experience, and race within certified elementary school staff in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi. As a result of statistical tests, no significant statistical differences were found, using the limited data which was collected, regarding the demographic groups perceptions on the culture of their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. Two demographic groups results could not be included in the statistical component of this study due to a skewed number of participants. These two groups were made up of males and females along with African Americans and Caucasians. While no statistical conclusions can be made regarding these demographic groups, their responses seem to suggest they view the culture of their schools in a positive manner based on the mean scaled scores of their responses.

When examining the demographic groups years of experience and educational levels and their perceptions of their school's culture during the Covid-19 pandemic, no significant statistical differences were found using the limited data which was collected. These results suggest, regardless of the years of experience or educational levels of certified elementary school staff, no discrepancies exist as to their perceptions of their school's culture during the Covid-19 pandemic. These conclusions can be beneficial to school leaders as they make future decisions which relate to the culture of their respective schools.

The SCS is made up of six elements and each element is measured by specific questions within the survey. The specific questions which make up each element are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

School Culture Survey Elements

Elements of School Culture Survey	Questions which make up elements
Collaborative Leadership	2, 7, 11, 14, 18, 20, 22, 26, 28, 32, 34
Teacher Collaboration	3, 8, 15, 23, 29, 33
Professional Development	1, 9, 16, 24, 30
Unity of Purpose	5, 12, 19, 27, 31
Collegial Support	4, 10, 17, 25
Learning Partnerships	6, 13, 21, 35

Note: (J. Valentine, personal communication, March 11, 2021)

Questions 2 through 5, on the School Culture Survey (SCS), collected demographic information which served as the study’s dependent variables. Tables 5 through 8 provide the frequency and percentages of the participants during the data collection process regarding demographic information.

Primary data consisted of 129 certified elementary school staff responses from two school districts in north Mississippi. Tables 5 through 7 explains the frequency distribution and the demographics which made up the participants.

The participants of the study were asked to provide their gender along with other demographic information. The population of the survey consisted of 93.8% females along with 4.7% males. The other 1.5% of the study population choose to not provide their gender and selected the prefer not to say option. Taking the overwhelming discrepancy of females to males

who participated in the study into consideration, no reliable statistical results could be produced. While reliable statistical results cannot be concluded, one observation which can be made is the overwhelming percentage of females who work in the elementary schools which participated in the study. Frequencies of gender in this study are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Frequencies of Gender

Years of experience	Frequency	Percent
Male	6	4.6%
Female	121	93.7%

The years of experience of the participants was collected in the study along with other demographic information. The population of the study, regarding years of experience, was made up of 42.6% of participants who had 1 through 5 years of experience, while 57.4% of the participants had 6 plus years of experience. This demographic category is similarly represented by both categories more so than any other demographic category in the study. Frequencies of years of experience in this study are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Frequencies of Years of Experience

Years of experience	Frequency	Percent
1-5 years of experience	55	42.6%
6 plus years of experience	74	57.4%

The race of the participants was collected in the study along with other demographic information. The population of the study, regarding race, was overwhelmingly made up of Caucasians. Caucasians made up 90.7% of the population while African Americans only made up 9.3% of the population. Like Gender, the discrepancy of the demographics does not allow for any statistical conclusions to be determined. The data does provide a glimpse into the population of the elementary schools which participated in the study and suggests African Americans are underrepresented as certified elementary school staff. Frequencies of race in this study are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Frequencies of Race

Race	Frequency	Percent
Caucasian	117	90.7%
African American	12	9.3%

The educational levels of the participants were collected as demographic information to be used in the study. Participants in the study who held graduate degrees made up 41% of the study population while 59% of the participants had only a bachelor's degree. While participants with bachelor's degrees outnumbered those with graduate degrees it was by a small percentage (18%).

Table 8

Frequencies of Educational Levels

Race	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor Degree	53	41%
Graduate Degree	76	59%

Results

This study was quantitative in nature and its purpose was to investigate whether a statistically significant difference existed between certified elementary school staff perceptions of school culture, using demographic information, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Data was collected using an online program called Qualtrics. Certified school staff were emailed a link and their participation was voluntary throughout the entire process. The certified elementary school staff who participated in the study worked in schools which served students in kindergarten through sixth grade. This was due to the Mississippi Department of Education’s definition of elementary schools.

Descriptive statistics in Table 9 provide information which includes the scores for male participants on each of the six elements which make up the SCS. The SCS element which had the highest scaled score was Unity of Purpose (4.1) while the element which scaled score was the lowest was Teacher Collaboration (3.5). Unity of Purpose is defined by Gruenert (1998) as to what extent teachers work together toward a common mission for their school. These results suggest males which participated in this study believe the certified school staff within their respective schools work together to achieve a common mission for their schools.

Table 9*School Culture Survey Gender (Male) Descriptive Statistics*

Elements of School	Mean	Mean(scale)	N
Culture Survey			
Collaborative Leadership	40.1	3.6 (4)	6
Teacher Collaboration	21.0	3.5 (5)	6
Professional Development	19.9	3.9 (3)	6
Unity of Purpose	20.5	4.1 (1)	6
Collegial Support	16.2	4.0 (2)	6
Learning Partnerships	14.3	3.6 (4)	6

Descriptive statistics in Table 10 provide information which includes the scores for female participants on each of the six elements which make up the SCS. The SCS elements which had the highest scaled score was Unity of Purpose and Collegial Support (4.0) while the elements which scaled score was the lowest was Teacher Collaboration and Collaborative Leadership (3.5). Unity of Purpose is defined by Gruenert (1998) as to what extent teachers work together toward a common mission for their school. These results suggest females which participated in this study believe the certified school staff within their respective schools work together to achieve a common mission for their schools. Collegial Support is defined by Gruenert (1998) as the degree to which teachers work together effectively. These results suggest females feel strongly concerning the fact teachers are working together within their schools.

Table 10*School Culture Survey Gender (female) Descriptive Statistics*

Elements of School	Mean	Mean(scale)	N
Culture Survey			
Collaborative Leadership	38.1	3.5 (3)	121
Teacher Collaboration	20.7	3.5 (3)	121
Professional Development	19.6	3.9 (2)	121
Unity of Purpose	19.8	4.0 (1)	121
Collegial Support	16.0	4.0 (1)	121
Learning Partnerships	14.1	3.5 (3)	121

Descriptive statistics in Table 11 provide information which includes the scores of each element for participants who have one through five years of experience on each of the six elements which make up the SCS. The SCS elements which had the highest scaled score was Unity of Purpose and Collegial Support (4.0) while the elements, which scaled score was the lowest, were Teacher Collaboration and Collaborative Leadership (3.5). Unity of Purpose is defined by Gruenert (1998) as to what extent teachers work together toward a common mission for their school. These results suggest participants with one through five years of experience believe the certified school staff within their respective schools work together to achieve a common mission for their schools. Collegial Support is defined by Gruenert (1998) as the degree to which teachers work together effectively. These results suggest participants with one through five years of experience feel strongly this is happening within their schools as well.

Table 11*School Culture Survey Elements Experience level (1- 5 years) Descriptive Statistics*

Elements of School	Mean	Mean(scale)	N
Culture Survey			
Collaborative Leadership	38.3	3.5 (4)	55
Teacher Collaboration	20.7	3.5 (4)	55
Professional Development	19.7	3.9 (2)	55
Unity of Purpose	19.9	4.0 (1)	55
Collegial Support	16.2	4.0 (1)	55
Learning Partnerships	14.5	3.6 (3)	55

Descriptive statistics in Table 12 provide information which includes the scores for participants who have six or more years of experience on each of the six elements which make up the SCS. The SCS element which had the highest scaled score was Collegial Support (4.0) while the elements, which scaled score was the lowest, were Collaborative Leadership and Teacher Collaboration (3.4). Collegial Support is defined by Gruenert (1998) as the degree to which teachers work together effectively. These results suggest participants with six or more years of experience believe the certified school staff within their respective schools work together effectively.

Table 12*School Culture Survey Elements Experience level (6 or more years) Descriptive Statistics*

Elements of School	Mean	Mean(scale)	N
Culture Survey			
Collaborative Leadership	37.9	3.4 (4)	74
Teacher Collaboration	20.5	3.4 (4)	74
Professional Development	19.4	3.9 (2)	74
Unity of Purpose	19.4	3.9 (2)	74
Collegial Support	15.9	4.0 (1)	74
Learning Partnerships	13.9	3.5 (3)	74

Descriptive statistics in Table 13 provide information which includes the scores of each element for Caucasian participants on each of the six elements which make up the SCS. The SCS elements which had the highest scaled score were Professional Development and Unity of Purpose (3.9) while the elements, whose scaled score was the lowest, was Collaborative Leadership (3.4). Professional Development is defined by Gruenert (1998) as the degree to which teachers value continuous personal development and school-wide improvement. These results suggest Caucasian participants believe the certified school staff within their respective schools value personal development and the improvement of the school in which they work. Unity of Purpose is defined by Gruenert (1998) as to the extent which teachers work toward a common mission for their school. These results suggest Caucasian participants believe the certified school staff within their respective schools work towards a common mission in their schools.

Table 13*School Culture Survey Race (Caucasian) Descriptive Statistics*

Elements of School	Mean	Mean(scale)	N
Culture Survey			
Collaborative Leadership	37.9	3.4 (5)	117
Teacher Collaboration	21.6	3.6 (3)	117
Professional Development	19.5	3.9 (2)	117
Unity of Purpose	19.6	3.9 (2)	117
Collegial Support	16.0	4.0 (1)	117
Learning Partnerships	14.0	3.5 (4)	117

Descriptive statistics in Table 14 provide information which includes the scores of each element for African American participants on each of the six elements which make up the SCS. The SCS elements which had the highest scaled score were Professional Development, Unity of Purpose, and Collegial Support (4.0) while the element which scaled score was the lowest was Teacher Collaboration (3.5). Professional Development is defined by Gruenert (1998) as the degree to which teachers value continuous personal development and school-wide improvement. These results suggest African American participants believe the certified school staff within their respective schools value personal development and the improvement of the school in which they work. Unity of Purpose is defined by Gruenert as to the extent which teachers work towards a common mission for their school. These results suggest African American participants believe the certified school staff within their respective schools work towards a common mission. Collegial Support is defined by Gruenert as the degree to which teachers work together

effectively. These results suggest African American participants feel as though certified school staff within their respective schools work together effectively.

Table 14

School Culture Survey Race (African American) Descriptive Statistics

Elements of School	Mean	Mean(scale)	N
Culture Survey			
Collaborative Leadership	39.7	3.6 (3)	12
Teacher Collaboration	21.2	3.5 (4)	12
Professional Development	19.5	4.0 (1)	12
Unity of Purpose	20.1	4.0 (1)	12
Collegial Support	16.3	4.0 (1)	12
Learning Partnerships	15.1	3.8 (2)	12

Descriptive statistics in Table 15 provide information which includes the scores for participants who hold an undergraduate degree on each of the six elements which make up the SCS. The SCS elements which had the highest scaled score were Professional Development, Unity of Purpose, and Collegial Support (3.9) while the element which scaled score was the lowest was Teacher Collaboration (3.4). Professional Development is defined by Gruenert (1998) as the degree to which teachers value continuous personal development and school-wide improvement. These results suggest participants who hold an undergraduate degree believe the certified school staff within their respective schools value personal development and the improvement of the school in which they work. Unity of Purpose is defined by Gruenert as to the extent which teachers work toward a common mission for their school. These results suggest

participants who hold an undergraduate degree believe the certified school staff within their respective schools work towards a common mission. Collegial Support is defined by Gruenert as the degree to which teachers work together effectively. These results suggest participants who hold an undergraduate degree feel as though certified school staff within their respective schools work together effectively.

Table 15

School Culture Survey Elements Undergraduate Degree Descriptive Statistics

Elements of School	Mean	Mean(scale)	N
Culture Survey			
Collaborative Leadership	38.2	3.5 (2)	53
Teacher Collaboration	20.5	3.4 (3)	53
Professional Development	19.5	3.9 (1)	53
Unity of Purpose	19.7	3.9 (1)	53
Collegial Support	15.9	3.9 (1)	53
Learning Partnerships	14.1	3.5 (2)	53

Descriptive statistics in Table 16 provide information which includes the scores for participants who hold a graduate degree on each of the six elements which make up the SCS. The SCS element which had the highest scaled score was Teacher Collaboration (3.5) while the element which scaled score was the lowest was Collaborative Leadership (2.0). Teacher Collaboration is defined by Gruenert (1998) as the degree school leaders develop and maintain collaborative relationships with staff members. These results suggest participants who hold a

graduate degree in this study believe the administrators within their schools maintain positive relationships with the staff members.

Table 16

School Culture Survey Elements Graduate Degree Descriptive Statistics

Elements of School	Mean	Mean(scale)	N
Culture Survey			
Collaborative Leadership	38.0	2.0 (6)	76
Teacher Collaboration	20.7	3.5 (1)	76
Professional Development	19.5	3.0 (3)	76
Unity of Purpose	19.7	3.1 (2)	76
Collegial Support	16.2	2.1 (5)	76
Learning Partnerships	14.1	2.8 (4)	76

The research questions in this study asked, if the perceptions, regarding the six elements of the SCS, of identified demographic groups differ as it relates to the culture of their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of the study provided no significant statistical differences, using the limited data which was collected, as it relates to demographic groups and their perceptions on the culture of their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. This said, the results provided do provide school leaders with important information, regarding the culture of their schools. With all the changes and added responsibilities certified school staff members have been given, recognizing how their feelings about the culture of their schools stand to benefit schools' leaders making decisions which may affect the culture within their respective schools.

Summary

H1: There is a difference between the gender of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed using the SCS survey.

H1:◦ There is no difference between the gender of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed using the SCS survey.

H2: There is a difference between the educational levels of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed using the SCS survey.

H2:◦ There is no difference between the educational levels of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed using the SCS survey.

H3: There is a difference between the years of experience of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed by the SCS survey.

H3:◦ There is no difference between the years of experience of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed by the SCS survey.

H4: There is a difference between the race of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of the six elements of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed by the SCS survey.

H4: o There is no difference between the race of certified elementary school staff and the perceptions of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic as assessed by the SCS survey.

To determine if a statistically significant difference existed between the independent and dependent variables a MANOVA analysis was used. A MANOVA was used to determine whether a statistically significant statistical difference existed between certified elementary school staff's perceptions of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic and identifiable demographic groups. The demographic information which was collected and compared to the certified elementary school staff's perception of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic were gender, race, educational levels, and years of experience of the certified elementary school staff who participated in the study.

The results of the study indicated no statistically significant difference, using the limited data which was collected, existed among demographic groups and their perceptions of the current culture of their school's culture during the Covid-19 pandemic. While no statistically significant differences could be derived from the study, when examining the mean scaled scores of the participants, it seems as though, overall, the participants feel as though the culture within their respective schools is positive as opposed to negative. This conclusion was reached by examining the six elements of the School Culture Survey (SCS) and the mean scaled scores of the participants.

Statistical Conclusions Concerning Males and Females

While determining the results of Hypothesis 1, a reliable determination could not be made due to the skewed number of participants in the study. Hypothesis 1 examined whether the gender of certified school staff affected their perceptions of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic. As Table 5 points out, only 6 out of the 129 participants were males. The remainder of

the participants were females. Due to the large discrepancy between female (N=121) and male (N=6) participants, no reliable statistical information could be produced. Rusticus and Lovato (2014) state when sample sizes were equal, the power of the statistical test was not impacted; however, when the population of a study is skewed this decreases the power of the results. Considering the skewed number of participants, no reliable results can be derived from the statistical test which was conducted examining if the gender of certified school staff affects their perceptions of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic.

As discussed previously, no reliable statistical conclusions can be derived from this study due to the skewed nature of the participants in Hypothesis 1, however; generalizations can be discussed in broad terms. Each item in the School Culture Survey (SCS) was answered using a Likert-type format ranging from one through five. When examining the mean scaled scores of males in Table 9, each mean averaged over 3.5 on a scale of five, with five being strongly agree and one being strongly disagree. These results seem to suggest certified school staff, who are male, view the culture of their school during the Covid-19 pandemic in a more positive manner as opposed to a negative one. The element which averaged the highest scaled score was Unity of Purpose (4.1) and the element which averaged the lowest scaled score was both Learning Partnerships (3.6) and Collaborative Leadership (3.6).

Statistical Conclusions Concerning Educational Levels

While determining the results of Hypothesis 2, no statistically significant differences were found using the limited amount of data collected. Hypothesis 2 seeks to determine if the educational level of certified elementary school staff affects their perception of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the results generated by the statistical test,

regardless of the educational level of certified elementary school staff, their view of the culture of their school during the Covid-19 pandemic does not differ in a statistically significant manner.

Each element of the SCS was measured using a MANOVA and all the p-values were above .05 which is the level of significance used in this study. The element with the smallest p-value was Learning Partnerships (.29) and the element with the largest p-value was Teacher Collaboration (.83). No significant statistical differences, using the p-values provided below, were found.

Table 17
School Culture Survey Educational Levels of certified school staff

Elements of School Culture Survey	P-value	Degrees of Freedom
Collaborative Leadership	.76 (5)	1
Teacher Collaboration	.83 (6)	1
Professional Development	.68 (3)	1
Unity of Purpose	.54 (2)	1
Collegial Support	.72 (4)	1
Learning Partnerships	.29 (1)	1

Statistical Conclusions Concerning Years of Experience

While determining the results of Hypothesis 3, no statistically significant differences were found, using the limited amount of data collected. Hypothesis 3 seeks to determine if the years of experience of certified elementary school staff affects their perception of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the results generated by the statistical test, regardless of the years of experience of certified elementary school staff, their view on the

culture of their school during the Covid-19 pandemic does not differ in a statistically significant manner.

Each element of the SCS was measured using a MANOVA and all the p-values were above .05 which is the level of significance used in this study. The element with the smallest p-value was Learning Partnerships (.21) and the element with the largest p-value was Collaborative Leadership (.78). No statistical difference, using the p-values provided in table 18, was found which suggests regardless of the years of experience a certified elementary school staff has, their views on school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic do not differ statistically.

Table 18

School Culture Survey Years of Experience

Elements of School Culture Survey	P-value	Degrees of Freedom
Collaborative Leadership	.78 (6)	1
Teacher Collaboration	.77 (5)	1
Professional Development	.66 (4)	1
Unity of Purpose	.38 (2)	1
Collegial Support	.64 (3)	1
Learning Partnerships	.21 (1)	1

Statistical Conclusions concerning Males and Females

While determining the results of Hypothesis 4, a reliable determination could not be made due to the skewed number of participants in the study. Hypothesis 4 examined whether the race of certified elementary school staff affected their perceptions of school culture during the

Covid-19 pandemic. As Table 7 shows, only 12 of the 129 participants were African Americans. The remainder of the participants were Caucasian. Due to the large discrepancy between Caucasians (N=117) and African Americans (N=12) no reliable statistical information could be produced.

As discussed previously, no reliable statistical conclusions can be derived from this study due to the skewed nature of the participants in Hypothesis 4, however; generalizations can be discussed. Each item in the (SCS) was answered using a Likert-type format ranging from one through five. When examining the mean scaled scores of Caucasians in Table 13, each mean averaged over 3.4 on a scale of 5 with five being strongly agree and one being strongly disagree. These results seem to suggest certified elementary school staff, who are Caucasian, view the culture of their school during the Covid-19 pandemic in a more positive manner as opposed to a negative one.

Conclusion

While no significant statistical differences were found, using the limited data which was collected, when comparing demographic groups and how they view the culture in their school during the Covid-19 pandemic, many observations can be made. A discrepancy exists among certified school staff members' race in the elementary schools which participated in this study. Due to the discrepancy in the participants' population, no statistical conclusions could be produced for the demographic group's race and gender. During the study only two school districts participated, however; the number of Caucasians versus African Americans is an area where future opportunities exist to further examine the effects of such large discrepancies in our elementary schools.

Another area of the study which no statistical conclusions could be determined, due to a large discrepancy in the population was gender. The population of the survey consisted of 121 males, 6 females, and 2 participants who choose not to reveal their gender. Like race, the demographic area of gender did not provide any statistical conclusions, but general observations can be made regarding the potential future research which explores if such a large discrepancy exists throughout other elementary schools in the state of Mississippi.

While no significant statistical differences were found in this study the data gathered does provide a glimpse into how certified school staff feels about their school's culture during the Covid-19 pandemic. Regardless of the demographic groups measured in the study, no apparent differences existed when comparing their views on how they view their school's culture during the Covid-19 pandemic. The responses which were provided seemed to suggest participants overall have a more positive than negative outlook on the culture of their school during the Covid-19 pandemic.

CHAPTER V

Summary and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the culture of elementary schools in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi during the Covid-19 pandemic. Demographic information of each participant was collected during the study and used to determine if a statistically significant difference existed as to how they felt about the culture of their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants responses as it relates to specific elements in the SCS were also used in this study to provide data which may be used to better understand the culture within their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of the study found no statistically significant differences in the way the identified demographic groups viewed the culture of their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The culture of a school can be one of the most important components of a school's success or lack thereof (Gruenert,1998). With this in mind, and the way in which the Covid-19 pandemic effected schools across north Mississippi, examining the culture of schools during the Covid-19 pandemic creates opportunities for educators to determine how the many changes the past three years have impacted the culture within the elementary schools in north Mississippi. When educators consider the possible changes during the Covid-19 pandemic, they can then make the necessary modifications or adjustments to ensure the culture within their school is a positive one.

Being familiar with the current state of school culture is vital due to the nature of how important a positive school culture is to the success of students in which the schools serve (Fullan, 2001). This is true regardless of when the culture of one's school is being examined but taking into consideration all the changes and disruptions the Covid-19 pandemic caused it can be more important than ever. As Ohlson et al. (2016) pointed out, a school with a positive culture is more likely to have higher attendance rates, fewer suspensions, and increased student achievement as opposed to schools with a negative culture. This statement reinforces the importance of this study and how the results can be used to better guide educators in making decisions which effect the culture of their schools in the future.

Educational Perspectives Change During the Covid-19 Pandemic

When changes occur teachers are the ones who are most likely to be affected the greatest in their everyday routines, but they often have a minimal amount of input as to how the changes will be implemented (Beck, 2014). The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze information which provides a glimpse of the current culture of the elementary schools in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi during the Covid-19 pandemic. With the sudden and unexpected changes schools experienced the past three years it is important for educators to have an idea of where the culture of our schools are functioning at the current time.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, certified elementary school staff were put into positions they most likely had never been in before. Things such as taking students' temperatures, creating and maintaining seating charts, and preparing extra assignments for students who may be quarantined are a few examples, but certainly, others exist. Taking into consideration all the changes and additional duties many certified elementary school staff experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic it is important for educators in Mississippi to gain an understanding of the

current school culture. With the many changes and additional duties within schools, it is reasonable to think the perspectives of certified elementary staff may reflect this change in a negative way.

When examining the data collected and analyzed during this study, it appears the certified elementary school staff within the schools which participated have more of a positive perspective than a negative one. When the results of the study were analyzed regardless of the demographic group which is examined the mean scaled scores are more positive than negative. The two demographic groups which can provide statistical results were years of experience and educational levels of the certified elementary school staff. These two demographic groups, according to the statistical results, do not have a negative perspective regarding the culture of their schools currently.

The two demographic groups which data could not be used, due to a skewed number of participants, also appear to not have a negative perspective of the culture of their school during the Covid-19 pandemic. These results were discussed in greater detail in chapter three, but in general terms, the mean scaled scores for Caucasians, African Americans, males, and females suggest their perspectives favor a more positive culture as opposed to a negative culture regardless of all the changes and additional duties which have occurred over the past three years during the Covid-19 pandemic. While no statistical conclusions could be reached during this study for these demographic groups, using the data provided in a summative manner can be helpful to educational leaders as they determine the culture of their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Lesinger et al. (2018) pointed out a positive school culture has the potential to solve a lot of problems which exist in a school and can also be used to build trust among the many different

staff members who work within a school. The above-mentioned results, regarding the perspectives of certified elementary school staff's feelings concerning school culture, can be useful to school leaders and guide their decisions as to how to best move forward with the cultures within their respective schools. Educational leaders are the driving force behind the culture of their schools, and they must be intentional in the decisions they make along with the behaviors which they model for the staff members within their schools (Fullan, 2001). The information provided concerning the perspectives of the certified elementary school staff and their views on the culture of their schools can be a potential tool for educational leaders to use to better guide their decisions moving forward in the future.

School Change During Covid-19 Pandemic

LaFrance and Beck (2014) state teachers, school administrators, and the education system, in general, seemed to face never-ending disruptions and changes under normal circumstances. The Covid-19 pandemic most certainly brought about its own disruptions and changes to schools across the country and in particular elementary schools throughout the state of Mississippi. Fullan (2001) pointed out, educational leaders must be able to operate during uncertain and complex times.

The Covid-19 pandemic presented itself as both complex and uncertain. The Covid-19 pandemic caused school leaders to be forced into doing things they had never done before. The results from this study have the potential to be beneficial to school administrators as they make decisions concerning the culture of their schools in the future. With more data being available school administrators will benefit from using the data to guide their decisions.

School Operations During the Covid-19 Pandemic

While the operations of schools were changed significantly, school administrators were still tasked with providing a meaningful educational experience for their students regardless of if this occurred in person, virtually, or via some type of hybrid model during the Covid-19 pandemic. As Sumarni (2017) points out when staff members feel valued and appreciated, they are more likely to become better teachers which leads to greater student success. The results of this study suggest the certified school staff feel as though the culture within their schools is more of a positive one than a negative one. No statistically significant differences were found because of the statistical test, however; when examining the results from each statistical test, in tables 10 through 18 most elements scores were closer to a positive one as opposed to a negative one. In general terms, this seems to suggest certified elementary school staff believe the cultures within their respective schools are positive and their school administrators have been successful in creating a positive collaborative culture during the Covid-19 pandemic.

With the seemingly positive mean scaled scores by all the demographic groups, it stands to reason that certified school staff have positive views concerning the culture of their respective schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. With this said, school administrators would benefit from being aware of their responses and how they may view the culture within their respective schools.

The mean scaled scores for male participants were all above 3.5 on a 5-point scale with five representing the most positive views and one representing the least positive view on the culture of their respective schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. While there were only six male participants the results in general terms slightly favor more of a positive view on school culture rather than a negative one. When looking at the mean scaled scores for the female

participants, no mean scaled score went below a 3.5 like the male participants. The mean scaled scores for males and females were similar and both suggest they view the culture of their schools in a positive manner. While the demographic group which is made up of males and females could not be used in the statistical aspect of the study, in general terms it seems both males and females view the culture of their school positively during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Transitions and School Culture During the Covid-19 Pandemic

The School Culture Survey (SCS), as discussed previously, is based on six elements and measures school culture through a lens of collaboration (Gruenert,1998). With so many uncertainties and unfamiliar tasks becoming reality, certified elementary school staff and their perspectives on the culture of their schools is a topic which can be beneficial to school leaders and those involved in the process of making decisions which may affect the operations within schools. The results of this study suggest certified elementary school staff do not differ when it comes to their views on the culture of their schools. When this is taken into consideration school leaders may find this helpful when determining how circumstances like this affect the staff perspectives on the culture of their schools during unexpected events which cause sudden and unanticipated changes.

As one school leader stated, during the Covid-19 pandemic cultivating a culture of collaboration and trust became one of our most important tasks early on while we transitioned to an online learning model (Justis et al., 2020). When the Covid-19 pandemic forced schools to adopt an online learning model, this was something which had never transpired before in more schools than not. With all the unexpected tasks, changes, and additional duties suddenly assigned to certified school staff, it stands to reason trust and collaboration would be two key aspects of how they move forward and best serve their students during this unprecedented time.

Collaborative Leadership Implications

Waldron and McLeskey (2010) pointed out successful school change is often dependent on school administrators' ability to foster collaborative relationships among the staff members within their schools. The Covid-19 pandemic forced many different changes and created additional responsibilities for certified elementary school staff. One key component of their success is the way in which they worked together. When teachers work together, they are more likely to be successful in forming a Professional Learning Community and the quality of teaching will improve throughout their school (Little, 2002).

With the many new task and responsibilities added to certified elementary school staff's plate, it stands to reason educational leaders would benefit from examining the results of this study as it relates to the identified demographic groups and how they felt about collaborative leadership in their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. Certified school staff with one through five years of experience responded in a way which suggest they believe collaborative leadership is occurring within their schools. Certified elementary school staff with six or more years of experience also responded in a way which suggest they also feel as though collaborative leadership is occurring within their schools. This information can be useful to school leaders as they make decisions in the future as they can be aware of the fact during the Covid-19 pandemic no statistically significant difference existed among certified elementary school staff as it relates to their years of experience

While no statistical test could be conducted, due to a skewed population of African American and Caucasian participants, overall, the responses provided by these two demographic groups suggest they believe collaborative leadership is occurring within their respective schools as well. Similarly, no statistical test could be conducted due to a skewed population in the

demographic group of male and female participants. Comparably, to African American and Caucasian participants, their responses to the survey suggest they also believe collaborative leadership is occurring within their schools. While these two demographic groups could not produce statistical conclusions, educational leaders stand to benefit from looking at their responses in general terms and using this information as they make decisions which may affect the way in which collaborative leadership is occurring within their schools.

Teacher Collaboration Implications

The teaching and learning process is often improved when teachers work together and participate in tasks such as examining new teaching concepts, participating actively in professional development, and identifying and recognizing differences in the way in which others carry out their teaching styles (Little, 2002). When teachers work together, they are more likely to be successful and improve the teaching and learning process not only within their individual classrooms but also throughout the entire school in which they work. For these reasons, educational leaders would benefit from using the results from this study, while determining to what extent teacher collaboration is occurring within their respective schools.

The Covid-19 pandemic created many additional tasks which certified elementary school staff members were required to take on. These staff members were already faced with limited time and adding yet additional responsibilities had the potential to affect the way they felt about the collaborative culture within their schools. Educational leaders stand to benefit by using the results of this study when making decisions concerning teacher collaboration and how that may or may not be happening within their schools. Lee and Li (2015) pointed out one of the keys to success for schools is to ensure they have a positive school culture due to the influence school

culture has on the teaching and learning process. This statement further supports the importance of teachers working together which is one of the six elements of the SCS.

With certified elementary school staff's already busy schedule, and the additional duties the Covid-19 pandemic forced them to undertake, teacher collaboration is an area of a school's culture which should be examined. Certified school staff with one through five years of experience responded in such a way which suggest they feel as though teacher collaboration is occurring in a positive manner within their respective schools. Certified elementary school staff with six or more years of experience also responded in a manner which suggests they believe teacher collaboration is occurring in a positive way within their respective schools.

Similar results were found when looking at the statistical test from participants and comparing those who have graduate degrees and undergraduate degrees. No statistical differences were found in the response of the two groups. The two groups' responses do seem to suggest they believe teacher collaboration is occurring within their schools in a more positive manner than a negative one.

While no statistical test could be conducted due to the skewed population of African American and Caucasian participants, in general terms the responses provided by these participants suggest they feel as though teacher collaboration is occurring within their schools in a positive manner as opposed to a negative one. No statistical conclusions could be determined when examining male and female responses due to a skewed number of female participants versus male. The responses from male and female participants do suggest, in general terms, they feel as though teacher collaboration is occurring within their schools in a more positive manner as opposed to a negative one.

Professional Development Implications

According to Mitchel (2008), a school with a positive culture is more likely to support the professional growth of the staff members through professional development opportunities.

Castro Garces and Martinez Granada (2016) stated teachers' professional development experiences are an important factor in creating more educators who are reflective and able to work on teams which find solutions to problems within their classrooms and within their schools. These two statements support the importance of professional development within schools and the benefits the results of this study may provide to educational leaders.

Professional development has traditionally consisted of in-person training where certified elementary school staff sits in place, listening and participating in some type of preparation. When the Covid-19 pandemic forced schools to operate in a remote and/or hybrid model, it stands to reason that school leaders didn't place professional development opportunities at the top of their list of priorities. When schools returned to in-person classes there continued to be an emphasis on participating in virtual professional development as to help reduce the spread of Covid-19 among staff members and students. Considering all the challenges and changes as it relates to professional development and the Covid-19 pandemic it is important to gain an understanding of how certified elementary school staff feels about professional development during the Covid-19 pandemic.

While no statistical conclusions could be derived from the male and female demographic group due to a skewed number of participants in the study, one can draw general conclusions from their responses. When looking at the responses of males and females regarding how they view professional development in their schools the results seem to suggest both demographic groups feel as though their respective schools are successful in providing positive professional

development experiences. School leaders can benefit from being familiar with these results considering how important professional development is to schools and their success.

Certified elementary school staff with one through five years of experience responded in a way which suggests they feel as though professional development is happening successfully within their respective schools. Similarly, certified elementary school staff members with six or more years of experience responded in a way which suggests they also view professional development as happening successfully in their respective schools. While there were no statistically significant differences found between certified elementary school staff's years of experience, it does stand to reason school leaders would benefit from knowing their responses seem to suggest they feel the professional development experiences within their schools currently are positive ones.

Similarly, to male and female participants, the demographic group made up of Caucasians and African Americans could produce no statistical conclusions due to a skewed population. While no statistical results can be provided regarding this demographic group, the study can look at the responses of Caucasians and African Americans in general terms. The results of the survey seem to suggest this demographic group feels as though school leaders within their respective schools are providing positive professional development experiences.

When comparing certified elementary school staff who have undergraduate and graduate degrees, no statistically significant differences were found. When looking at the mean scaled scores of these two demographic groups, the results seem to suggest both groups feel as though professional development is occurring in a more positive manner in their schools as opposed to a negative one. These outcomes, along with the above-mentioned results, regarding professional

development, have the potential to be beneficial to school administrators as they make decisions in the future and how they will carry out their professional development programs.

Unity of Purpose Implications

When teachers work towards a common or unified mission in their schools this is known as unity of purpose (Gruenert,1998). The Covid-19 pandemic caused many changes throughout schools, but teachers working together may have been more important than ever. With so many additional responsibilities and nontraditional ways of doing things becoming the norm, teachers collaborating and assisting each other navigate the new way of doing things was potentially an important aspect of their success or lack thereof. Considering the importance of teachers working together to solve new problems and create new ways of doing things, educational leaders can benefit from the results of the study regarding the unity of purpose and how the identified demographic groups responded.

Teachers will work together naturally when a positive culture exists due to their understanding of how important collaboration is to the teaching and learning process of their schools (Kelly et al., 2018). Educational leaders would be wise to use the results of this study, regarding the unity of purpose and the different demographic groups which participated. Certified elementary school staff who participated, overall, found unity of purpose is a part of their respective school in a positive and meaningful way. When comparing certified elementary staff and their years of experience, no significant statistical differences were found. Both demographic groups, certified elementary school staff with one through five years of experience and six or more years of experience seem to feel as though unity of purpose is occurring in a positive manner as opposed to a negative one within their respective schools.

While no statistical conclusions could be made when comparing Caucasians and African Americans, due to a skewed number of participants, when looking at their responses the results seem to suggest these demographic groups feel as though unity of purpose is a positive component of their respective schools. This stands to benefit school leaders if they use these results to guide their decisions in the future concerning how teachers work together in their schools towards a common mission.

Similarly, to the demographic group Caucasians and African Americans, when comparing the responses of male and female participants no statistical conclusions could be made due to a skewed population in the number of participants. The responses of male and females seem to suggest both groups of participants feel as though teachers are working together effectively as it relates to a common mission within their respective schools. These results can serve as an important tool for school leaders as they make decisions in the future as to unity of purpose and how this is occurring or not occurring successfully within their schools. Taking into consideration all the changes and uncertainty the Covid-19 pandemic caused, teachers working together towards a common mission within their schools is an area which stands to benefit teachers and students alike.

When comparing certified elementary school staff and if they hold an undergraduate or graduate degree, no significant statistical differences were found as it relates to how they view unity of purpose within their schools. When looking at the responses of the participants in this demographic group, the results suggest unity of purpose is occurring in a more positive manner as opposed to a negative one in their respective schools. The mean scaled scores of these two participants were used to make this determination. With all the changes the Covid-19 pandemic

caused, being aware of how participants feel about unity of purpose can benefit educational leaders and their decisions in the future.

Collegial Support Implications

Collegial support is defined as the degree to which teachers work together effectively (Gruenert,1998). Collegial support may involve teachers assisting each other with developing lesson plans, altering instructional strategies, or creating classroom management plans. All these mentioned activities effect the teaching and learning process and its effectiveness, therefore collegial support is an element of this study which can provide meaningful information as to how the interworking's of the participating schools are occurring. When teachers work together to improve their teaching, or any other part of their daily responsibilities, the students they teach are more likely to be better served and successful.

No statistical conclusions could be derived from the demographic group which was made up of males and females due to the skewed number of participants. While no statistical conclusions could be made, the responses of the participants can be examined in general terms. The responses of these participants seem to suggest male and female participants feel as though collegial support is occurring in a more positive than a negative manner in their respective schools. The mean scaled scores suggest they feel as though teachers are working together effectively in their schools.

When comparing certified elementary school staff's years of experience, no significant statistical conclusions can be made. The participants' responses seem to suggest both certified elementary school staff who have one through five years of experience and certified elementary school staff with six or more years of experience feel as though collegial support is occurring successfully within their schools. While taking into consideration all the new responsibilities and

new ways of doing things created by the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers working together could prove to be beneficial to everyone involved including educational leaders. Educational leaders can use this information to guide their future decisions which may affect any components of collegial support.

The demographic group which consisted of Caucasians and African Americans could not produce any statistical conclusions due to a skewed number of participants. When examining the participants' results in general terms, the results seem to suggest both Caucasian and African American participants feel as though collegial support is occurring within their respective schools in a more positive manner as opposed to a negative one. This can be an important piece of information for educational leaders as they make decisions in the future regarding the components of collegial support within their schools.

No significant statistical differences were found when examining the demographic group which consists of certified elementary school staff with undergraduate degrees and certified elementary school staff with graduate degrees. While the level of degree earned did not produce any significant statistical differences, the results from the participants did seem to suggest they feel as though collegial support is occurring within their respective schools in a more positive manner as opposed to a negative one. This along with the other above-mentioned demographic groups results provide a summary which suggests collegial support is viewed as a positive attribute within the participant's school. As mentioned previously, the Covid-19 pandemic changed many of the daily operations for certified elementary school staff. The results of this study can provide valuable information to school leaders as it relates to how teachers are working together during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Learning Partnerships Implications

Learning partnerships describe the degree to which stakeholders work together for the common good of the students within a school (Gruenert, 1998). Learning partnerships are unique in they are made up of people within the school and outside of the school. Smith et al., (2010) state, there are numerous benefits of parents being involved in the education process. When the Covid-19 pandemic forced schools to make changes, it also changed the way parents and members of a community were able to interact with their child's schools. No longer were parents and community members allowed to come inside schools regularly and interact and assist. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many schools only allowed parents and stakeholders into their buildings for special occasions if they were allowed inside the buildings at all.

No statistical conclusions could be made from the demographic group which consists of males and females due to the skewed numbers of participants. The responses from the male and female participants, their mean scaled scores particularly, do seem to suggest they view learning partnerships as happening positively within their respective schools. With so many changes brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, it stands to reason that school leaders would be wise to use this information while making decisions which affect those within their schools working together with stakeholders to better the educational experience for all students.

Certified elementary school staff with one through five years of experience responded in a way which suggests they feel as though learning partnerships are occurring positively within their school. Certified elementary school staff with six or more years of experience also responded in such a way which suggests they believe learning partnerships are occurring in their schools in a positive way as opposed to a negative one. While no statistically significant differences were found when comparing certified elementary school staff with one through five

years of experience to those who have six or more years of experience, it should be noted their responses have the potential to provide results which can be useful in guiding future decisions as it relates to how stakeholders and certified elementary staff are working together.

When examining the demographic group made up of African Americans and Caucasian participants, no statistical conclusions could be made due to the skewed numbers of participants. While no statistical conclusions could be derived, the responses from African American and Caucasian participants can be viewed in general terms. The responses provided seem to suggest this demographic group feels as though learning partnerships are occurring positively within their respective schools.

No statistically significant differences were found when comparing certified elementary school staff who have undergraduate degrees versus those who have graduate degrees. Their responses seem to suggest they feel as though learning partnerships are occurring positively in their respective schools. This information has the potential to be beneficial to school leaders as they make decisions regarding how school staff and stakeholders are working together for the good of the students within their schools. With the many changes and challenges the Covid-19 pandemic has presented schools, having stakeholders involved can be viewed as a positive sign. While not statistically significant, findings were produced while examining learning partnerships, overall, the responses of the participants suggest learning partnerships are occurring in a positive manner within the participating schools.

Limitations

Statistical limitations existed within this study. When developing this study, the original plan was to include enough schools to provide a representation of school districts throughout the state of Mississippi. While many school districts were asked to participate in the study, only two

were willing to allow their certified elementary school staff to complete the School Culture Survey (SCS) regarding school culture and the Covid-19 pandemic. The two school districts which agreed to participate in this study were both located in the same geographical region of the state of Mississippi, which limits the representation of a bigger portion of the state of Mississippi.

The Covid-19 pandemic was a once-in-a-lifetime event and does not have definite beginning and end dates. While the changes brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic are still being felt today in many schools, a sense of normalcy has returned in others. For the purposes of this study, the Covid-19 pandemic covered a timeframe beginning in March 2020 and lasted until May of 2022. While this is not exact or ideal, considering the uniqueness and complexities of the Covid-19 pandemic, it provides a timeframe which allows the study to provide information from a particular timeframe during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Another limitation of the study was the skewed number of participants regarding the demographic groups of males, females, African Americans, and Caucasians. The skewed population of each group did not allow for any statistical test to be completed; therefore, no statistical conclusions could be derived. The results provided by each of these demographic groups were discussed in general terms, which allowed for some data to be provided, but it is not as complete as statistical data.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine the culture of elementary schools, using certified school staff in two school districts in adjoining counties in North Mississippi during the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants responses as it relates to specific elements in the SCS were also used in this study to provide data which may be used to better understand the culture within their

schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. While certified school staff were the focus of this study, future studies may focus on different populations such as school administrators and paraprofessionals. Opportunities exist to gain a better understanding of how all school staff feel about the culture of their schools not simply one population, such as certified elementary school staff.

Another recommendation from this study is to include secondary schools in a similar study to determine if elementary school staff and secondary school staff are similar in the way they view the culture of their schools. While the Covid-19 pandemic brought about unforeseen changes to all schools, secondary educators faced different challenges and changes simply based on the structure and makeup of the different ways elementary school and secondary schools operate. This may be important as secondary students typically have multiple teachers as opposed to elementary students as they swap classes more frequently.

The number of female participants compared to the number of male participants is another area which has the potential for further studies. As previously mentioned, no statistical determinations could be made regarding this demographic group due to the skewed number of participants. While only two school districts participated in this study, it stands to reason to ask the following question: Is there a large discrepancy throughout the state of Mississippi's elementary schools? With the female demographic group being the more populated one, future studies would be beneficial to determine if elementary schools within the state of Mississippi may need to focus on recruiting more male staff in their elementary schools.

The state of Mississippi has struggled with teacher retention in the past. Considering school culture has been at a minimum identified as one variable which leads teachers to leave the profession the results from this study can provide information which provides valuable insight as

to at least one variable in the equation. Obviously a more thorough and detailed study would be needed to determine if there is any type of correlation as it relates to teachers leaving the profession and the culture within their schools. The results of this study seem to suggest in a very small sample size the culture within the participating schools is more positive than negative across the identified demographic groups.

Finally, including more schools throughout the state of Mississippi would be helpful in providing data which could be more representative of a bigger portion of the state of Mississippi. This study provides useful information from two school districts which are both in the northeast portion of the state. If more schools throughout the state would agree to participate in future studies, demographic regions of the state could be compared and other areas such as schools serving specific populations could be included as well. Many possibilities exist for future studies regarding school culture and different demographic groups within the schools throughout the state of Mississippi.

Conclusions

School culture is a concept which can be difficult to measure, but it is a concept which is important to the success or lack thereof of students within schools (Gruenert, 1998). In this study, the demographic groups which were measured did not provide any statistically significant results, but when the mean scaled scores of the participants were examined in general terms, it appears the certified school staff which participated in this study view the culture of their schools in a positive manner. With the changes and uncertainties schools faced due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the data provided from this study can be helpful to school administrators when making future decisions regarding the culture within their schools.

With the Covid-19 pandemic being such an impactful event not only for our schools but also for our society in general, the results of this study can provide a glimpse into how this pandemic affected the culture of elementary schools in the state of Mississippi through the lens of the certified elementary school staff who agreed to participate. The results of this study suggest the culture within some schools was positive during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is important as school leaders can use this data to determine how the pandemic may or may not have affected the culture within their respective schools.

School leaders throughout the state of Mississippi made many decisions during the Covid-19 pandemic with little information or past experiences to base them on. While all the changes and unexpected results of the Covid-19 pandemic, certainly influenced our schools the results of this study provide information which stands to be helpful when determining what the perceptions of certified elementary school staff were during the Covid-19 pandemic. Now that, at least some, normalcy has returned to our schools, the results of this study can aid school leaders as they make decisions in the future which may affect the culture of their schools.

While the Covid-19 pandemic has been deemed over by many, the effects continue to be felt within our school systems. Many students spent over a year participating in online instruction which in some cases was not done with fidelity. Many students seem to be lagging as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and schools must adjust accordingly in the future. As has been stated previously, school culture can influence a school's success or lack thereof. To this end, school leaders throughout the state of Mississippi would benefit from recognizing the results of this study and using them as they move their schools forward. Gruenert (2008) stated the culture of the school can be compared to the personality which exists within someone. In the future,

school leaders should benefit from knowing the personality of their schools as they make decisions which move their schools forward from wherever they may be.

Implications

The results from this study can be useful to not only school administrators, but for frontline educators as well. One element, or useful piece of information, is Learning Partnerships. Learning Partnerships are defined as the degree to which teachers, students, and parents work together toward the good of the students (Gruenert,1998). When examining the results of all six elements of the SCS, this element had the lowest scores from the participating certified elementary school staff.

Frontline educators can use this information and make needed improvements or changes while interacting with students and stakeholders throughout their schools. During the Covid-19 pandemic the interactions and involvement from parents looked different than at any point in the past. Parents were not allowed in the schools as often, if any at all. Additionally, during times of online and hybrid learning parents' involvement in their child's education increased drastically. Whether these two factors played a role in the overall scores concerning Learning Partnerships is unknown. Frontline educators and school administrators can use this information in the future as they make decisions which involve teachers, students, and parents working together for the good of the students within their schools.

The similarities among five of the elements which make up the SCS have the potential to benefit those within school districts regardless of their individual roles. No significant statistical differences were found when comparing the perceptions of identified demographic groups and their perceptions of the culture within their schools. These results suggest certified elementary school staff share similar perceptions of the culture of their schools regardless of which

demographic group they identify with. The mean scaled scores of each element of the SCS, excluding learning partnerships, seem to suggest all participants feel as though the culture within their schools is more of a positive one than negative one.

Participants of the study who held a graduate degree seemed to have lower scores according to the mean scaled scores. Participants with graduate degrees were not found to have a statistically significant difference compared to participants who have an undergraduate degree; however, it may be beneficial to further examine their perceptions as it relates to the culture within their schools. School administrators along with frontline workers in elementary schools would benefit from having more information as it relates to the certified elementary school staff who have more education and if that effects the way they view the culture within their schools. As with all the results of this study any information which can be used in guiding future decisions, as in regards to school culture, has the possibility to benefit those working within our schools whether they be a frontline worker or a school administrator.

Certified elementary school staff can use these results to better understand the similarities among themselves and their coworkers and their perceptions. These perceptions may lead to further discussions or activities among them which can build upon the seemingly positive perceptions as provided by the scores of the SCS elements. While these elements measure different aspects of school culture, each element is based on collaboration and to what degree it is occurring within their schools. With this said, certified elementary school staff can use this information to move forward when making decisions within their individual schools.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Sample List of Researchers who have obtained permission to use the SCS (2010-2017)

- Purita Baltazar, Cebu Normal University, Cebu, Philippines
- Starlynn Daley, Cardinal Stritch University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Wayne Birks, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom
- Jarett Guy, Grand Canyon University, Arizona
- Philip Pearson, The University of Southern Mississippi, Mississippi
- Jacklyn Underwood, Harding University, Arkansas
- Tim Wagner, Southern Illinois University, Illinois
- Helene Bend, University of the West Indies, Barbados
- Joanna Lim, University of Canterbury, New Zealand
- Wanda Fielder, UMKC, Missouri
- Greg Brunton, Western International School of Shanghai, China
- Lili Mariah, Asia E-University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Travis J. Thorvilson, University of North Dakota, North Dakota
- Emma Williams, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus,
- Yusuf Ozdemir, Manila, Mandaluyong, Philippines
- Linton Britton, Sarawak, Malaysia
- Kerri Sankey, Lesley University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Marilyn Morales-Obod, Our Lady of Fatima University, Philippines
- Hester Darcy, Independent Consultant, Washington, DC
- Barid Fauziah, Jakarta, Indonesia
- Edna Hickey, University College Dublin, Ireland
- Kim Best, University of the West Indies, Barbados
- Colleen Swain, Ph.D., The University of Texas at Tyler
- Ambika Subrahmanya, Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand
- Abby Standerford, Central Michigan University, Michigan
- Denise Enriquez, De La Salle University, Manila
- Gracious Msuya, St Cloud State University, Minnesota
- Jeff Noe, Liberty University, Virginia
- Christine Manna, Kean University, New Jersey.
- Jann MacInnes, PhD, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida
- Mark A. Farrugia, University of Leicester, Malta

APPENDIX B

School Culture Survey

School Culture Survey

Indicate the degree to which each statement describes conditions in your school.

Please use the following scale:

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Undecided 4=Agree
5=Strongly Agree

	S t r o n g l y D i s a g r e e	D i s a g r e e	U n d e c i d e d	A g r e e	S t r o n g l y A g r e e
1. Teachers utilize professional networks to obtain information and resources for classroom instruction.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. Leaders value teachers' ideas.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. Teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and subjects.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. Teachers trust each other.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. Teachers support the mission of the school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. Teachers and parents have common expectations for student performance.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. Leaders in this school trust the professional judgments of teachers.	①	②	③	④	⑤
8. Teachers spend considerable time planning together.	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. Teachers regularly seek ideas from seminars, colleagues, and conferences.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. Teachers are willing to help out whenever there is a problem.	①	②	③	④	⑤
11. Leaders take time to praise teachers that perform well.	①	②	③	④	⑤
12. The school mission provides a clear sense of direction for teachers.	①	②	③	④	⑤
13. Parents trust teachers' professional judgments.	①	②	③	④	⑤
14. Teachers are involved in the decision-making process.	①	②	③	④	⑤
15. Teachers take time to observe each other teaching.	①	②	③	④	⑤

- | | | | | | |
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| 16. Professional development is valued by the faculty. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 17. Teachers' ideas are valued by other teachers. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 18. Leaders in our school facilitate teachers working together. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 19. Teachers understand the mission of the school. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 20. Teachers are kept informed on current issues in the school. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |

Please continue on the back of this survey.

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Undecided 4=Agree
5=Strongly Agree

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| 21. Teachers and parents communicate frequently about student performance. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 22. My involvement in policy or decision making is taken seriously. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 23. Teachers are generally aware of what other teachers are teaching. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 24. Teachers maintain a current knowledge base about the learning process. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 25. Teachers work cooperatively in groups. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 26. Teachers are rewarded for experimenting with new ideas and techniques. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 27. The school mission statement reflects the values of the community. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 28. Leaders support risk-taking and innovation in teaching. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 29. Teachers work together to develop and evaluate programs and projects. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 30. The faculty values school improvement. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 31. Teaching performance reflects the mission of the school. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |
| 32. Administrators protect instruction and planning time. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⓧ |

33. Teaching practice disagreements are voiced openly and discussed.	①	②	③	④	QR
34. Teachers are encouraged to share ideas.	①	②	③	④	QR
35. Students generally accept responsibility for their schooling, for example they engage mentally in class and complete homework assignments.	①	②	③	④	QR

Steve Gruenert and Jerry Valentine, Middle Level Leadership Center, University of Missouri, 1998.

APPENDIX C

IRB Application



The University of Mississippi
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
Division of Research Integrity and Compliance - Institutional Review Board
100 Barr Hall - University, MS 38677
irb@olemiss.edu 662-915-7482

Screening / Abbreviated IRB Application

Purpose: Many studies qualify for an abbreviated review, according to the federal regulations and university policy.

- **Part I of this form screens for a brief review.**
- **Part II of this form completes the abbreviated IRB application.**
- **The IRB makes the final determination on whether you must fill out a full application.**

Use the most recent version of this form: <http://www.research.olemiss.edu/irb/protocol/forms>.

Prepare as a Word document. **E-mail the completed form and attachments as *Word* documents** to irb@olemiss.edu; **e-mail the *signature page* as *PDF*** to irb@olemiss.edu.

DO NOT send or deliver a hard copy of the application.

Note: Some studies may qualify for a classroom waiver of IRB Application. See form here.

APPENDIX D

Teacher letter

I am a doctoral student at the University of Mississippi working towards obtaining a Ph.D. in K-12 Educational Leadership. My dissertation research examines school culture of elementary schools during the Covid-19 pandemic in the state of Mississippi. I will be surveying certified elementary school staff in schools throughout Mississippi. I am reaching out to you in hopes you will consider participating in my study. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete one Likert type survey. The survey is based on your experiences during the 2021-2022 school year. This survey is called the School Culture Survey and it measures a school's culture.

Basic demographic information will be collected such as race, educational level, years of experience, and whether you are a male or female. This past year has been a difficult one for many of us. Educators have been asked to go above and beyond the already many responsibilities they have. This study will assist in figuring out how to improve school culture.

As a classroom-based educator myself, I realize how valuable your time is, and I appreciate your consideration. The survey typically takes no longer than 10 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary and all responses will be kept strictly confidential. You may withdraw your participation at any time. I have attached my contact information, along with my advisors, should you have any questions or concerns. Again, your participation is voluntary but will be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time.

Rodney Hurt
E-mail: rhhurt@olemiss.edu
Phone: (662) 801-1469

Mark Deschaine, Ph.D
E-mail: medescha@olemiss.edu
Phone: (662) 915-2198

APPENDIX E

School Administrator letter

I am a student at the University of Mississippi enrolled in the K-12 Educational Leadership Ph.D. program. My dissertation research examines the current state of school culture in elementary schools in the state of Mississippi. I am asking you to consider your schools participation in my research study. Your participation will provide educational leaders with valuable feedback to help understand what the current state of school culture is in elementary schools, in the state of Mississippi is, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Should you choose to participate, your school's involvement will entail having certified elementary school staff complete the School Culture Survey (SCS) by Scott Gruenert. The certified school staff will be asked to complete the SCS regarding the 2021-2022 school year. A link will be emailed to the certified school staff and can be completed at their convenience. Participants can withdraw their participation at any point they wish. The survey takes approximately 10 minutes to complete each time. The results from the study will be presented in pooled form and no individual school will be examined. Basic demographic information such as years of experience, educational level, race, and sex will be collected.

The confidentiality of all participants will be respected and everyone's participation in this study is voluntary. The surveys will only be sent to certified elementary staff after receiving prior approval from your school district. Your consideration for approval is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. My academic advisor Dr. Mark Deschaine's contact information is listed below as well should you have any questions; he may be able to answer.

If you agree, kindly send me a e-mail stating your permission for your school district to participate in this study, The Covid-19 pandemic has presented many challenges for our schools throughout our state. I greatly appreciate your consideration in helping educational leaders gain a better understanding of its effects on the culture within our elementary schools.

Rodney Hurt
E-mail: rhhurt@olemiss.edu
Phone: (662) 801-1469

Mark Deschaine, Ph.D
E-mail: medescha@olemiss.edu
Phone: (662) 915-2198

APPENDIX F

SCS Permission Document

Valentine, Jerry W. (Emeritus) <ValentineJ@missouri.edu>

Thu 3/11/2021 10:15 PM

To: rhhurt

Cc: medescha

Rodney:

I am pleased to provide you with permission to use the School Culture Survey as an instrument in your dissertation study. This permission is based upon the affirmations you provided in your request to use the SCS.

Dr. Gruenert and I wish you the best of luck in your study and we look forward to reading your findings.

Jerry Valentine

Jerry Valentine, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus

University of Missouri

ValentineJ@missouri.edu

www.ipistudentengagement.com

Mail address:

1266 Sunset Drive

Columbia, MO 65203

APPENDIX G

SCS Request to Use Email

To: ValentineJ@missouri.edu
Cc: medescha;
Steve.Gruenert@indstate.edu

Full name of graduate advisor.docx
14 KB

Information for use of SCS.docx
14 KB

2 attachments (28 KB) Download all Save all to OneDrive - University of Mississippi

Dr. Valentine, I have attached the required information to be considered for permission to use the School Culture Survey. We communicated a few weeks ago concerning the process and the requirements.

Thank you for your help and your consideration.

Rodney

VITA
Rodney Hurt
rodneyhurt1@yahoo.com

EDUCATION:

K-12 Leadership: Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)
2018-Current (ABD)
University of Mississippi
Graduation date: May 2023

Educational Specialist Degree, Educational Leadership
2012 - 2014
University of Mississippi

Masters of Arts, Curriculum and Instruction in Special Education
2009 - 2011
University of Mississippi

Alternate Route, Teaching License
2006 - 2007
University of Mississippi

Bachelor of Arts, Psychology
1999 - 2001
University of Mississippi
1996 - 1999
Pearl River Community College

EXPERIENCE:

Instructor of Teacher Education
August 18th, 2022- Current
University of Mississippi

- Adjunct Instructor for EDSP 407 Special Education Law and Procedures Spring Semester 2019
- Adjunct Instructor for EDSP 407 Special Education Law and Procedures Spring Semester 2020

- Adjunct Instructor for EDSP 410 Strategies for the Inclusive Classroom Spring Semester 2020
- Adjunct Instructor for EDSP 407 Special Education Law and Procedures Spring Semester 2022
- Adjunct Instructor for EDSP 407 Special Education Law and Procedures Spring Semester 2022
- EDSP 327 Classroom Management and Behavioral Interventions (3 sections)
- EDSP 352 Practicum and Field Experience with Exceptional Children
- EDSP 308 Introduction to Special Education

Director of Oxford Learning Center
 July 5, 2022 - August 1, 2022
 Oxford City School District

Regroup Teacher
 July 2019 – June 2022
 Oxford City School District

- Provide behavioral support for students in grades Pre-k through 4th grade
- Develop and implement Individual Education Programs for up to nine students.
- Participate in Professional Learning Communities
- Maintain positive relationships with students, parents, and stakeholders
- Develop lessons to ensure growth in reading and math over multiple grade levels

Director of Educational Services
 July 2017 – July 2019
 North Mississippi Regional Center

- Supervise 70 educational services staff
- Ensure policies and procedures are being followed
- Ensure Non-Public School Accreditation status is met yearly
- Conduct yearly performance appraisals for teachers
- Develop and oversee the educational five-year strategic plan
- Conduct monthly staff meetings

Coordinator of Early Childhood Intervention Services (Project Run)
 July 2017 – July 2019
 North Mississippi Regional Center

- Supervised six staff members who provide early intervention services
- Oversee federal guidelines and ensure policies and procedures are being followed
- Maintain records and assist with scheduling intervention appointments

Employment and Prevocational Programs, Day Services Ault, and Community Employment Coordinator

May 2015 – January 2018

North Mississippi Regional Center

- Supervise 100 Employment and Prevocational Staff members
- Oversee the community employment program
- Created policies and procedures, staffing plan, and training plan for a supported employment service for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Created policies and procedures, staffing plan, and training plan for a job discovery service for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities

Special Education Teacher/Workshop Director

2012 - 2015

North Mississippi Regional Center

- Supervised 20 Education Staff members
- Approved educational objectives for 80 students
- Conducted yearly professional development training
- Supervised the Recycle Program between the North Mississippi Regional Center and the City of Oxford

Special Education Teacher (Hopkins Adult Workshop)

2011 - 2012

North Mississippi Regional Center

- Developed curriculum for a transitional skills program
- Developed educational objectives for 20 individuals living in a community home setting
- Assisted in transition planning for individuals who were scheduled to move to a community setting

Special Education Teacher (Life Skills Program/Postsecondary)

2006 - 2011

North Mississippi Regional Center

- Developed and implemented individual support programs
- Supervised one teaching assistant and two resident living staff, daily
- Served as a Qualified Intellectual Disabilities Professional for eight individuals with disabilities

Psychology Technician

2002 - 2006

North Mississippi Regional Center

- Collected and entered data into the database concerning specific behaviors
- Provided support in ensuring behavioral programs were being implemented
- Provided active treatment and basic reinforcement
- Provides social skill development opportunities
- Monitor the progress of behavior interventions
- Participator in the development of behavior programs

ACHIEVEMENTS, MEMBERSHIPS, AND AWARDS

- Nominated and chosen for an accelerated leadership program offered by the Mississippi Department of Mental Health (Focus)
- 2010 Programmatic Employee of the Year
- Developed an 8-hour recertification training program for Positive Action Support System; Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) a staff training model utilized by the Department of Mental Health throughout the state of Mississippi
- Facility instructor for Positive Action Support System (ABA) behavioral training
- School Leadership Licensure Assessment Score: 186
- Graduate of State Executive Development Institute of Mississippi.
- Completed G364 Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools (MEMA)
- Completed Academic Outreach's eLearning training course. (Endorsement to teach online).