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**SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERSHIP, RESOURCES AND LITERACY
DEVELOPMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON SCHOOL
DISTRICT LEADERS' EXPERIENCES ON BUDGET ALLOCATION
FOR LITERACY**

Jared E. Littman

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DEVELOPMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON SCHOOL DISTRICT
LEADERS' EXPERIENCES ON BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR LITERACY

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by
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ABSTRACT

SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERSHIP, RESOURCES AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERS' EXPERIENCES ON BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR LITERACY

Jared E. Littman

School district leaders can have a vast influence on school improvement and student achievement. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of school district leaders with budget allocation and decision-making responsibility for literacy and the factors that determined their budget allocation decisions. This study also addressed school district leaders perceived benefits of funding allocated to literacy development. Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured one-on-one interviews. A thematic analysis, interpretive phenomenological approach was used to analyze the data. Themes and patterns that emerged from the data were: 1) literacy sets the foundation for the budget although doesn't represent a high percentage of the budget allocation; 2) leadership comfort level varies in school finance and budgeting; 3) who benefits from increased funding and expected student outcomes; and 4) achievement starts and ends with personnel. The findings of this study help us better understand the factors that go into making budget allocation decisions and leaders' perceptions of the benefits of funding on literacy achievement. If this phenomenon is better understood, there may be potential to review existing policy and practice so that school district leaders are afforded the training to make effective decisions on budget allocation and oversight on education finances for literacy improvement.

DEDICATION

This dissertation, and all the time, effort and hard work that went into it is dedicated to my family. To my wife Nerissa, for keeping me on task. To my children, Luke, London, and Penelope, for their understanding and patience in allowing me the time to be able to complete this dissertation.

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CHAPTER 1: THE INTRODUCTION

Background

Early literacy development is essential in creating successful pathways for student achievement as children progress through school. Decades of research has indicated a consensus that teacher effectiveness is one of, if not, the most important aspect in student achievement (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). High-quality teachers are essential to a productive educational environment. School leadership decisions play a vital role in allocating appropriate resources in support of literacy programs, including but not limited to professional development, teacher retention initiatives, learning opportunities, curriculum, tutoring, implementation, and evaluation (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Providing the needed resources such as allocating funding appropriately is critical to its success, making the role of school district leaders who make these decisions essential.

During the past 56 years, there have been federal policies implemented to address school leadership, teacher impact in the classroom and the resources required to support student learning. Starting with the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 to address building a national curriculum and closing the achievement gap for students that come from different socioeconomic backgrounds and holding schools accountable for improving their educational environments. When the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized as No Child Left Behind (2002), *Early Reading First* was created as a specific component calling for intensive professional development to impact teacher quality (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). In addition, the *Grow Smart Initiative* was created in 2002 by the United States Department of Health and Human Services to achieve a more efficient alignment between pre-school and

elementary grades by training teachers in effective early literacy pedagogy. Professional capital is a long-term investment in educational spending (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). More recently in 2015, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized again as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). One of components to this law is that all students in the United States would be taught to high academic standards and prepare them for future schooling years as well as careers (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). It could be argued that school leadership is one of, if not, the most important factors in student achievement next to teacher quality. However, the current literature has not addressed the experiences of school district leaders with budget allocation responsibility for literacy.

Statement of the Problem

Leadership is directly involved with monitoring and evaluating school curriculum, creating a collaborative culture, instruction and assessment practices, clearly defined goals and objectives, supporting the development of high-quality teachers which all in-turn impact student learning. School district leadership decisions on school finance and funding allocation for literacy development activities is essential in making a positive impact on student achievement. Therefore, school district leaders must have the knowledge, skills and educational background to be able to make the most effective budgetary decisions that determine school improvement and student outcomes.

While there have been studies conducted on teacher professional development and some literature on characteristics of effective leadership, there is limited quantitative or qualitative research conducted on the amount of funding allocated to these programs, how the decisions are made, and the ways leadership believe these decisions influence

literacy in their district. This is a weakness in existing research. Leadership has a direct effect in providing effective resources to an educational environment; and, by not examining school leaders' decisions on the allocation of funding for literacy is a significant gap in the literature.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of school district leaders decision-making and responsibility with budget allocation for literacy and the factors that determine their budget allocation decisions. Funding allocation for literacy could range from but is not limited to hiring literacy teachers, professional development programs for teachers, student mentoring, curriculum, additional learning opportunities, and evaluation. Exploring school district leaders' experiences with budget allocation may help us better understand the factors that go into making these decisions and the leaders' perceptions of the benefits and or challenges of funding on literacy achievement. If this phenomenon is better understood, there may be potential to incorporate new methods or processes for budget allocation for literacy improvement. Increased knowledge of this phenomenon of how school district leaders utilize their expertise in funding allocation could provide beneficial information for future allocation means, such as more effective ways of budget allocation for increasing literacy achievement as well as the appropriate training for school district leaders so they are most effective in their decisions. This additional knowledge can provide school district leaders with a better understanding on ways to allocate funding for hiring teachers, teacher professional development and teacher retention as well as mentoring, learning opportunities and evaluation for literacy. Effective professional development

will enhance teacher quality and by offering teachers the resources to increase their efficiency in the classroom may also lead to retaining high quality teachers. In turn, more effective budget allocation for literacy activities may increase the efficiency of these activities which can lead to an increase in literacy achievement.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study will qualitatively address the following overarching research question:

How do school district leaders describe their experiences with budget allocation for literacy?

To further guide this study the following sub questions, include:

- What factors influence school district leaders' decisions about budget allocation for literacy activities?
- How do school district leaders perceive the benefits of funding allocated for literacy activities?

Definitions of Terms

Budget allocation: Is the amount of funding designated to each expenditure line.

It designates the maximum amount of funding an organization is willing to spend on a given item or program, and it is a limit that is not to be exceeded by the employee authorized to charge expenses to a particular budget line (Ryckman, 2019).

Implementation: the degree to which school improvement procedures are

implemented and school leaders recognize that implementation is a continuous process with varying levels of effectiveness.

Phenomenology: the study of a phenomena; phenomenology is both a philosophy and research methodology. Phenomenological research seeks to learn how individuals construct meaning of the human experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

Conceptual thinking: the ability to critically examine factual information, connect prior knowledge to new learning, be aware of patterns and connections to be able to solve an issue or create a new one.

Inquiry: is the degree to which leaders correctly analyze the underlying causes of deficiencies and success in student achievement and equity (Reeves, 2020).

Self-efficacy: a personal judgement of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations (Bandura, 1982).

Title I designation: Part A of the elementary and secondary education act, as amended by the every student succeeds act (ESEA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Professional capital: is a long-term investment in educational spending.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The constructivist worldview as defined by Creswell (2014) is typically seen as a framework in qualitative research in which individuals develop subjective meanings to their experiences and seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. A constructivism or social constructivism paradigm within a research study's major objective, is to obtain and rely as much as possible on the participants' experiences and views of the phenomenon being researched. This study employs an exploratory, qualitative research design which reflects a social constructivist (Berger & Luekmann, 1967) and interpretivist paradigm (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) in which the philosophy is one that believes, inquirers generate or develop a theory or pattern of meaning. Specifically, this study explores the experiences of school district leaders with budget allocation for literacy and the factors that play a role in those decisions.

A conceptual lens provides a deeper understanding of concepts and information for thinking. School leadership and teacher quality are two extremely important factors in student achievement as they guide students to deeper understanding to raise their level of critical thinking to prepare them for many different situations. School leaders, teachers and students are linked in the degrees of success or failure. School leaders, teachers as well as students must think conceptually which demands the ability to critically examine factual information, connect prior knowledge to new learning, be aware of patterns and relationships, produce significant understandings at the conceptual level, evaluate the validity of these understandings based on evidence obtained, transfer this knowledge across situations, and sometimes use this method of thinking to creatively solve an issue

or design a new one (Erickson, Lanning & French, 2017). Conceptual thinking embraces aspects of critical, creative and metacognitive thinking. Leadership influence could determine the quality of teacher in the classroom and that in turn will influence literacy development and student achievement. School leaders must think conceptually so they are thinking at a deeper level, just as teachers, to understand concepts and methods to integrate student thinking at a deeper level.

There are multiple theoretical frameworks which guide this study. Phenomenology is both a philosophy and research methodology. Phenomenological research seeks to learn how individuals construct meaning of the human experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). This theoretical framework guides the methodology of this proposed study. This framework seeks to discover the reality in the participants' narratives of their lived experiences of the phenomena. There are multiple approaches within the phenomenological philosophy, and it consists of transcendental, existential and hermeneutic theories (Cilesiz, 2010). Transcendental philosophy is being able to go outside of the experience as if we were able to be outside ourselves to view the world from above. Existential philosophy reflects a need to focus on our lived experience and hermeneutic phenomenology highlights interpretation in addition to description. This study will utilize the hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy as interpretation of the data will play a role combined with description. Development of the understanding we call interpretation and based on the work of Heidegger; he regards interpretation as the own possibility of understanding, or as the working-through of possibilities projected in understanding (Yu & Lau, 2012).

This study will also be framed by social cognitive theory (SCT) in which Albert Bandura renamed in 1986 from his initial theory called social learning theory created in the 1960's. This theory consists of four components: observational learning, self-regulation, self-efficacy and reciprocal determinism in guiding behavior (Grusec, 1992). Bandura emphasizes self-efficacy development and the most effective way to build a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences (Bandura, 2011). Bandura's SCT speaks to ways to develop and strengthen self-efficacy. The first way is by being resilient and overcoming obstacles and failures through persistent effort. Social modeling is the second way to develop and strengthen self-efficacy. In SCT, models and observation are a source of motivation, aspiration and competency and by seeing others succeed through persistent effort in similar situations increases one's beliefs in their own abilities (Bandura, 2011). The third mode of influence is social persuasion which stresses, if one is persuaded to believe in themselves and put in situations for success then the individual will put forth more effort in order to be successful (Bandura, 2011). SCT helps to frame this proposed study as it is expected that the participants (school district leaders) use their literacy knowledge and experiences to guide their decisions on budget allocation for literacy within their schools.

In addition, this study will use another theoretical framework as a guide known as experiential learning. Learning as defined by Kolb (1984) is the process whereby knowledge is created by the transformation of experience. A well-known approach for experiential learning is Kolb's (1984) four stage model which he refers to as the Lewinian experiential model and the Lewinian model of action research and laboratory training. Concrete experiences are the basis for observations and reflection in which those

are formulated into a theory for which new inferences for action can be determined (Kolb, 1984). The two critical points of this theory is the immediate personal experience as that is the principal point for learning, and the feedback process. The provided feedback supports a continuous process of goal-directed action and evaluation as well as accountability. The absence of adequate feedback can be a cause of ineffective individuals and institutions (Kolb, 1984).

It is important to examine leadership decisions and the influence it has on student literacy outcomes. Based on Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning and the context of this study, educational leaders play a vital part in student achievement. Leaders have the power to create a learning culture and environment that emphasizes observation, reflection and feedback for continued goal-directed action to foster a successful educational institution. Like Kolb and the Lewinian model is Dewey's (1938) model of learning is similar with the added emphasis on feedback and how learning transforms the impulses and feelings of concrete experiences into focused action. To acquire intellectual momentum, the ideas of blending consequence with feeling and impulse is needed as a moving force (Dewey, 1938).

These multiple theoretical frameworks, phenomenology, social cognitive theory, and experiential learning all intermingle within the context of this proposed study. The research questions are particular to a phenomenological research study based on exploring the lived experiences of the participants.

Review of the Literature

This chapter aims to provide an understanding of school leadership decisions and how those decisions improve school learning environments. It starts with a historical overview going back over fifty years of government enacting laws (U.S. Department of Education, 1965) and again (2002) and then again (2015) to support teacher development to ultimately enhance student learning. This review then examines leadership influence, education finance and budgeting as well as teacher professional development and the effects on student learning. In addition, this review explores leadership efficacy and the impact on the educational environment.

The researcher also examined a collection of articles on leadership and school improvement on a global perspective and explores some key components to better understand the theoretical and empirical agenda for effective leadership and improving the educational environment (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). In addition, this review provides information on characteristics of effective professional development programs, educational leaders role in the process and the association with teacher learning and ultimately student achievement.

Historical Analysis

Effective and efficient leadership should improve the school learning environment which would equate to increased student learning and achievement. Improving schools and the leadership of schools has become a focus of national governments in many parts of the world which are driven by diverse perceived social, cultural, political and economic requirements all aligned with the engagement of change activities to improve school effectiveness by increasing the wanted outcomes for students (Rhodes &

Brundrett, 2004). Over 50 years ago, the federal government enacted a great society program named the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA) which allocated federal funding to elementary and secondary school education towards building a national curriculum (U.S. Government, 1965). In addition, this act created an instrument to increase equality in education on a national level and hold schools and districts accountable. This act primary target was students of low-income families with the goal of providing them long-term assistance by improving their schools and the resources they need to achieve. During this time, there was a large disparity in student achievement and resources provided among students from differed sociocultural and economic backgrounds. A major aim of this act was to close the achievement gap by implementing goals and benchmarks to measure and track the progress of students. In order for this to work efficiently, ESEA entailed provisions to capture this information to be able to allocate resources accordingly. One of the provisions emphasized was the Title I designation for eligible schools. Schools that had more than 40% of its students classified as low-income by the U.S. government would qualify for Title I designation. The goal of this provided funding was to increase and encourage academic development by providing these resources to improve test scores and ultimately climb out of poverty and this designation. The government would hold schools accountable by withholding future funding if schools were not improving the quality of education provided to their students. Since the Title I designation was established for these schools, funding has grown from \$2 billion to \$25 billion reflecting the increasing number of schools under this federal mandate in which they must comply with the mandates of the federal government to continue to receive funding (Education Laws, 2019).

In the years to follow, the federal government implemented policies to further increase student achievement such as the *Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981* and *Improving America's Schools Act of 1994*. In 2002 to address the importance of school leadership known as *The School Leadership Program*, which entailed recruiting, retaining, and developing/training individuals in school leadership roles to become more effective leaders to better support their teachers and improve student success (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). This followed the federal policy to improve teacher quality known as the *No Child Left Behind Act NCLB*, (2002) which was the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)*. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education in further support of school leadership followed by announcing they made \$9.2 million available in grant awards to improve leadership in high-need school districts. The focus of these school leadership grants is to create, develop and expand innovative programs to recruit, train and provide leadership professional development opportunities. More recently in 2015, further federal policy was implemented to address leadership accountability if schools were underperforming as stated in the policy *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, the latest reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, where all students in the United States of America is to be taught to high academic standards that will support them when ready for college and careers (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Leadership Influence

Leadership sets the foundation of school culture. School culture effects classroom practices as well as teacher retention. Leaders have a responsibility to foster an effective educational environment that supports the development of high-quality teachers, school

process and improvement that ultimately impacts student achievement. It is imperative for leaders to not only increase resources, but also to allocate those resources in order to maximize student achievement (Chiu & Khoo, 2005). Research and current literature suggest that school leadership may be second to only the teaching occurring in the classroom as having the most impact on student achievement (Whitworth & Chui, 2015). Effective leadership is directly involved with monitoring and evaluating school curriculum, creating a collaborative culture, instruction and assessment practices, clearly defined goals and objectives, supporting the development of high-quality teachers which all in-turn impact student learning. Making a difference by taking charge of effective decision-making as it relates to professional development (Cardno, 2005) as well as all areas noted for school improvement making a positive impact on student achievement.

There has been much research that explores professional development relations to teacher change and although less research specifically on professional development effects on student outcomes there is a consensus that there is a relationship between these variables. Professional development is a major component of leadership school planning (Cobb, 2005). Some find significant effects on student achievement while others believe there are only small to moderate impacts. Existing literature indicates that when there are effective professional development programs implemented, student achievement can be improved (Whitworth & Chui, 2015). Feedback and reflection are vital to a teacher's deepening knowledge and understanding (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Others take it a step further by stating with the addition of coaching and professional development makes a larger impact for developing teachers into higher quality teachers (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). U.S. schools and districts had increased literacy coaching as a

strategy for improving learning and instruction (Matsumura, Garnier & Resnick, 2010). Based on this literature comprehensive, collaborative, evaluative and sustainable teacher professional development opportunities seem as they have an association to student outcomes. District school leaders' decision-making, planning and budgetary responsibility can dictate school success.

A theory that literacy leaders must develop and embody a certain “mind frame” and a framework of thinking associated with a plan for success are more likely to have positive effects on student learning and literacy development (Hattie, 2012). Kirtman’s 7 competencies (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019) for highly effective leaders were developed after the observation of highly effective leaders performing in their roles toward identifying the set of skills associated with their success. The observed leaders shared the following characteristics: challenge the status quo, through clear communication and expectations you build trust, design a commonly owned plan for success, emphasis on team over self, maintain a high sense of urgency when it comes to change and sustainable outcomes, a commitment to continuous improvement of self and the organization, and build external partnerships and networks which make-up the components and characteristics of a leadership framework (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019). While there may be other factors that contribute to school improvement, leadership decisions strongly influence and have a direct association to the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Leaders who are engaged in guiding and supporting their teachers impact school success (Hayes, Christie, Mills,& Lingard, 2004). To support and enable change to improve learning, structural and cultural mechanisms including accountability must be in place for the development of leaders themselves (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2004).

A projected \$8 billion is spent each year on teacher development across the fifty largest U.S. school districts (Jacob & McGovern, 2015). As the picture is not entirely clear, school level resources may or may not impact student achievement (Chiu & Khoo, 2005). There is a lack of comprehensive information on the mixed reviews that professional development for teachers has a significant impact on their learning despite the financial investment (Jacob & McGovern, 2015). Unfortunately, a major issue with professional development is that there are not enough ongoing characteristics of effective professional development being delivered as much professional development are short one-off training workshops with little or no follow-up (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). This indicates a poor use of these allocated funds where the return on investment is low. There is the need for professional capital which encompasses high-quality teachers is a long-term investment in developing teachers to become properly prepared, trained, committed and continuously developed (Hargraves & Fullan, 2012). For professional development for teachers to have increased impact on student outcomes there must be a long-term investment made offering an effective, sustainable professional development program. This directly speaks to school district leaders' decision-making and allocating funding appropriately and effectively within the district budget. Hiring and or training school district leaders who are of high-quality alongside high-quality teachers are essential for school improvement. For example, a study conducted through the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program indicated the effectiveness of well prepared and sustainable professional development program as well as examined school-leader support (Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005). The Australian government saw a critical need for teacher-quality improvement in which funding was needed to support a high-quality sustainable

training program. Based on this research, policy was to be created for teacher professional development and the implementation of corresponding effective professional development programs. This data obtained from this research was to be used to guide the government and school system in designing improvements to teacher professional development programs to enhance and sustain opportunities for students to learn and positively affect student achievement. The survey study data included three thousand two hundred fifty (N=3,250) teachers who had participated in eighty (80) individual professional development activities. To assess program impact, three months after the program the participants were given a survey. The states and territories that had received funding for these programs by government were required to participate in the evaluation of these programs. The components of the programs evaluated were as follows: workplace learning through action research; institutional learning to facilitate research findings understanding and best practice; mentoring and coaching; participation in conferences and seminars, online-learning, and school support.

Study findings indicate that effectively designed teacher professional development programs, result in positive impact on student achievement. The research suggests that professional development programs that focus on content had the most positive impacts. The content was defined as follows: learning and teaching strategies consistent to the content they teach; how students learn this content; student individual differences and how they support their needs; linking assessment into the teaching and learning process and classroom management. Regarding “school support” this study indicated that student learning was positively impacted by teachers who felt supported by their senior leaders (Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005). School district leaders play a

vital role in overall school success by their planning and decision-making responsibility when it comes to allocating funding effectively.

From a logical perspective, leaders have direct involvement with monitoring and evaluating school curricula, the creation of a collaborative culture, clearly defining goals and objectives and supporting their teachers and administrators with the appropriate resources to achieve the goals set in place. The connection between leadership and the learning environment could vary from school to school or district to district based on specific school or district understandings and expectations of school leaders as their leadership (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). However, continuous school improvement by setting and refining goals and objectives for school improvement is necessary for leaders to be effective for student learning (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2005).

Productive and effective leadership enhances the development of the entire school community which emphasizes learning, professional communities and aligning these practices with support and development of effective pedagogies (Hayes, Christie, Mills & Lingard, 2004). Interaction among school leaders, teachers, administration, students, and community can support the learning environment. Social capital increases one's knowledge as it expands your networks of influence and opportunity to learn (Hargraves & Fullan, 2012). There is power in social learning and collaboration supports learning and the development of collective knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). This collective knowledge aims to support the entire learning environment. In addition, leaders have a significant role in the planning and implementation of teacher professional development (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). This literature indicates that teacher characteristics are responsible for the highest variation in student success more than all other aspects of a

school combined (Hayes, Christie, Mills,& Lingard, 2004). Leadership positions such as superintendents, assistant superintendents and additional school district leaders involved in school budget decision making play a vital role in serving the needs of their learners. To be able to effectively achieve this, leaders should learn to do their jobs as well as possible to effectively address school improvement (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009).

There are interventions such as leadership training, leadership education, and leadership support that influence how school leaders are developed (Cardno, 2005). Specifically, in what they are expected to do using certain types of thinking and priorities seen as appropriate. Some of these leadership interventions include sharing of leadership and acting on a collaborative decision-making process, supporting the relationships between administration, teachers, and students; aligning strategically with community concerns; having a focus on pedagogy as well as to support a culture where teachers are encouraged to make decisions; and developing organization process to facilitate seamless operations of running a school (Hayes, Christie, Mills,& Lingard, 2004). Some research explores potential tensions between “required” expectations regarding leadership as well as the expectations within school policies and priorities and the expectations and goals of individual leaders themselves. Potential disagreements, priorities and tensions between leaders and policy can impact how leaders “lead” and the impacts of school success (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). In a study by Leithwood, Harris,& Hopkins (2008), successful leadership is one that engages administration, teachers and students in the learning environment for increased quality of education that s student’s experience so that school improvement and better outcomes are achieved (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). This literature confirms the notion that there is a relationship between leadership quality and

school improvement based on learner outcomes (Hayes, Christie, Mills,& Lingard, 2004). Although these collections of articles are of this belief, a more complete picture is needed to confirm the significance of leadership and the investment made in leadership and teaching development to student learning and outcomes (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009).

School Finance, Budgeting and School Improvement

There has been limited research conducted on school district leaders' experiences with school finance and budgeting as it pertains to the district budget process and how it specifically relates to literacy. Research that has been conducted has indicated that school district leaders have had little to no training in strategic school spending (Roza, 2019). This is a major concern when these school district leaders are making decisions on how to spend the country's \$650 billion budget (Roza, 2019) for public education grades K-12. The school boards hire their district leaders who are in charge of creating and overseeing their district budget. Funding is spent on hiring teachers, counselors, infrastructure, bus services, implement new programs to name a few of the expenditures within the district budget. Deciding on how to spend the country's education dollars is a tremendous responsibility and sometimes the decisions work out well and students achieve and sometimes they work out poorly and students do not achieve to a level expected (Roza, 2019). School boards need to look at existing policy and practice to ensure more effective measures so that the school district leaders are afforded the training or possess the knowledge to make appropriate and effective decisions on budget allocation and oversight on education finances.

The relationship and communication between the district school leaders and the community is extremely important for school improvement and student success. The

community must be on board with the district school budget. If not, this can cause backlash from the community who ultimately, supports the budget. The main cause of tension is usually budgets, and it is very important to remember and understand that the community owns the district and the schools (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019). The management aspect of the school district leaders' position is figuring out how finite resources can be allocated effectively to meet district goals and create community success (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019). There have been missed opportunities to provide support with training for district leaders as well as examining current policy and practice to increase probability of success. State education boards can ensure their district leaders are well equipped with the skills and knowledge that they need to perform at a higher level on behalf of the students as a major concern is that school district leaders who are responsible for the district budget have little to no formal training in school finance (Roza, 2019). One study uncovered that nearly twenty percent of the district employees have never been evaluated in their current positions and the remaining eighty percent received inconsistent, unrelated, and ambiguous evaluations to their most critical responsibilities (Reeves, 2020). In this case, the state education boards are not aware if their district leaders are performing to the level they should be. Or, if they actually can perform to that level without the appropriate school finance and budgeting backgrounds. In another study, there were five participating districts that reported that of their total budget, between two and four percent (between \$8M-\$126M) of total operating expenditures were spent on professional development. Findings indicated that of all these dollars spent, none had a district level strategy to ensure that the spending around professional development was effective and centered around student performance (Plecki

& Monk, 2003). A more comprehensive understanding of school finance and budget allocation associated with program effectiveness, districts /school need, and goals and objectives associated towards increase student performance is essential for overall school improvement and student success.

Further literature on financial leadership training states that there is an issue with school district leaders not having the appropriate training and background in budgeting and school finance prior to obtaining these district level positions that have budget and school finances as a primary responsibility. An analysis conducted in 2012 by the National School Boards Association reported that only fifteen states require any budget or finance training for school board members and district leaders; and this minimum training consisted of timing of budgets and audits, compliance with federal grants, and financial conflicts of interest rather than budgeting and expenditures of the public funding on behalf of students (Roza, 2019). There seems to be a disconnect between the education school boards and the training and experience that is so badly needed for district leaders when it comes to school finance. Building a foundation with strong skills, knowledge and behaviors will ensure that the pathway to success will be able the weather all the challenges that working in education presents on a daily basis (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019). The training that school district leaders receive is mostly instructional leadership. These leaders have not been trained in what financial metrics matter most and what to expect in return for those investments, the need for training is vast and providing this training for the individuals who are responsible for the allocation and expenditures of public education dollars is a no-brainer (Roza, 2019).

Gap in the Literature

While there have been studies conducted on teacher professional development and some literature on characteristics of effective leadership, there is limited quantitative or qualitative research conducted on school district leaders' experiences with budget allocation for literacy and the factors that play a role in these decisions that ultimately impact literacy achievement. This is a weakness in existing research in which leadership has a direct effect in providing effective resources to an educational environment; and, by not examining school district leaders budget allocation decisions, funding levels and its relationship to student outcomes is a significant gap in the literature.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The central question for this research study was: *How do school district leaders describe their experiences with budget allocation for literacy?* The specific sub questions were:

1) What factors influence school leaders' decisions on budget allocation for literacy activities?

2) How do school district leaders perceive the benefits of funding allocated for literacy activities?

Research Design and Procedures

The study's phenomenological research design explored school district leaders' experiences with budget allocation for literacy activities as well as provide in depth information on the factors that influence their decisions. Phenomenological research is a qualitative strategy which allows the researcher to identify the core of human experiences described by the participants in the study about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). The researcher concluded that phenomenology was best suited for this exploratory research design. A phenomenological design is appropriate for this study as it allows the researcher to explore multiple individual experiences to gain insight on this phenomenon. Phenomenology is securing rich descriptions of phenomena and their settings as the researcher must allow the data to emerge (Groenewald, 2004). A qualitative research strategy has been chosen so the researcher can best navigate the data collection for this phenomenological research study.

Participants were recruited via email and word of mouth. The researcher contacted fifteen individuals either through email or by phone call. Some of these individuals were contacted randomly through New York district school websites. The other individuals were contacted by the researcher through colleagues or friends that were able to put the researcher in contact with the participant. Within the context of the recruitment, a promotional flyer (Appendix A) was included, and the participants were given overview information about the study, the goals of the study and confidentiality measures that were taken. Then participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix B).

Qualitative data was collected through in-depth, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each participant (Appendix C). In developing the interview protocol questions, the researcher piloted the interview questions with two individuals recommended by a colleague/mentor to obtain feedback on the questions being asked in support of the desired data being collected. That feedback was considered and some of it was incorporated into the protocol interview questions. The feedback that was incorporated into the interview questions were regarding the participants educational background as it pertains to school finance. Each interview was conducted virtually through online video meeting platforms WebEx and Zoom. The average interview lasted a little over thirty-one minutes. The shortest interview was fifteen minutes and the longest was forty-four minutes. Due to COVID-19, following NY state guidelines and the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols all interviews were conducted virtually. Although there was the potential of some pitfalls with online synchronous interviews/meetings such as internet connectivity, visual and sound quality, and security;

the researcher felt comfortable navigating any challenges that had arisen as we have become more adaptive with this technology in our current environment these past twelve months. Using an online virtual platform to conduct these interviews did have some benefits such as including participants from around New York state and other states such as New Jersey and Maryland increasing convenience for the participant as well as the researcher. Once the data was collected, interview recordings were transcribed and stored on an encrypted, password protected hard drive and any hard copies of data or analysis was stored in a locked cabinet and room.

Sampling and Participants

This study included ten participants chosen through purposive snowball sampling. This method of snowballing expands the sample by asking the participant or others (also known as informants) to recommend individuals to be interviewed (Groenewald, 2004). A purposive selection of participants ensured that the researcher selected individuals who were able to best help them understand the research problem and research questions (Creswell, 2014). After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, emails were sent to potential participants including the recruitment flyer (Appendix A). The emails were sent to school district leaders by obtaining their email contact through school district websites as well as through word of mouth. The participants were superintendents, assistant superintendents, and district leaders in charge of budgets and a school principal. The school district leaders were from a mix of public and private schools in urban and suburban regions. However, it was not necessary to have maximum variation by obtaining school district leaders' perspectives from multiple districts on budget allocation for literacy to be a successful study. Phenomenology research typically

ranges between three and eight participants to be interviewed in a study (Creswell, 2014). Allowing for a larger sample was beneficial to the study as it did provide additional school district leaders experiences with this phenomenon and allow the research to more effectively compare the data and examine for specific themes within the data. The phenomenon explored was the experiences and factors that influence school district leaders' decisions on budget allocation for literacy and the school leaders' perception on the benefits of these funding allocations.

Summary of Participants

This study included ten participants from eight different school districts. Five of the districts were located in New York, two located in New Jersey and one in Maryland. Table 1 indicates background information reported by each participant during their one-on-one interview.

Table 1*Participant Information*

Name	Position	Years in Position	Level of Education	Role in Budget Process	Size of District Budget
Jennifer	Assistant Superintendent	3	Currently in Doctoral Program	Yes	\$500,000 (Other than personnel)
Carol	District Employee	18	Masters Plus 30	Yes	\$2,500,000
Adam	Assistant Superintendent	5	Masters	Yes	\$100,000,000
Brian	Superintendent	9	Doctorate	Yes	\$190,000,000
Charles	Deputy Superintendent	2	Doctorate	Yes	\$185,000,000
Gabby	Assistant Superintendent	15	Masters	Yes	\$95,000,000
Samantha	Coordinator for Superintendent	15	Masters	Yes	\$2,500,000
Barbara	Superintendent	15	Masters	Yes	\$67,000,000
Dorothy	Executive Director of Academic Support of Schools	3	Currently in Doctoral Program	Yes	\$200,000,000
Sally	Assistant Principal	20	Doctorate	No	NA

Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to protect their identity and the school districts in the study. All data mentioned in this study and any direct quotations

used were taken directly from the interviews. There were seven female and three male participants of which nine of the ten played a role in their district finances and budgeting. Two of the participants held a role of Superintendent, one participant Deputy Superintendent, two participants Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, one participant Assistant Superintendent for Business, one participant Executive Director of Academic Support of Schools, one participant District Employee to the Superintendent, one participant Coordinator for Superintendent and one participant Assistant Principal. The years of experience of the participants in these roles ranged from two to twenty and all of the participants held a minimum level of education of a Master's degree plus additional certifications. Three of the participants obtained Doctorates and two others are currently in a doctoral program. Four of the districts were located in urban settings and six districts located in suburban settings. The annual district budgets reported ranged from \$2,500,000 to more than \$200,000,000. To note, one annual district budget reported at \$500,000 which only represents other than personnel portion of the budget and does not make up the entirety of the budget as personnel was not confirmed.

Additional Recruitment Measures

Additional measures of recruitment were taken to increase the sample size including outreach to educators and school leaders through district school websites and colleagues and asking if they would be willing to post a message about the call for participants within their various networks, listserves and social media groups. In addition, the researcher respectively asked if these individuals would also be willing to contact district school leaders they may know and ask them if they are interested to participate in

this study and/or to post this information through their networks. The researcher expanded the recruitment process beyond New York State and recruited participants from New Jersey and one from Maryland. For this study, location was not a primary factor; however, school district leaders with budget experience in any district or state were critical to this study.

Instruments

In this research study, there was a semi-structured interview protocol used for one-to-one in-depth interviews with the participants (Appendix C). The beginning of the interview and the very end focused on collecting demographic data. Data collected included: 1) gender identity; 2) race/ethnicity; 3) role in the district; 4) number of years in the role; 5) number of years working in the district; 6) district/school location; 7) district/school setting considered to be urban, suburban, or rural. The researcher decided to ask the demographic question of self-identification at the end of the interview for the purpose of a smooth interview flow.

Questions specifically related to the participants' experiences with budget allocation for literacy was addressed in detail. To ensure the same questions were being addressed by each participant as well as to allow for flexibility and a natural flow of the participants experiences, a semi-structured interview was best suited to obtain the data. This instrument allowed the researcher to change the order in which the questions were asked depending on the participant's response and it encouraged a comfortable flow in the interview communication between the participant and researcher.

Data Analysis

After all the interviews were conducted, a thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a method used for recognizing, analyzing and recording patterns-themes within data and could then take it further by interpreting numerous aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Specifically, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), were used to interpret the data. IPA which is connected to a phenomenological epistemology is utilized to gather in-depth individual experience of reality in order to obtain an understanding of the phenomenon in question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Edward Husserl who developed phenomenology was interested in identifying the experiences and/or essential components of phenomena which makes them unique or distinguishable from others (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Themes are researcher constructions and interpretations, and themes help answer the research question and is one of the core criteria for their place in the analysis (Saldana, 2021). In this study the researcher analyzed the data and explored themes that occur. This process began by transcribing the interviews using the software Otter.ai then reading and re-reading the transcripts multiple times. Cross-referencing the transcripts with the audio recording was also conducted to ensure accuracy of the data. During this stage in the process, it allowed the researcher to write notes on his observation and reflection as well as indicate any potential significance. Identifying emerging themes within the data followed by examining connections between the emerging themes (Saldana, 2021). The researcher then explored patterns across cases to be able to finalize the development of themes and sub-themes.

The next stage in the process the researcher coded the data and examined patterns that emerge. Coding is the process of organizing the data by categories and clustering the

similar topics in which derive from the participants language also known as in vivo term (Creswell, 2014). The researcher used Tesch's eight step approach in the coding process (Creswell, 2014) as follows: 1) Read all transcriptions; 2) Examine each case writing individual notes as you read; 3) Make a list of topics and cluster together similar topics and then categorize into subtopics; 4) Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text and organizing this data to see if new categories and codes emerge; 5) Locate the most descriptive wording for the topics and turn them into categories and then look to reduce the total list of categories by grouping related topics; 6) Make a final decision on the abbreviations for each category and alphabetize; 7) Prepare the data material within each category and perform a preliminary analysis; 8) Recode existing data if needed.

The researcher coded deductively and created a provisional list of codes prior to collecting the data. Coding deductively is to begin the analytic project by determining beforehand codes, a starting list of codes prior to fieldwork (Saldana, 2021). The research then coded inductively by adding additional codes after reviewing the data the first time. Coding inductively is an approach that spontaneously creates original codes after reviewing the data (Saldana, 2021). The researcher created a short list of potential coding for themes and then created additional codes during analysis (Appendix D).

Three cycles of coding were conducted and recoded after reviewing the data multiple times. Deep reflection and meticulous attention were given as the researcher constructed meanings and patterns of the participants' experiences.

During interviews, participants were asked if there is public access to district budget documents. More specifically, the researcher asked the participants during the

interviews, if within the public budget document, it would be possible to identify budget allocation specifically for literacy. Depending on their response, the researcher then went further in asking if they could provide a budget that specifically indicated funding for literacy within the overall district budget. The researcher was able to access two district budgets, so a content analysis was conducted. The researcher examined the presence of certain themes and concepts in order to code the data such as overall percentage of funding allocation for literacy. The percentage of the funding allocation for literacy allocated to personnel compared to other than personnel. Using content analysis, the researcher quantified the data to analyze the relationships of the themes.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Participant Overview

Nine of the ten participants in this study reported in depth information about their experiences in their role as it pertains to budget allocation for literacy within their district and schools. One of the participants informed that they did not play a role in school finance and/or the budget process. Aside from two of the participants, the others were from different districts. The information reported by the participants ranged widely in perspective, however, there were many overlapping perspectives and experiences. This information has been grouped to clearly identify the similarities and differences across the participant experiences. These experiences in their roles within the district budget process and decision-making responsibility sets the context for all the findings to follow. The patterns and findings based on the analysis within the participants experiences are grouped by the following themes: 1) literacy sets the foundation for the budget although doesn't represent a high percentage of the budget allocation; 2) leadership comfort level varies in school finance and budgeting; 3) who benefits from increased funding and expected student outcomes; 4) and achievement starts and ends with personnel.

Budget Process and Decision Making

Five of the participants, Jennifer, Carol, Brian, Gabby and Barbara all indicated that they were in charge of creating and preparing the district budget. They considered themselves the “decision-maker” and had final say prior to presenting the budget to the board of education. Brian and Barbara held the position of Superintendent while Gabby was the Assistant Superintendent of Business, Jennifer the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction and Carol the district employee to the Superintendent. Carol's

title was unclear and the only additional information she provided was that she was second in command to the superintendent and was responsible for preparing the budget.

Brian and Barbara both indicated that each year the budget process begins by determining the gaps in learning. Reviewing the data of the previous school year which includes student test scores and their progress throughout the year for each individual school within the district. If the outcomes in achievement for a particular grade from a specific school within the district is significantly lower than the others, more funding may need to be allocated so those students are supported in order to level the learning/achievement gap. Both Brian and Barbara reported that they obtain input from their school principals, curriculum personnel and key administrators on their needs and wants for the upcoming year. Brian provided a budget process timeline in which information is disseminated to the principals and curriculum personnel in November. In December, the team reviews the data from the previous year's achievement outcomes to determine the gaps in learning. If the system is working effectively, the gaps in learning will synchronize with the needs and wants of the principals and curriculum personnel. The Superintendent will then prioritize the order of needs and wants in preparation of the budget. Then in January the state budget numbers are released and then they have to determine which needs and wants will fit within the budget. When the state dollar figure is higher than the initial projection everything is great according to Brian because you can then add more needs and wants onto the budget. If it is not, cutting items and programs from the budget is the more challenging aspect. Working within the framework of the budget is a must. Barbara a Superintendent for fifteen years said:

You have to be very cautious of increases because you need to be very sensitive about the needs of the community. You can't put in the budget everything you want and need so you work with teams of people to develop a responsible budget.

Barbara further reported after a responsible budget has been prepared, she would then present the budget to the finance committee of the Board of Education. Once that review is complete and revisions are made if needed, the budget would be presented to the public so that the people in the community understand exactly how the funds are being used. Questions that are answered during this stage are: "What are the goals and objectives of the district? How are you funding these goals so that the students can achieve?" Once this is complete and approved, the budget must be submitted back to the Board of Education and then goes to the county for review. The Superintendent then works with the county business administrator in the state of New Jersey and goes over each line of the budget to ensure all avenues of all students are being supported as best as possible. Barbara went on to add that it is a lengthy process and once you finish you start again. This process is what funds every program.

Jennifer, an Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction also reported that the process begins with evaluating all of the district programs including supplies and materials to determine the effectiveness and need. Similarly, to Brian and Barbara, she explained that this is a collaborative process in which she includes building leaders such as Principals, supervisors, and teachers in voicing their opinions in the process.

Regarding the budget process, Jennifer said: "It is a collaborative process and kind of a collaborative decision, but not completely, because you can't make everybody happy, but you try to get everybody's input and voice."

Jennifer further reported an extensive part of the process is reviewing the data on student achievement and evaluating the effectiveness of the materials, digital tools all the way down to the specific consumables. Then a determination is made on the level of need compared to the effectiveness so that the most efficient programs and materials are included in the budget. Once this stage of the budget process is complete, Jennifer would then have meetings with the superintendent and the business administrator to review and revise the budget accordingly. Jennifer went on to say:

During the meetings with the Superintendent and business administrator not all items on the budget are met with the same opinion in which this needs to be talked through, but you know, we have a couple of arguments in the process.

Jennifer noted that the process of preparing the annual district budget does not come without its share of disagreement, but throughout the preparation many voices are heard and at the end of the day the Superintendent has the final say before it is presented to the Board of Education.

Carol a district employee to the Superintendent in her district provided a process that seemed less structured than some of the other participants with budget decision making responsibilities. Her process differed as she reported that she would meet with teachers and curriculum personnel at the close of the school year as an “exit conference” to obtain information from them of what programs and what materials would need for next year. Carol would also meet with them in teams and individually to gather the information. She also would base her budget decisions on the academic year student outcomes. Carol then explained that the teachers’ input was very important in her preparing the budget. Carol said:

We base the budget on our philosophies of enrichment. I never had any teacher turnover issue because teachers were free and were not afraid to take chances.

This philosophy supported the budget as many of the programs and materials were effective each year and ultimately had a positive effect on student outcomes.

Although Carol worked for the superintendent in having budget oversight, she did report that she had decision making authority regarding the budget and when speaking with the superintendent, there were never any issues of concern or disagreement with her decisions.

Gabby, an Assistant Superintendent of Business reported similar information in that she includes her Assistant Superintendent of instruction, principals, supervisors, and coordinators for their input in terms of what is needed for the upcoming year from their perspective. That would also include implementing new programs. New programs cost a lot of money to implement as they may require new textbooks, software, and possibly professional development for the teachers. Costs for a new program can easily run \$50,000 to implement. In addition, funds may be needed for building repair and maintenance. Gabby said:

I start the budget from scratch each year and construct the budget by obtaining input from the team which includes building principals, supervisors and coordinators, building and grounds, information technology and special education. If there are new programs being discussed, we need to think about where that funding is going to be coming from.

Gabby also reported from year to year you may have different grade sizes in which one year you may have three, third grade classes in a building but the next year you may need four, third grade classes due to the number of students that age. Therefore, additional materials may be needed for the additional third grade class. Gabby said, “By the time the budget gets presented to the board of education, it has already been well thought out.” After the budget is complete, Gabby described that she presents the budget to the Board of Education as the assistant superintendent for business alongside the superintendent for approval.

Two of the participants, Charles, and Dorothy, indicated that they play a major role in the budget process, but they do not make the final decisions. The Superintendents in their respective districts make the final decision on the budget prior to presenting to the board of education. Charles holds the position of Deputy Superintendent and Dorothy holds the position of Executive Director for Academic Support to Schools.

Charles reported that his primary role within the budget process is overseeing the need for personnel and infrastructure. When Charles reviews the personnel component within the district budget, the first item he ensures is budgeted is literacy teachers for grades K-5. He explained that it is of high importance that literacy is these teacher’s primary function. Ensuring that every elementary grade has the appropriate funding for reading teachers, English teachers, and special education teachers are accounted for in the budget. Charles reported that hiring elementary teachers with literacy backgrounds is an effective use of funding because you gain more in literacy by hiring teachers with literacy backgrounds and you are able to stretch the funds further across all areas of the budget. Charles said, “The biggest bang for the buck is to have the classroom teacher a literacy

teacher.” Charles reported that the majority of the funding approximately 78% within the district budget is allocated for salaries and benefits. Some districts a little more and some a little less. The remaining portion of the budget funds everything else.

Dorothy who oversees 16 elementary schools in her role as Executive Director of Academic Support Services reported that she plays a major role in the budget process which includes preparing the budget and leading the teams of individuals who collaborate in the process. Then she presents the budget to the Superintendent who makes the final decision. Dorothy reported, similar to Charles that the majority of the budget, approximately 80% is for personnel, 10% operational and 10% materials and supplies. She described that once the budget was prepared it would be presented to the public so the community would see where the funding was budgeted for the year.

Dorothy reported that she did not feel that the budget tightly aligned with the areas that their data indicated needed improvement. Dorothy said, “As far as the overall district budget, it’s very vague as it pertains to tightly aligning spending to match areas that are in need of improvement.” She went on to further emphasize that the budget planning begins by reviewing the annual student outcomes data and that the budget is contingent on what the data indicates. However, funding may be reallocated depending on discussion from role players within the budget creation. There could be specific programs they decide to implement or positions to hire that shift the focus which do not particularly align with the data indicating areas of need. This contrasted what many of the other participants reported.

Two of the participants, Adam and Samantha indicated that they play a small role in the budget process, and they do not have decision making responsibility over the

budget. The superintendent makes the final decisions. Adam holds the position of Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, and Samantha holds the position of Coordinator for the Superintendent.

Adam reported that his role in the budget process is to provide a list of materials, instructional supplies, professional development technology, consumables and instructional infrastructure needs to the business office. Then the business office responds indicating that your request exceeds the amount of funding allotted so you will need to revise. Or the business office responds informing that there is more room in the budget so you may want to add additional resources. Once the business office puts together the preliminary numbers from all the departments then Adam along with other unit department heads meet with the Superintendent to discuss the numbers. Adam reported that after some discussion and questions from the superintendent, the Superintendent will decide which items stay on the budget or will be removed. Adam said:

The district puts forth a considerable amount of money for new texts for our elementary schools as well as our secondary schools to keep the literature fresh and current. In addition, money towards professional development, particularly in literacy, readers/writers' workshop and curriculum development constantly looking at our youth study ensuring relevant teaching practices and that they are aligned with the most intriguing and relevant curriculum for our students.

Adam reported similarly to the other participants that the bulk of the budget funds salaries for personnel. Much of the personnel background is based in literacy. Adam said, "The budget for personnel aligns with what the district goals are for literacy." Adam

further informed that teacher training in literacy is of high priority and must allocate funding accordingly. During the budget planning process this is taken into account.

Samantha informed that her role in the budget is to provide information on special education programs and the budgetary needs for the upcoming year. She would also be asked by the Superintendent to research new programs that would be of need to enhance their special education needs. This would also include professional development programs in this area. Samantha reported that her role in the budget process was small. When asked if she would like to have a larger role in the process Samantha said, “No, I am very happy being asked about researching particular programs and my opinions on them. I never really had a big interest in budgeting, per se, it’s not my thing so my level is absolutely fine.”

One participant, Sally, reported she did not have any role in the budget process and did not know how the budget process worked. When I asked her if she would like to have a role in the process, she indicated yes but would not provide any details on how she would want to be involved. Table 2 provides an overview of decision-making authority and budget knowledge for all participants.

Table 2**Decision-Making and Budget Knowledge**

Name	Position	Decision-Making Authority	Knowledge of the % of Funding Allocated to Literacy	District Budget Data Included Indicating Literacy	Training in Budgeting and School Finance
Jennifer	Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum	Yes	Yes	Yes (not entire budget -only other than personnel)	None
Carol	District Employee	Yes	No	No	None
Adam	Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum	No	No	No	One Course
Brian	Superintendent	Yes	No	No	Yes
Charles	Deputy Superintendent	No	Yes	Yes	None
Gabby	Assistant Superintendent of Business	Yes	No	No	Yes
Samantha	Coordinator for Superintendent	No	No	No	Yes
Barbara	Superintendent	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Dorothy	Executive Director of Academic Support of Schools	No	No	No	None
Sally	Assistant Principal	No	No	No	NA

Themes

While each individual participant had distinctive experiences as a school-district leader there were common experiences reported and identified. The leading themes that are present across the data are indicated below which include: 1) Literacy sets the foundation as a core construct of the budget although doesn't represent a high percentage of the funding allocation, 2) leadership comfort level varies in school finance; 3) who benefits from increased funding and expected student literacy outcomes, and 4) budgeting and achievement starts and ends with personnel.

Theme One: Literacy Sets the Budget Foundation Although Doesn't Represent a High Percentage of the Budget Allocation

There was a consensus among the participants that literacy sets the foundation of the budget and that budgetary decisions are made based around the funding needs for literacy. However, the data collected from the participants indicated a wide range of perspectives from both those who were aware of the percentage of funding allocated to literacy, as well as the individuals who did not know the funding percentage allocated to literacy. Three of the participants (30%) reported that the percentage of allocated funding towards literacy was significant, a high percentage. Three of the participants (30%) reported that the percentage of the overall budget towards literacy was a small percentage and four participants (40%) reported that they did not know. Only three of the participants (30%) reported knowing the percentage of the budget that was allocated towards literacy. One of the remaining seven participants who reported playing a large role in the budget process indicated that they believed literacy to be a small percentage of the overall budget. Two of the remaining seven participants reported that the allocation

for literacy was significant, a high percentage of the overall budget. Four of the remaining seven participants reported that they just did not know.

Jennifer, Charles, and Barbara were the three participants who reported that they knew the exact percentage of funding allocated to literacy. The parameters of what literacy consisted of varied somewhat depending on the individual defining it. Jennifer reported 50 percent of the budget was allocated to literacy, Charles reported 25 percent and Barbara reported twenty percent. Brian and Carol indicated they did not know the percentage of the budget allocated towards literacy but believed it was a high percentage of the budget. Gabby was the one participant who did not know the percentage of funding allocated to literacy but indicated that it would be a very small percentage of the overall budget. While Adam, Samantha, Dorothy, and Sally reported that they did not know the percentage of funding allocated to literacy and could not say if it was a large or small percentage of the overall budget.

Six of the participants reported that they had complete involvement within the budget process and five of those six participants reported that they made the final decision on the budget prior to it being presented to the board of education. Of the five participants who made the final budget decisions, Carol was the outlier as she was the only participant not being in a position of a Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent. Her role is the District Employee to the Superintendent. Gabby was an outlier because although she indicated she did not know the percentage of the overall budget allocated to literacy; she was the only one who reported she believed funding allocated to literacy would be a very small percentage of the overall budget. Three of the remaining four participants indicated they played some role in the budget while one participant did not

play any role in the budget process. Of those four participants, aside from the participant who did not play any role in the budget, two participants (Adam & Samantha) did not know the percentage of the overall funding for literacy and could not say whether they believed it was a large or small percentage of the overall budget. The remaining participant (Charles) reported that he knew the percentage of overall funding allocated to literacy and it was a smaller percentage of the overall budget.

Sub Theme: Knowing the percentage of the budget allocated to literacy and budget availability.

Only three of the participants Jennifer, Charles and Barbara reported that they knew the percentage of funding of the overall district budget that is allocated towards literacy. That equates to thirty percent of the participants knowing the funding allocation percentage. Jennifer and Charles were able to send the researcher direct information on the allocation percentages of the budget. Barbara informed during the interview that she would try and send the researcher the budget, however, the researcher was unsuccessful in receiving the budget from her.

Jennifer who was one of the three participants that reported knowing the percentage of funding allocated to literacy was the outlier in the group. She informed that the funding allocation percentage for literacy was a substantial portion of the overall budget. Jennifer shared the budget with me, and the budget indicated 50 percent of the budget was allocated towards literacy. Jennifer did confirm that her district budget allocates 50 percent of the overall budget towards literacy. However, within this budget personnel were not listed. To be accurate, Jennifer reported that fifty percent of the non-personnel budget was allocated to literacy. Jennifer reported that she did not have the

entire budget on hand, so it did not include personnel. She never sent the entire budget. Therefore, this percentage is based on all budgetary items other than personnel. She did go further to breakdown the expenses and programs for the upcoming academic year which indicated a 50 percent budget allocation towards literacy. Jennifer said:

Half of the budget goes towards literacy. I don't have personnel numbers but as far as other numbers such as professional development, supplies and materials, digital tools, and new programs such as reading programs it is all in the budget.

This percentage was the highest percentage reported from all the participants but not completely accurate as this data was for non-personnel budget and not the overall district budget.

Charles, one of the three participants to report that he knew the percentage allocation towards literacy provided the most in-depth information from all the participants. Charles reported that the total proposed 2021-2022 district budget was \$184,937,763. The total budgeted costs for all employees' salaries and benefits in the projected 2021-2022 budget is \$136,939,227. Salaries and benefits equate to 74.05% of the total proposed budget. Charles was also able to then breakdown the personnel portion of the budget and provide me the figure that would be specifically allocated for literacy personnel. \$46,325,500 of the 2021-2022 proposed budget was allocated for personnel for literacy. The total percentage of the district wide salary and benefits committed to literacy equates to 33.83%. The remaining \$47,998,536 (25.95%) of the entire budget was allocated for other than personnel such as materials and supplies, new programs, technology and infrastructure. Of that funding, Charles reported that \$415,000 was allocated for literacy. \$184,937,763 was the total district wide budget. Of that total,

\$46,740,500 was allocated towards literacy. The percentage of funding allocated towards literacy from the total proposed district budget was 25.27%.

Barbara was the third participant to report that she knew the percentage of the district budget that was allocated for literacy. Although she informed me that she would be able to provide me with the budget, unfortunately, she never did send it. Barbara reported that 20 percent of the overall district budget was allocated for literacy. This number was not too far off from the 25 percent reported by Charles. It would have been beneficial to see the budget from Barbara to compare it to the numbers Charles was able to provide. Barbara was able to offer additional information in regard to determining the allocation for literacy. Barbara said:

Usually, literacy comes under curriculum and instruction so if I had the budget in front of me, I could tell you to the penny what I was spending on language arts literacy. A healthy budget should have at least in the low 20th percentile for your curriculum development. Literacy does take up a large piece of it because you are not just dealing with the textbook program but you're dealing with professional development for the staff which is critical and technology online programs and assessment which is needed to monitor student achievement on a quarterly basis and all of that cost money.

Barbara further reported that in today's climate budgeting assessment for literacy is very much needed to ensure the proper support for the students so they can achieve to the expected levels of the district. In addition, for students to be successful high-quality teachers and principals are needed so budgeting for their professional development is very costly on an annual basis. Barbara said:

Every content area supports literacy. You're always looking for opportunities for students, whether it's science or social studies as it's all linked to literacy and reading and the ability of students to be able to read independently on their reading level. That's something you need to do and hopefully go beyond that and that's got to be a main focus of the budget.

Carol, one of the participants who reported that she did not know the percentage of the overall budget allocated to literacy was one of the two participants that informed that she believed a significant percentage of funding went to literacy. Carol said:

I would say most of the money went to literacy. If you think about it, every teacher is a literacy teacher. There is no such thing as a math teacher, just teaching math as the new math has students having to read through a word problem, show their steps, they're thinking. It's not just adding calculations anymore. Everything is based around literacy so I would say all of the money trickles down to instruction in the classroom teaching students how to read and write all of the day.

This data indicates that Carol reported that a large percentage of the budget is allocated to literacy. Carol went on to further point out that physical education teaching and learning has even changed. Physical education is not only change into your athletic clothes and play physical sports or exercise anymore. The physical education teacher gives the students vocabulary words to study in this content area and then the teacher would have a vocabulary contest that would increase literacy within gym class. Literacy is weaved into everything, Carol informed.

Brian was one of the two participants to report that the percentage of funding allocation for literacy was a high percentage of the overall budget. Although Brian reported that he was the Superintendent and made the final decision in regards to the budget prior to presenting to the board of education, he informed he did not know the percentage of funding allocated to literacy. When asked if he knows the percentage of funding allocated to literacy Brian said:

No, and the reason it's no is that literacy is the foundation in all our elementary spending which includes all of our elementary teachers, teacher training, programs, materials, new teacher hires, classroom time and even our teacher spending. Literacy is the first focus.

Brian went on to further indicate that his elementary school principals drive the train in their schools, and he expects that everything from K-5th grade should be literacy focused. Funding requests and allocations primary focus should be towards literacy. Once literacy budgets and programs are finalized then they work in the other disciplines such as mathematics. Brian said:

Literacy is the primary foundation of grades K-5 and we hire principals whose primary focus is on literacy. Literacy being their baby and that is why we have a district which is 51% minority and have the positive results that we have.

Brian went on to further report that reading, and writing is the fundamental cornerstone of instruction in the district and everything in the budget is funneled towards literacy. Brian informed that even their mathematics teachers have literacy backgrounds.

Everyone in the district should be teaching literacy and that is how Brian expects the budget to be prepared ensuring literacy is the focus and foundation.

Adam, Samantha, and Dorothy all reported that they were not aware of the percentage of funding from the overall budget that was allocated to literacy and could not say whether it was a large or small percentage of the overall budget. Adam reported that the district does allocate funding for new textbooks in literacy for the elementary and middle schools to keep the literature current. In addition, funding is allocated to teacher professional development particularly in literacy, but he did not know the percentages or the specifics of how much. Adam reported that there are several components of the budget and the first one is salaries which make up the majority of the budget. Some of which Adam informed is allocated towards literacy as the budget aligns to what the district goals are for literacy. Samantha, similar to Adam did not know the percentage allocated towards literacy and could not say if it was a large or small percentage. Samantha informed that she has been in this business a long time as she started back in the 1980's. She reported that she remembers funding being earmarked for certain budgetary lines when she first started. Now she informs that in current times the principals and superintendents have more autonomy with the budget. This could be a positive or negative process in which determines outcomes. It all depends on how competent the school leader is in making budget determinations. Samantha informs that school leaders and administrators play an extremely important role in the process of student outcomes. Budget creation and allocation is critical to the success.

Dorothy, similar to Adam and Samantha, also indicated that she does not know the percentage of the budget allocated to literacy and informs that she can't say whether

that percentage is large or small. Dorothy did report that eighty percent of the budget is made up of personnel, ten percent operational and ten percent materials. She indicates that portions of funding from all three categories does go to support literacy. Dorothy said:

There are so many different pieces within each portion of the budget. There is reading literacy and then are we looking at cross disciplinary literacy? Also, there could be additional funding for disadvantaged students that there may be a need to allocate funding for a reading resource teacher in addition to a reading specialist. In addition, the summer reading program or after school program that is for foundational reading skills. It's very hard to quantify.

Dorothy also reported that funding needs to be aligned with the needs of the schools within the district and she is not sure that the budget always conforms to this. Dorothy said, "As far as the district budget overall, I think it is too vague and needs to tightly align it with literacy needs and programs." She went on to indicate that funding allocation must match the areas in need of improvement. This should be based on what the data looks like and that should determine how funding is reallocated.

Gabby is the one participant who reported that she does not know the percentage of funding allocated to literacy but believes it to be a very small percentage of the overall budget. She indicated that the greatest component of the budget is instructional and within that salaries are budgeted. Gabby reported that it is difficult to break out the literacy pieces but did not provide any further information.

Nine of the ten participants reported that the district budgets were public knowledge and could be found on the district websites. One participant (Sally) did not provide an answer. When I asked the question to all participants if I would be able to figure out the funding allocated specifically for literacy, all nine participants informed me that the budget would not be that specific. I then asked if they would be able to provide me with a budget indicating the lines specifically for literacy and only three of the participants indicated that they would be able to share a budget with those specifics (Jennifer, Charles & Barbara). These three participants were the only three that reported they knew the percentage of funding allocated to literacy. Jennifer and Charles did send budget information to me while Barbara never did send me that information. Jennifer's budget was not the entire district budget. She provided a budget and was speaking directly to the components of the district budget excluding personnel. Charles's budget was the entire district budget.

From the three participants that were able to provide information on budget allocation for literacy, all three reported that the percentage of funding allocated to literacy was fifty percent or less of the overall district budget. Charles reported an exact number of 25.27% of the proposed 2021-2022 district budget was allocated to literacy. Barbara reported twenty percent (20%) of the overall budget was allocated to literacy and Jennifer reported fifty percent (50%) of the budget (other than personnel) was allocated to literacy.

Theme Two: Leadership Comfort Level Varies in School Finance and Budgeting

There was a wide range of self-perspective on the participants' level of comfort in school finance and budgeting. The self-reported comfort level ranged from extremely

comfortable/one hundred percent comfortable to not comfortable at all reported by the participants. Participants also reported having a medium level of comfort with budgeting and if they had more training, they would feel comfortable having a larger role in the budget process. Some participants reported having a fair level of comfort in which they would need a good amount of additional training to possibly play a larger role in the budget process. Five of the ten participants (50%) reported that they were very comfortable or one hundred percent comfortable in budgetary matters and school finance. One participant (10%) reported a medium comfort level while two participants (20%) reported a fair level of comfort and one participant (10%) reported not being comfortable at all. One participant (10%) who was the only participant not holding a district level position did not answer this question as they were not involved in the budgeting or school finance matters at all. Table 3 provides an overview of comfort level in budgeting and school finance for all participants.

Table 3

Comfort Level in School Finance

Name	Position	Decision-Making Authority	Comfort Level in Budgets and School Finance	Think More Training Would Increase Comfort Level
Jennifer	Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum	Yes	Not at all	Yes
Carol	District Employee	Yes	Very Comfortable	No

Adam	Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum	No	Fair	Yes
Brian	Superintendent	Yes	Very Comfortable	No
Charles	Deputy Superintendent	No	Very Comfortable	No
Gabby	Assistant Superintendent of Business	Yes	Very Comfortable	No
Samantha	Coordinator for Superintendent	No	Fair	Yes
Barbara	Superintendent	Yes	Very Comfortable	No
Dorothy	Executive Director of Academic Support of Schools	No	Medium	Yes
Sally	Assistant Principal	No	NA	NA

Carol, Brian, Charles, Gabby and Barbara all reported that they were extremely comfortable in school finance and budgeting. Four of these five participants held the positions of Superintendent (two of these four participants), Deputy Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of Business. Carol being an outlier held the position of district

employee to the superintendent. Carol also reported that she did create and have final decision-making power alongside the superintendent. Regarding comfort level in budgeting and school finance Carol said: “I am one hundred percent comfortable in the budget process and with school finance.” Four of these five participants also had final decision-making responsibility prior to presenting the budget to the board of education. The similarities of these five participants that reported feeling completely comfortable in school finance and budgets is that eighty percent (80%) of them held superintendent positions and eighty percent (80%) reported to have final-decision responsibility regarding the budget.

Brian and Barbara are both Superintendents of their respective districts. For clarity, they are not from the same district. Brian has been in this position for nine years and Barbara has been in this position for fifteen years. Both participants reported having a very high comfort level in school finance and budgeting. Similarities of these two participants is that they both hold the position of superintendent, both have final budget decision making responsibility and they both have many years of experience in this position. Brian said, “My comfort level with budgeting is very high. I have a very high acumen because I’ve had such a blessing in training. I could come in and be someone’s business official because of my nine years here.” Brian is referring that he has had a business official working for him during these past nine years that he has learned a great deal from regarding the budget and process within the educational system.

Barbara informed that the budget process varies somewhat depending on what the needs of the specific district are. But the budget process is vital to school, community, and student success. Barbara said:

I am very comfortable with budgeting and school finance. Once you've done a budget and you've done them year after year, my comfort level increased to where I am very comfortable with the process. I could start the budget process from beginning to end without a problem.

One difference between Brian and Barbara when it came to budgets and school finance is that although both participants reported being very comfortable with the budget process, Barbara was able to provide a percentage of allocated funding to literacy of the overall budget where Brian was unable to do so. Barbara indicated twenty percent of the overall district budget was allocated to literacy where Brian reported that he did not know the percentage but informed that most of the funding went to literacy. There was a reported difference in school finance and budgeting training between Brian and Barbara. Brian explained he did not take any formal educational training in school and learned on the job where Barbara reported that she did take a couple of courses within her educational background.

Charles and Gabby held positions of Deputy Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of Business respectively. Charles has been in this position for two years while Gabby in her position for eight years. Charles also reported that he held the position of Assistant Superintendent of Business the previous three years in his district. Both reported that they are very comfortable in budgeting and school finance. Charles said:

My comfort level is at the top in terms of making financial decisions. I know how to negotiate contracts and I am very comfortable with school finance and financial

decisions and discussing them. As long as I have the nuts-and-bolts person or team, I'm very comfortable.

Aside from their roles within their districts, and budgeting comfort level both reported that they play a large role in the budget process. Gabby said, "I am very comfortable with budgeting and school finance. I've been doing it for so many years." Another similarity of these five participants is experience. All five participants indicated that their experience in playing their extensive roles in the budget process has increased their level of comfort in which currently all of them reported being very comfortable in the budget process and with school finance. A key difference between Charles and the other four participants is that Charles reported that the final decision on the budget prior going to the board of education is the Superintendent. Charles is the outlier in this group of five participants who reported being very comfortable with the budget process as he is the only participant among the five that does not make the final decision regarding the budget.

Dorothy who holds the position of Executive Director of Academic Support Services to Schools was the only participant to report that she has an overall medium comfort level when it comes to budget and school finances. Dorothy plays a large role in the budget process but is not the final decision-maker as she indicated that responsibility falls on the Superintendent. Dorothy said, "When it comes to the district budget, I definitely have lots of questions." Dorothy also reported that she has three years' experience in her current position but twenty-two years of experience in her district. She informed that when she was a principal of a school in the district, she was much more comfortable with the school budget. She indicated that the budget was its own separate

piece that she would report to the business office and at the district level there are many more components with more people involved voicing their needs and wants. Dorothy said:

At the district level, I've got more compartmentalized knowledge of certain areas, maybe a little more than others; but I am not completely comfortable. However, in my own little school when I was a principal, I felt very comfortable.

Dorothy was able to provide some information on her experience when she was in control of a budget of a school as principal compared to the more complex budget process at the district level. Dorothy indicated there is much more that goes into the district level budget and your knowledge of budgets and school finance must be greater to be able to handle the budget process appropriately and effectively meet the needs for all schools and their students.

Adam and Samantha reported having a fair level of comfort when it came to the budget process and school finance. Adam held the position of Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction in which he was in that position for five years. Samantha held the position of Coordinator for the Superintendent and has been in that position for fifteen years and in her district for thirty-three years. Both participants were similar in that they both played a smaller role in the budget process and neither of them had any decision-making responsibilities within the budget process. Adam said:

I am good at putting together my wish list and aiming to get the resources that are needed both from the curriculum instruction point of view and the instructional technology point of view. I leave all the rest of the budget to the business office.

Samantha reported that she has a very small role in the budget process and that she does not want to be more involved in the process. Samantha said:

My comfort level is fair to medium. If I had to, I would learn it as I have seen my supervisor be a whiz at it. I would certainly need to take some professional development on budgeting before I would feel comfortable. I would not be able to do it tomorrow, its just not my expertise.

Aside from both Adam and Samantha not playing a significant role in the budget process, there is not many similarities between these two participants. They both have different positions within the district and Samantha has many more years than Adam in their current roles. The one similarity is that both indicated that they would need additional training and or professional development in budgeting and school finance to become more comfortable in the budget process.

Jennifer was the only participant to report that she is very uncomfortable with budgeting and school finance. Jennifer holds the position of Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, and she has been in this position for three years. She reported that she plays a major role within the entire budget process. Jennifer said, “I’m not comfortable with budgeting and school finance at all. I really don’t know too much about numbers and I’m not great at balancing budgets.” Although Jennifer reported that she plays a key role in all aspects of the district budget she informed that she was not comfortable with the process or with numbers in general. She further reported that the key team members who played a significant role in the budget process were the superintendent, the director of special services, the business administrator and herself. Jennifer said:

In regard to budgeting and not feeling comfortable, I think it's indicative of a lot of leaders in a district, certainly ours. We all have our own specialty and expertise. Whether it's legal, budgeting, or instructional where instructional is my wheelhouse, not numbers. Being involved in the process is experience and you learn as you go.

The team works together to prepare the budget even though some of the key members in the process are not very comfortable with budgets and school finance. Jennifer is the outlier of the nine participants that reported they play some role in the budget process reporting that she is not comfortable at all with budgeting and school finance. In addition, she is one of seven participants who reported that they play a major role in the budget process and the only participant to indicate that she is very uncomfortable with the budget process and school finance. She explained that she would need formal training in school finance to start becoming comfortable to any degree with budgeting and finance.

One participant, Sally did not answer these set of questions as she reported she did not play any role in the budget process.

Sub Theme: Training in Budgeting and School Finance not too Common.

Of the ten participants, five of them (50%), Jennifer, Carol, Adam, Charles, and Dorothy reported that they did not receive any formal training such as in their college and graduate degree programs or specific on-going training in budgeting and school finance. One participant, Sally did not answer this question as she was not involved in the budget process. Of the nine participants that informed they did play a role whether large or small in the budget process, five participants reported not having training prior to their position.

Two of the five participants Jennifer and Carol informed they have had no training in school finance although reported that they had budget decision making responsibility when it came to their district budget. Charles and Dorothy of the remaining three participants who indicated they had no training reported that they played a key role in the budget process. Only Adam of the five participants indicated they played a small role in the process. Jennifer said:

I have had no business courses ever. So, I don't think I'm really good at it, but I have learned through working under three business administrators in my career as a school leader and learned a bit from each of them. But no real training.

Jennifer reported that her level of education includes a master's degree in administration, teaching degrees in elementary and special education and she is currently working towards a doctorate degree.

Carol who also did not have any training in school finance did not provide much information aside from informing that she had no training in this area. Carol reported that her level of education included a master's degree in reading and literacy, a second master's degree in supervision and administration plus thirty assorted credits.

Charles also reported not having any formal training in budgeting and school finance. He informed that it was all on the job learning and training. Charles said:

No formal training. When I went back to school to get my administration license, I did a good chunk of my internship in the business office. Then when I went into administration after teaching, I became the assistant director of personnel for a couple of years, and I started learning. I worked with the assistant business

manager so that person did all the nuts and bolts of the budget and that was great guidance, so it was a beautiful match.

Charles level of education includes a doctorate plus business certification. Charles is the only participant that has obtained a doctorate level of education of the five participants that reported receiving no formal training in budgeting and school finance.

Dorothy, like Jennifer is currently working towards her doctorate. Her level of education includes a master's degree in special education and some classes in an MBA program. Dorothy said:

I did believe that business was going to be a huge part of being a school leader, so I did take like six MBA courses because I felt that I needed not just school leadership and educational leadership, but organizational leadership, especially being in a position outside of a school building. But that was a self-driven goal.

Dorothy reported receiving no formal training in school finance, although she did take some courses in an MBA program. These courses were not in budgeting or finance. She did inform that in her district when becoming a school-based administrator there were certain professional development trainings for different operational process. Dorothy said: "There is a lot more on the job training than formal training."

Adam is one of the five participants that reported receiving no formal training in budgeting and school finance, however, he did follow-up by saying he took one course in finance in the district leadership program. For clarification, he explained that this course did not really go into much detail on budgeting or examining school finance. Adam said:

There was one school finance course in the district leadership program but other than that I did not take any. The program did not focus on school finances but focused more on literacy instruction, pedagogical practices, and data analysis.

There was no emphasis on analyzing school finances.

Adam reported his level of education includes a master's degree in science education and certifications in school building level and school district level leadership.

Brian, Gabby, Samantha and Barbara reported that they did have some formal training in budgeting and school finance. Three of these four participants Brian, Gabby and Barbara held positions of Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent for Business. One of the participants Samantha, held a position of Coordinator for the Superintendent. Brian, Gabby and Dorothy were similar in the position they held and all three played key roles in the budget process. Samantha being the outlier as she did not hold as high-level position as the others, and she did not play a significant role in the budget process.

Brian, who is a Superintendent, reported receiving some training in budgeting and school finance. He informed that there were courses in these subjects within his certifications as superintendent. Although reporting that he did receive some formal training, it was not more than a few courses. Brian said:

My education in school finance was mostly trial by fire. I knew a lot being a building principal because in the district I was principal it was a very lean district and they included principals a lot in the decision making. Then when I came to this district it was truly trial by fire. I also was blessed. My first several years in this district my business administrator had forty years in the business and his

office was down the hall from me. He was a guru and each day I picked up new things from him. I was fortunate to be attached at the hip with him and it was extremely helpful.

Brian reported that his level of education included a doctorate in instructional leadership and administration and had building and district certifications.

Gabby an Assistant Superintendent of Business reported receiving a good amount of training and education in school finance. She reported taking courses in finance and budgeting in the superintendent certification and her focus was on finance and not instruction. She also informed that the majority of her professional development has been in finance. Gabby said:

I have been working in finance and budgeting for so many years. I learned everything I know about budgeting from the Office of the State Comptroller. They would take a Twenty-one-million-dollar budget, have six to eight people in the conference room for three months, ripping it apart, before the district could go out and present it to the community. Every dime you had in that budget you needed to tell them, where it was coming from, why you needed it, and what you were going to do with it. So, I learned that you need to know all the details of the budget and have good back up materials. I was trained by the best people out there probably to be trained from.

Gabby reported that her level of education includes a master's degree in education and school district leader certification to be an assistant superintendent. She also informed that she worked on wall street prior to the educational system.

Dorothy who holds the position of Superintendent reported having training in budgeting and school finance. She informed that she took finance courses within the superintendent certification. She also reported taking a graduate level course in budgeting. Dorothy reported that taking these courses helped but her experience learning with the right people on the job was essential. Dorothy said:

I always say that the business administrator and the superintendent are dance partners. You have to have a business administrator who is very bright and that you can trust has a good sense of balance in the district and watches the budget like a hawk.

Dorothy informed that the business administrator is a superintendent's key person in the budget process and school finances. The relationship is critical and if a superintendent is fortunate to have an effective and special business official, you learn a lot on the job from that person when it comes to school finance. Dorothy reported having a level of education that includes a master's degree in special education and her superintendent certification.

Samantha who is a Coordinator for the Superintendent reported that she has taken some training in budgeting and school finance. She informed taking school finance courses within her administration and supervision graduate degree program. Samantha did not provide more information regarding training on the job or other professional development pertaining to school finance. She reported playing a small role in the district budget process. Samantha informed her level of education includes a master's degree in administration and supervision.

The data indicates that only one participant (10%), Gabby has taken more than one or two courses in budgeting and school finance as well as significant additional formal professional development and training in school finance and budgeting. The consensus of the data collected indicates that there was not much formal training in school finance although, the majority of the participants play a key role in budgeting and finance in their districts. Most of the participants learning of budgeting and finance came from on-the-job training through their experience.

Theme Three: Who Benefits and Expected Student Literacy Outcomes

Nine of the participants reported that all of the stakeholders including the students, teachers, schools and community benefit from increased funding for literacy. One participant did not provide information as she was not asked this question based on her earlier responses. Carol reported that it's best for all involved when the students are able to perform to their capacity. When you have additional funding allocated towards literacy you can support the students at a higher level. Carol also explained that being able to run Saturday programs for the parents and provide them with knowledge on supporting their children academically at home increases achievement. In addition, providing parents whose English is not their primary language support has been very effective in student outcomes in her district. Carol said:

Increase funding for literacy first and foremost benefits academic performance, but it also brings the community together. Staff working with the parents and enriching the students becomes a pillar of the community rather than just a school.

Jennifer reported very similar data in which indicated that first and foremost the students benefit as she oversees a K-8 district. Jennifer said:

We are the foundation, so all our decisions start with the needs of the students.

Increase funding for literacy also benefits the teachers who are the next important piece of the puzzle and then the next important piece the community in which our schools are each just another place in the community that our families feel welcomed, and they can communicate with the staff. Our doors are always open.

Jennifer went on to further describe that the budget must have an impact on student's growth. With effective decisions on the budget and increased funding this leads to the benefit of student growth and academic achievement, teacher growth in knowledge and presentation and the home-school connection that benefits the community. Barbara also reported that the entire community benefits with increased funding allocation for literacy. When programs are set forth there are high expectations for the teachers and staff in the district to perform at a high level to be able to obtain the student outcomes objectives.

Barbara said:

Home is linked to the school. If the school is successful and the district receives a high rating, people get a lot of money for their homes. Everything is tied together. It starts with a book and look how it branches out; it has a lot of tentacles. Then it all comes back to the superintendent because the expectation is to achieve a good standard and then if you can do that the expectation is excellence above and beyond that.

Adam reported that all constituents and stakeholders benefit from literacy funding. The group that benefits the most are the students as they will receive high quality instruction. The teachers benefit as they will be able to obtain more resources to grow as professionals in the field and the schools and community benefit from increased student test scores. When schools are flourishing and doing well more families move into the community to be in the school district. Adam said, “Schools tend to drive the real estate in communities. The higher the test scores, the better the school ratings, the more families want to move into the community.” The data collected from Brian indicated that all stakeholders benefit from increased funding for literacy. Brain said:

Increased funding enables us to serve. We serve many masters, so it enables us to accentuate the talents of students that are already on grade level or above, by differentiating instruction and moving them into the correct instructional programs enables us to close the instructional gap. We have a very diverse population within this district with a tremendous learning gap amongst the students. Additional funding and resources enable us to close the learning gap.

The data collected from these interviews strongly indicate that all parties including students, teachers, schools, districts, and the community with students being on the top of the list of the beneficiaries of increased funding for literacy.

When it came to the question of the expectation to see a positive difference in student performance that could be measured when there is an increase of funding for literacy all ten participants definitively reported yes, they expected to see a difference in student performance and outcomes. Increased funding for literacy was not the only factor. Increased funding along with school leadership decisions on how to allocate those

resources play a major role in student outcomes. Brian reported that funding drives increased performance, but it does not ensure increased performance alone. All the participants reported high-quality teachers are critical, and the professional development and resources enables a better chance of achieving and obtaining the more effective teacher and ultimately increased student performance. Brian said:

I will take a good teacher and attempt with a piece of chalk with no resources over someone who is not affective with all the resources in the world. The teacher is everything but when that good teacher is given the professional development and the tools and the time, then you have magic. That is the winning combination.

Samantha and Dorothy both reported that they absolutely expect student performance to increase with increased funding for literacy. They both went on to inform that high-quality teachers are essential in the process and the only way to obtain and support this effort is to have quality professional development programs. Samantha reported that the funding must be administered correctly. The best programs being brought in but more importantly the staff and leadership running and overseeing the programs and progress, or the funding is being wasted.

One of the participants, Charles brought another perspective on how increased funding for literacy can support student performance by providing additional resources for students with socioeconomic needs, low-income families, or students with disabilities. Increased funding provides the ability to support the needs of these students which ultimately improves performance. For example, providing internet service for students with a low socioeconomic status in order for them to have the resources to succeed. Charles said:

When students and their families are concerned about food, shelter and transportation their educational needs such as books and internet play a smaller role in their priority list. With additional funding we can provide these resources to these families and reduce their burden which goes a long way in increasing their performance.

The consensus among all the participants indicated that increased funding for literacy benefits multiple stakeholders including the students first and foremost, the teachers, the schools and district and the community. When funding allocation increases and utilized effectively for literacy the entire community benefits as student achievement outcomes increase, teachers obtain high-quality professional development, school and district achievements increase drawing more support from families in the community and real estate value increases.

Theme Four: Achievement Starts and Ends with Personnel

Based on the data collected, the consensus of the participants indicates that personnel are critical to student success. Teachers and school leaders directly play a role in student outcomes. Investing in teachers so they become high-quality teachers is essential to increase student performance. School leaders' decisions on budget allocation and resources and investing in human capital is vital for an educational environment to thrive. Achievement starts and ends with the teachers and school leaders within the schools and district. Nine of the ten participants provided data on what they perceived was the most beneficial use of funding based on their experience. Eight of the nine participants reported that the most beneficial use of funding for literacy was to allocate funding towards high quality professional development programs for teachers. These

participants also indicated that teacher quality and effective leadership is essential for students, schools, and district success. Five of those participants stressed school leaders and administration as well as teacher quality is critical. One participant Gabby being the outlier reported the most beneficial use of funding is allocating it towards reading literacy programs and did not mention specifically professional development or training for teachers in this area. Where Jennifer reported that professional development for teachers specifically in early reading instruction is the most beneficial use of district funding for literacy.

Dorothy reported that she encourages her principals to direct their funding towards its human capital and professional development of their teachers and administrators. Dorothy said:

There are too few high-quality people in positions with lots of skills and if you have poorly trained individuals even with the best material it is not going to serve the students and district well. Professional development of that personnel is critical in successful decision making for the entire team. You can spend a whole lot of money on a bunch of stuff that goes and sits in a back room somewhere but that isn't really serving students.

Barbara reported that it is vital to have high-quality teachers and administrators to be most successful. Both groups of personnel, teachers and school leaders need to be trained and held accountable to become high achieving. She informed that you can't have one and not the other. Both are critical to in achieving high student outcomes. Barbara said:

Teacher training is critical and that's number one. It must be ongoing and not only in workshops but also in the classroom and it has to be very supportive. Training of your administrative staff is critical. You must set expectations and the administrators have to know what they are expecting their teachers to know. Everyone involved must know how to achieve excellence. The training piece is critical. When you put all this together you come out successful, but you can't shortchange one area for another. It has to be excellence across and holding everyone to a very high expectation.

Brian reported that the most beneficial use of funding is hiring teachers with literacy backgrounds and then ensuring they are high-quality by providing them with effective professional development. Samantha reported that training for teachers and school leaders is essential in student success and the most beneficial use of funding. School leaders must be able to plan and provide the resources needed so that teachers can be effective in the classroom, so all students learn. Samantha said, "Teachers and school leaders must be high-quality as they both need to be the drivers in motivating the students towards success."

Adam who also reported that the most beneficial use of district funding is for literacy professional development for teachers. Through professional development, this training provides the teachers with the most effective tools in teaching the students. Adam went on to further report that time as in the daily school schedule for literacy is important. Adam said, "How much of the master schedule from the elementary and secondary viewpoint is devoted towards literacy? Time spent on literacy is another important component which might often be forgotten about."

Charles, similar to eight of the other participants also reported that the most beneficial use of funding for literacy is for personnel. Charles was very specific in informing that personnel is the single most important use of district funds for student achievement and overall district success. Charles said:

Education is a people business. It's about providing for the students, their families and the community and it is being done by people. So, while other expenses are also present such as in textbooks and software the money is in the people and that is where it should be.

Charles further informed that teachers and school leaders makes the biggest difference in achievement so the investment of district funds must be in the personnel.

Jennifer reported that the most beneficial use of funding to have literacy success is funding professional development and coaching for teachers specifically to enhance reading instruction. Jennifer said:

Professional development and coaching are most important and best use of the funding. We have professional development implementation with fidelity, and you have to have the right people work with the teachers to implement. It is multifaceted and you can't just get the best program and give it to the teacher and expect it to work. The different individuals and pieces must work together and make it successful. Funding professional development is a must to increase literacy.

The data significantly indicates that investing in personnel including teachers and school leaders are the most beneficial use of district funding and plays a major role in student literacy achievement.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

This study investigated the experiences, practices, and perspectives of school district leaders who play a role in the district budget process, school finance and have budget decision-making responsibility. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of school district leaders with budget allocation for literacy and the factors that determine their budget allocation decisions.

This study used a phenomenological qualitative exploratory research approach with ten participants chosen through purposive snowball sampling. Qualitative data was collected through in-depth, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each participant. The researcher used Tesch's eight step approach (Creswell, 2014) in the coding process details provided in chapter 3, and examined patterns that emerged.

Several patterns and themes were identified from the one-on-one interviews with the participants including, *Literacy sets the budget foundation although doesn't represent a high percentage of the funding allocation; leadership comfort level varies in school finance; who benefits and expected student literacy outcomes; and budgeting and achievement starts and ends with personnel.* The participants experience in their roles within the district budget process and decision-making responsibility set the context for the themes and findings. The interpretation of these themes resulted in the following key conclusions of this study, 1. A deeper understanding is needed of what is considered literacy and where it falls within the budget, and 2. district school leaders who play a key role in creating, overseeing and have decision-making responsibility should have more training in school finance.

Districts vary in size in terms of the number of schools and students they serve. Each district also varies in the amount of annual funding they have to work with in their budget preparation. In addition, it is not always clear in each district who actually is responsible for creating, overseeing, and determining funding allocation of the budget. Findings indicate that the individual in this role could be the assistant superintendent for business, the deputy superintendent, the business administrator or the superintendent. Within the annual district budget process, there are several individuals involved at the beginning stages to provide their input such as the school principals and directors of various departments. Ultimately, it then comes down to a smaller group of key stakeholders including the superintendent, assistant superintendent of business, the business administrator and depending on the district an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction and or deputy superintendent. The superintendent is ultimately the individual responsible for the final budget being presented to the board of education. The data also indicated that after the board of education review, and prior to the budget final approval it was very important to present the budget to the community to ensure the community is aware of how the funding is going to be spent and that they accept this plan of action. Data and literature inform that the community is a partner or collaborator with the district and the district needs community support to achieve the highest level of success. Findings by research question are discussed followed by the key takeaways of this study.

What factors influence school leaders' decisions on budget allocation for literacy activities?

All participants reported that reviewing student achievement data from the previous year is a major factor in preparing the budget for the upcoming year. Bridging the learning gap amongst students in a district was also a priority. Determining what the most critical needs are to improve literacy learning, the district leaders analyze and plan to make the determination for budget allocation. In addition, there was consensus among study participants that a major factor in budgetary allocation decisions are the goals and objectives of the district.

How do school district leaders perceive the benefits of funding allocated for literacy activities?

The participants reported that there is benefit in allocating more funding towards literacy. The data suggests that increased funding for literacy will ultimately improve student achievement by providing more support to the teachers and the students. In allocating more funding to literacy districts are able to employ high-quality literacy teachers, provide effective professional development for teachers, consult with literacy coaches, purchase up-to-date textbooks and software and implement needed programs for all students. Ultimately, this positively effects student outcomes. Aside from increased funding for literacy, a critical component for success is school district leaders who can appropriately and effectively prepare and utilize the budget to be able to position the schools at a high level for improved student achievement and overall school success.

A Deeper Understanding of What is Literacy and Where it Falls Within the Budget

Findings suggest that literacy is the foundation and a critical component of the budget, however, it is not always clear where funding for literacy is allocated in the district budget. In addition, a deeper understanding of what is considered literacy is needed as it has been defined differently depending on the individual defining it. Participants reported that 75 to 80 percent of the budget is allocated to personnel. The remaining 20 to 25 percent is allocated to everything else including but not limited to materials, supplies, professional development and building maintenance and construction. This indicates that most of the funding is allocated for personnel noting that personnel are of high importance. The National Center for Education Statistics public school expenditure reports indicate that salaries and benefits for personnel make up approximately 80 percent of expenditure costs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). There were varying responses from the participants explaining of their understanding of the funding allocated to personnel, how much of that funding was allocated specifically to literacy personnel. Most of the participants could not explain as they did not know. One participant reported that there are so many different pieces of literacy within each portion of the budget such as reading literacy, cross disciplinary literacy, a reading resource teacher for disadvantaged students, and foundational reading skills after-school program that it is very difficult to quantify. There was only one participant who was able to directly explain the personnel allocation for literacy down to the exact dollar and percentage of the budget. The other than personnel funding which equates to the remaining 20 to 25 percent of the overall budget the percentage of funding allocated to literacy activities is generally in the 20th or lower percentile range. The findings suggest that literacy is the foundation of the budget and of critical importance, a

deeper understanding of what is considered literacy is needed and that district leaders responsible for the budget are able to clearly delineate funding allocation for literacy.

District school leaders who play a key role in creating, overseeing and have decision-making responsibility should have more training in school finance

Key takeaways from these findings are that school district leaders are vital in school improvement and student achievement. The annual district budget process is a major component of supporting and enhancing school improvement and overall student success. It is crucial that the individual or individuals that create and oversee the budget are knowledgeable and have the skills to be effective in budget allocation and school finance to appropriately and effectively align the needs of the district, schools, teachers and students to achieve district objectives effectively. For this to happen, the school district leaders responsible for school finance must have the proper training and skill set. This could be local school boards investing in effective school finance training for the district leaders with budget responsibility and or hiring school district leaders that already have the appropriate formal training, knowledge, and skills. While some training in budgeting is offered in Educational Specialists Programs, most of the training is in curriculum the participants reported. Many school district leaders that have budget responsibilities do not possess this training or degree. More training is needed. This is consistent with the literature that suggests that states should increase their district leaders' ability to use financial data to drive spending decisions and build their capacity to make intelligent, tactical decisions from the limited funding that will yield the greatest benefits for students (Roza, 2019). The leaders in the district who are responsible for budgetary allocation and oversight should be clearly identified and have the skill set to perform

these responsibilities at a high level of efficiency. The district leaders also should be proactive with the community ensuring that they are transparent and have their community support in all components of the district budget. The community is extremely important in district and school success and a collaborative environment between the district and the community is essential.

Additional findings suggest that leadership comfort level varies in school finance, and student achievement starts and ends with teachers and school district leaders. Unfortunately, not all school district leaders that play a key role in the process know the budget percentage allocated to literacy. In addition, school district leaders that play a key role in the budget process as well as the primary decision makers vary in their knowledge of the percentage of the budget allocated to literacy. Of the participants who played a role in the budget process, only 33 percent had the knowledge of their budget allocation. Other 33 percent of the participants reported that they did not know the percentage allocated to literacy and 33 percent reported that the allocation to literacy was a high and significant percentage of the overall district budget. These findings suggest that since these individuals vary in their knowledge of their budgets there should be more training, knowledge and oversight in school finance and the budget process for the key role players and decision-makers. Some of these participants that play a key role in their district budgets were not accurate regarding the funding percentage allocation to literacy.

Further findings suggest that school district leaders comfort level varies when it comes to school finance and budgeting. Fifty-six percent of the participants reported that they were very comfortable with school finance and budgeting, 33 percent had a fair to medium comfort level and 11 percent reported not being comfortable at all. One

participant reported not feeling comfortable at all in budgeting and school finance where they were a key role player in school finance decisions. This participant reported that they feel this is indicative of a lot of school leaders and being involved in the school finance process is experience and you learn as you go. Fifty-six percent of the participants also informed not have training in budgeting and school finance while 44 percent indicated they had some training. The consensus of the participants informed that their training was mostly on the job training. Based on these findings, further training and understanding of school finances, the budget process and budgeting is recommended. The budget and school finance are vital for a district to operate effectively, and the school board, teachers, students, and community should have confidence that these district leaders with budget and finance responsibility are effectively creating and overseeing the budget. Therefore, more training, and knowledge is needed for these school district leaders to ensure high-level budgeting and oversight of the district and community funds.

Implications for Policy and Practice

School boards need to look at existing policy and practice to ensure more effective measures so that the school district leaders are afforded the training or possess the knowledge to make appropriate and effective decisions on budget allocation and oversight on education finances. The data suggests that school district leaders play a critical role in its success, therefore, these leaders should have more training to appropriately and effectively create, prepare and oversee the district budget to ensure the highest return on investment in our students and districts achievements. In addition, the data provides strong indication that literacy is a vital component in the annual district budget. School boards and school district leaders should create new policy and practice to

ensure the percentage of allocating funding from the overall district budget is at a percentage that will maximize literacy improvement and student literacy achievement. First, there needs to be a common understanding of what is considered literacy so that it can be identified appropriately within a district budget. School boards should review district leaders' decisions on budget allocations for literacy over a period of time and correlate it with student achievement.

Limitations

Limitations of this research study include a small sample size of school district leaders across three states in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. In addition, obtaining enough district budgets indicating funding allocation for literacy to be able to conduct a true content analysis was a limitation. The researcher made every attempt to secure participants in a variety of districts but most importantly obtain enough participants who were involved with the district budget to increase validity and reliability of the data. An additional limitation is timing. School district leaders had less time to participate due to the demands in keeping schools running efficiently during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is still much to be explored to further this research and better understand the experiences of school district leaders with budget allocation for literacy and the factors that determine their budget allocation decisions. One future study could be to only have individuals participate who are school district leaders that create and oversee the budget and are the final decision-makers regarding the budget. This will ensure that all the participants in the study would have the major role in school finance to be able to

compare the experiences of these district leaders that have the same or similar responsibilities when it comes to the budget process. Keeping this study in mind, another study could include participants from different states which would allow for comparisons between outcomes in different regions across the United States.

Another possible study that could be conducted with either a quantitative or qualitative research design, would be to obtain overall district budgets with the allocation for literacy specified, then a true content analysis could be conducted. This would lend itself to explore correlations and patterns within the data to see the allocations across districts through the lens of the school district leaders. In addition, a correlational study researching the education level and professional training backgrounds of the school district leaders, the district budget allocation for literacy, and student literacy outcomes could be explored.

Overall, this dissertation has explored the experiences of school district leaders in school finance and district budget responsibility by conducting in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews with school district leaders. Despite the limitations of this study, new knowledge on this subject was gained that sets the stage for implementing additional policy and practice for school districts leadership to better maximize resources for increased school improvement and student literacy achievement.

APPENDIX A

Are you a School Leader?

Are you a school District leader?

As a school district leader your experience and input are vital to this study entitled:

School Leadership, Resources and Literacy Development:
A Phenomenological Study on School Leaders Experiences on
Budget Allocation for Literacy

When: March to April 2021

Where: Virtual meeting on WebEx or Zoom

Time Commitment: 30 minutes

Benefit: Your contributions as a school leader in support of Literacy Development

Participation: Confidential!



Contact: Principal Investigator

Jared Littman

Ph.D. in Literacy Candidate/Summer 2021

St. John's University, New York

APPENDIX B



INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: School District Leadership, Resources and Literacy Development: A Phenomenological Study on School District Leaders Experiences on Budget Allocation for Literacy

Principal Investigator: Jared E. Littman

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “School Leadership, Resources and Literacy Development: A Phenomenological Study on School Leaders Experiences on Budget Allocation for Literacy.” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you self-identify yourself as 1) a school district leader, and/or 2) play some role in budget allocation. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being conducted to explore the experiences of school leaders in the context of budget allocation for literacy. The investigator is interested in learning more about school leader decisions on how funding is budgeted for literacy.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed one time by me with a possibility of a brief follow-up for any clarifying questions. This is a semi-structured interview in which you will be asked to discuss your experiences with budget allocation for literacy. These interviews will be audio-recorded. After the audio-recording is transcribed the audio-recording will be deleted. Each interview will take approximately 30 minutes. Your identity confidential and your name will never be used in any reports from the study.

The interviews will be conducted virtually via WebEx or Zoom. All interviews will be conducted in English.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily school leadership role or teaching/learning life. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to, and you can stop participating in the study at any time.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participants may benefit in contribution to the development of new understandings that may impact the field of Literacy Education.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate; there are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

The investigators will keep all materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer drive that is encrypted password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded.

_____ I give my consent to be recorded _____
Signature

_____ I **do not** consent to be recorded _____
Signature

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Jared Littman, dissertation committee Chair Dr. Kyle Cook, or IRB coordinator Dr. Marie Nitopi.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at their professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: _____ **Date:**

Signature: _____

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR FUNDING LITERACY PROGRAMS

Opening:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on school leadership, resources, and literacy development in districts/schools. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes. You are free to stop participation at any point and do not need to answer all the questions. This interview will be audio recorded, but your name, district, and school will not be used in any findings or articles that may result from this study. My name is Jared Littman, and I am the Director of the Office of Grants and Sponsored Research at St. John's University. I am conducting this study for my dissertation to complete my doctorate in Literacy. The goal of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of school/district leaders experiences with budget allocation for literacy activities. Do you have any questions before we get started?

First, I will ask you about your professional experiences and the programs you supervise in your district/school followed by your role in the budget allocation process. Then, I will ask what your perception of the benefits of funding allocated for literacy development activities and outcomes achieved.

Experiences with Literacy Programs and Resources

Guiding Question: Tell me about your work experience.

Probes:

- How long have you been working in your district/school?
- What is your role?
- How many years' experience do you have in your position?
- Where is your district/school located? Would you consider the setting urban, suburban, or rural?
- Do you play a role in the budget process?
- Do you oversee literacy programs in your district in any way?

Guiding Question: For those leaders with budget experience: What are your experiences in budget allocation for literacy and how is the allocation of funding determined in your school or district?

Probes:

- What is your role with the budget?
- Do you know what percentage of the budget is allocated to literacy?

- Are there specific budget lines for literacy development?
- Of the total school/district budget, how is the percentage of dollars for literacy determined?
- In your district can you tell me how the budget process works?
- Who determines how much funding is allocated to literacy?
- Where can I download or obtain a public copy of the school district budget from last year? Can you share district budget documents and highlight funding for literacy (this will be kept anonymous).
- Please direct me to the specific lines in the budget that funding is allocated to literacy.
- What is the main source of funding for literacy programs in your district? Title I, state, tax levy, grants, contributions?

Guiding question: Can you tell me a little bit about your background and education or training that supports your role?

- What do you have a degree(s) in?
- Have you taken a school finance course within your studies?
- Did you ever receive professional development or training on school finance?
- What is your comfort level with budgeting and school finance in general?

For leaders that have indicated they do not have experience with the district budget:

- In your district do you know how the budget process works?
- Would you like to be involved in the budget process?
- Do you know who is involved in the budget process?
- Are you aware of how budget allocation for literacy is determined?
- What is your perspective on the resources in support of literacy within your school/district?

Guiding Question: What is school leaders' perspective on funding allocation for teacher professional development programs in literacy? To what degree are title 1, 2 and 9 funds used for literacy teacher PD?

Probes:

- Are there professional development opportunities in literacy for teachers to participate in?
- Is professional development in literacy for teachers ongoing and are they evaluated?

- How is funding allocation within the budget for teacher professional development in literacy determined?

Guiding Question: Who benefits from funding the programs to support literacy development? Students? Families? Teachers? The entire school community?

Probes:

- In what ways is it beneficial?
- Would you expect to see a positive difference in student performance that could be measured? How?
- What do you believe is the most beneficial use of funding for literacy? Why?
- Are there circumstances when literacy programs are not beneficial?

Guiding Question: Are there particular challenges present in implementing and funding various literacy programs?

Probes:

- What are the challenges?

Guiding Question: Is there anything else you would like to share about funding of literacy within districts/schools?

As a reminder your name and your district's name will not be used in any write ups of this research. It is helpful to have some background information Would you mind indicating how you self-identify in terms of your gender and race?

Thank you for participating in today's interview and taking time from your busy schedule. I appreciate your professionalism and expertise you have added to this research.

APPENDIX D:

Table 1. Codes

Female
Male
Budget Experience
Role in the process
Oversee Literacy
Who Benefits
Decision-making
Outcomes
Perspective
Professional Experience in years
Professional Development
Training in School Finance
Comfort level in School Finance
Level of Education
Most Beneficial use of Funding for Literacy
Evaluation of Professional Development
Not beneficial use of Funds
Literacy allocation Percentage of the

Budget
Budget Process
Budget Availability specifically outlining Literacy
Determining Allocation for Literacy
Capacity of Role in the Process
Sources of Funding
Challenges

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