

RURAL AND SUBURBAN SUPERINTENDENT BELIEFS, VALUES, AND  
ATTITUDES IN RELATION TO ENGLISH LEARNER STUDENTS: AN EQUITY-  
FOCUSED EXPLORATION

by

REBECCA VEGA


A Scholarly Delivery Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

West Texas A&M University


Canyon, Texas

December 2, 2022

Approved:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Gary Bigham  
Professor of Educational Leadership  
Chair, Scholarly Delivery Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Janet Hindman  
Associate Professor of Educational Leadership  
Member, Scholarly Delivery Committee


\_\_\_\_\_  
11/18/2022  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Mark Garrison  
Professor of Education  
Methodologist, Scholarly Delivery Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Qualified Signature	✓	Yes		No		Literature Review		Case Study	✓	Empirical Study
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\*The qualified signature of the methodologist indicates agreement only with the scholarly deliverable(s) checked. The lack of one or more checked scholarly deliverables is not indicative of disagreement, but instead reflects a lack or absence of the methodologist's involvement with the unchecked scholarly deliverable(s).

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Gary Bigham, EC-12 Director  
Department of Education

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Betty Conway, Head  
Department of Education

\_\_\_\_\_  
11/18/2022  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Eddie Henderson, Dean  
College of Education and Social Sciences

\_\_\_\_\_  
11/29/2022  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Angela Spaulding, Dean  
Graduate School

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Scholarly Delivery Framework**

This scholarly delivery is a combination of two articles that both highlight social justice leadership, decision-making of superintendents and the impacts this type of leadership has on the English Learner population. The first scholarly deliverable is a case study titled “Standing Up for What's Right: A New Superintendent Challenges Mindsets.” The case study examines a complex set of problems for a new superintendent. The problems include dealing with concerns from teachers and parents about the equitable treatment of students in the district. The second scholarly deliverable is an empirical research article titled “Rural and Suburban Superintendent Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes in Relation to English Learner Students: A Qualitative, Equity-Focused Exploration.” The study explores four Texas superintendents and what influences their decision-making on issues of equity with English Learner students.



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS**  
**Letter of Approval**

Dr. Bigham:

The West Texas A & M University Institutional Review Board is pleased to inform you that upon review, proposal #2022.04.020 for your study titled, “**Superintendent’s Equity-Based Decisions for English Language Learner (EL) Students,**” meets the requirements of the

WTAMU Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) No. 15.99.05.W1.01AR Institutional Review Board (Use of Human Subjects in Research). Approval is granted for one calendar year. This approval expires on **May 26, 2023.**

Principal investigators assume the following responsibilities:

1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed on or before the expiration date if the research project requires more than one year for completion. A Continuing Review form along with required documents must be submitted on or before the stated deadline. Failure to do so will result in study termination and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** At the conclusion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a Close out form must be submitted to AR-EHS.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Pursuant to SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.13AR, unanticipated problems and serious adverse events must be reported to AR-EHS.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-Compliance:** Pursuant to SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.05AR, potential non-compliance, including deviations from the protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an Amendment form to AR-EHS for review by the IRB. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented. Amendments do not extend time granted on the initial approval

6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form, only the IRB approved form is allowed.
7. **Audit:** Any proposal may be subject to audit by the IRB Administrator during the life of the study. Investigators are responsible for maintaining complete and accurate records for five years and making them available for inspection upon request.
8. **Recruitment:** All recruitment materials must be approved by the IRB. Recruitment materials distributed to potential participants must use the approved text and include the study's IRB number, approval date, and expiration dates in the following format:  
  
WTAMU IRB##-##-## Approved: ##/##/#### Expiration Date: ##/##/####.
9. **FERPA and PPRA:** Investigators conducting research with students must have appropriate approvals from the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

administrator at the institution where the research will be conducted in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) if applicable to the research being proposed. The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) protects the rights of parents in students ensuring that written parental consent is required for participation in surveys, analysis, or evaluation that ask questions falling into categories of protected information.

Sixty days prior to the expiration of this proposal, you will receive a notification of the approaching expiration date at which time you will need to submit an [Amendment/Continuation/Close out](#) form.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angela Spaulding". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Angela" and last name "Spaulding" clearly distinguishable.

Dr. Angela Spaulding  
Vice President of Research and Compliance

## **Acknowledgements**

I first wish to acknowledge my family as valuable contributors to the completion of my doctoral degree. Our family is a team, and without my team, I would not have been able to achieve this goal. To Alfred, thank you for always being there for me, being my shoulder to lean on, and always helping me be set-up for success. To my children, Estella and Sebastian, thank you for understanding that mom couldn't always be available, but you still chose to support me and encourage me along the way. I love all of you deeply, and truly could not have accomplished this without our team. We did it!

Secondly, I would like to show sincere appreciation to Dr. Bigham and Dr. Garrison for their support and guidance throughout this process. The support that I felt as I embarked on this journey has meant so much to me, and I have loved the personal relationships and collaboration that WT has encouraged. I have enjoyed working with you and thank you for helping me grow as a student and as a professional.

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# **Standing Up for What's Right: A New Superintendent Challenges Mindsets**

by

Rebecca Vega

A Scholarly Delivery Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the requirements for the Degree

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Canyon, Texas

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## **Author Note**

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Rebecca Vega,  
Department of Education, West Texas A&M University, Canyon, TX 79016. Email:  
rjvega1@buffs.wtamu.edu



### **Abstract**

This case focuses on a new superintendent at odds with a community with a deep heritage and her own beliefs as a social justice leader. Decision-making for the new superintendent will be a challenge as a new leader trying to navigate the political waters in a school district for the first time. The case becomes more complicated as the school board president shares his views on the issues, and they certainly do not align with the superintendent. This case examines how the new leader will use her leadership style and values to attempt to change the direction of a school district that seems to be stuck in the past.

*Keywords:* leadership, educational leadership, social justice leadership, superintendent

## **Case Narrative**

Sunset Meadows ISD is located in a small rural suburb of a larger metropolitan area with a population of 13,000 people. The school district comprises five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. All elementary campuses consist of grades PK through five, the middle school includes grades 6 through 8, and the high school is grades 9 through 12. The school district has become more diverse as years have gone by, and the community has had a few recent public struggles surrounding diversity. Currently, district-wide, 35% of the student population is white, 25% African American, 33% Hispanic, 5% American Indian, and the other 2% is accounted for by other races. The Sunset Meadows Indians have a long heritage of winning football games, and you can often hear the fight song of the Indians at the football games while their mascot, Chief Sun, yells his battle cry.

Sunset Meadows ISD has performed well on recent administrations of the state assessments. The elementary and secondary principals all have several years of experience and are a very tight-knit group of administrators. Several administrators attended Sunset Meadows ISD as students and graduated from Sunset High School, so the community roots run very deep in the district. With the growth that the district has experienced, they have seen an increase in the number of Hispanic students, specifically in the number of students identified as English as a Second Language (ESL) or Bilingual. In recent years, the district has had to increase the number of bilingual staff while competing with the higher salaries and better benefits available in the larger metro area just up the road.

Dr. Mickey Johnson served as the district superintendent for the past two years and just this year accepted a position in a larger, more prestigious district. During his short time in Sunset Meadows ISD, Dr. Johnson was a beloved superintendent. He was a highly active superintendent and knew the value of being seen in public at events. He often would attend several events in the evening and take photos with students and community members to post on social media. The community would often comment things like, "that guy is everywhere" or "he never takes a break." Following his mid-year departure, the school board hired an interim superintendent and began the search for the next executive leader of Sunset Meadows ISD.

### **The Search Begins**

The School Board hired a search firm to help locate their next great leader. They had not been entirely happy with Dr. Johnson and were looking for someone who would follow their direction a little better. They constantly felt like they were trying to wrangle in Dr. Johnson and some of his crazy ideas, but they realized how much the community loved him; it was sort of a behind-the-scenes tug-of-war between the superintendent and the board. They had several candidates and narrowed it down to two. The two final applicants were Dr. Suzy Gonzalez and Dr. Anthony Armstrong.

Dr. Suzy Gonzalez was an assistant superintendent in a smaller, rural district not far from Sunset Meadows ISD. She received her doctorate from a nearby university in Educational Leadership. She had been a critical factor in leading her current district to receive the highest marks from the state accountability system. She had a background in curriculum but was also given the opportunity as the assistant superintendent to assist in issues spanning across several departments in her district. She describes herself as

"passionate about learning for all students, no matter their background," and "down-to-earth."

Dr. Anthony Armstrong is currently an assistant superintendent in Sunset Meadows ISD and a graduate of Sunset Meadows. This year, Dr. Armstrong received his doctorate from an online-only university in Educational Leadership. He is a tried-and-true Sunset Meadow Indian, and his office is decorated in all of the school spirit paraphernalia one could cram in there. He has done a good job for the district as Assistant Superintendent of Operations, and the board has been pleased with him over the years.

The board was divided on the choice. Some wanted to go with Dr. Gonzalez and felt that she could help the district move the needle with academic scores. The board was hungry for those top honors from the state. Others, including the board president, really loved Dr. Armstrong and felt his community ties would continue the strong traditions built over the years in Sunset Meadows ISD. After much deliberation, the board selected Dr. Gonzalez in a 4-3 vote. Dr. Gonzalez was ecstatic about the offer and knew that Sunset Meadows would be a great place to bring her family. She knew that things were working well here in Sunset Meadows ISD, and as a new superintendent, only a few tweaks would need to be made to take them to the next level. She happily told the board that she would not let them down and couldn't wait to get started.

### **Being Seen and Being Heard**

As Dr. Gonzales got started, it was vital for her to get out on the campuses and talk with the principals, staff, and students. So she asked her secretary to clear her schedule on Tuesdays so that she could spend those days out on campuses. She was so excited to see all of the fantastic things going on out there, and this would give her a

chance to see each campus' climate and culture, which is something she prided herself on when she was a campus principal. Dr. Gonzalez visited Braves Elementary on the first Tuesday and was incredibly pleased with what she saw and heard. The campus was running well, and students and staff seemed generally happy to be at school. Dr. Gonzalez felt good about herself and even went home that night and bragged to her husband about how great her first campus visit had been.

The following Tuesday, she was set to visit Pow-Wow Elementary. When she arrived at PW, she noticed the signs on the door were in English and Spanish. "This is great," she thought. Not a native-born Spanish speaker, Dr. Gonzalez had studied abroad and could speak conversational Spanish. As she talked to the principal, she learned that this was the only elementary in Sunset Meadows that housed the district bilingual program. She began walking the building and was highly impressed with the language-rich student work she saw posted in the hallways. Next, she approached a second-grade class and walked in, quickly realizing this was a bilingual classroom. The teacher, Mrs. Vasquez, recognizes that this is the new superintendent and takes the opportunity to voice some of her concerns.

"Dr. Gonzalez, I am so glad that you dropped by my class today! Bienvenidos!", said Mrs. Vasquez. "Gracias, Mrs. Vasquez. It is so great to see all the smiling faces in here!" responded Dr. Gonzalez.

Do you notice how many smiling faces there are in this classroom?

Unfortunately, our bilingual classes are overcrowded, as usual. There are 28 students in this classroom, and it just feels like the district does not even care. I hope you will give the bilingual program the attention it deserves. These kids are

just as important as everyone else in the district, and no one else has more than 20 students in their classes, Mrs. Vasquez replied.

A little rattled at Mrs. Vasquez's candid response, Dr. Gonzalez assured her that she would take her concerns seriously and investigate the issue. Dr. Gonzalez knew the value of being bilingual and, as a social justice leader, felt that equity was important in any district. However, she could not imagine that this issue was widespread.

The following day, Dr. Gonzalez arrived at her office and began answering her e-mails and returning phone calls. She had a message from Carla Ponce, a parent of a fourth-grade student at Pow-Wow Elementary. She returned the phone call, and Carla was terribly upset on the other end of the line. She told Dr. Gonzalez that she is sick and tired of the students in the bilingual classes not being given the same opportunities as the other students at PW Elementary. Her main concern was overcrowding in the classes. She tells Dr. Gonzalez that there are 30 students in her son's class and that none of the English-speaking classes have that many students.

"It's just not fair," she says. "The students get less time with the teacher and are packed in there. They can barely move around." Dr. Gonzalez reassures Carla that she is personally looking into the situation. "One more thing. We also need to get rid of that racist mascot we have. As an indigenous person, I find it very offensive," she said. Dr. Gonzalez again felt blindsided by these claims and felt a duty to investigate further as the new leader in this district.

She started by asking the principal at Pow-Wow Elementary for some backstory on what had been going on with this program over the years. The principal, Mrs. Jackson, informed her that not only were both the teacher and the parent frustrated, but they were

also right. The program had grown over the years; however, the previous administration had done nothing to support that growth. This resulted in several years of overcrowded classrooms and even mixed-grade classrooms just so the district could avoid getting waivers from the state. The principal felt that it would reach a boiling point with both the staff and the parents if something were not done soon.

When Dr. Gonzalez left the school, she felt even more upset than earlier that morning. How could this have just been ignored? These students mattered, and it was up to the leadership in the district to give them what they deserve, just like everyone else. She went back to her office and went to the Director of Human Resources and asked why they hadn't added more bilingual teachers at Pow-Wow Elementary. She was shocked to find out that the previous superintendent had commented that it was just "those kids" in the bilingual classrooms, and "they needed to learn English if they wanted to be in this country anyway." This broke Dr. Gonzalez's heart. She believed in equity and a level playing field for all students and could not fathom this type of behavior from a leader who was so beloved by the community. She immediately set up a meeting with the school board president to discuss her plans for the bilingual program, which meant adding staff immediately.

### **Meeting with the President**

The following morning, Dr. Gonzalez held a meeting with the school board president, Mr. Wilkins. "Mr. Wilkins, I have uncovered some information that I would like to discuss with you about our bilingual students and teachers," she said. "Oh, yea! Do we even have to have bilingual classes, or is that just something we have been doing to be

nice? If you ask me, they can learn English or go back where they came from", he replied.

Dr. Gonzalez could not believe her ears and struggled to respond to Mr. Wilkins. His comments went directly against who she was as a leader and her beliefs as a member of society, but she also realized the political power that the school board president held. "Well...I am not sure that I agree, Mr. Wilkins. Let me investigate the claims a little more and get back to you," said Dr. Gonzalez.

She explained to him that another issue that came up during her visit with a parent was the school district mascot and that some believe it to be offensive. Mr. Wilkins told her that those parents can just "get over it" because they have always been and will always be the Sunset Meadow Indians.

### **What Now?**

Dr. Gonzalez was really in a predicament now. She must formulate a plan to address the issues brought up to her by concerned stakeholders while defending the rights of her students to a school board president who had very different and borderline racist views. She really had not anticipated these types of issues in Sunset Meadows ISD. Everything looked so calm and collected from the outside.

### **Teaching Notes**

According to Theoharis (2007), social justice leaders are those who make issue of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision (p. 223). This definition of social justice leadership is widely cited and utilized. It sums up the idea of addressing and eliminating the marginalization of



staff, students, and the community in the school system. Before social justice can be enacted, the superintendent must recognize the inequities present in their organization (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). A strategy that can aid in the identification of inequities would be to conduct an audit of the school's current educational and social arrangements (Wang, 2018). These inequities in our systems can exist in many areas, including health, economic opportunity, and education (DeMatthews et al., 2016). Once identified, the school leaders should eradicate the inequities and move toward more equitable practices (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014).

Navigating the school community requires leaders to begin strategically analyzing their current situation and deliberating over potential actions while considering what resistance they may face in the wake of their decisions (Ryan, 2016). Opposition can take many forms and can result in friction, so engaging in cultural work is pivotal, and leaders should embrace the differences that their community offers instead of fearing them (Cooper, 2009). Especially when cultural differences abound, open-mindedness and flexibility are vital while being empathetic to the students and the background from which they come (Clake & O'Donoghue, 2019). Research has made it clear that "educational leadership no longer enjoys a frictionless, antiseptic space in which to practice" (Dantley & Green, 2015, p. 821).

Making change and advocating for equitable practices is complicated work that requires school leaders to act with determination and flexibility (Shields & Hesbold, 2020). Several prevalent researchers have studied the movement to action within the last twenty years, and strategies for success have been identified. These strategies included "communicating purposefully and authentically, developing a supportive administrative

network, working together for change, keeping their eyes on the prize, prioritizing their work, engaging in professional learning, and building relationships" (Theoharis, 2007, p.244). Other strategies found to be impactful in social justice leadership are constant self-reflection and leading by example (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Santamaria, 2014). Self-reflection is a tool that school leaders have used to identify gaps in their knowledge and the areas in which they need to grow professionally regarding social justice issues (DeMatthews et al., 2020).

Cultural responsiveness is another strategy that has proven to be effective when strategizing for equity in schools. Honoring the community and other stakeholders is impactful in the movement toward social justice ideals (Santamaria, 2014). The goal of having a successful school district is not only defined by scores on standardized tests but also by the belief that learning for all students, regardless of their background, ethnicity, or culture, is attainable and necessary.

Wasonga (2009) proposed that this can occur more efficiently when leadership works toward social justice and democratic communities in tandem. Through collective decision-making and collaboration with stakeholders, leaders can show the staff and community that the members are valued. Voices need to be heard, and those voices cannot be silenced simply because their viewpoint is different from the leader's. In addition, the student voice should not be snuffed out in decision-making, and an environment in which they are free to be vulnerable should be fostered (Hernandez & Marshall, 2009).

Though the work for social justice ideals is seen in many cases as necessary by superintendents, there is often considerable resistance. Resistance is often present from

several different levels, and although it is often significant, it is still possible to create more equitable and just schools (Theoharis, 2008). Superintendents should also understand that there is usually a level of resistance with any transformation, so courage is necessary (Shields & Hesbol, 2020).

Resistance can also occur beyond the school environment itself, and leaders often face opposition to social justice issues with policymakers and legislators. Research specifically conducted with prominent policymakers and advocacy groups on the need for social justice policy reform and implementation has yielded grim results. When interviewed on the need for social justice reform, most of the participants agreed on the need for and importance of it; however, most also made excuses and recognized that there are substantial barriers and resistance to any actual implementation or changes (Marshall & Ward, 2004). This is concerning since the people who participated in the study were from highly regarded institutions and groups, yet they are aware of the reality of the situation. Essentially, while they all recognized the necessity of addressing the social justice and equity issues in our current educational system, they were unwilling to put forth the energy and potentially harmful consequences to ensure an equitable education for all students (Lopez, 2004).

The need to address these types of issues while doing work that the leader feels is necessary for the advancement of an equity-oriented school leads to physical and emotional demands on school leaders (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). While barriers exist in schools with inequities, it does not excuse the school leaders from their duty to be creative in developing systems to ensure a quality education for all (Scanlan & Lopez, 2012). Schools with leaders who believe in social justice tenants and embrace those

values believe that the inclusion of all students will lead to positive results (Pazey & Cole, 2013). Resistance does not occur in a vacuum, and there can be consequences for leaders attempting to enact social justice ideals (Theoharis, 2007).

Good social justice leaders know the importance of emotions and are sensitive to the reality of their surroundings (Moral et al., 2018; Ryan, 2016). Emotions in the administrator's decision-making can simply be defined as the leader's feelings about a given situation (English & Bolton, 2008). When dealing with moral and ethical issues, school administrators felt that emotions and feelings were at the center of making decisions (English & Bolton, 2008). When the emotional level is high, superintendents tend to fall back on their morals for direction (English & Bolton, 2008). Beard (2013) found that the superintendent in her study also determined that her decision-making on ethical issues was centered around her moral values. The role of emotion in decisions is fluid within the decision-making process and usually continues after the actual decision has been made (English & Bolton, 2008).

New superintendents are presented with challenges as they attempt to navigate political waters while maintaining their own sense of self and belief system. The relationship with the school board is critical for the superintendent because decisions made by the school board must be implemented by the superintendent, whether they agree with the conclusions or not. The superintendent is an employee who answers directly to the board, and so their adherence to enforcing the school board decisions is necessary to maintain employment. This can cause discord when the decisions being made go against the superintendent's personal beliefs, ethics, and values.

For example, Sampson (2019) found that the issue of racism within the school board itself inhibited how the board addressed educational inequities with English Learner (EL) students. School board members who feel that they are in a position of power that oppressively manifests itself can cause a breakdown in the purpose of the school board-superintendent relationship (Mountford, 2004). Mountford (2004) studied the relationship between the school board and the superintendent and found that if there are members on the school boards whose motivations for membership are personal, then this can create a contentious situation for the superintendent, who must determine which issues are at the forefront and what the consequences are of not addressing other issues.

Walker and Donlevy (2008) proposed five commitments that superintendents should adhere to in order to ensure ethical decisions that are "reasonable, responsible, and balanced" (p. 460). These five commitments should be used as a guide when leaders are faced with ethical dilemmas and include a commitment to common ethical principles, a commitment to relational reciprocity, a commitment to professional constraints, a commitment to personal conscience, and a commitment to professional convictions. Because of the ever-changing nature of the circumstances and emotions that surround decisions on equity-based issues, utilizing the five commitments can be helpful in ensuring ethical decisions (Walker & Donlevy, 2008).

In this case study, Dr. Gonzalez sees the potential in the new community that she has moved her family to, and she values the diversity in this new community. She knows that she must be committed to her community, share common interests, and value the different perspectives to be effective (DeMatthews, 2018; Moral et al., 2018). In her attempt to tap into the community and understand, research shows that engaging with

community leaders to discover and cultivate honest and open communication would be valuable (Quantz et al., 2018).

Dr. Gonzales must also ensure that policies and practices are in place to ensure that her vision for the district is attained. Mavrogordato and White (2020) state that if the goal is for ELs to have access to equal opportunities for learning, then leaders must have a process toward that goal.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Theoharis' (2007) definition of a social justice leader includes making issue of race, disability, etc. Why do you think Dr. Gonzalez opted to back off the issues when speaking to the school board president?
2. How should Dr. Gonzalez proceed on the issue of the overcrowded classrooms? Should her strategy be the same or different when speaking to the staff vs. the parents? Explain.
3. Dr. Gonzalez says that she will "investigate the claim" and then get back to Mr. Wilkins. What kind of additional information should she gather before this meeting? How can she prepare for the resistance she has already seen from Mr. Wilkins?
4. How should Dr. Gonzalez approach the mascot issue without marginalizing the community members' concerns?
5. Being a social justice leader, Dr. Gonzalez believes in equity for all students. What steps and strategies might she utilize to initiate the process of shifting the mindset of a community and school board that does not seem to be embracing its diversity?

6. With two sides with different views on what is right in this situation, what policies and procedures should be put into place to ensure that the English Learner students get an equitable experience in school while navigating the political aspect of the relationship between the superintendent and the school board?

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**Rural and Suburban Superintendent Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes in Relation to  
English Learner Students: A Qualitative, Equity-Focused Exploration**

by

Rebecca Vega

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**Author Note**

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Rebecca Vega,  
Department of Education, West Texas A&M University, Canyon, TX 79016. Email:  
rjvegal@buffs.wtamu.edu

## **Abstract**

This research was conducted to better understand how superintendents make decisions when presented with problems involving an issue of equity and the English Learner population. The problem addressed is that superintendents' values and beliefs as shaped by previous life experiences may not align with or place priority on EL equity, and even if they do, may present significant political problems for superintendents with their boards and communities. An embedded multiple-case study was used that examined four Texas superintendents from rural and suburban school districts and how their values, attitudes, and beliefs influenced their decisions. The study also examined district characteristics and the school-board and superintendent relationship and how those influenced decisions. The findings indicate that superintendents' values, attitudes, and beliefs do influence their decisions, and that the relationship with the school board is also influential in their decisions.

*Keywords:* superintendent, equity, school-board, English Learner, decision-making

## **Rural and Suburban Superintendent Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes in Relation to English Learner Students: A Qualitative, Equity-Focused Exploration**

Superintendents in Texas face the ongoing challenge of addressing the inequities that exist for English Learners (ELs) in their school districts while attempting to maintain good relationships with their school boards and communities. Decision-making that results in equity for marginalized populations is complex work. The population of EL students is growing in Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2021) and this increases the urgency with which executive leaders in school districts across the state and nation should understand and advocate for equitable treatment of these students and their families. In 2020, EL students made up 20.6% of the total population of students enrolled in Texas public schools (Texas Education Agency, 2020). Understanding how social justice leadership is used by superintendents to make equitable decisions for a population that comprises one fifth of the students in Texas is valuable.

The expectation of educational leaders can be challenging as they are required to provide expertise related to the development of the community and the teaching staff, be influential instructional leaders, and share in the decision-making process while ensuring that needs are met for children and families from diverse backgrounds (Shields, 2004). Although the role of the superintendent can present significant difficulties, by understanding the decision-making process, and through self-reflection, superintendents can make more informed and fair decisions when their goal is focused on equitable treatment of all student groups.

## **Problem**

Research has shown that leaders are influenced by values, attitudes, and beliefs when making decisions (Beard, 2013; Bon & Bigbee, 2011; Findlay, 2015; Frick et al., 2012; Hammersly-Fletcher, 2015; Klinker & Hackman, 2004; Roegman, 2017; Sileo et al., 2008; Stefkovich & Begley, 2007). Guided by the standards required for the superintendent certificate, Texas superintendents are trained with explicit expectations for implementing learner-centered values and ethics of leadership (19 Tex. Admin. Code § 242.15(b), 1999). The growing population of Texas EL students forces a shift in beliefs and views that are often politically driven, and can inhibit superintendents from advancing greater equity across the school districts (Sampson, 2019). Along with beliefs and values, superintendents' own experiences with EL students and their families can potentially impact their decisions on matters of equity.

Inequities that can exist with any marginalized population require superintendents to use social justice leadership to address issues with special considerations for each group. EL students and their families face inequities related to their culture, language, and race. Even within the EL population, teachers and leaders encounter students from different cultural backgrounds and varying language proficiencies, making the population dynamic with varying needs based on the individual circumstances (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014). Thus, a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate when advocating for EL student equity.

Equity, and the need to advocate for and enact change, is at the core of social justice leadership with the desired result of more equitable schools for marginalized student populations (Theoharis, 2007). Unfortunately, while superintendents may

acknowledge the need for this type of leadership and action, when asked about social justice issues or the inequities in their schools, they tend to speak in generalities and avoid direct conversation over the topics (Kruse et al., 2018). This reluctance to acknowledge the reality of the current state of the districts results in little to no action by superintendents with regard to enacting equitable decisions and policies. Research has shown that to advocate for social justice, the problems must first be acknowledged (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014).

Ryan (2016) studied educational leaders who were also social justice leaders and how they chose to interact on social justice issues within their organizations. His study found that school leaders did not wish to engage in the more traditional methods of activism and instead preferred to be strategic in their activism to avoid placing their positions at risk. The research is clear that while attempting to enact change and move towards a more equity-oriented educational system, school leaders face resistance from all levels within the organization, including themselves (Theoharis, 2007).

Additionally, superintendents are responsible for maintaining a working relationship with school boards, whose views on equity for EL students may not always align with the superintendents' views. This unique relationship brings its own set of challenges as superintendents must determine to what extent they will advocate for students whose backgrounds and circumstances may differ greatly from the members of school boards and communities. Discord may occur when the decisions being made by school boards go against the superintendents' ethics, beliefs, and values. While superintendents attempt to advocate for the need for equity for students, there is a point where leaders must be strategic in navigating the political waters in which they find



themselves swimming with communities and the school boards. Accordingly, the problem is that superintendents' values and beliefs as shaped by previous life experiences may not align with or place priority on EL equity, and even if they do, may present significant political problems for superintendents with their boards and communities.

### **Purpose**

The challenges associated with social justice leadership are exacerbated when employed by the school superintendent. Superintendents hold highly influential positions in their school districts that are political in nature and their decisions come under intense scrutiny from all levels within the organizations and communities they serve. Therefore, understanding how equity-based decisions are made within the context of social justice leadership through structured and methodical analysis is of relevance and importance to many aspects of the field of education. The purpose of this research is to expand the current research on social justice leadership with a specific focus on superintendents and the beliefs, ethics, and values that influence their decisions towards an equity-oriented educational system with emphasis focused on EL students.

While superintendents may recognize the need for social justice leadership and action, they may be reluctant to enact change because of the potential professional ramifications of the advocacy. Superintendents may also be reluctant to openly discuss the inequities that exist in their districts, so in many cases, the issues continue to be unresolved (Kruse et al., 2018). Sometimes the conversations are uncomfortable when addressing personal biases or the opinions of others regarding a specific group of students; however, it is necessary to move forward (Shields, 2004). Because of this, it is

essential to address how superintendents make decisions for equity to ensure a quality and equitable education for all students in their care.

While research has been conducted on social justice leadership, including strategies and resistance, it has primarily been conducted at the campus and classroom levels. The role of the superintendent is different from that of a campus-level administrator in several ways. Superintendents focus on global views of their districts, so their decisions typically make more significant impacts. Scant literature exists on the role of superintendents and how they identify and enact change focused on district-level equity-based school systems.

Although the literature is replete on social justice leadership and decision-making with campus-level administrators (Beard, 2013; Bon & Bigbee, 2011; Decman et al., 2017; Findlay, 2015; Frick et al., 2012; Hammersly-Fletcher, 2015; Hawk & Martin, 2011; Kim, 2020; Klinker & Hackman, 2004; Roegman, 2017; Sileo et al., 2008; Stefkovich & Begley, 2007; Xia et al., 2020), there is a void on how social justice issues impact superintendents. Due to the uniqueness of the role of the superintendent, this void needs to be filled. Enacting social justice leadership through equitable decisions could present additional forms of resistance or strategies at the district level that are different than those at the campus level. In most cases, the decisions being made are systematic in nature, affecting more students and families (Xia et al., 2020). In addition, superintendents are the districts' public faces and are the top-level decision-makers, so understanding how their past experiences, beliefs, and personal values influence their decisions at the district level is beneficial.

Superintendents who wish to engage in this work will need to use the tool of personal reflection combined with action to be successful social justice leaders (Furman, 2012). By reflecting inward on their past experiences, they can understand and process their personal biases when making equity-based decisions for EL students, ultimately resulting in decisions grounded in social justice leadership.

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed the gaps in the research by answering the following questions:

RQ 1. How do superintendents' values, beliefs, and attitudes about equity influence their decision-making processes concerning EL students?

RQ 2. How do school districts' demographics and characteristics influence superintendents' decision-making processes concerning EL students?

RQ 3. How do school boards for which superintendents work affect superintendents' decision-making processes concerning EL students?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Boske et al. (2017) asserted, "Social justice leadership also acknowledges the background and reality of those who have been marginalized while taking action towards reform" (p. 361). As a result of the marginalization of specific populations, there are inequities present, and these inequities can exist in many areas, including education (DeMatthews et al., 2016). Once identified, social justice leaders should attempt to eradicate the inequities and move towards more equitable practices (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014).

Through social justice leadership, superintendents can provide equitable experiences for all students. School superintendents who are social justice leaders find themselves advocating for students who are not being ensured equitable treatment based on their culture, language, race, gender, or disability (Theoharis, 2007). This statement highlights the many different marginalized groups and the need for action by social justice leaders.

### **Literature Review**

The current research on social justice leadership and how it impacts the educational system has been primarily conducted with school principals or other campus-level administrators. Accordingly, the literature in this review was purposefully sought for social justice leadership applicability for superintendents at the school district-level. This review is structured into sub-headings beginning with social justice leadership and then moving to the current research on decision-making and what influences those decisions. This allows for background knowledge as the review moves into considerations specifically for the EL student population. Lastly, it moves forward with school board relations and culminates with research regarding strategies and resistance to issues of equity.

### ***Social Justice Leadership***

Theoharis (2007) contended that the most marginalized students in America are not being sufficiently educated; "students of color, students with low socioeconomic status, students who speak a language other than English, students with disabilities, and other students who have been excluded from the benefits of public school" (p. 4). Social justice leadership embraces respect and recognition of others (Theoharis, 2007).

It is not enough for superintendents to merely identify the need for change, they must also be able to guide others to enact social justice (McKenzie et al., 2006). Strategies for the forward movement of equity-based policies and procedures are necessary but often met with resistance. Opposition can take many forms resulting in friction, so engaging in cultural work is pivotal, and leaders should embrace the differences that their community offers instead of fearing those (Cooper, 2009). A study conducted on school leadership at schools near the USA and Mexico border, where cultural differences abound, found that open-mindedness and flexibility were vital while being empathetic to students and the background from which they came (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2019). Dantley & Green (2015) argued that "educational leadership no longer enjoys a frictionless, antiseptic space in which to practice" (p. 821).

### ***Equity***

Current and past research on social justice leadership links back to the overarching concept of equity (DeMatthews, 2018; Kruse et al., 2018; Theoharis, 2007; Wang, 2018). Roegman (2017) studied how context played a role in the equity-focused leadership of school superintendents. The four specific contexts studied were personal, social, occupational, and organizational, and these contexts overlapped when leading for equity. Being aware of how these contexts interact and overlap allows superintendents to better advocate and make changes for equity.

When school districts plan with equity in mind, they should explicitly value all students and allocate resources to ensure equitable practices for all (Starr, 2019). Superintendents need high levels of equity consciousness to understand that all students can achieve at high levels, -education should be equitable for all students regardless of

their race or other differences, and the adults in the schools are responsible for ensuring this equity (McKenzie et al., 2006). This can prove challenging for superintendents as equity-focused conversations sometimes become uncomfortable; however, it is necessary to move forward (Shields, 2004). Furman (2012) contended that social justice leaders must employ both reflection and effort in combination to be successful.

### ***Decision-Making***

The role of the superintendent is primarily isolated in a school district because there are no other positions on a lateral level within the organization. The demands and requirements of the job are significant, in addition to working directly with school boards and the politics therein associated. Hawk and Martin (2011) found that superintendents expressed ~~that~~ their most common stressors were decisions surrounding state mandates and obtaining resources to implement directives. They also reported high amounts of stress when dealing with the financial requirements pertaining to the operation of school districts. These findings imply that superintendents are more frequently immersed in managerial and operational decision-making.

Xia et al. (2020) studied the relationship between district- and campus-level administrators to determine the decision-making power relationship that existed. They found that at the district level, superintendents held tighter to decisions in the areas of accountability and curriculum and instruction, whereas at the campus level, principals were given more autonomy in the area of personnel and budget decisions. Again, as in Hawk and Martin's (2011) work, this study does not make note of any social justice, vision, or culture decisions that are made at the district- or the campus-levels; therefore, a gap exists in determining how those decisions are made. What is clear from this research

is that superintendents must decide what values will be tightly held by the district and what decisions will be delegated to the campus level.

It is important to note that not all decisions are made in isolation and collaborative arrangements can be helpful to both parties (Xia et al., 2020). This shared decision-making is viewed as valuable to superintendents as it helps mold the direction of their districts (Decman et al., 2017). Listening to the thoughts and opinions of others has enabled school leaders to make better decisions (Kim, 2020). Although research has shown that many decisions made by superintendents are managerial in nature, considerations should be made concerning how decisions impact all students (Decman et al., 2017).

These considerations are pivotal in determining if inequities exist among the different student groups represented in the school district. Superintendents should not solely focus on the decisions that involve managerial tasks but should also give considerable thought and time to decisions that involve social justice issues.

### ***Values, Beliefs, and Attitudes***

Beliefs and values are impactful factors when making decisions regarding diverse student populations, especially when those students' backgrounds are different from those of the decision-makers (Sileo et al., 2008). In Texas, ethical decisions and the role of the superintendent have been explicitly communicated as an expectation through the State of Texas Administrative Code (19 Tex. Admin Code § 242.15(b), 1999). These professional ethics guide the moral principles and values that should influence an individual's actions (Sileo et al., 2008). Making ethical decisions can become challenging when both parties feel that their moral stance is correct (Walker & Donlevy, 2008). While acting ethically is

seen as necessary, superintendents face many challenges, especially when balancing law, policy, and ethical behavior (Frick & Gutierrez, 2008).

When making equity-based decisions, past experiences inform approaches taken by leaders (Roegman, 2017). Moral judgments are based on one's value system, personal history, and connections with the community and other individuals (Klinker & Hackman, 2004). This tacit knowledge can have positive and negative implications as some behaviors can inhibit questioning the status quo (Nestor-Baker & Hoy, 2001). For this reason, self-reflection should continue to be a practice used to address any personal experiences or biases that may inhibit decision-making for equity.

### ***English Learners (ELs)***

In Texas, equity is given priority, as indicated by the state accountability system. Scores are reported by race and ethnicity and thus force school districts to examine their practices for evidence of inequities among student populations (Texas Education Agency, 2021). Superintendents should use the data for their school districts to begin asking questions about inclusive practices and the equitable allocation of resources (Shields, 2020). Because of this focus on high-stakes testing and the accountability ratings in Texas, students who speak languages other than English and are from culturally diverse backgrounds can be seen as a threat, so models for instruction for these students in many cases are subtractive versus an additive approach where the language is embraced (Scanlan & Lopez, 2012). The subtractive model tends to focus on the students' deficits or the deficiencies perceived by the adults in the schools (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016).

This method of thinking or acting leads to what Callahan and Shifrer (2016) described as the equity trap. This occurs when school district staff expect less from EL



students because of their limited proficiency in English. By doing so, teachers and staff enable an equity trap to occur when they expect less engagement and fail to encourage students beyond the minimum requirements (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016). Superintendents need to understand what influences their decisions surrounding key equity issues with EL students to address the culture and climate of the district to move toward a more inclusive setting (Russell, 2018).

### ***School Board Relations***

The relationship between the school board and the superintendent should be cultivated to work as a team with common goals. Superintendents are explicitly faced with implementing change in schools while simultaneously preserving the traditions and cultural values of the school district (Klinker & Hackman, 2004). Although ethical decisions rely on their past experiences and beliefs, there is also the reality that superintendents should understand the political dimensions of their work (Norberg & Johansson, 2007). Sampson (2019) found that the issue of racism among school board members inhibited how the boards addressed educational inequities with EL students.

Superintendents are often put in positions where they must act in accordance with directives mandated to them, even though the mandates may not always align with their moral beliefs and values (Hammersly-Fletcher, 2015). Not only may they be navigating this dilemma to compromise their own beliefs to enact directives with the board of trustees, but also with the teachers and staff on the campus who may not share their moral reasoning (Frick & Gutierrez, 2008). Frustration can occur for administrators who feel the need to comply with directives, policies, and laws when they think the directives conflict with their desire to do what is best for students (Bon & Bigbee, 2011). For

example, superintendents who stood up for social justice in *Abbeville v. South Carolina* faced considerable risk when they filed suit against the state for inequities among the schools, and most of them agreed that they risked losing their jobs and their livelihoods as a result of participating in the case (Tran et al., 2021). The risks were significant and included community resistance because of the reputational implications involved in admitting that inequities existed in their schools; however, the superintendents stated they took the risk because they ultimately believed in the cause (Tran et al., 2021).

### ***Strategies***

Navigating the school community requires superintendents to strategically analyze situations and deliberate on potential actions while considering the resistance they may face in the wake of their decisions (Ryan, 2016). Leading change and advocating for equitable practices is complicated work that requires superintendents to act with determination and flexibility (Shields & Hesbold, 2020). Self-reflection is a vital tool for recognizing and examining past beliefs and values. It also enables superintendents to acknowledge what may influence their decisions for marginalized groups such as EL students. In addition, self-reflection helps school leaders identify gaps in their knowledge and the areas in which they need to grow professionally regarding social justice issues (DeMatthews et al., 2020).

The goal of having a successful school is not only defined by standardized test scores, but also by the belief that learning for all students, regardless of their backgrounds, ethnicities, or cultures, is attainable and necessary. Wasonga (2009) proposed that this can occur more efficiently when leadership works toward social justice and democratic communities in tandem. Through collective decision-making and

collaboration with stakeholders, leaders can show staff and communities that all members are valued. Voices need to be heard, and those voices cannot be silenced simply because their viewpoint is different from their leaders. Student voices should not be silenced in decision-making, and an environment in which they are free to be vulnerable should be fostered (Hernandez & Marshall, 2009). This strategy of creating and acknowledging democratic communities resonates with the core of social justice leadership.

Another strategy for moving educational systems toward equity and social justice is using data-informed leadership (Enzanni, 2020). School leaders can use data to promote educational equity and social justice ideals (Knight & DeMatthews, 2018); however, certain groups can be viewed by teachers and administrators as those who are likely to impact standardized testing data in a negative way rather than for their additive qualities (DeMatthews & Mueller, 2021).

Educators may be reluctant to discuss data because it could bring to the forefront an uncomfortable reality that they have low expectations of students in marginalized populations (Park, 2018). However, data should be used to identify areas that need improvement and develop goals to address those areas (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014). In addition, these inward reflection practices help schools develop a plan to address the need for training and continual education (Pazey & Cole, 2013).

### ***Resistance***

Theoharis (2008) examined the resistance faced amidst work toward an equity-oriented school system. The school leaders worked on similar, though not identical, agendas for social justice. The study found that considerable resistance was faced when they took action toward social justice. The opposition came from several levels, including

the school and the community within and beyond the district. Although the resistance faced was significant, creating more equitable and just schools was still possible.

Shields (2004) offered another insightful look at a form of resistance that involves self-reflection and acknowledgment of how powerful silence can be. Pathologies of silence occur when educators are not comfortable with the differences in students, resulting in them being silent as a way of not singling out children. In many ways, this has become the norm in education, where teachers and administrators feel they can never be too careful in making a child feel devalued. Unfortunately, the pendulum may have swung too far in that direction, as many educators are uncomfortable in situations where they must discuss issues involving race or other diverse factors and may have excused themselves from these conversations as a result.

Shields (2004) contended that educators cannot ignore the diverse students in schools, but must value and embrace diversity, fostering better relationships and the benefit of growing as individuals. Her work suggested that to create more socially just schools, superintendents should engage in building relationships by regularly entering into a dialogue that is both moral and relational in nature. In addition, school leaders should continue to bring to the forefront the importance of equity and issues surrounding creating a more inclusive and caring environment (DeMatthews & Mueller, 2021).

While barriers exist in schools with inequities, this does not excuse superintendents from their duty to be creative in developing systems to ensure a quality education for all students (Scanlan & Lopez, 2012). School districts with leaders who believe in social justice tenants and embrace those values believe that the inclusion of all students will lead to positive results (Pazey & Cole, 2013). Bringing these issues into the

light through discussion and a shared understanding of how the past and present circumstances influence the decisions of superintendents will be pivotal in establishing an equitable education for all students regardless of their race, language, or culture.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

An embedded multiple-case study research design was utilized in this study. This design focused on multiple embedded units of analysis over a specified amount of time and employed an approach that included the context surrounding the units of analysis or cases (Yin, 2009). This design approach also included collecting quantitative data for each case that aided in understanding the context (Yin, 2009). The units of analysis for this study were superintendents and their school boards, with the superintendents being the primary units of analysis. The context surrounding the units of analysis was captured in part by the demographic characteristics of the school districts where the participants worked. This qualitative approach relied on interviews, observations, and demographic data. Nonverbal data were also collected during the interviews, inclusive of body language and emotions.

### **Participants**

Participants were selected through convenience sampling of currently practicing superintendents. All participants in the study were chosen based on their geographical location and availability to participate. In Texas, twenty regional Education Service Centers (ESC) support the state's 1,026 public school districts as grouped in geographical areas. Due to proximity, this study recruited superintendents from the Region 10 ESC,

which is located in the Central Texas region of the state. There were no gender, age, or race inclusion criteria.

Potential participating superintendents were initially contacted by telephone, including those with whom a relationship with the researcher already existed. Calls were made, followed by recruitment e-mails until four participants were secured.

Once participants were selected, a pre-interview phone conversation was conducted. Prior to the pre-interview phone calls, Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR) from each district were reviewed for the researcher to gain familiarity with the districts to enhance conversations with participants about their schools while building rapport with them. Because of the complexity of the relationship with participants and their role as a critical data source, building rapport is paramount when conducting qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013).

Participants were ensured confidentiality in their responses by an IRB-approved informed consent form with the researcher. Guarantees included using pseudonyms for participant names and masking any other identifying information, such as school district names and locations of the school districts.

### **Data Collection**

Quantitative data collection began by obtaining each participant's district demographic data, which was obtained from the most recent information available on the districts' TAPR, posted on the TEA website and the districts' website. Data included the size of the district's student population and the campus configurations of each district. This informed the researcher about each district and allowed them to engage in substantive conversation with each participant to gain rapport when speaking to them

about their districts. Following demographic data collection, each superintendent participated in a short pre-interview visit via phone. During the pre-interview visit, the only goal for the researcher was to gain a connection and explain any details of the study.

Interviews via Zoom with each superintendent consisted of two fictitious case scenarios with ten questions following each scenario (Appendix A and B). The researcher designed the case scenarios to center around a problem involving equity and the EL population. The first scenario (see Appendix A) involved a parent/student concern in which a parent was complaining to the superintendent that they overheard the Pledge of Allegiance being recited in Spanish over the school announcements. The parent believed that this was disrespectful and demanded that this should stop immediately. The second scenario (Appendix B) involved a school board member's concern that the superintendent approved additional staff for bilingual classrooms and increased stipends received for all bilingual teachers in the district. The school board member was upset and shared that they had received feedback from teachers in the district that they were also upset.

Each scenario was emailed to the participants prior to the interview and were read aloud to the participants during the interviews. Interviewees were then asked pre-written, scripted questions for each scenario, and probing questions were asked to gain additional information as needed. For example, after speaking about both case scenarios, superintendents were asked if they felt one scenario was more difficult to deal with than the other. These probing questions varied with each participant. Following the interview, audio recordings were transcribed.

Memos were used to record observations during the interviews. These memos were recorded immediately following the interview and included notes regarding how the

participants responded and reacted to the questions. For example, the researcher noted that one respondent seemed guarded in his responses and was reluctant to share personal experiences when asked, while another was confident and open in his responses.

### **Data Analysis**

Following the recommendation of Yin (2009), the analysis was structured in accordance with the following propositions:

1. A superintendent's values, beliefs, and attitudes about equity can influence their decisions.
2. Demographics of a district influence the superintendent's decisions concerning EL students.
3. Because of the political nature of the relationship between the school board and the superintendent, the school board's beliefs and attitudes about EL students influence a superintendent's decisions.

Transcripts were made of each participant's interview and imported into Atlas.ti. This software facilitated color-coding of the qualitative data and created tables of the coded data. This process was pivotal as it began to identify the similarities that existed within the cases themselves and were driven by the propositions. The data were coded first utilizing values coding by looking specifically for the participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs (Saldana, 2009). The criteria used to code for values, attitudes, and beliefs were drawn from Saldana (2009) and made distinctions among the three. Values were those statements that held personal meaning to the superintendents and were about what is right or wrong when making a decision. Attitudes were defined as how a person thinks



or feels about something or someone, and beliefs were a combination of their values, attitudes, and experiences about how things work in the world.

After the values coding was complete, the researcher moved on to an additional layer of coding by using substantive categories to broaden the scope and pursue a deeper meaning in the responses (Maxwell, 2013). This included the researcher returning to code for other themes exploring connections and co-occurrences. Each case was analyzed individually to identify themes that emerged and to look for connections between different elements of the interview. The next round of analysis examined themes and patterns between the different cases and how those related to the districts' demographics. This combination of categorizing and connecting methods provided a more well-rounded analysis of the data and for a deeper understanding to emerge.

Both during and after the interviews were completed, memos were written to highlight the connections with the research questions and reflect on the process as the study progressed. Written memos served as a tool that enabled the researcher to observe non-verbal cues to go beyond the verbalized answers thinking more carefully about themes and underlying patterns (Maxwell, 2013). This was an ongoing process both during the interview and as an analytical approach, encouraging reflection and shaping the direction of the analysis.

A narrative analysis was developed following the coding of the data and identifying co-occurrences to establish answers to the research questions. This narrative analysis moved beyond codification and focused on how the data fit together to create a better understanding, including context. This included written memos, transcripts of the interviews, field notes and observations, and the data available from TEA. These data

were reviewed and reorganized cohesively for the narrative analysis while identifying the connections and context. Finally, the data were triangulated and synthesized. This process was conducted by combining the coded data with the contextual data looking for relationships and connections. This approach to data analysis culminated with a presentation of the data that is easy to understand and answers the research questions by looking across data sources.

### **Validity**

To address the validity threat of researcher bias, methods included rich data collection, such as recording the interviews with the superintendents. In addition, measures to assure confidentiality increased validity as genuine answers to the interview questions are more likely when fear of professional consequences is limited.

The researcher had some background knowledge and personal interest in this study. Experience as a campus assistant principal and principal at a bilingual campus led to dealing with inequity issues in a district where the researcher was an administrator. Through those two positions, substantial experience was gained in serving EL students and their families, and the legal and compliance requirements for EL students. In addition, those experiences shaped beliefs about EL students where advocating for students was commonplace. The researcher served as the Director of Specialized Learning and led the district's bilingual and ESL programs. This position gave the researcher a global understanding of how programming worked at the district level and the different aspects of serving EL students, families, and communities.

On a personal level, there were also experiences with inequities for ELs because of the researcher's experiences with their spouse, a first-generation American who had to

learn English upon enrolling in a U.S. school. Inequities and racism were experienced throughout the marital relationship, and those experiences shaped the researcher's beliefs and values. Because of the researcher's experiences, the occurrences of racism and inequity became more authentic and palpable, and led the researcher to have a deep value for the differences that occur among people and the belief that all people deserve equitable treatment regardless of their background.

While the researcher's experience and background allowed for gaining valuable knowledge in the study, it is recognized that this could also be a threat to validity. Therefore, the choice of data collection and data analysis methods attempted to remove the researcher bias that may have occurred because of these experiences.

### **Findings**

Four superintendents serving Texas schools agreed to participate in the study. While there were similarities among the four, there were also differences that were acknowledged. In the participants subsection, a description of each superintendent and their districts' demographics lead the findings section to provide context that was integral to interpreting interview data. Pseudonyms were assigned to each superintendent to maintain their confidentiality. Next, the thematic analysis subsection reports the data organized by the previously mentioned propositions. The data is presented in a combination of tables and narrative. Additional findings are also presented and include data that does not correlate directly with a proposition but were found to be noteworthy regarding superintendent decision-making.

## **Participants**

John Harper served a small rural school district with an enrollment of 2,550 students, as reported in the district's TAPR. He had been a superintendent for over 20 years and spent much of that time in rural districts. During the interview with John, he was confident in his responses and relied on his years of experience in furnishing his answers to the interview questions. He was also very open and candid in his responses. Student characteristics for his district were as follows: 5.8% were African American, 73.5% were Hispanic, and 18.6% were White. Of those, 81.3% were classified as Economically Disadvantaged and 32.3% were ELs.

Ronnie Beasley also served a small rural district of approximately 1,150 students. He had been a superintendent for less than ten years and several of those years were in the district where he was currently employed. His responses were very broad, tending to be more general than other participants. Student characteristics for his district were as follows: 1.9% African American, 19.6% Hispanic, and 75.9% White students. In addition, this school district had 39.4% of students classified as Economically Disadvantaged and 5.9% as ELs.

Bob Higgins served the largest district of the participants in the study, with approximately 9,600 students. He had been a superintendent for less than five years and had worked in one other district included in this study. He had been in his current district for less than a year. In the interview, he was the most careful in his responses; however, he also appeared to be honest. Student characteristics for the district were 14.4% African American, 33.8% Hispanic, and 47% White students. The population of students

classified as Economically Disadvantaged was 45.9%, and ELs made up 8.4% of the population.

A small rural school district employed Keith Johnson with around 1,200 students. He was the most candid in his responses and was open and willing to share during the interview. He had a passionate spirit and was outspoken about putting students first when leading in his district. His school district had the following student characteristics: 1.9% African American, 44.6% Hispanic, and 50.8% White students. In addition, 54.5% of the students were classified as Economically Disadvantaged, and 12.9% were ELs.

### **Thematic Analysis**

***Proposition 1:*** A superintendent's values, beliefs, and attitudes about equity can influence their decisions.

Decisions influenced by the superintendents' values, attitudes, and beliefs were found to occur frequently in all four of the superintendent's responses across the two scenarios.

**Table 1**

*Frequency of Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs by Participant*

Codes	Number of Occurrences				
	John	Ronnie	Bob	Keith	Total
Values	7	4	6	12	29
Attitudes	15	26	21	30	92
Beliefs	20	15	23	12	70

John's value statements had a strong occurrence of both valuing differences in each other and being student-focused. He made three statements regarding valuing the differences in each other, and nine statements focused on the needs of students. Of those statements,

five of them co-occurred with a belief statement and being focused on student needs. When responding to one of the interview questions, he stated, "we are here to provide opportunities, and that's what we need to be doing regardless of what color they are, whether they speak English or not." When asked about his initial private reaction to the school board member's concern about paying bilingual teachers an additional stipend in Scenario 2, he spoke about the need for training for school board members and communicating his vision to the school board. John responded:

I didn't do a very good job of doing new board member orientation training with them whenever they got elected if they got elected while I was here because those are things we cover, not that specific topic, but we cover making decisions that are best for all.

Keith had the most value statements, and like John, there was also a strong co-occurrence between his value statements and being focused on the needs of students in his decisions. He stated, "We have to do what's best for our kids and our district." Keith was also the most opinionated and open of the four participants. He was most passionate in his responses and unapologetic about how he responded to the interview questions. When asked about the most challenging part of responding to the parent in Scenario 1, he answered, "I really don't have much patience with the whole racism thing, so probably emotionally that one's going to get to me."

John and Keith had the most in common of the four superintendents interviewed. Interestingly, their interview data showed a strong co-occurrence between values and being focused on student needs. They also had the most diverse student populations and the highest number of ELs of the four participants.

Both John and Keith shared personal and professional experiences in which they took a stand against inequitable treatment based on race or ethnicity. John has a son-in-law whose first language is not English, and he said that this had influenced the way he makes decisions. He commented, "... so there were times he was chastised for speaking Spanish, or it was difficult for him as a monolingual Spanish speaker coming in, so I try to look at things through his lens." Keith shared an experience where he spoke out to a group of community members regarding race and ethnicity:

And there's a couple of them that make me uncomfortable sometimes with what they talk about, and I pretty much blasted them the other day about how hard those people work, and if you didn't have them the whole United States economy would shut down, and they didn't appreciate what I had to say.

Ronnie had the fewest value statements and did not elaborate on his answers as much as the other three. For example, he stated, "Maybe it's not necessarily so much as just the patriotic side of this, but as this is a learning opportunity for the student" when describing his professional reaction to the parent in Scenario 1.

Bob was the most calculated in his responses; however, he gave some definitive value statements regarding his conservative Christian values. His value statements tended to be more from the lens of religion and conservative political affiliation. When responding to a question in Scenario 1 that asked if he had any personal experiences that would influence his decisions, he described a friend who was also a superintendent. He felt that in the superintendent position, the professional can often bleed into personal experience. When speaking about how his friend was criticized, Bob commented that he was "being labeled a dang liberal, are you kidding me?" and that he valued a friend of his

because he was "one of the most faithful Christian conservative people." He also identified himself by saying, "I'm pretty naturally a pretty conservative guy." He was the only participant who identified himself with a political or religious affiliation, and through his answers, it seems that these values were influencing his decisions. For example, in Scenario 1, when asked about his decision regarding saying the Pledge of Allegiance in Spanish, he answered, "just making sure that everything we're doing does comport with our local values, that were appropriately honoring America."

Overall, 28 co-occurrences between attitude and understanding were observed, and all four superintendents spoke about trying to develop a shared understanding between themselves and the other party in both scenarios. There was a desire to reach resolutions through understanding and explanation in both scenarios. For example, when discussing what may be difficult when constructing his response to the school board in Scenario 2, when there is the potential for emotions to be heightened, John commented, "we hope reason wins out and we get to actually have a conversation." For Ronnie, fourteen co-occurrences of attitude and understanding existed in his responses across both scenarios. When asked about his response to the parent in Scenario 1, he responded, "I've dealt with a lot of parents that have very far right-leaning beliefs, and I try to understand their point of view obviously as I would with anybody."

Keith's statements that were coded "attitude" and "understanding" primarily pertained to school board relations. When asked about Scenario 2, where the school board member was upset with adding staff and stipends, he stated, "you just got to explain to them and make them understand that's [class size differences] apples to oranges, basically," and "obviously trying to convince that board member that doesn't



think that we need to do that [add staff], you know, that's probably going to be the most difficult portion is getting them to understand and getting them on board."

The superintendent's beliefs statements and a focus on student needs also had a strong co-occurrence. This finding is noteworthy because there were 11 co-occurrences across three superintendents. The most co-occurrences of any other code with beliefs was "school board relations", with 14 co-occurrences. In addition, many of the statements addressed equity issues, directly indicating the influence of student-focused beliefs on decision-making. Table 2 highlights the belief statements made by the superintendents, that co-occurred with a focus on student needs.

**Table 2**

*Student-Focused Belief Quotes*

	Quote
John	<p>It actually puts them at a competitive disadvantage going out into the workforce and looking at those higher-paying jobs that they may be seeking. And so, hopefully, I would be able to spin it in such a way that being able to speak Spanish and English fluently is ultimately the goal for every kid. It just so happens that those that are native Spanish speakers are actually a little bit ahead of our native English speakers because they're having to be immersed in English to learn, to learn the second language. So that would probably be the way that I would go about it. – Responding to the question about how they would react to the parent's concern in Scenario One</p> <p>The kids that have the greatest need or the kids that need the greatest resources –Responding to the question about how their initial private reaction to the school board concern in Scenario Two.</p> <p>...because we've got to create opportunities. We've got to give these kids the chance to become leaders in this country because they're going to be in charge of it whenever we're old. So, this just supports that. – Responding to how they would respond to the school board member in Scenario Two.</p> <p>My greatest concern is having a board that is petty and fighting among themselves and unwilling to do what's best for kids overall, and that doesn't accomplish anything for any of us. –Responding to the question about what would worry them most when dealing with Scenario Two</p>

I would also want to be able to articulate why we're doing what we're doing and ultimately be able to share back with them, you know, data that shows that kids that are biliterate ultimately end up becoming potentially greater learners than those that are, that are only literate in one language –Responding to Scenario One and what to communicate to the school board.

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Ronnie I mean, the students, if that's something we need to utilize, I don't know why you would change that. –Responding to what their final decision would be in Scenario One.

I think you initially have to say, well, I do support this. I feel like this is something that we absolutely need for our kids. –Responding to the question about how to navigate an upset school board member in Scenario Two.

...then it also helps our student population and, you know, so on and so forth. And then the more that we're able to help these students to become stronger students, the better they're going to be able to work within just the general ed classroom. –Responding to the question about how to deal with the upset school board member in Scenario Two.

...that we're able to help these students to become stronger students – Responding to how they would communicate their decision with the school board in Scenario Two.

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Bob I'm really going to then go into a mode of education because this is not, it's not about equal is fair. –Responding on how to gain a shared understanding with the school board on Scenario One.

What was the need for those English learners? And so, the English learners had a greater need, so I've got to educate... --Responding to how to gain a shared understanding with the school board on Scenario Two.

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***Proposition 2:*** Demographics of a district influence the superintendent's decisions concerning EL students.

The demographic characteristics of a leader's district do appear to influence their decisions. Three of the four superintendents were from small rural districts, and one was from a larger suburban district. Being from a larger district, Bob was more cautious in his answers and was more concerned about the potential political ramifications of his decisions than the other three. Ronnie mentioned that sometimes things are not an issue

in his district because they are a small community of mostly like-minded people. He stated, "So, I think in bigger communities, maybe more polarized communities, that would be an issue that they might have to address more head-on, but in our community, that's [a concern about race] not really been an issue."

John and Keith had the most diverse student populations, and both had the most vocal support for EL students on the scenarios. Not only were their district populations diverse, but they both have larger EL populations. More students in this category appeared to influence their willingness to advocate for the EL populations openly.

The table below shows the demographic characteristics of each participant's district.

**Table 3**  
*District Demographic Characteristics*

	John	Ronnie	Bob	Keith
African American	5.8%	1.9%	14.4%	1.9%
Hispanic	73.5%	19.6%	33.8%	44.6%
White	18.6%	75.9%	47.0%	50.8%
Eco Dis	81.3%	39.4%	45.9%	54.5%
EL	32.3%	5.9%	8.4%	12.9%
Bilingual/ESL	30.7%	5.9%	8.6%	12.7%
Total Students	2583	1160	9668	1243

**Proposition 3:** Because of the political nature of the relationship between the school board and the superintendent, the school board's beliefs and attitudes about EL students influence a superintendent's decisions.

School board relations had a strong presence in the data, with 62 total occurrences across all four participating superintendents. John spoke in detail about his relations with

the school board and how he interacted with them. When asked about his relationship with the school board and how he knows when to share information, he stated:

I think that at times we are gatekeepers of information and what we share with our board. We can choose to use it in a way ultimately that is always best for our kids and always best for our system, and always best for those that we're charged with supervising and overseeing.

He had the most years of experience as a superintendent and talked about how he managed the relationship with them. When speaking about sharing with the school board, he stated, "but we can choose to share it [information] in such a way that either strengthens our position or weakens our position or creates collegiality with the board or creates animosity with the board." He also felt that being proactive is essential to stay ahead of any potential issues. He stated:

It's never pleasant to openly cross a board member, particularly if they have a real strong stance on a position. Even if you win them over with reason and data and they come around, invariably, they may have hard feelings, and that rears its head at some other point with some other topic.

Ronnie elaborated least on his answers to the interview questions but did say that he had a great relationship with the school board. He is in a small district and feels confident about his relationship with the board, but he acknowledges that managing a group of seven can be difficult. He said, "You're trying to convince two people, and the bottom one, you're convincing seven, so you've got seven board members. And so, trying to get seven people on the same page is difficult."

Bob spoke about communicating with the board and that, ultimately, the school board employed him, and he took note that he needed to check in with them and see where they were on a topic before he weighed in on that topic. He stated:

If I can weather it and honor the practice [saying the pledge in Spanish] and continue the practice; if my board's going to be supportive of that, then I can be supportive of it, but they'll make it real clear to me," and "the board's huge, you know, especially on these hot button issues. All right. And so, they'll make it real clear.

Keith was the most confident in his relationship with the board, but still acknowledged the need for shared understanding with the board. Keith stated:

Obviously, trying to convince that board member that doesn't think we need to do that [add staff and give a stipend], you know, that's probably going to be the most difficult portion is getting them to understand, and getting them on board. And, you know, I'm not saying everything's smooth as silk. Every once in a while, you'll have that board member that, you know, has to really be convinced or sold that, you know, this is what's best. But that, that would probably be the biggest challenge would be just meeting with that board member and convincing them.

Being proactive when dealing with the school board emerged as a common theme across all four superintendents. There were 18 occurrences of taking a proactive approach when responding to the two scenarios, and 13 of those were explicitly about dealing with the school board. John stated:

I have learned over time that if there are things that I think they need to know in advance, I better tell them, and I better be able to create that expectation in advance. He went on to explain his reasoning for a proactive approach:

So, those are things that, and again, the things you try to frame those conversations in advance so that whenever something eventually comes up, they've already at least heard from you and are at least thinking, hopefully, the way that you want them to think about a situation, as opposed to the way they normally would. As a new board member, they think, oh, I can come in and fix this, and this and this, and I've got this pet I'm going to take care of, and I've got this program I'm going to support.

Ronnie also saw the value in taking a proactive stance and said, "Well, I would hopefully circumvent that ahead of time. So, the plan on that would be that I wouldn't just approve that. I would take that recommendation to the board and say, here's our recommendation. And here's the why." Regarding being proactive, Bob stated, "the way I was always taught and the way I practice it is that if it is things that they're going to hear from somebody else, I want them to hear from me."

### **Additional Findings**

All four superintendents mentioned data as a lever to gain the understanding of their board with respect to decision-making. Overall, there were 25 occurrences of "data" coded across all four superintendents. John Harper had the most statements coded with 11, showing that he relied heavily on data as a means for articulating his understanding or as a rationale for his decisions. The other three also used data as a tool to develop the board's understanding of an issue as well.

Social media also emerged as a theme and a concern for superintendents when making decisions. All four superintendents indicated that social media was an area of concern, and there was a strong co-occurrence between “social media” and an attitude of negative emotion. Although this was not part of the study's original design, it became clear that it affects the decisions being made by the participating superintendents. John stated:

Typically, things that are race relations, and this is, in a way, racial relations. I always try to share that with the board in advance because those become such hot topics on social media. And I try to avoid any of my board members getting involved in those conversations publicly.

Ronnie referred to those who post on social media as "keyboard warriors" and acknowledged that his decisions could have "ramifications" on social media. When Bob was asked how social media influences his decisions, he stated:

Oh, a hundred percent. Because you know, that's all it takes is how does this parent respond? Because what's a real likely scenario is the parent left that school and then went on the Facebook and said, oh my gosh, you would not believe what I just heard. And then it would get added to, you know, small-town buzz, small-town talk groups, and then, you know, here we go.

Keith stated:

I guess you're always going to be concerned with social media, like is it today that that parent's going to go out, and you know, we have what's called The Voice of the District. I call it The Bash of the District because anytime a parent gets mad, they go straight to The Voice of the District, you know, whether true or not. So,

you know, there's always that concern that it's going to get posted on social media. And at that point, you know, nobody asks questions; they just react. So, you'd always have to worry about that blowing up then into something larger.

## **Discussion**

### **Summary**

While research has shown that leaders are influenced by values, attitudes, and beliefs when making decisions (Beard, 2013; Bon & Bigbee, 2011; Findlay, 2015; Frick et al., 2012; Hammersly-Fletcher, 2015; Klinker & Hackman, 2004; Roegman, 2017; Sileo et al., 2008; Stefkovich & Begley, 2007), this study attempted to make the connection between those and superintendents' decision-making when addressing the inequities that may exist for ELs. Through social justice leadership, superintendents can address these inequities by first recognizing them and then advocating for the necessary changes. Unfortunately, while superintendents may recognize the need for this action, sometimes there is a reluctance to acknowledge the current inequities that exist in their districts (Kruse et al., 2018).

The resulting problem is that superintendents' values and beliefs may not align with or place priority on EL equity, and even if it does, may present significant political problems for superintendents with their boards, communities, or both. This problem led to the development of three research questions focused on how superintendents' values, beliefs, and attitudes influence their decisions concerning EL students. The questions also sought to better understand how the districts' demographics and school boards may influence their decision concerning EL students.



Through this qualitative research, participating superintendents were given two fictitious case scenarios that both focused on an issue of equity, explicitly dealing with the EL student population. They were then interviewed with pre-determined questions and were asked probing questions throughout the interview to gain a deeper understanding of their perspective and decision-making process.

The study found that the participating superintendents' values, beliefs, and attitudes did influence their decisions and that they often focused on what the students needed to be successful. There was also evidence that the school board relationship affected the decisions made by the superintendent. Interestingly, social media emerged as a concern for all four participating superintendents in their decision-making process.

## **Conclusions**

Research Question 1 asked how superintendents' values, attitudes, and beliefs about equity influenced their decision-making processes concerning EL students. Based on the analysis of data collected in this study, values, attitudes, and beliefs were influencing the decisions being made. While the superintendents' values and beliefs varied, they all relied on them when making decisions across both case scenarios. Personal experiences with equity implications outside of their professional roles also influenced their professional decisions dealing with matters of EL equity. Two of the superintendents spoke about their experiences, how they use them, and their values when faced with a problem over race or ethnicity.

All four participants had commonalities between their attitudes about seeking a common understanding with parents and the school board. Superintendents relied on their values, beliefs, and attitudes and applied those to their decisions. A strong sense of doing

what is best for all students came across as a common theme, which also spoke to their desire to make equitable decisions. In the superintendents' belief statements, several spoke directly about equity and showed that their personal beliefs influenced their decision on the scenario. While there may have been differences in what they held as personal values or beliefs, all four superintendents were influenced by them when making decisions involving scenarios with an equity-based focus.

Research Question 2 asked how districts' demographics and characteristics influence superintendents' decision-making processes concerning EL students. The data showed that the demographics of a district did influence their decisions. Both superintendents who had a higher percentage of students in the Hispanic and EL categories, were more outspoken in their support for EL students. They were both explicit in their responses regarding doing what is needed for EL students specifically to be successful. The smaller three rural districts also seemed to translate to a closer relationship with school boards, which led to more confident relationships. The superintendent in the larger district was more aware and cautious regarding the politics that play a role in decisions.

Research Question 3 asked how the school boards for which superintendents work affect superintendents' decision-making processes concerning EL students. According to the data analyzed, this relationship influenced the decisions being made by superintendents. "School board relations" was the most frequent code found in the data. It indicated that superintendents kept that relationship in mind in all decisions they made, especially when they believed decisions may have had political ramifications. When making decisions, superintendents were processing and determining whether they should

inform the school board of the issue at hand. This proactive approach emerged as a common theme and led to the conclusion that the superintendents understood the need to manage the relationship between themselves and the board. The data indicated that most decisions regarding equity and race would not be made in the absence of board input. Being proactive and having a cohesive board were seen as factors that would lead to a successful relationship.

All four superintendents also recognized that they needed the support of their board or the understanding of their board to maintain a working relationship. There was also a recognition that because the board is made up of elected members of the community, there could be differing opinions and agendas. This can be challenging for superintendents striving to maintain a cohesive team. School boards and their influence on the decisions made by superintendents were apparent throughout the study.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The sample size of this study was four Texas superintendents, which could be considered a limitation. More superintendents would have allowed for additional data across regions and possibly spanning different states or nations. However, this could also be viewed as a strength of the study. Because of the smaller sample size, the researcher was able to spend more time with each participant and conduct a more in-depth analysis of the data collected. The embedded multiple case study was appropriate because the findings were examined across more than one setting, that may reduce skepticism of the results (Yin, 2009).

The use of fictitious scenarios was also a limitation of this study. It is acknowledged that responses to a fictitious situation may differ from real-life situations.

While the decision to use a scenario was chosen because of the desire to gain honest answers and elicit less resistance, the responses could be different when faced with an actual problem.

## **Implications**

Values, beliefs, and attitudes influence the decisions made by superintendents; however, they may not always align with the school board or community's views when making equity-based decisions for EL students. This problem is brought to the forefront in Texas, where the population of EL students continues to grow (Texas Education Agency, 2021), and thus the inequities are further exacerbated.

The implications of this study for EL students and their families are that through a deeper understanding of how decisions are made, superintendents can utilize the results to self-reflect on their decisions and their relationship with the school board. This self-reflection and conscious attention to issues through metacognition focused on equity with EL students may result in more equitable treatment of students and families.

Understanding how superintendents' decisions are influenced when making decisions concerning EL students adds to the existing body of research on social justice leadership by examining the role of the superintendent specifically and exploring how their decisions have political implications for the school board. Superintendents are influenced by the school board when making decisions which can result in backlash or even the loss of their jobs if superintendents' opinions are in contrast to the boards' views. Superintendents are expected to define the roles between themselves and the school boards while creating solid working relationships (19 Tex. Admin Code § 242.15(e), 1999). Because of this, superintendents should work together with school

boards to ensure that the visions of their districts are in alignment with equitable treatment for all students. Superintendents should also be proactive in training school boards to further their understanding of district policies and procedures regarding specific student populations.

While recognizing the need for social justice leadership is imperative, and action is necessary, many times superintendents can be reluctant to advocate for and enact policies and procedures that will result in more equitable treatment for EL students for fear of discord or potential professional consequences if their actions and views do not coincide with their school boards' views. The implication for EL students is inequitable treatment resulting in a subpar education in comparison with their classmates. To combat this issue, superintendents can practice equity audits to gain data for presentation to their boards to justify additional resources.

Superintendent preparation programs can use the results of this study to better train aspiring superintendents on what influences their decisions concerning EL students. Superintendents also need training on how to manage the complex relationship between themselves and the school board, which this study shows is influential in their decision-making.

There are implications for policymakers as they better understand how a district's demographics and school boards influence superintendents. This research implies the continued need for policy that addresses the commonly found inequities as a result of district demographics. Policy has been developed by the Texas Association of School Boards that ensures that school boards are held to a high standard of moral and ethical standards and to ensure equitable practices for all students. This policy includes always

having the commitment to do what is in the best interest of all students (Texas Association of School Boards, 2022). Superintendents should remember that the word all is very powerful and encompasses each and every student group in the districts they serve.

Further research is recommended on what influences superintendents' decisions for other marginalized populations. While there may be similarities, there could also be differences in the number and type of inequities present for different student groups.

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## Appendix A

### Case Scenario 1

You are the current superintendent in a small school district with three elementary campuses that serve bilingual students in grades PK-5. Your schools utilize a one-way dual language model for instruction, meaning that they instruct students in both English and Spanish. The classes are only available to students whose first language is Spanish.

This school year, the bilingual campuses decided to incorporate the bilingual students into the morning announcements at each school. Each morning, one of the bilingual students does the announcements with the school counselor and repeats the English portion in Spanish. The bilingual students love this new addition and feel excited when they hear their home language on the speaker each morning. The announcements include the Pledge of Allegiance each morning and are recited in both English and Spanish.

This morning you received a phone call from an angry parent. Their child attends one of the bilingual campuses, and they happened to be in the building that morning for the announcements. They are upset and tell you that they will not stand for the disrespect that they heard this morning. They are particularly upset that the Pledge is being said in Spanish and feel that this should stop immediately. The parent says, "that's not even the official language of the United States. Why would the school district be allowing this?" They go on and say, "those Mexicans either need to learn English or go back where they came from."

1. What is your initial (private) reaction to the parent's concerns?
2. What additional information, if any, might you want before responding?
3. What do you think your first response to the parent's concern would be?
4. Who would you want to speak with as you figure out how you are going to address the parent's concern?
5. What do you think your final decision would be?
6. What worries might you have before and after deciding what to do?
7. Are there personal experiences you have had that might influence how you would deal with this situation?
8. Are there professional experiences you have had that might influence how you would deal with this situation?
9. Would you communicate this situation to your school board? How do you think they might respond?
10. What part of responding to this situation do you think would be most difficult for you? Why?

## **Appendix B**

### **Case Scenario 2**

You are the current superintendent of a small school district. Your Director of Bilingual/ESL has been advocating for months to you for additional staff and retention stipends for the bilingual teachers. There has been considerable growth in your district's EL population, and the class sizes are getting too big. The Director brings you the data supporting the addition of three additional bilingual teachers, and you agree to make it happen. Because of staffing issues, you also agree to increase the bilingual stipend for all bilingual teachers.

You receive an e-mail from a board member requesting a meeting. You agree, and the board member comes in that afternoon. The board member shares with you the concern that she has been hearing from teachers. She shares that teachers are upset because the bilingual teachers are getting all of the money and smaller classes. She says, "you didn't approve additional money for those teachers, did you?" She went on, "why are those kids who need to learn English more important than the other kids?" She lets you know that she has already called the other board members, and they are upset as well.

1. What is your initial (private) reaction to the school board member's concerns?
2. What additional information, if any, might you want before responding?
3. What do you think your first response to the school board member's concern would be?
4. Who would you want to speak with as you figure out how you are going to address the school board member's concern?
5. What do you think your final decision would be?
6. What worries might you have before and after deciding what to do?
7. Are there personal experiences you have had that might influence how you would deal with this situation?
8. Are there professional experiences you have had that might influence how you would deal with this situation?
9. How might you justify your decision to the school board? How do you think they might respond?
10. What part of responding to this situation do you think would be most difficult for you? Why?