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The Principalship: Transitional Leadership Considerations for Overcoming Obstacles to Lab School Implementation in Partnership With an Urban School District in North Carolina

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THE PRINCIPALSHIP: TRANSITIONAL LEADERSHIP CONSIDERATIONS FOR OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO LAB SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AN URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT IN NORTH CAROLINA

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Tasha Hall-Powell under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Dedication

I dedicate this manuscript to my Lord and Savior, as my work has not been done in vain. All I do is for His glory and His work. I also dedicate this work to my children, Jayden and Travis, and my grandchild, Neveah, in hopes that they have gained an appreciation and passion for what true perseverance and patience are when pursuing one's dreams and aspirations. I also thank my children for the hugs and compassion they have shown towards me as the years of preparing for this moment have transpired. To my parents, I am forever grateful for your words of encouragement and prayers throughout my life and this educational journey. I am honored to have you both in my life. To my siblings, I thank you for showing me what great family and love can do to inspire creativity and resiliency during this humbling and worthwhile experience. Last, but certainly not least, to my dearest friends and colleagues who encouraged me to keep swimming and pushing towards the completion of this important work, I am forever grateful to you.

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Abstract

THE PRINCIPALSHIP: TRANSITIONAL LEADERSHIP CONSIDERATIONS FOR OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO LAB SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AN URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT IN NORTH CAROLINA, Hall-Powell, Tasha, 2022: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

Colleges and universities have taken on the legislative challenge within the state of North Carolina to engage civically through joint efforts with school districts within counties with dire challenges to improve academic and social and emotional outcomes for children. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of lab school processes and their impact on teachers and student outcomes. This is a qualitative study of school leaders, teachers, families, and support personnel within a university lab school to determine their impact on at-risk populations in kindergarten through Grade 5. Data from this study were obtained using a qualitative research design utilizing a narrative analysis evaluation. Experiences of those engaged in supporting high-risk students for improved academic outcomes in partnership with an urban school district of North Carolina were included in this research. Participants responded to questions emerging from journaled accounts of lab school processes, academic programming, and educational practice. Follow-up questions developed from identified and emergent trends and themes were conducted through individual interviews surrounding the four core research goals of this study: support, service, pedagogy, and partnerships. Findings will inform school leaders and stakeholders in the educational arena of the most efficacious approaches for improving outcomes for children existing within at-risk educational environments. The majority of this study indicated the lab school had multiple positive effects on lab school

students and staff especially in the areas of increased student and teacher efficacy through a strong sense of community, increased teacher autonomy and access to professional development, providing more exposure to areas at-risk students lack, as well as focused instruction based on student needs.

Keywords: leadership strategies, lab schools, at-risk students, narrative analysis, university partnerships

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Failing schools have been an ongoing and critical issue facing both urban and rural school districts across North Carolina and the United States. On Tuesday, January 6, 2015, the 114th Congress of the United States of America reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and established the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to support the achievement of every student. The purpose of ESSA was centered around improving basic programs operated by the state and local educational agencies (ESSA, 2015). Close to 10% of the nation's schools (8,652 of some 91,000) already face the first level of sanctions under ESEA. School systems have to permit students from "failing" schools the opportunity to go to other schools that are performing better on the test while also giving students access to transportation (National Center for Fair & Open Testing, 2015).

Background of the Problem: Dissatisfaction in Educational Reform

The presence of imbalances of students from varying backgrounds in education programs, especially those with special needs, including corrective practices, causes a dilemma for teachers, school leaders, and parents. Imbalances are an ongoing inherent issue and are not the blame of anyone in particular; because of this, it demands urgent collaboration and meaningful dialogue among local stakeholders (Fullan, 2001). Fullan (2001) suggested dissatisfaction with and interest in educational reform are worldwide issues. Charter schools have been both criticized and commended for both improving and tearing down the system of public schools. Business sectors are overtaking school districts declaring they are able to run schools more effectively, while surprising legislation is passed to bring attention to failing schools and failing school districts by

equally intrusive strategies aimed at correcting the situation. Among this confusion, agencies at all levels strive to push additional programs on educators, while teachers feel these same promoters of change should be institutionalized, in lieu of their programs. Fullan (1982, 2001) suggested that four comprehensive phases to the change process exist: initiation, implementation, continuation, and outcome. Fullan (2001) also suggested that the world is progressively complicated, requiring trained people who can adapt constantly while working with others from various backgrounds, nearby and abroad. While the origin of blame differs, it is evident in these present times that the educational structure and its allies have ceased to produce people able to give to and profit from a world that allows extensive opportunity and the justly complex struggle of existing within it (Fullan, 2001).

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation initiated an innovative project in November 2012 connecting traditional public schools and charter schools along with Catholic schools aiming to increase best education opportunities. Together, they invested in shared commitments, and these compacts were supported by not only district superintendents but charter school heads and community partners as well with funding through grants ranging between $2 million and $5 million (McCullough et al., 2016).

Statement of the Problem

North Carolina public school units are missing the mark in educating at-risk learners. In traditional schools across the state of North Carolina, children are not performing on grade level. Retaining primary-age children is becoming increasingly acceptable nationwide as a strategy to guarantee that children are ready for upper grades and beyond (Garcia & Weiss, 2018). In 2012, in an attempt to improve primary reading

achievement in North Carolina and to dissolve an in-practice policy of "social promotion" that sets more importance on age than on demonstrated proficiency, the North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA) passed legislation mandating the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) create and establish a system that would reinforce grade-level proficiency in reading for every third-grade student. It is regularly cited to as Read to Achieve. The history of third- and fourth-grade End-of-Grade (EOG) reading scores has been grim, as we continue to see achievement scores as stagnant (fourth grade) or regressing in some cases (third grade) since its inception (Porter et al., 2018).

The North Carolina EOG General Test and Alternative Assessment Results of the 2018-2019 school year revealed third- through eighth-grade children are struggling to make adequate progress in English/language arts (ELA). Less than 40% of students in Grades 3-8 scored a Level 4. As Figure 1 illustrates, this rating indicates students at a Level 4 show solid command of the State Board of Education-adopted ELA standards assessed at their grade level. Less than 15% of students in North Carolina performed at a Level 5 (NCDPI, n.d.a).

Figure 1

2018-2019 NC EOG Statewide Test Assessment Results for Grades 3-8

Table 1. 2018–19 End-of-Grade General Test and Alternate Assessments Results
Statewide Percent of Students at Each Achievement Level by Grade
English Language Arts (ELA)

Achievement Levels/Generic Descriptors		Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Level 1							
Students performing at this level have **limited command**	General Test	24.8%	25.6%	26.2%	18.9%	20.4%	22.1%
of the knowledge and skills contained in the SBE-adopted	NCEXTEND1	18.1%	10.3%	9.5%	16.6%	15.2%	15.9%
ELA content standards assessed at their grade level and will need academic support to engage successfully in this content area.							
Level 2							
Students performing at this level have **partial command**	General Test	18.4%	17.1%	19.4%	21.0%	20.8%	22.4%
of the knowledge and skills contained in the SBE-adopted ELA	NCEXTEND1	24.1%	31.7%	18.5%	28.3%	30.9%	27.4%
content standards assessed at their grade level and will likely need academic support to engage successfully in this content area.							
Level 3							
Students performing at this level have a **sufficient command**	General Test	11.7%	13.3%	13.1%	10.8%	10.6%	12.0%
of grade-level knowledge and skills contained in the SBE-	NCEXTEND1	6.2%	14.7%	16.3%	14.9%	14.2%	14.8%
adopted ELA content standards assessed at their grade level, but they may need adademic support to engage successfully in the content area in the next grade level.							
Level 4							
Students performing at this level have **solid command** of the	General Test	33.2%	36.7%	33.2%	35.7%	36.2%	33.1%
knowledge and skills contained in the SBE-adopted ELA	NCEXTEND1	30.7%	23.0%	33.2%	27.7%	10.5%	25.7%
content standards assessed at their grade level and are academically prepared to engage successfully in the content area.							
Level 5							
Students performing at this level have **superior command** of	General Test	11.9%	7.2%	8.1%	13.5%	12.0%	10.4%
the knowledge and skills contained in the SBE-adopted ELA	NCEXTEND1	20.9%	20.3%	25.4%	12.4%	29.2%	16.2%
content standards assessed at their grade level and are academically well-prepared to engage successfully in the content area.							

Students performing at Level 5 have a superior command of State Board of Education-adopted ELA standards assessed at their grade level. These figures indicate a need for better support in teaching and learning practices for students statewide. Gaps are evident across grade levels for on-grade-level student understanding and mastery of key literacy skills and ELA concepts.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported on the issues facing inner-city schools and the perceptions of many Americans who feel inner-city schools are

falling short of the ability to properly teach children of these communities. NCES reported that those who believe schools are doing an overall decent job, in certain schools, also believe circumstances are poor. Their perceived notions, fueled by numerous reports and observations, continue to foster opinions that urban students miss potential academic gains, receive less education, and experience less success in the workforce as adults. Researchers and educators alike tend to frequently tie this notion of subpar performance of inner-city children to home and school surroundings failing to nurture academic and economic achievement. Furthermore, inner-city teachers share their concern for increasingly prevalent issues with preparing inner-city children who are frequently displaying difficulties such as poverty, language barriers, limited family stability, and illness (NCES, n.d.). We can credit No Child Left Behind (NCLB) with giving citizens data on all public school performance outcomes, bearing in mind that this is mainly comprised of standardized test results. Former U.S. President George W. Bush signed into law this act on January 8, 2002, to include a measurement of school performance and to share state standardized test scores with the public once results are analyzed (Schneider, 2017). We continue to see this lag as test scores remain the catalyst of conversations of the general public, parents, and policy makers in rating the quality of schools without having all other extraneous factors (Schneider, 2017). On February 13, 2004, former President George W. Bush was quoted as stating the following about school choice:

> It's the first time ever where the federal government has recognized that school choice is a viable alternative for parents. It's an opportunity for us to say to a mother or a dad, here's your chance to achieve your expectation for your child.

> You see, a society that is responsible is one in which a mother and dad love their children with all their heart and all their soul, and a parent who does that wants the very best, the very best, for their children. And so this initiative is one that's the beginning of what I hope is change all across the country. It's the beginning of a go-by for other school districts and other communities. It says, look, we want our public schools to succeed. We want them to do well, but we're going to raise the bar and raise expectations. And when we find children trapped in schools that will not change, parents must be given another viable option. (The White House, 2004, paras. 19–20)
>
> This society of ours must challenge what I've called the low—the soft bigotry of low expectations. That means when you lower the bar, when you don't believe in the human potential of a person, you're likely to get lousy results. (The White House, 2004, para. 10)

As a growing body of research suggests, test scores do not truly measure school quality. Based on the research of Schneider (2017), in assessing public schools in America, research shows that using standardized test results is an ineffective way to rate a school overall. Schneider went on to state,

> Many parents also tend to use race as a proxy for school quality, knowing that students of color have long been denied equal educational opportunities, middle-class white parents often shy away from schools with large concentrations of black and brown students. By doing this, they exacerbate segregation, take their high levels of capital elsewhere, and ensure that people like them continue to avoid schools with large populations of color. (p. 3)

Roughly two thirds of suburban kids are White, and the vast majority are not low-income based (Schneider, 2017). According to Schneider (2017), White students more often enroll in school already ahead, coming from households with college-educated parents. Considering this, suburban students tend to start school equipped with early literacy and numeracy skills and are on track to understand grade-level programming. Sharkey (2019) presented the most problematic situation facing communities in America. Sharkey (2019) believed that "children's neighborhoods have a powerful impact on their chances in life and that neighborhood inequality remains severe, is multigenerational, and the consequences are cumulative" (p. 2).

Inner-city schools are faced with providing education to a rising population of learners from historically poor families (Schneider, 2017). These students are likely to be surrounded by adults with low levels of academic achievement along with few professional opportunities, a societal situation that can have a dynamic effect on ways in which children view school and imagine their lives (Schneider, 2017). Sharkey (2013) defined poor neighborhoods as consisting of having a threshold of at least 20% of those living within it under the line of poverty (Sharkey, 2013). African American youth ranging in age from 13 to 28 are 10 times more likely to reside in impoverished communities compared to 6% of White youth (Rothstein, 2014). Studies also show that children living in poor neighborhoods for more than two consecutive generations cause a near 9-point reduction in their cognitive skills. This equates to a 2- to 4-year deficit in grade-level education (Rothstein, 2014). When NCLB was signed into law, it immediately shed light on its main caveat involving testing and accountability. It called for all states to put into place school and district checks and balances as identified by

student data on EOG tests. States along with school district leaders are required to put a plan in place to address failing school outcomes and fix failing schools with a focus on reading and math content areas. Millions of children across America are currently enrolled in schools that are not educating them to appropriate expectations. Consequently, year after year, a large majority of schools remain trapped on the failure list. More research is needed regarding how to move schools from failure to success.

Arne Duncan stated in 2009 that

> while there are many beacons of excellence; regretfully some of our existing teacher preparation programs are not up to the job. They operate partially blindfolded, without access to data that tells them how effective their graduates are in elementary and secondary school classrooms after they leave their teacher preparation programs. Too many are not attracting top students, and too many states are not setting a high bar for entry into the profession. (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2011, p. 2)

Vacancies persist in important content areas such as math, science, technology, special education, and engineering. The federal government has determined that a limited number of teacher preparation programs offer the type of rigorous, clinical experience that prepares future teachers for the realities of today's diverse classrooms (USDOE, 2011). ESSA was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015, and constituted hope for our country's schools. This bipartisan measure reauthorized the 50-year-old ESEA, the nation's national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students (USDOE, n.d.a). Supports within ESSA include protecting the nation's most disadvantaged and at-risk student populations; requiring schools to

prepare all students for college and careers while giving families, educators, and the public access to information about how students are fairing in terms of academic progress on state tests. Additionally, it provides families with access to enhanced preschool education and supports local innovations and research-based interventions with opportunities to increase efforts over time. In 2012, flexibility was granted to states by the Obama administration in regard to mandates of NCLB as long as states developed strong comprehensive plans aimed at improving achievement across all learners, including reducing barriers and improving teaching standards and instruction (USDOE, n.d.a).

According to Brady (2003), these interventions can come in the form of labeling, extending the school day or year, offering supports for school staff, or more drastic measures such as replacing the school leader, shutting down the entire school, or subjecting districts to being taken over by their state. Although less stringent strategies have frequently been attempted, fewer examples of the more intrusive measures have been used. The report also revealed several common themes from three major school districts. The report examined three interventions in detail with nearly half or less of the schools demonstrating true improvement in student performance academically: schools under registration review process in New York; comprehensive school reform in Memphis, Tennessee; and school reconstitution in Prince George's County, Maryland. Several lessons can be drawn from America's previous experience with state- and district-level interventions into failing schools. More often than not, failing schools are becoming the status quo and schools are not reaching the levels of success aimed for. No evidence points to any one specific successful intervention, but it was evident that a

common theme identified was the role of the school leader in turnaround efforts was significant in those that experienced success (Brady, 2003).

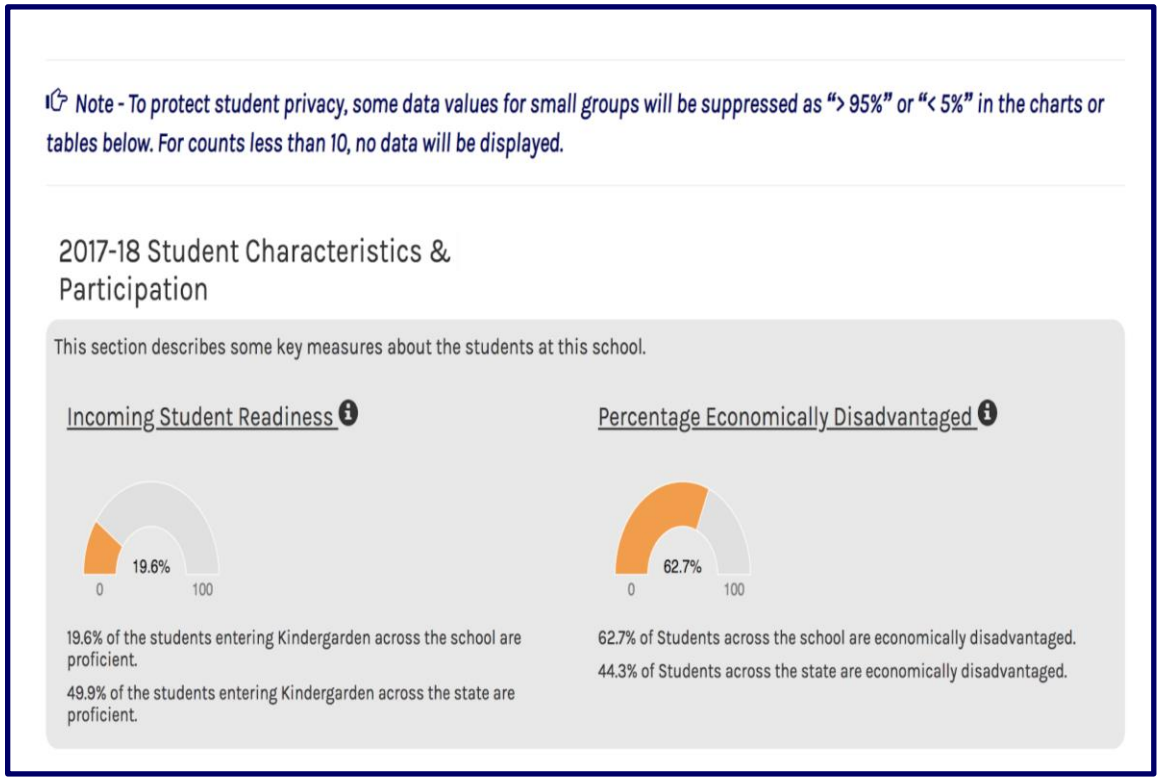
Background of the Research Site

New Beginnings Elementary School (New Beginnings) is located in the suburbs of a large urban city in North Carolina and carries the identification label of low performing by NCDPI. New Beginnings has been designated as a failing school for the past 5 years and is ranked in the lowest 5% of schools in North Carolina. New Beginnings has had a history of high teacher turnover and low test scores in reading, math, and science. It serves largely African American and Hispanic populations of students and includes a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students. New Beginnings is identified as a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) school which qualifies for 100% free breakfast and lunch for enrolled students. In June 2017, the assistant principal was appointed the principal of New Beginnings with the expectation that she would remain on staff and help transition the school to a literacy lab school under the leadership and direction of a university within the University of North Carolina (UNC) system and serve as principal for the K-5 literacy lab school initiative. See Figures 2-4 regarding New Beginnings historical data.

Figure 2 depicts the percentage of students entering the school into kindergarten in 2017-2018, within the previous school year demonstrating proficiency at 19.6%. This compares to students across the state of North Carolina entering kindergarten at a proficiency rate of 49.9%. Additionally, the number of students within New Beginnings who are classified as economically disadvantaged total 62.7%. This is 18.4% higher than the state average of 44.3%.

Figure 2

2017-2018 New Beginnings Student Readiness and Student Characteristics



In Figure 3, student performance levels are shown across achievement Levels 1-5. Levels 1 and 2 are considered below grade level, while Level 3 means the student is on grade level. Levels 4 and 5 are deemed as on track for career and college readiness. Students at New Beginnings have performed consistently below grade level with 60% of students scoring at Level 1, an average of 20% scoring at Level 2, and roughly 5% scoring at Level 3 in math. A mere 10% scored at Level 4, and no students obtained a score of 5 in the school year 2017-2018. In ELA/reading, New Beginnings students scored 60% at Level 1, nearly 18% at Level 2, approximately 5% at Level 3, only 18% at Level 4, and none at Level 5. When compared to other schools in this large urban county in which the school is located, this was far below the local and state averages.

Figure 3

2017-2018 New Beginnings Student Proficiency in Subject Areas

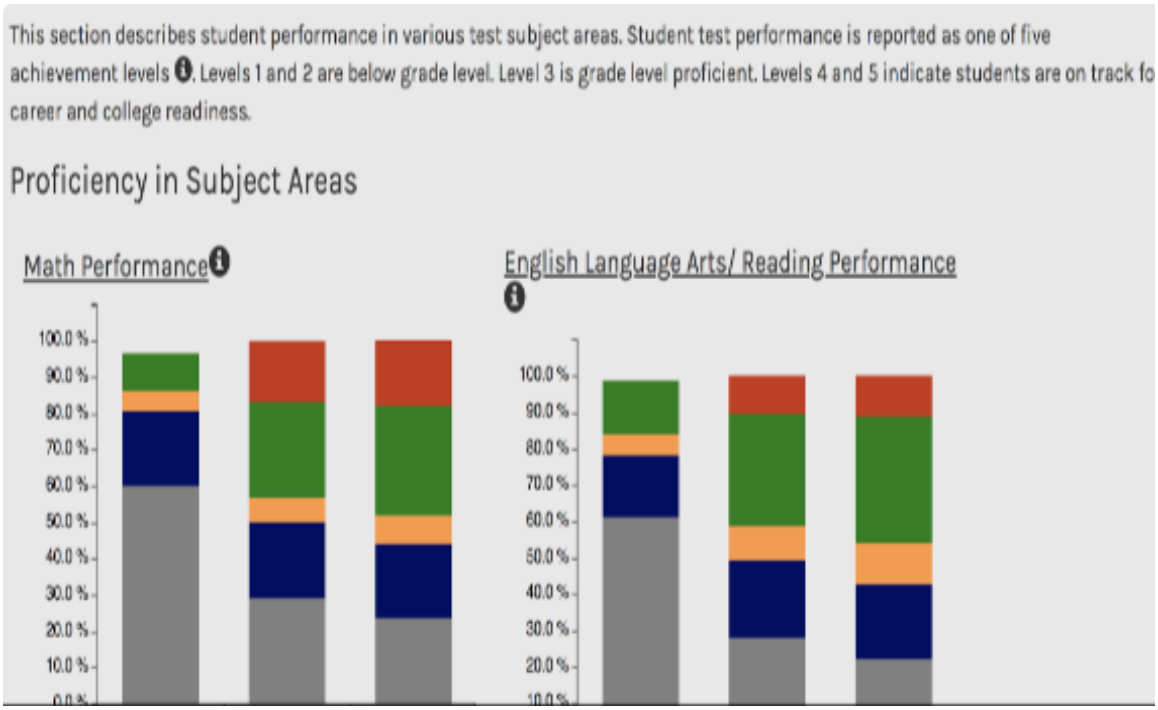
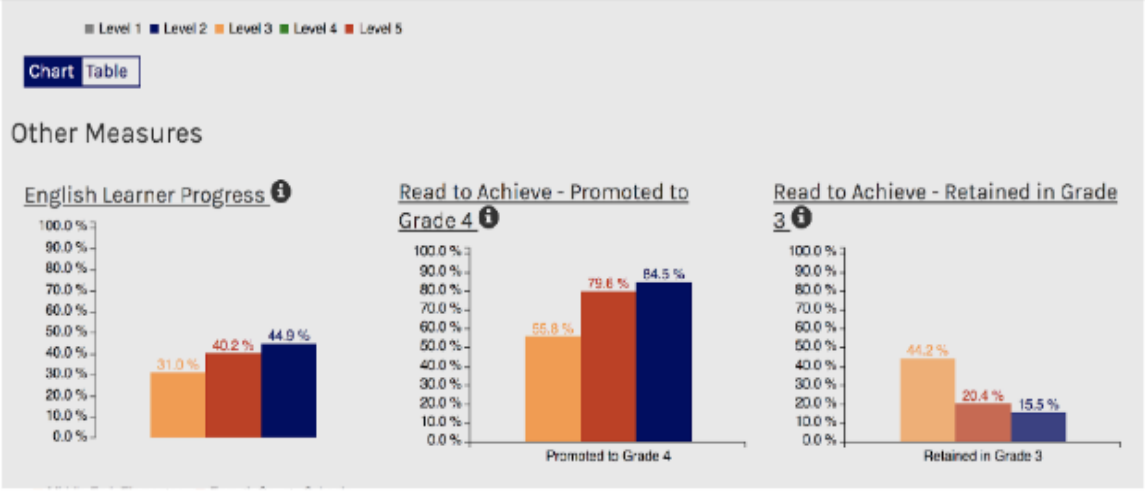


Figure 4 displays the English Learner population and the rate of achievement demonstrated in 2017-2018. New Beginning's English Learner progress resulted in 31% demonstrating progress compared to the local county results of 40.2% and the state of North Carolina outperforming both with 44.9%. On the state's Read to Achieve test resulting in student promotion from Grade 3 to Grade 4 in 2017-2018, New Beginnings had 55.6% pass, while the district within the local county exceeded 79.6%. This county's passing rate was just under the state's performance at 84.5%. Figure 4 also shows the number of Read to Achieve students retained in third grade (not promoted) as 44.2% of the New Beginnings enrollment, with less than half of the large urban school district students being retained at 20.4%. The state reflected the lowest number of students being held back in Grade 3 at 15.5% (NCDPI, n.d.b).

Figure 4

2017-2018 New Beginnings English Learner and Third-Grade Read to Achieve Progress



Theoretical Framework

Lab schools were created by North Carolina lawmakers through a provision in the 2016 budget. The stated purpose is to

> improve student performance in local school administrative units with low-performing schools by providing an enhanced education program for students residing in those units and to provide exposure and training for teachers and principals to successfully address challenges existing in high-needs school settings. A laboratory school shall provide an opportunity for research, demonstration, student support, and expansion of the teaching experience and evaluation regarding management, teaching, and learning. (Public Schools First NC, n.d.b, para. 1)

A lab school operates much like a charter but is managed by a collaborating university. Lab schools are designed to help at-risk, underachieving schools and improve student outcomes. In lab schools, flexibility in curriculum and instructional methods are

used to create innovative staffing and teaching models. The universities in North Carolina selected to run lab schools include Appalachian State, East Carolina, N.C. Central University, UNC Charlotte, UNC Greensboro, UNC Pembroke, UNC Wilmington, and Western Carolina University. These selected institutions offer training programs for teachers and could theoretically utilize a lab school to test innovative education techniques. Only 50% of the teachers at a lab school are required to be licensed. This provision allows student teachers to participate in lab schools. Student teachers and administrators in training have an opportunity to practice new methods in real-world situations before moving on to other schools.

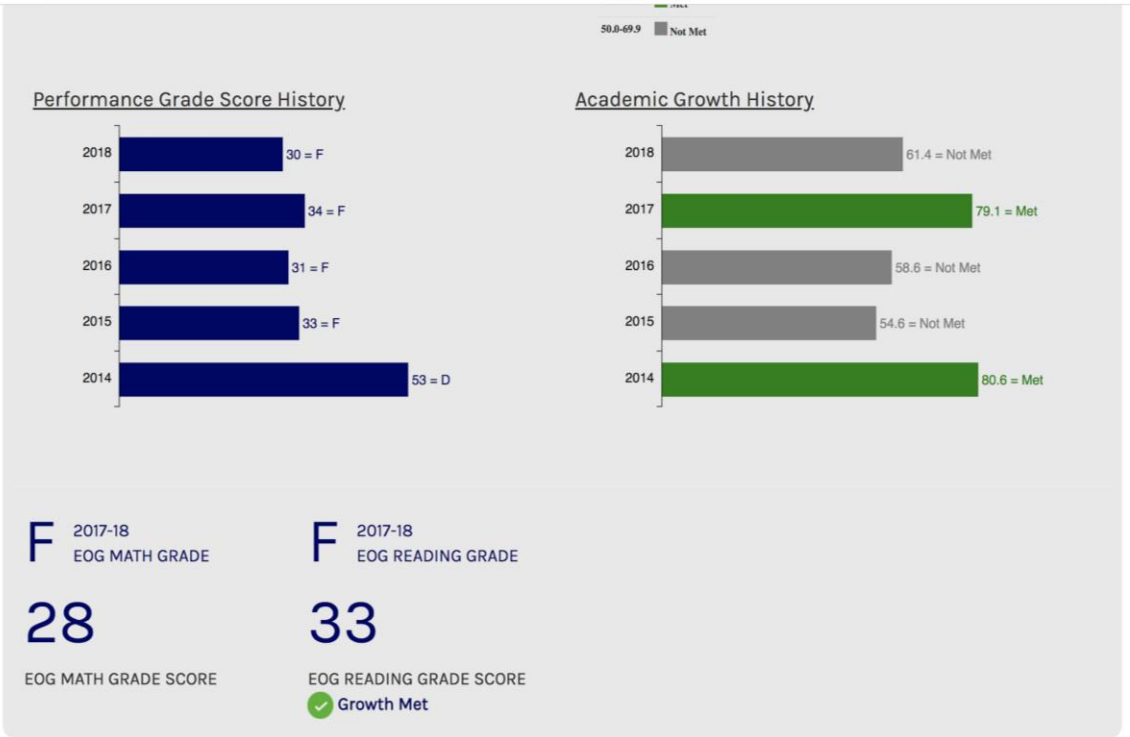
In recent years, experts have recorded low functional literacy skills among young adults, educators have declared falling test scores, and humanists have argued about the need for more "cultural literacy." Kaestle and Damon-Moore (1991) referenced in their book on literacy in the United States that book reformers have warned us for years of an illiterate America, and legislators have submitted bills to eliminate illiteracy. Television networks, newspaper chains, business councils, and prominent figures have joined the campaign. According to Kaestle and Damon-Moore, it is an issue with incredible staying power. Today's teachers are tasked with dual challenges: (a) social changes such as children born to poorer, younger, and less-educated parents; and (b) limited educational funding at a time when the schools are expected to do more and more. Literacy gaps are an issue not just for children but for adults as well. As demands for closing gaps increase, the resources continue to dwindle. As cycles of poverty continue, our present-day circumstances mirror the results of years of failing to meet the educational needs of high-needs populations (Beverstock & Newman, 1991). There are many circumstances causing

gaps in literacy for children. Students may struggle with breaking words into sounds, comprehension, or language. Children can also fall behind because instruction might not be matched to their needs (Sayko, 2017).

New Beginnings has been identified as a failing school for 5 consecutive years. In 2014, the school earned a grade of D while progressively declining to a failing grade of F from the year 2015 to the present as shown in Figure 5. From the year 2014 to 2018, student academic growth history has remained stagnant with only 2 years of students showing growth. In 2014, 80.6% of students met growth; in 2017, 79.1% made growth. Students, however, still lagged in proficiency, and the school remains in the bottom 5% of schools in the state.

Figure 5

New Beginnings Performance Grade Score and Growth History



New Beginnings serves students who are from economically disadvantaged

populations. Due to its high population of economically disadvantaged students, New Beginnings qualifies for a free breakfast and lunch program otherwise known as CEP. CEP is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. CEP allows the nation's highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications (U.S. Department of Agriculture, n.d.).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate if operating a lab school is more effective and has a larger impact on student achievement and overall school culture. This study utilized my experiences as a lab school principal opening a lab school and subsequently presenting recommendations that might help avoid pitfalls in the implementation and collaboration efforts in partnership with a failing school district.

As a lab school principal, I intend to help students achieve proficiency by implementing structures that support a lab school focused on literacy for all learners in kindergarten through Grade 5. Leadership and support for teachers within an innovative lab school setting may prove to be more effective than that of a traditional elementary school with students of similar socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Operating as a university lab school under the governance of the UNC System allowed me to generate a less restrictive teaching and learning environment that encourages creativity and promotes a natural curiosity in children through engaging and exploratory classrooms. This was achieved through my leadership and support of teachers and the administrative team while navigating the process of opening a lab school in this suburban region in North Carolina. Lab school implementation, managing staff, recruiting families, and

culturing are key focus areas of the principal's role.

Significance of the Study

Critical data obtained from this study may allow others in educational leadership to learn how to overcome obstacles in efforts to bridge effective relationships, meaningful collaboration, and communication with district partners. Additionally, this study provides insight into the workings of a school leader sharing university, school, and district-level expectations for school operations, teacher retention, and improved student achievement. Ultimately, the goal of this research centers around providing a blueprint for other aspiring innovative leaders interested in opening and sustaining a school that operates under the guidelines of the UNC System as opposed to a traditional county school district. This research study may open a path for others to explore innovative methods to improve outcomes for at-risk student populations through the identification of best practices of lab school processes such as support for teachers and students, community partnerships, academic programming, and inventive educational practices. This research will add to the body of information on newly formed university lab schools, as this school is one of six in the state of North Carolina chartering the waters of this new venture in rethinking and retooling schools.

New Beginnings students deserve to leave fifth grade reading fluently on or above their grade level. They should experience success as students in preparation for college and careers without the pressures of low self-esteem and repeated exposure to failing test scores. Factors such as less-than-adequate instruction and limited resources due to the struggles of staffing and high turnover rates plagued with pressures facing teachers and administrators in failing public schools should not deter students from reaching their full

academic potential.

Narrative analysis was the research methodology applied to this study. The narrative analysis research approach describes the experiences the individual encounters at the work site where they interact daily. I collected and captured stories through journaling and written artifacts about the work experiences as the school transitions from a failing public elementary school to a fully operational university lab school through the leadership of the university and its relationship with the partnering school district. The analysis captured my relationships and expectations as the principal of a university lab school, along with the UNC System, the Board of Governors, and NCDPI, that fall within my job functions as the lab school principal.

Research Questions

The specific questions pertaining to this study are outlined below.

1. What perceived benefits result from teaching and learning in a university lab school setting, and what support for teachers are provided?
2. How does a university lab school provide support for students and families?
3. Which aspects of a university lab school allow for innovative approaches to improving failing schools and failing student outcomes in comparison to traditional public school units within low-income areas?
4. What are the perceived areas of strengths and/or challenges that exist between the community-based Local Education Agency (LEA) and the newly formed lab school?

Definition of Key Terms

North Carolina School Report Card

Under ESSA, the 2017-18SY School Report Card includes the following:

- English Learner progress indicator
- Long-term goals
- Grade 8 Math Exception configurations
  - Combined EOG/EOC scores
  - Separated EOG/EOC scores
- School performance grades by subgroup
- Subgroup reporting changes for several academic indicators
- ACT/ACT work keys
- Alternative school reporting adjusted to comply with State Board of Education directive
- CSI/TSI designations (including the reasons for any such designations)
- Participation rate reporting
- Chronic absenteeism by subgroup
- School safety by subgroup
- Charter school demographics by subgroup
- Preschool enrollment by subgroup
- Specialized course enrollment by subgroup
- School improvement plans

Additionally, the report card will include data for college endorsements, KEA school readiness, and arts and education.

CEP

A non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas, CEP allows the nation's highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications (U.S. Department of Agriculture, n.d.).

Board of Governors

The Board of Governors maintains *The Code* and the UNC Policy Manual. *The Code* incorporates the requirements of the North Carolina Constitution and General Statutes as well as the Board of Governors' bylaws and other high-level policies.

UNC System and System Office

The UNC System is a multi-campus university dedicated to serving the state of North Carolina and its people through world-class teaching, research and scholarship, and outreach and service. More than 225,000 students are enrolled in the UNC System's 16 university campuses across the state and the NC School of Science and Mathematics, the country's first public, residential high school for gifted students. The UNC System office, located in Chapel Hill, houses the offices of the president and senior administrative staff for the university. This core administrative staff executes the policies of the UNC Board of Governors and provides system-wide leadership and support in the areas of academic affairs, business and financial management, communications, strategy and policy, human resources, legal affairs, and government relations. The UNC System office also has administrative oversight of a number of university affiliates (UNC System, 2021).

Lab School/University Lab School

The UNC lab school initiative aims to provide enhanced educational

programming to students in low-performing schools and to plan demonstration sites for the preparation of future teachers and school administrators. According to North Carolina Legislation (2016), the purpose of the lab schools is to

> improve student performance in local school administrative units with low-performing schools by providing an enhanced education program for students residing in those units and to provide exposure and training for teachers and principals to successfully address challenges existing in high needs school settings. (p. 1)

Lab School Partnership

The establishment of the UNC lab schools provides the opportunity to redefine and strengthen university partnerships with public schools, improve student outcomes, and provide high-quality teacher and principal training. The lab schools will partner directly with local school districts to promote evidence-based teaching and school leadership while offering real-world experience to the next generation of teachers and principals. UNC lab schools will serve every part of the UNC mission of teaching, research, and public service.

Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee

The Board of Governors shall report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee and the Office of State Budget and Management by March 1 of each year regarding the sum of facilities and administrative fees and overhead receipts for UNC that are collected and expended by each constituent institution. The report shall include all the following information:

a. The collection of facilities and administrative fees and overhead receipts by

grant or program.

b. The use of facilities and administrative fees and overhead receipts showing expenditures by grant or program.

c. The sum of facilities and administrative fees and overhead receipts collected or expended by each constituent institution for maintenance and operation of facilities that were constructed with or at any time operated by funds from the general fund (North Carolina Legislation, 2016).

Literacy Through Evidence-Based Reading Instruction

In its simplest form, evidence-based reading instruction means that a particular program or collection of instructional practices has a record of success. A record of success means there is reliable, trustworthy, and valid evidence to suggest that when the program is used with a particular group of children, the children can be expected to make adequate gains in reading achievement. Other terms that are sometimes used to convey the same idea are research-based instruction and scientifically based research (NCDPI, n.d.c).

Failing School

Researchers and educators often link this perceived performance of urban youth to home and school environments that do not foster educational and economic success. Moreover, urban educators report the growing challenges of educating urban youth who are increasingly presenting problems such as poverty, limited English proficiency, family instability, and poor health. Finally, testimony and reports on the condition of urban schools feed the perception that urban students flounder in decaying, violent environments with poor resources, teachers, and curricula, and with limited opportunities.

(NCES, n.d.)

A school's performance grade will be based on 80% of the school's achievement score and 20% on the students' academic growth. The final grade was based on the following 15-point scale for the 2017-2018 school year only: A = 85-100, B = 70-84, C = 55-69, D = 40-54, and F = less than 40. Beginning in 2014-2015, a 10-point grading scale was used. Following is an example for calculating a school's performance grade (NCDPI, n.d.a).

CSI/Low-Performing (CSI-LP) School

CSI-LP schools are the lowest-performing 5% of all schools receiving Title I, Part A funds (served) in the state. The first year for identification of CSI-LP schools was the 2018-2019 school year, using 2017-2018 data. The 2018-2019 school year was a planning year with implementation in 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022. CSI-LP schools are identified every 3 years; therefore, the next identification group is in 2021-2022, using 2020-2021 data (NCDPI, 2018).

At-Risk Students

The term at risk is often used to describe students or groups of students who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school. The term may be applied to students who face circumstances that could jeopardize their ability to complete school such as homelessness, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, serious health issues, domestic violence, transiency (as in the case of migrant worker families), or other conditions; it may refer to learning disabilities, low test scores, disciplinary problems, grade retentions, or other learning-related factors that could adversely affect the educational performance and attainment of some students (At-risk,

n.d.).

LEA

Synonymous with a local school system or a local school district, indicating that a public board of education or other public authority maintains administrative control of the public schools in a city or county (USDOE, n.d.b).

ESEA

The principal federal law affecting K-12 education with its longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students. The ESEA of 1965 was later amended and reauthorized by NCLB (USDOE, n.d.a).

ESSA

The latest reauthorization of ESEA of 1965. See ESEA above. ESSA was signed into law in 2015 and requires each state to create a plan to meet the components of the law (USDOE, n.d.a).

Public School Unit

A public school unit is any of the following: A local administrative unit; a charter school; a regional school; a school providing elementary or secondary instruction operated by one of the following:

1. The State Board of Education, including schools operated under Article 7A and Article 9C of this Chapter.
2. UNC, including schools operated under Articles 4, 29, and 29A of Chapter 116 of the General Statutes (North Carolina Legislation, 2019).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

> A compelling and expanding literature provides strong arguments for why and how universities today are engaging civically. Of utmost importance to the nonprofit research community are the main concerns that drive this movement: grounding academic knowledge in real-world conditions, connecting knowledge to practice, bringing academics and practitioners into more meaningful relationships, while improving conditions in local communities, and growing democracy and civic engagement. (Ostrander & Portnoy, 2007, p. 12)

The Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action conducted a study on this movement. The research resulted in four key findings:

1. The main components of engagement (student learning, curriculum transformation, community-defined priorities, and knowledge production) vary and change in emphasis as the work develops and as circumstances change.
2. Local community factors and conditions present both facilitators and barriers that need to be identified, understood, and taken into account.
3. An intellectual rationale and a set of intellectual projects are important to involving faculty.
4. New organizational structures appear necessary to develop and sustain campus-community partnerships that share power and resources (Ostrander, 2004).

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into the need for innovative lab schools in North Carolina for at-risk populations in failing schools within low-performing

public school districts in North Carolina. Included in this chapter is a literature review of the history of lab schools, a theoretical context of the need for school reform, and the evolution and impact of the lab schools in North Carolina. This includes changes in approaches to teaching and learning, culturing and climate, leadership, and professional development from a lab school leader perspective. The research obtained in this study will be used for improving academic and behavioral support and teaching and learning structures as opposed to current traditional public school constructs. Lab schools were created by North Carolina lawmakers through a provision in the 2016 budget. The stated purpose of a university lab school is to

> improve student performance in local school administrative units with low-performing schools by providing an enhanced education program for students residing in those units and to provide exposure and training for teachers and principals to successfully address challenges existing in high-needs school settings. By design, A laboratory school shall provide an opportunity for research, demonstration, student support, and expansion of the teaching experience and evaluation regarding management, teaching, and learning. (Public Schools First NC, n.d.b, para. 1)

UNC lab schools must serve students in Grades K-8. The enabling legislation originally required the UNC System to establish lab schools in local administrative units in which at least 25% of the schools within the system were performing below grade level. An amendment to the enabling legislation allows the UNC System to exercise a waiver for up to three universities to establish lab schools in districts that do not meet this requirement.

> The University of North Carolina Laboratory School Purpose (2016); § 116-239.7. (a2) Waiver for Certain Local School Administrative Units. – Notwithstanding subsection (a1) of this section, a chancellor may submit a proposal to the Subcommittee to locate a laboratory school in a local school administrative unit that does not meet the minimum threshold for the number of low-performing schools located in the unit under G.S. 116-239.6(4) if the proposal demonstrates that the laboratory school shall primarily serve students who did not meet expected growth in the prior school year in accordance with G.S. 116-239.9(c1). The Subcommittee may waive the requirement for the number of low-performing schools in a local school administrative unit for the location of a laboratory school, for up to a total of three laboratory schools established under this Article, only if both of the following conditions are met for the laboratory school: (1) The proposal has been submitted jointly by the chancellor and the local school administrative unit in which the laboratory school will be located. (2) The Subcommittee determines that the proposed location would satisfy the purposes set forth in G.S. 116-239.5.
>
> (North Carolina Legislation, 2016)

Currently, two of the UNC universities have used this waiver to establish lab schools in districts that do not meet the low performing requirement.

Background

As early as the 17th century, lab schools have been documented in Japan and Europe and were commonly referred to as attached schools (Haag, 2017). University-run or affiliated schools have a long history in the United States. This history reaches back to

the earliest colleges such as Harvard, Yale, William and Mary, and the University of Pennsylvania, in order to prepare students for college, many of which operated Latin schools or departments (Haag, 2017). Founded in 1768, Rutgers Preparatory was one of the longest-standing schools of this type and kept its connections to the university through the 1950s (Cucchiara, 2010). Rutgers, like most preparatory schools, was private and provided an elite educational experience to its students. These schools eventually became irrelevant, as the increasing availability of high-quality high school education came into existence. At the same time, several universities began to explore the concept of lab schools (Cucchiara, 2010).

The first lab schools, referred to as model schools, were operated by teacher training institutions. It was here that future teachers could improve their own skills through observing expert teaching techniques and working with the latest teaching equipment. In New England during the late 1820s, this type of lab school first opened and spread west to Minnesota by the 1860s. One of the most famous of these schools, the Hunter College Campus Elementary School, opened in 1870 and was known as the Model Primary School (Cucchiara, 2010).

Between the mid-19th and 20th centuries, lab schools grew considerably in the United States and have played a major role in the field of educational research. In the 19th century, many universities and normal schools (teacher training institutions) opened lab schools. Lab schools were directly connected to the research or teacher training efforts of the universities, unlike college preparatory schools. These schools have served several functions over the years, in particular demonstration, experimentation, and teacher training. Undoubtedly, the history of lab schools is one of contested definitions and

multiple, often competing, purposes (Cucchiara, 2010). In Chicago, John Dewey (1859-1952), psychologist and philosopher, founded one of the most famous lab schools during progressive education (Haag, 2017). During most of the 20th century, the term "progressive education" has been used to describe ideas and practices that aim to make schools more effective agencies of a democratic society. Progressive educators share numerous variations of style and emphasis, yet they share the belief that democracy means active participation by all citizens in social, political, and economic decisions that will affect their lives (A Brief Overview of Progressive Education, 2002). According to this perspective, educating people requires two essential elements: (a) respect for diversity, meaning each individual should be recognized for their own abilities, interests, ideas, needs, and cultural identity; and (b) the creation of socially and critically active thinking that allows people to understand and engage effectively in the matters of their community through partnership and collaboration to achieve a common good.

These characteristics of progressive education have been named "child-centered" and "social reconstructionist" approaches; and while in extreme forms they have sometimes been separated, in the thoughts of John Dewey and other major theorists, they are seen as being related to one other (A Brief Overview of Progressive Education, 2002).

The research related to lab school undertakings is best explained by providing contextual information that lends itself to the importance of lab schools and how they have come about. Understanding how universities design, plan, and implement lab school concepts, content, and practices not only increases understanding for the readers of this work but also provides relevance and a connection to the focus of the researcher for the purposes of this particular lab school study. Historical background and individual

contributions of accomplished lab schools are woven within the following section to build background for the embodied research within this study.

Uniqueness of 21st Century Lab Schools

Many of the lab schools of the 21st century share common characteristics in that they are attached to colleges of education (COEs) and may offer innovative approaches to teaching and academic assessments, freedom to explore research-based practices for improving student achievement, service as observatories for teacher and administrator training, direct partnerships with county/local educational agencies, and autonomy with the design of the organizational structure (UNC System, 2021).

The School at Columbia

At the turn of the 21st century, lab schools evolved into two sets of schools. Some lab schools, such as Columbia University's School at Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania's Penn-Alexander School, focused on providing a quality education choice in the neighborhoods surrounding these universities, while others like Stanford, Florida State University, the University of California San Diego, and the University of Chicago were focused on providing the resources of the university to support educating low-income inner-city students (Cucchiara, 2010). A private university, Columbia was designed to accommodate the children of Columbia faculty members. In this era, New York private schools were very expensive, and as such, professors found it difficult to identify quality affordable schools for their children (Cucchiara, 2010). Initially, the School at Columbia University was designed to accommodate and attract university professors in its efforts to help offset the cost of living in New York and thus provide an incentive for professors to work there (Cucchiara, 2010). Half of the seats were reserved

for the children of faculty of Columbia University, and the remaining enrollment spots were given to children from the surrounding neighborhood (Cucchiara, 2010). The School at Columbia University considers itself to model a unique approach to teaching and learning and is a site for student teachers and the school faculty to take courses at the Teacher College (Cucchiara, 2010). The School at Columbia (established in 2003) defines itself as a compelling educational alternative to local public and private K-8 schools serving as a lab and model school that brags on innovative and research-based curriculum and pedagogy. This school currently serves over 500 students and employs over 200 faculty and staff (The School at Columbia University, n.d.). Features of the School at Columbia include a lottery-based, need-blind system for admitting students from the community to maintain need-blind admissions; opportunities to conduct research on what the lab school's innovative practices are and report findings to the wider community; retention of outstanding faculty members; and faculty work as members of the grade levels as opposed to isolated departments (The School at Columbia University, n.d.).

Penn-Alexander School

Similarly, another neighborhood lab school concept evolved from the University of Pennsylvania, known as Sadie Alexander School or Penn-Alexander. It was deemed as a public school within the local public school system and was a "demonstration school" for the university (Penn Alexander School, n.d.). It was initiated to validate that schools in inner-city neighborhoods could be successful, both academically and socially, for all students and serve to revive a struggling yet diverse socioeconomic neighborhood (Penn Alexander School of Philadelphia, PA, 2016). An additional goal of the Penn School

partnership between the University of Pennsylvania, the School District of Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers was to attract and support businesses, encourage homeownership, and help with safety and neighborhood beautification projects. Named for a woman of many firsts in the country, this lab school was founded in 2001 and features the following:

- First public-private community partnerships
- Included the involvement of university faculty, teachers, parents, neighborhood groups, and members of the community
- A school-wide endeavor with the university provided an operating contribution of $1,330.00 per student, helping to keep teacher-student ratios low (1:18 for kindergarten and 1:24 for Grades 1-8).
- Professional development and student teachers from Penn in the classrooms
- Mentors and tutors from across the university campus
- Penn Alexander students receive discounted rates or free tickets and services
- West Philadelphia students and families involved as a community in developing the grounds for their use (Penn Alexander School, n.d.).

The Sadie Tanner Mosell Alexander University of Pennsylvania Partnership School opened in September 2001 as a K-1 school as it prepared to become a PreK-8 school, with the final phase being completed in 2004. The school's mission is to maximize the academic and personal competence of all its students to become successful lifelong learners and productive citizens in a diverse and highly technological society (Penn Alexander School, n.d.). Penn Alexander School prides itself on having strong instructional leadership, a focus on whole-child development, advancement of teachers

for National Board certification, and maintaining a 95% acceptance rate to select high schools while earning numerous awards and recognitions for student achievement in science, technology, and music. The school was designated as a National Blue Ribbon School in 2016 (Penn Alexander School of Philadelphia, PA, 2016).

Stanford University

Stanford University's lab school is more commonly known as The Design School. Its mission focuses on helping people to unlock their creative abilities and apply them to the world by aiming to actively confront and challenge the mindset that design can only be used by a privileged few (dschool, n.d.a). The school was originally established in the summer of 1973 by Dr. Bernie Roth, who currently serves as the academic director. During his residence at the University of Negev in its Mechanical Engineering Department, Dr. Roth created a manual titled "Design Process and Creativity." George Kembel, founder of The Design School, currently runs a nonprofit known as dglobal.org. This lab school's characteristics include serving K-12 students; using a design-thinking approach to teaching and learning; offering teaching through immersive, real-world projects; offering Design Thinking workshops and professional development for teachers; and being based on the School Reform Initiative. The Design School prides itself on building creative confidence in the elementary and secondary levels. This university lab school holds a firm belief in interrupting inequities, obliterating opportunity gaps, and making sure every student has affirming and inspiring learning experiences (dschool, n.d.b).

Louisiana State University Lab School

University Laboratory School opened its doors in September 1915 as

Demonstration High School with a total of 64 students in Grades 8-11. The school was situated on North Third Street in Baton Rouge. In 1923, seventh grade was added. In 1936, Grades 1-6 were added by LSU's COE followed by 12th grade in 1945. Kindergarten was the final grade to be added in 1981. Its purpose was to provide teachers and preservice teaching candidates with opportunities to study and observe methods of effective teaching and to help preservice teachers gain practical knowledge and classroom experience under the expertise of its four faculty members and university professors.

Other highlights of the school include an expansion of the library in 2005, allowing for more students to attend their renovated campus which currently serves an estimated 400 students. The University Laboratory School prides itself on having maintained its ranking as one of the best primary and secondary schools in the state of Louisiana and beyond in the arts, athletics, academics, facilities, and services (University Laboratory School, n.d.). Highlights of this K-12 lab include:

- Total effort in all endeavors for maximizing student achievement through development, implementation, and demonstration of exemplary programs and instructional practices
- Known as the first IB program offered in Louisiana
- 45 enrolled students completed 107 International Baccalaureate examinations in 2019
- STEM accredited
- Over 1,400 students are enrolled in kindergarten through Grade 12
- Having over 80 earned state championships in varsity athletics

- Nationally recognized for high levels of student achievement (University Laboratory School, n.d.).

University of Florida

The University of Florida's COE's affiliated lab school opened in 1934. This lab school, now known as P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School, serves students in kindergarten through Grade 12. This school was named for Phillip Keys Yonge who served 22 years as board chairman. Of those 29 years, he served with the Florida board of control, the governing body for all Florida public universities. Currently, according to U.S. News & World Report (n.d.). P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School is ranked 47 within Florida. P.K. Yonge School is the only high school within the Florida lab school district. Its mission is to design, test, and disseminate innovations in K-12 education by serving a diverse student community while committing to educating the whole child (P.K. Yonge School, n.d.). Their logos are split between two areas of focus, one for academics and one for athletics, while also having an alumni Facebook page for graduates. At P.K. Yonge, students can take Advanced Placement coursework and exams. Another unique feature of this lab school is that it is led by a director and a principal. Highlights of this university-affiliated lab school include the following:

- A high rate of Advanced Placement participation at P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School (82%).
- The total minority enrollment is 53%, and 29% of the students are economically disadvantaged.
- P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School, having once been a one-school district is the only high school in the University of Florida Lab School District

(U.S. News & World Report, n.d.).

- P.K. Yonge is a lottery school serving 1,150 K-12 students.
- Faculty responsibilities include teaching and engaging in formal research projects while also presenting their research at annual inquiry symposiums attended by all faculty and colleagues from the University of Florida's COE.
- They boast competitive athletics and a marching band, Color Guard, and performing arts program, while also gaining recognition for championships in boys' and girls' basketball, boys' and girls' track and field, boys' cross country, and girls' volleyball across the school's origin.
- They serve hundreds of educators annually from school districts across the country via workshops and professional development in literacy, project-based learning, technology integration, student-centered instruction, active learning, student collaboration, personalized learning, Universal Design for Learning, Multi-Tiered System of Supports, inquiry-based science, and student discourse and engagement (P.K. Yonge School, n.d.).

Far-reaching impacts of P.K. Yonge include its influence on schools in Florida as well as other states across the nation, by offering professional learning activities for teachers and administrators. Most recently, the program's impact has extended internationally with participants traveling from Abu Dhabi, Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Germany, India, Israel, and Slovakia (P.K. Yonge School, n.d.).

UCSD Preuss School

This university-run charter school has gained recognition by Newsweek as the lead transformative high school in the United States for 3 consecutive years. It opened in

1999 with 150 students in Grades 6-8. Preuss currently serves 846 students in Grades 6-12. The Preuss School University of California San Diego is a unique charter for economically disadvantaged students. Preuss has a culturally diverse student body with 68% Hispanic, 10% African American, 19% Asian/Indo-Chinese, and 3% White. Additionally, students come from more than 41 zip codes throughout San Diego County. A unique feature of Preuss includes its financial backing through private support. The school is housed on the campus of the University of California San Diego and targets children desiring to be first-time graduates from a 4-year college. The Class of 2013 was the first class to achieve a 100% acceptance rate to 4-year colleges and universities; 39 students have received the Gates Millennium Scholarship within the past 13 years (Preuss School, n.d.). Enrolled students come from throughout San Diego County to take advantage of an environment that encourages intellectual risk-taking while offering a variety of academic supports. Their mission is to develop problem solvers and thinkers along with confident colleagues and citizens. Their motto boasts of empowering, elevating, and transforming others and communities. Highlights of Preuss School include the following:

- It boasts a high graduation rate of nearly 100% moving on to college-level studies.
- Its graduates are consistently accepted to 4-year colleges and universities at a rate of more than 90%. It boasts of nearly 100% of graduates advancing to higher education including colleges and universities such as Harvard, Yale, MIT, Stanford, Columbia, Cornell, and Dartmouth as well as many of the schools in the University of California system.

- Millions of dollars in scholarships have been received from organizations and foundations.
- The lottery-based criteria include the background of the applicant as coming from a low-income family with no history of family college graduates from a 4-year college; submission of the application by the deadline date for enrollment is also required.
- It is chartered by the San Diego Unified School District and operated by UCSD.
- It is recognized as the best high school in San Diego County by the U.S. News & World Report (Preuss School, n.d.).
- It has a longer school day–over 10,000 additional hours over the required time for California schools–and students are supported by the same teacher from Grades 6-12 in an advisory program known as the Advancement via Individual Determination Program model originally created by Clairemont High School in San Diego (P.K. Yonge School, n.d.).

Pruess also serves as a demonstration school with published articles in 2006 on detracking students by the principal. In 2006, one of its founders, Doris Alvarez, and Hugh Mehan, the school principal and also a founder, published an article describing Preuss's successful experience with detracking and enrolling all students in a college preparatory program. They attested, "This gives us an existence proof that detracking (i.e., presenting underserved students with a rigorous academic program, supplemented by a comprehensive system of academic and social supports) can propel students from low-income households toward college eligibility and enrollment" (Alvarez & Mehan,

2006, p. 82).

History of the Evolution of the UNC System of University-Led Laboratory Schools

In the state of North Carolina, the mission of the UNC System lab schools is to improve student performance in local administrative units with low-performing schools by providing an enhanced education program for students residing in those units and to provide exposure and training for teachers and principals to successfully address the challenges that exist in high-needs school settings.

To fulfill this mission, UNC lab schools are committed to delivering high expectations to prepare students for college and life; ensuring that students learn to read and communicate effectively; addressing the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students; and harnessing the benefits of partnerships to strengthen learning, teaching, and school leadership (Bastian et al., 2018).

UNC lab schools provide all aspects of the university mission–teaching, research, and public service–and represent an innovative extension of the UNC System's presence in K-12 education (UNC System, 2021). Lab schools offer COEs opportunities to innovate and improve their preparation programs for teachers and administrators. According to the Review and Evaluation Report of the Educational Effectiveness of the UNC Laboratory Schools, the legislation enabling lab schools specifies that the mission of a lab school shall be to give opportunities to teachers and school principals for training that will allow them to better respond to the issues facing those in at-risk school settings and allow for pupil support, demonstration of research, and growing the experiences of teachers (North Carolina Legislation, 2016, para. 1) by

- providing a new and unique opportunity for COE faculty and preservice

candidates to be exposed to the challenges of improving outcomes for high need students by:

- providing a unique opportunity for COE faculty to understand the practical realities of teaching in and leading K-12 public schools and better connect research to problems of practice; and
- providing an infusion of university resources into laboratory schools, including people and services (NCGA, n.d.).

Laboratory schools are intended to give COE faculty insight into the day-to-day realities of schooling that inform how they approach their own research and the instruction and supervision of preservice candidates. Specifically, the UNC System laboratory schools may help COE faculty better understand what is necessary to address the needs of high-need, low-performing students (Bastian et al., 2019)

In this chapter, I identify changes in approaches to teaching and learning in the lab school setting to include culture, climate, leadership, and professional development from a lab school leader perspective. The expected outcomes of lab schools are to improve the overall academic achievement of struggling students. In 2016, NCGA passed legislation requiring the UNC System, in consultation with UNC System institution COEs, to establish lab schools. These lab schools are K-12 public schools of choice operated by a UNC System institution rather than supported by a local school district. Five lab schools are currently in operation. East Carolina University and Western Carolina University opened their lab schools in the academic year of 2017-2018. Appalachian State University, UNC Greensboro, and UNC Wilmington opened in 2018-2019. UNC Charlotte plans to open its lab school in the 2020-2021 school year (UNC

System, 2019).

Highlights of UNC System university-led lab schools consist of the following: physically and socially safe environments for students, balanced approaches to curriculum efforts including enrichment opportunities for underserved children, and increased teacher autonomy and access for COEs to public lab schools. UNC laboratory schools serve high concentrations of students with poverty-associated needs. Students suffer from increased mobility, exposure to adverse childhood experiences and trauma, limited support networks such as safety nets, lack of access to transportation, food insecurity, and unstable housing. Laboratory schools employ staff and/or engage institution and community partners to address these needs in several ways:

1. providing health, social work, and counseling services
2. providing food and clothing to meet basic subsistence needs
3. educating staff on the effects of trauma and adverse childhood experiences
4. using positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) and restorative justice practices to emphasize individual and community relationships (Bastian et al., 2018).

UNC lab schools pledge to ensure that students are exposed to academic instruction across content areas rather than a primary focus on simply reading and math. This system of lab schools also uses community partnerships and university faculty, facilities, and events to expose students to the arts, history, recreation, and other supplemental learning activities that lab school students may not otherwise experience (Bastian et al., 2018).

UNC lab schools are known for giving COE faculty direct exposure to the

challenges that educators in North Carolina public schools face, especially within high-needs teaching environments. Having this kind of exposure and learning can also influence how COE faculty organize their university courses and how they instruct teacher and school leader candidates. Lab schools also facilitate opportunities for in-service teachers to access university resources such as COE faculty, advanced certification, and degree programs (Bastian et al., 2019). UNC lab school teachers report having increased instructional autonomy. Preservice student teachers also describe increased responsibility for their classrooms and autonomy in planning and leading instruction which may better prepare them to lead in their own classrooms (Bastian et al., 2019).

Painting the vision for branding a school as a lab school comes with rethinking school as we have become accustomed to in the past. It becomes a canvas for different research-based and evidence-based instructional design. They are rethinking how a school can meet students where they are and move them forward; this goal requires strategic planning and many hours of implementation and retooling.

Teacher Efficacy

Education is deeply contextual and therefore successful implementation of any intervention must include meaningful service co-design and customization with educators. Furthermore, the education environment changes rapidly with demands that continuous and objective improvement mechanisms be embedded before, during, and after any meaningful change effort (Sowa et al., 2021). Quality teaching and learning are at the center of student growth. Strengthening the teacher agency and efficacy is essential to these principles because empowered teachers are more likely to empower students and

are thus less likely to just “cover” material (as they are more interested in the actual learning than getting through the text) and more likely to be innovative/take risks in the classroom (Hart & Nash, 2021).

Leadership efficacy has been found to have a direct impact on student achievement, and significant effects have been noted for the number of students in schools reaching or exceeding the state’s proficiency level (Grissom et al., 2021). Additionally, the school principal’s ability to develop and nurture collective efficacy among instructional staff is a critical influencer for optimizing student achievement. Once principals are adept at problem-solving in the field by facilitating continuous professional development and through creating a collaborative culture within schools, they are then well-positioned to lead successful schools (Mizell, 2010). Studies suggest it is thereby essential to recruit and retain the highest quality leadership for strengthening teacher efficacy in order to build professional value for both teachers and school leaders. Several studies have confirmed the conventional understanding that highly talented principals improve teacher efficacy and therefore student achievement (Grissom et al., 2021).

Research has thoroughly supported the notion that teacher collective efficacy strongly and positively affects student achievement. After conducting a synthesis of meta-analyses, Hattie determined that collective teacher efficacy has proven to be greater than three times more powerful and predictive of student achievement than a child’s socioeconomic status (Donohoo et al., 2018). Given the potential effect of collective efficacy on achievement for vulnerable student populations, this concept is regarded as a leading indicator for increased student achievement. Collective teacher efficacy commands the attention of all educators everywhere (Donohoo & Katz, 2017). Collective

teacher efficacy is the notion that "collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference in their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities" (Donohoo & Katz, 2017, p. 21).

The Problem: Failing Schools

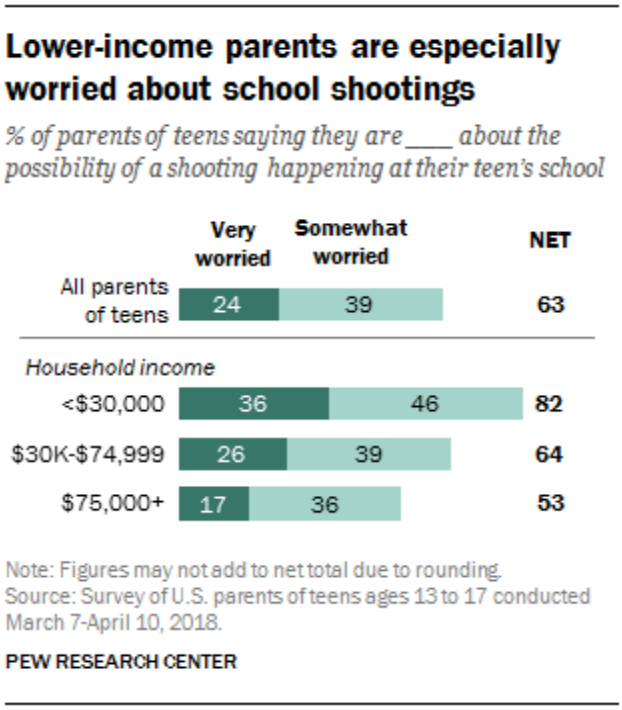
North Carolina schools have received an A-F performance grade since 2013. The Excellence in Public Schools Act, Section 9.4, calls for the annual awarding of individual A-F school performance grades as follows: 80% of the weight of the grade is based on test results. Twenty percent of the weight of the grade is based on school growth as measured by Standards Aligned Systems also referred to as SAS and Education Value-Added Assessment System or EVAAS. A D or an F was received by 21.7% of the schools in 2018-2019. Ninety-five percent of schools in this failing school category were serving high-poverty populations (Public Schools First NC, n.d.a).

For years, debates over changes to the American education system have existed. For policy makers, this has led to bickering and the need for changes in how education is viewed, led, and advanced. While arguments exist, a winning solution has yet to be found. For several reasons, we have seen schools fail to perform at their best. Specifically, some of the more prevalent reasons schools fail include the following:

1. Lack of sufficient government funding; more than 90% of K-12 schools rely on state and local funding for resources, teachers, and school programming.
2. Reduction in school safety. In one survey, 50% of teenagers worried about gun violence in school. Lower-income families are increasingly more worried about shootings in school. In Figure 6, lower-income parents feel concern regarding student safety while in school (Graf, 2018).

Figure 6

Lower Income Parent Perceptions of School Safety Survey Results 2018



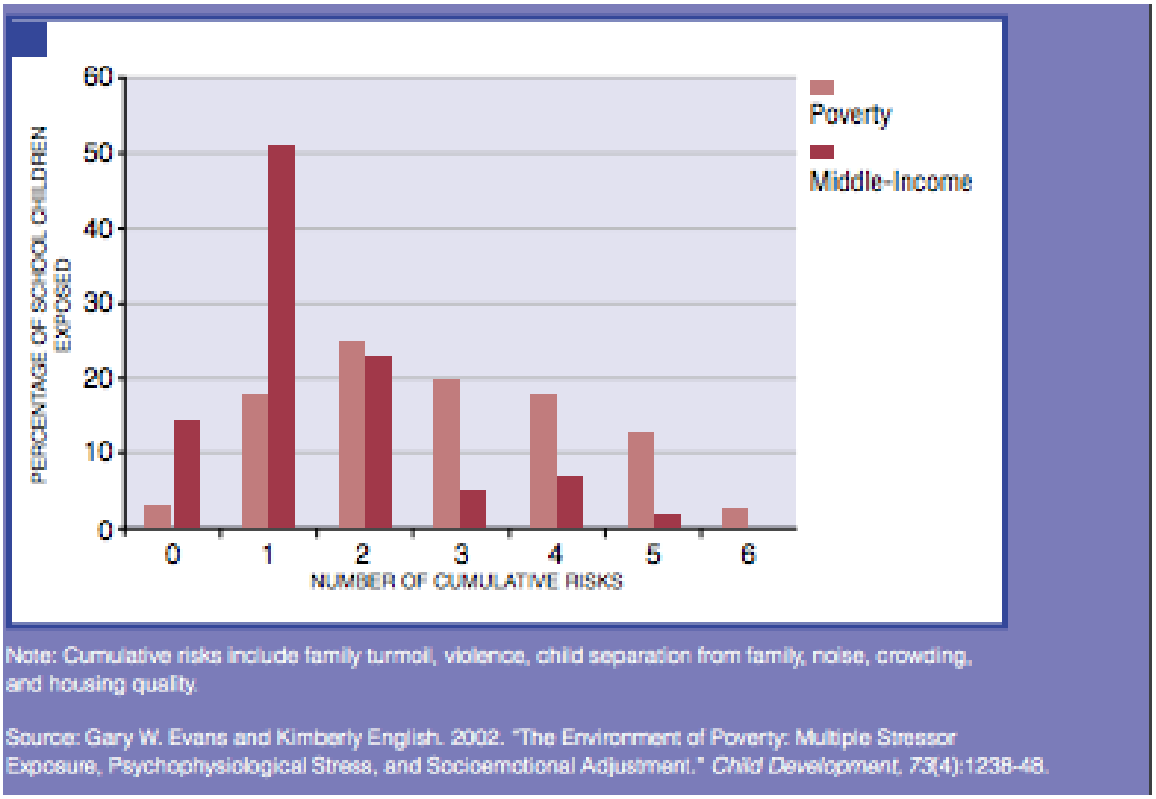
3. Schools also struggle with the inability to engage students through the use of updated technology resources.
4. Conflicting beliefs over school choice in relation to voucher and charter school programs and whether or not they strip funding from struggling public schools.
5. Difficulties with Common Core and the lack of teacher innovation and flexibility with teaching and learning.
6. Teacher pay is at an unimpressive rate in many states across the country.
7. There is an increased emphasis on standardized testing and the increased pressure on teachers to produce high test results.
8. Violence in schools has increased with bullying being one of the most

prevalent challenges students face (stopbullying.gov, 2021).

9. Increased issues with student poverty with more than 50% of the nation's public schools being made up of students emanating from low-income families. According to a study by Stanford University, the stressors children of poverty endure take on both a physical and psychosocial form (Evans et al., 2011). The study pointed out that poor children are exposed to substandard environmental conditions including toxins, hazardous waste, ambient air and water pollution, noise, crowding, poor housing, poorly maintained school buildings, residential turnover, traffic congestion, poor neighborhood sanitation and maintenance, and crime. Evans highlighted that poor children experience significantly higher levels of family turmoil, family separation, and violence and significantly lower levels of structure and routine in their daily lives. Figures 7 and 8 outline the risk factors on the health of low-income versus middle-income children identified below. Figure 7 displays data on cumulative risk exposure among low-income and middle-income rural 9-year-olds. Figure 8 outlines the resting blood pressure in White 9-year-old rural children (Evans et al., 2011).

Figure 7

Cumulative Risk Exposure of Trauma on Children of Poverty

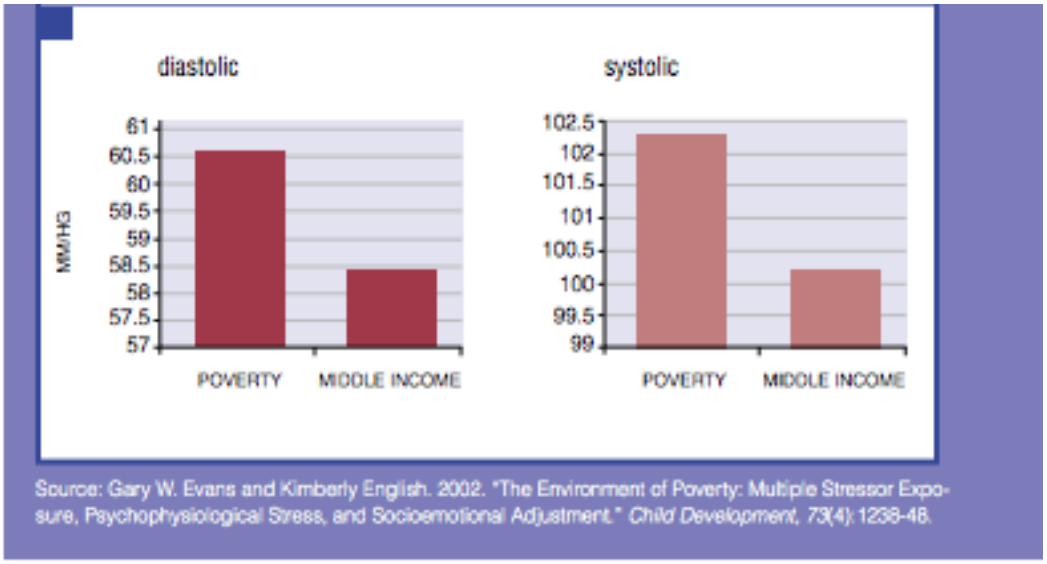


Note: Cumulative risks include family turmoil, violence, child separation from family, noise, crowding, and housing quality.

Source: Gary W. Evans and Kimberly English. 2002. "The Environment of Poverty: Multiple Stressor Exposure, Psychophysiological Stress, and Socioemotional Adjustment." *Child Development, 73*(4):1238-48.

Figure 8

The Environment of Poverty: Measure of Socioemotional Stress Exposure



Source: Gary W. Evans and Kimberly English. 2002. "The Environment of Poverty: Multiple Stressor Exposure, Psychophysiological Stress, and Socioemotional Adjustment." *Child Development, 73*(4):1238-48.

Overcrowded schools and classrooms lend to teacher frustration with providing high-quality instruction for improved student outcomes. In the past decade, the average class size has increased from 21 to 27 students per classroom in 2011 and 2012 to 30 to 40 students in present-day elementary and secondary schools. Teachers have reported a smaller class size makes a difference in the quality of instruction and improved student outcomes.

10. Growing mental health challenges for students (Barrington, 2019).

Impact of Poverty That Directly Affects a Child's Performance in School

Nearly half of North Carolina's children live in poor or low-income homes (Tucker, 2019). Based on research obtained through NC Child, all youth should experience a safe and healthy environment while being assured of a lifestyle that includes secure finances and a sound education. American Indian, Black, and Hispanic children in North Carolina are more likely to live in low-income families (Tucker, 2019). Additionally, Blacks and Hispanics account for 63% of North Carolina's children in poverty (Tucker, 2019). It was also found that among the 100 counties in North Carolina in 2019, the 20 highest poverty rates in the state were all in rural counties (Tucker, 2019). Children experiencing food insecurity have more social and behavioral problems (Deeds, 2015). According to recent research, the cognitive, emotional, mental, and physical consequences of food insecurity and poor nutrition follow children into the classroom, often resulting in poor academic performance (Deeds, 2015). Hungry children ages 0-3 years old cannot learn as much, as fast, or as well because chronic undernutrition harms their cognitive development during this critical period of rapid brain growth, changing the fundamental neurological architecture of the brain and central nervous system.

Hungry children do more poorly in school and have lower academic achievement because they are not physically well prepared for school and cannot concentrate. Hungry children have more social and behavioral problems because they feel bad, have less energy for complex social interactions, and cannot adapt as effectively to environmental stresses (Kennedy, 2018).

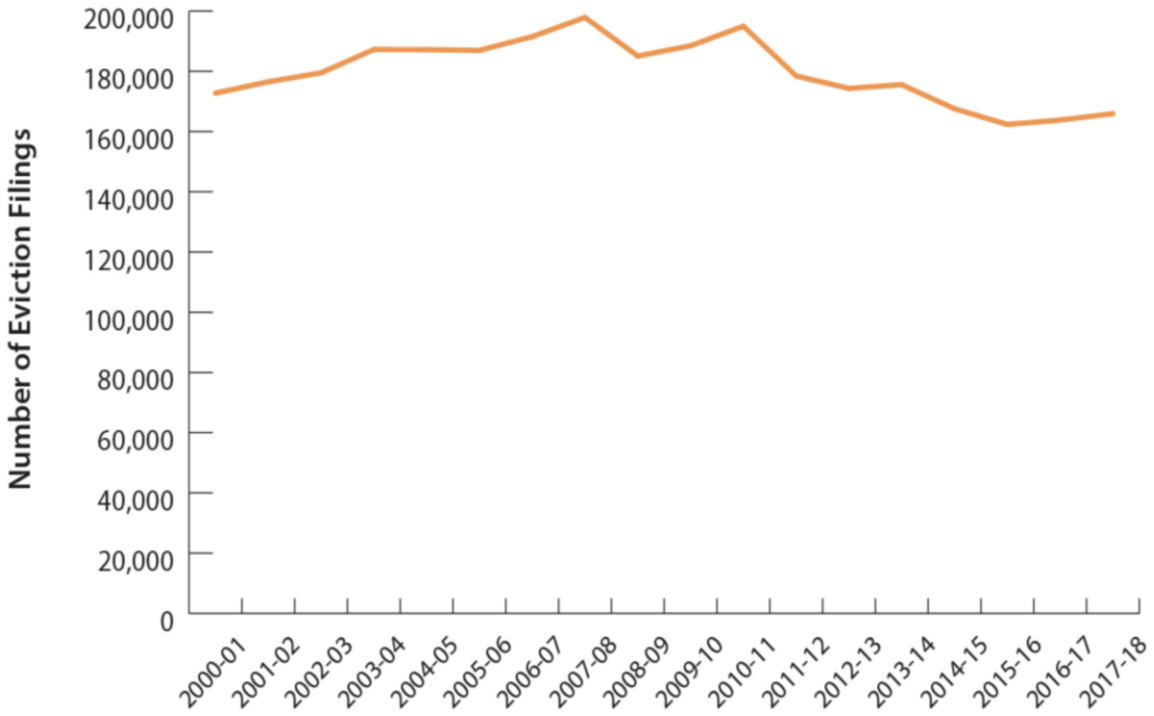
Seven years into the economic recovery, the poverty rate in North Carolina remains well above historical averages. While the economic recovery is evident for some, it is falling short of expectations for our state's economic performance. That performance should be measured by how many North Carolinians struggle each year to avoid hardship and how many North Carolinians have incomes so low that they are faced with impossible choices to pay for the growing costs for the basics. More than 11 million children in the United States live in "food insecure" homes. That phrase may sound mild, but it means that those households do not have enough food for every family member to lead a healthy life (Kennedy, 2018).

Although our state is experiencing economic growth as measured by more jobs and increased productivity, far too many North Carolinians are being left behind. In 2016, more than 1.5 million North Carolinians faced serious barriers in just paying for the basics such as food, rent, and transportation. Poverty, which means living on less than $24,600 a year for a family of four, touches individuals in every part of our state and every walk of life; and while last year marked the first year, we saw the income of the households in the middle of the distribution (the median) rise above 2009 levels, typical workers still make $1,130 less annually than they did before the recession, after adjusting for inflation (Kennedy, 2018). Researchers have also linked housing instability with poor

educational achievement caused by prolonged absenteeism, changing schools frequently, and disruption of a child's environment (Public Schools First NC, n.d.c). In fiscal year 2016-2017, North Carolina had 163,818 eviction filings, a rate of 12.2 evictions per 100 renter households. There were 8,943 fewer eviction filings during fiscal year 2016-2017 than during fiscal year 2000-2001, a decrease of 5.17% between 2000 and 2018 (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

A Snapshot of North Carolina Evictions 2001-2018



Notably, this slight decline does not make the issue of evictions and housing instability any less significant. North Carolina, along with other states in the Southeast, still has some of the highest numbers of eviction filings in the country. Eviction, and the displacement that follows, is a very harsh reality for many North Carolina residents. With ever-increasing rent prices, the inadequacy of investment in affordable housing programs,

compounded by the loss of affordable units because of expiring subsidies and stagnant wages, leaves many North Carolina families struggling to make rent payments. Indeed, nearly half of all renters in North Carolina pay more than 30% of their income toward housing. Paying more than 30% of household income toward housing is considered unsustainable and means that families often have to choose between paying rent and utilities and purchasing adequate food, medicine, or other necessities. There is a minimal allowance for unexpected emergencies such as illness or vehicle repair costs. These are just some of the factors that place families at a greater risk of eviction (Idzikowski, 2018).

These statistics on child hunger are important to the body of research because factors such as these exist within the New Beginning's lab school setting. New Beginnings is identified as a CEP school, which is a 100% free breakfast and lunch feeding site. The New Beginnings lab school serves children and families who transition often due to housing instability, low-wage jobs, and limited access to healthy food sources. CEP is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. This eligibility allows the nation's highest identified poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications from attending families (U.S. Department of Agriculture, n.d.). Although the lab school infrastructure is currently being redesigned, challenges relative to transportation and attendance issues persist. Moreover, student issues such as trauma, family displacement, and child foster placements remain prevalent.

The research highlights the opinions and experiences of those working with children whose everyday lives are significantly impacted by risk factors such as these.

Through a narrative analysis study, I assessed the lab school environment at New Beginnings focusing on whether the school lends itself to a more engaging and empowering school setting. The commitments of New Beginnings and its vision for children may also prove beneficial for the retention of high-quality teachers working in collaboration and cooperation with the faculty of the COE and school leadership using creative approaches to meeting the needs of at-risk students.

Summary

As the literature reviewed in this chapter indicates, schools continue to fail children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds for reasons mentioned above including but not limited to low teacher autonomy and low teacher efficacy, a continuum of demands of low-performing schools from the districts and states of which they operate, high teacher turnover in high-poverty schools, and a need for change in the way low-performing schools are led. Colleges and universities have taken on the legislative challenge within the state of North Carolina to engage civically through joint efforts with school districts within counties with dire challenges to improve academic and social and emotional outcomes for children. Many of the schools highlighted in this literature review have demonstrated a passionate approach to building children's resiliency, encouraging college readiness, promoting a desire to succeed, and engaging and building upon the human connections within and of its populations. Most importantly, this research embarks upon the efforts of one North Carolina lab school and its inner workings and relationships it forged that will add to the body of research for others exploring explicit innovative approaches and identifiable leadership strategies within a university lab school environment.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of lab school processes and their impact on teachers and student outcomes. The UNC System lab school initiative aims to provide enhanced educational programming to students in low-performing schools and to plan demonstration sites for teacher and school administrator preparation (UNC System, 2021). This qualitative study provides others in education insight into the inner workings of an innovative lab school in North Carolina, as it works with at-risk primary age children in a failing school within a low-performing public school district. Lab schools partner directly with local school districts to promote evidence-based teaching and school leadership while offering real-world experiences to the next generation of teachers and principals.

The data from this study were obtained using a qualitative research design utilizing a narrative analysis evaluation. According to Reissman (1993), a narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself. Reissman also stated that the accounts could range from being data related to being reflective of participant feelings and dispositions in regard to the school culture, dynamics, and infrastructure. Texts about our lives that could be interpreted to reveal intersections of the social, cultural, personal, and political aspects affecting the participants are found in narrative analysis. Reissman went on to reveal that participants, if not interrupted with standardized questions, will "hold the floor for lengthy turns and sometimes organize replies into long stories" (p. 3). Mishler (1991) wrote that traditional approaches to qualitative research can provide a misinterpretation of communicative intent in the analysis of narrative discourse. Mishler

added that traditional approaches can also eliminate the sequential and structural features that characterize narrative accounts.

The research obtained in this narrative analysis study attempts to assess the effects of the implementation of lab school strategies relative to the improvement of academic and behavioral support as opposed to current traditional public school constructs. Second, this study was conducted to determine the impact lab school methods and processes have on lab school teachers, school leaders, students, and their families. Last, the study addresses the effects of examining the benefits of a community partnership with an LEA.

As a lab school principal, the lab school process requires a completely different approach to finding ways to improve a failing school. The barriers facing this population as reflected in an underperforming learning environment were captured through journaled accounts and meeting notes, along with the learning curve of the staff as it undergoes an overhaul of schoolwide reform with a history of high teacher turnover, high rates of absenteeism for both students and staff, and a lack of resources to climb out of the bottom of the lowest 5% of schools within North Carolina. This research is important and will provide a footprint for others interested in this type of turnaround leadership.

In this study, I identified changes in approaches to teaching and learning, culturing and climate, leadership, and professional development from a lab school leader perspective. As the researcher, I captured events and daily interactions among teachers and students over time as they interacted with curriculum and research-based strategies provided by the lab school university and lab school initiatives as they pertain to supporting whole child development. The focus of this study also involved capturing the pulse of the school as it transforms its systems for thinking about critical components of

teaching, learning, professional development, curriculum design, clinical approaches to reading, and exemplifying community and inclusiveness.

Setting

This study was conducted within a single lab school in an urban area of North Carolina. The demographic makeup of the lab school in this study was as follows: 1.1% Asian, 46.3% African American, 39.6% Hispanic, .4% American Indian/Native American, 4.8% Multi-Racial, and 7.8% Caucasian students. The school meets the criteria for being classified as CEP and is therefore eligible for non-pricing meal service for low-income areas (U.S. Department of Agriculture, n.d.).

New Beginnings is a K-5 elementary school in a county in the northwest region of North Carolina. The teacher-to-student ratio at New Beginnings ranges from 1:12 to 1:18. The classes are small in size to allow teachers opportunities to interact with and engage students in learning. Instruction is tailored to a hands-on, research-based curriculum that aims at targeting specific deficits of students in literacy and math across content areas. New Beginnings serves at-risk students in multiple grade levels, K-5. The university's chancellor serves as the superintendent for the lab school. Additionally, an advisory board presides over New Beginnings where they provide organizational infrastructure for policies and procedures. A principal, a director of curriculum, and a director of student affairs lead the school with guidance and support alongside university leadership and professors for instructional design, cultivation of an inclusive culture, and climate, while assisting students with social and emotional needs that directly impact learning.

Research Design

Qualitative research is appropriate for developing an in-depth understanding of participant narratives of their experiences (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research has no absolute rules regarding the number of participants for study (deMarrais, 2004). According to deMarrais (2004), "less is more" (p. 61). Although qualitative research is typically more focused on detail and depth, including only a few participants in a study is appropriate (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To gain an in-depth understanding, the number of participants matters less than the depth of understanding and analysis of each of the participant's experiences and how they are re-storied. The research design of journaling provides a qualitative procedure that allows the researcher to reflect on perspectives of narrative discourse in real time. The benefits of self-reflection allow for further analysis of comparing ideas and synthesizing thoughts at different points of data collection. This, in turn, will support new inquiry and discovery of themes and trends noted in the narrative analysis evaluation (Gonzalez, n.d.).

According to Creswell (2008), in narrative research, researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect, and tell stories about the lives of individuals, and write narratives of individual experiences. A narrative analysis approach focuses on gathering data through a collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual, in this case, the principal. This study aimed to utilize the guiding principles as outlined by Creswell (2008) to target the goals of the research. Such characteristics include identifying the following:

- relationships and collaboration with participants,
- the context and setting of the newly transitioned lab school,

- individual experiences,
- a chronology of the process of the transition and transformation from a traditional public elementary school to a university lab school,
- collecting individual stories of those participating in the lab school experience,
- re-storying experiences as they are captured and shared with the researcher, and
- highlighting themes that organically evolve from the process and collection of journaled experiences and conversations within the culture of the lab school.

The lab school formation, transition, sustainability of programming, and culture to narrative analysis will provide a method to engage with real-time, socially based research that can provide insight into academic and social activities for the field of education. According to Somers (1992), narratives demand that we discern the meaning of any single event only in temporal and spatial relationships to other events. Additionally, the main characteristic of narrativity is "that it produces understanding by connecting parts to a constructed configuration or a social network of relationships made up of symbolic, institutional, and material practices" (Somers, 1992, p. 615). Another element of narrating is "its evaluative criteria which enables the researcher to make qualitative and lexical distinctions between the variety of events, experiences, characters, institutional promises, and social factors that impinge on our lives" (Somers, 1992, p. 617). Narrative analysis research examines narratives as a creative way of exploring and describing realities. As the researcher, I took note of the individual and cultural resources people used to construct their narratives of the lab school experience (Nelson, 2013).

The steps within narrative research include

1. identifying a unique idea or situation that addresses an educational problem
2. intentional selection of individuals from whom the researcher can learn about the unique idea or situation
3. obtaining stories from the participants that showcase personal experiences
4. building in past, present, and future while also including the place and setting
5. analyzing participant stories to identify trends/themes
6. describing participants stories through retelling
7. collaborating with participants who share their stories in all stages of the research
8. validating the information obtained from the participants and data collected to ensure accuracy of the research report (Creswell, 2008).

The narrative analysis evaluation approach allows for the researcher to assess the impact of a lab school through a qualitative research design lens. Stakeholders, including schoolteachers, school leaders, families, and community partners, will have an instrumental role in providing such narrative discourse and voice. Such perspectives from individuals will allow for a collection of reporting of stories in real time and an evaluation and assessment of their perspectives. A comparative analysis based on participant feedback will give an opportunity to discuss meaning and provide a benchmark for performance improvement. Conducting qualitative research provides the flexibility needed to retell stories of the participants in meaningful form by utilizing narratives instead of numbers, thereby allowing the researcher the freedom to make use of a systematic approach for gathering research-based evidence (Butina, 2015).

Narrative analysis perceives narratives as a creative means of exploring and describing others' realities and are arranged and bound in time. This approach also integrates the effect of time, place of telling, and audience into the analysis (Frost, 2011). Frost (2011) explained narratives as stories with clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience. Narratives include sequencing and always respond to the question, "And then what happened?" (Frost, 2011, p. 93).

In this study, four core groups of participants (schoolteachers, school leaders, students/families, and local LEA) provided their narrative analyses relative to evidence-based teaching pedagogy; innovative methods for best practices for improving student academic and behavior achievement; best practices for retaining and recruiting high-quality teachers; and family and community engagement. The goal of the study was to help others understand the daily operations of a lab school and its transformation and improvement as a result of the changes initiated by the governing university.

The following research questions were used to gather data on specific information related to the mission and work of lab schools. New Beginnings lab school served as a place for observation, conversations, and feedback on perceptions of the following research questions:

1. What perceived benefits result from teaching and learning in a university lab school setting, and what support for teachers are provided?
2. How does a university lab school provide support for students and families?
3. Which aspects of a university lab school allow for innovative approaches to improving failing schools and failing student outcomes in comparison to traditional public school units within low-income areas?

4. What are the perceived areas of strengths and/or challenges that exist between the community-based LEA and the newly formed lab school?

The data were gathered from a sampling of teachers, school leaders, students/ families, and the community-based LEA who served as stakeholders within the North Carolina UNC lab school educational model. The selected research design allowed for stories to be collected about teachers, staff, and their influence on student achievement working within the lab school setting. This research examined the adaptability, flexibility, and resiliency encountered along the journey throughout the transition from an internal leadership perspective. The environment, time of year, and conditions within the transformation process are included in the re-storying of the lab school experience.

The narrative analysis was provided through journaling by me and multiple interviews that were conducted with the participants. This study highlighted themes and trends that organically evolved from the process and the collection of journaled experiences and interviews reflective of the culture of the lab school dynamic. Furthermore, the mission of this study was not to seek an ultimate truth; rather, the intent was to discover meaning as described from the perspective of the participants (Crotty, 2004; Merriam, 2009).

These data were displayed as a narrative story about the transformation of New Beginnings. This included a chronological sequence of events that led up to the application of the legislation guidelines for operating a lab school in North Carolina under the governing board of the UNC System through the initial years of operation. Distinct characteristics were captured through this narrative study to collect direct feedback from individuals who have been involved with the opening, branding, visioning,

and marketing of the school itself. It also captured the events and actions that took place such as the creation of the organizational structure, the role of the partnering LEA, creation of budgets, capital expenditures including rental of infrastructure, human relations processes, creation of policies, the application process for students and staff, the contractual agreements needed for related services, transportation, child nutrition services, technology infrastructure, negotiations of contracted services, and curriculum and instruction design.

Instrumentation

To capture the chronology of events that transpired to create a university lab school and understand the stages of development of the key components of lab school operations, journaling was a critical component of this research study. To elaborate, as the researcher of this study, the use of journaling the accounts of individuals was obtained and discussed with those involved in the body of research. As the researcher, I maintained a continuum of anecdotal notes during the research process in research journals. Journaling is a useful technique for obtaining real-time data and capturing details, thoughts, and opinions. According to Glesne (2011), it is "important to capture these analytic thoughts when they occur" (p. 189). Glesne stressed the importance of how collecting ideas and themes that form as data are reviewed and evaluated. Journaling served as a record for any initial analysis of data that encapsulated ideas needing further research to be explored (Glesne, 2011). Furthermore, exchanging information with participants in this way helped in the formulation of additional interview questions and other focal points to delve deeper into with participants. As such, research was obtained through a compilation of narratives captured through multiple interviews and was the

main method of instrumentation for this qualitative study.

Mishler (1991) considered an interview as a type of discourse, or rather a speech event that is considered a joint product shaped and organized by asking and answering questions. Furthermore, scholars have historically utilized surveys and interviews for gathering information useful for planning and evaluating programs (Bickman & Rog, 2008). Thorne (2008) described narrative inquiry as "an accommodation, an eclectic but reasoned and mindful integration of theoretical and technical devices to the understanding of nurses, physicians, teachers and other practitioners require to accomplish their respective social missions" (p. 12). By using narrative inquiry, participants could share their experiences of the roles they play in the transformation, daily operations, teaching, and partnering of intricacies within lab school operations.

Chase (2008) argued that "a narrative may be oral or written and may be elicited or heard during fieldwork, an interview, or a natural occurring conversation" (p. 59). By representing the lives of participants as stories, narrative inquiry lends a way for the researcher to recount the experiences in an engaging way. To successfully accomplish this, I sought to understand the perceptions of the participants using open-ended questioning in a series of multiple interviews. The re-storying process bridged an informal tie linking ideas by working to draw conclusions from the research. By using narratives, each participant shared their own truth that stood alone as a story of its own. This revealed how and why specific events took place and provided more open-ended experiences that brought about challenging questions as opposed to providing concrete answers (Polkinghorne, 1995; Saldana, 2009).

Interviews are defined as a procedure designed to collect information. Fontana

and Frey (1994) referred to interviewing as “one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand fellow humans” (p.118). In this study, interviews were conducted to ask questions of participants that engaged them in responses to gain an understanding of their experiences in the lab school which helped to answer the research questions. Schwandt (2007) considered structured, semi-structured, and unstructured or conversational interviews to be the most common types of interviewing methods within qualitative research. Structured interviews are those in which the researcher prepares the interview questions prior to the start of the interview and the questions remain consistent throughout. Semi-structured interviews are more flexible and begin with a predetermined set of questions but may add or replace questions based on the flow of the interview and what information is given during the interview. An unstructured or conversational interview occurs when the researcher creates questions as the interview takes place, without any predetermined set of questions, similar in nature to a conversation (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Glesne, 2011; Schwandt, 2007). While there are three types of commonly designed interviews in qualitative research, I used semi-structured interviews in this research study.

Procedure

I initially gained approval from the IRB for the study and was granted permission from the partnering university prior to conducting the research within the university lab school prior to collecting data from any lab school leaders and staff, students and families, and the community-based LEA.

I took initial steps to explain the purpose of the study and the process for sampling and recruitment of participants. Careful considerations regarding the

explanation of the methods for narrative journaling and interviewing were discussed before interviews were conducted. I ensured all participants were aware of anticipated recordings, interview methods, and the collection of subjective feedback through a nonevaluative lens. This was done to ensure that participants understood what methods were to be used to collect and analyze data. I met with the former assistant dean of the COE to explain the intended research and gather support for identifying potential participants.

Correspondence via email was used to obtain consent from participants for involvement in this research study. Those who elected to participate granted permission to me in writing. Confidentiality statements and information forms (Appendix A) included detailed information about the research questions, and the rights of the participants were provided to each participant. After consent was obtained, journaling and the narrative analysis evaluation were conducted. Confidentiality was maintained by discussing with participants the method for data collection and the assurance that what was collected would remain confidential to the greatest extent possible.

The analyses were used to answer the four research questions within this study by linking perceptions of participants and the respective roles they play in the inner workings of a university lab school in North Carolina. Through interview sessions with participants and the use of individual narratives, data were collected on the following key areas critical to the research in this narrative analysis study: evidence-based teaching pedagogy, best practices for recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers at a lab school, community-based LEA partnership, and support for students and families.

The questions used for the interviews were validated by a total of three experts in

the field of lab schools. The expert panel included the former assistant dean of the COE and the New Beginnings lab school and two lab school principals of North Carolina lab schools with similar student populations and grade levels. Approval was obtained from these individuals before the start of the research. It is important to note that I did not lead in with direction in questioning participants, rather I used notes from journaled accounts to pinpoint questions that developed organically from the experiences, thoughts, interactions, and reactions of those involved.

The guiding interview questions were intentionally designed in an open-ended format to bring about reflective storied responses. Organically, this led to additional follow-up questions to be used with participants. According to Fontana and Frey (1994), developing a "partnership between the researcher and respondents, who should work together to create a narrative–the interview" (p. 117) is encouraged. My goal as the researcher was to bring forth sustained uninterrupted narratives that painted a picture of the lab school transition and experiences that are reflective of the perceived benefits and challenges of working within a university lab school in North Carolina.

Key areas of the questionnaire included benefits of working in a lab school, differences in teaching and learning styles, levels and types of teacher support, perceptions of participant roles in teaching and learning in a lab school, variables that impact outcomes for children within a lab school, contributions and/or factors that contribute to participant continuation of dedication and work within the university lab school, and community LEA district partnership.

Each interview was transcribed upon completion of initial interviews and before conducting another. During the transcription process, notations of significant events were

recorded to analyze data and to develop questions about events or occurrences that required deeper discussion. Participant checks included members of the study to allow participants to be co-narrators of the reported experiences, so findings were not based solely on my perspective. Consistent checks for accuracy of the transcripts as well as my interpretations that could be entangled based on the data collected were conducted to protect accuracy, credibility, and rigor through data collection, analysis, and presentation (Patton, 2002; Turner & Coen, 2008).

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling is the practice of identifying participants from a known sample that is rich with useful data for a particular study (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). According to Creswell (2007), when using qualitative research, "the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 125). Participants involved in the study included parents, teachers, support personnel, curriculum director, former assistant dean, a professor from the COE, and an assistant superintendent of the partnering district to capture actions of those involved with the lab school and changes taking place. Participants were selected for this qualitative study through voluntary requests for participation after consultation with the director of the academy. The study utilized individuals such as the former assistant dean for the academy, the director of the academy, and the school administrative team who have insight into the transformation process.

To better understand the perceptions of lab school teaching and learning outcomes, a diverse group of participants were selected to participate in this study. These

participants had experience and/or familiarity with at-risk student populations and at-risk school settings including the climate and culture of those who receive services, and they teach or lead within a lab school setting. The majority of the participants came from traditional school settings to work or participate in a university lab school environment. At-risk students are students or groups of students who tend to have a higher probability of failing academically or not graduating from high school (Strauss, 2019). The participants in this study included the following:

1. School administrators and university leaders (3) for New Beginnings lab school:
    a. University professor
    b. University leader
    c. School-based leader
2. Schoolteachers and support staff (5) for New Beginnings lab school:
    a. A first-grade teacher
    b. An EL teacher
    c. A fifth-grade teacher
    d. Teachers of exceptional children
    e. Teacher assistant
3. Community-based LEA representatives (4) in partnership with New Beginnings lab school:
    a. School social worker involved in the welfare, compulsory attendance, support for McKinney-Vento provisions for homeless children, at-risk students, and the families of New Beginnings lab school, while also

serving as a liaison between the partnering district for the lab school

   b. School nurse
   c. Technology facilitator
   d. Assistant superintendent for the partnering LEA

4. Parents as participants (5). Parents who were involved in the opening year of New Beginnings and have maintained their involvement with the lab school were included in the interview process.

Those who agreed to participate in the study were provided with a detailed consent form that described and explained the purpose of the research vital to this qualitative study. Information was provided by me on the procedure including what was expected of the participant including if they were to be audiotaped and or videotaped. Additionally, participants were informed that they may elect to opt out of any of the interview questions they did not feel comfortable answering; and if so desired, they may end the interview and withdraw from the study at any time. For transparency purposes, the amount of time participants may be involved in the study as well as a confidentiality disclosure were explained both verbally and in writing (Appendix B) to ensure the comfort level and commitment were voluntarily agreed upon. As the researcher, I protected confidentiality by keeping notes on participants, using coding for names. For example, Participant 1 was coded as such without revealing actual names within the study. A log was kept on who was associated with the number assigned solely for the purpose of me tracking the data and its source. Information was disclosed by me to participants prior to participating on how data were to be collected, how data would be shared, and how data would be disposed.

As the researcher, I used the following processes for managing data obtained in this study:

1. Data were collected through journaling and recording of accounts and day-to-day happenings within the lab school.
2. Data will be shared in a detailed report at the conclusion of the study without exposure of participant names or identifiable information that could reveal who they are in the study.
3. Data collected will be kept by me in a secured file cabinet for a span of 5 years after the final publication of the study.
4. Data collected for this study will be disposed of after a 5-year period by me by shredding journals and deleting audio recordings and electronic files that contain any and all personal data from participants.

The data were collected through a process of handwritten journaled accounts of multiple interviews with participants. The data will be shared with the university in a written summary report at the conclusion of the study. Participants may email me to request a copy of the written summary report.

Role of the Researcher

I am an administrator at the research site, New Beginnings. As such, I conducted interviews based on the journaled accounts collected and looked for emerging trends that revealed the thoughts and feelings of those involved in true lab school work. I sought to understand and bring forth information related to the mission of UNC lab schools: teaching, research, and public service through direct partnership with local school districts to promote evidence-based teaching and school leadership (UNC System, 2021).

Additionally, I gathered data as the recorder of significant occurrences and events that impact the managerial, cultural, and instructional operations of the university lab school. I served as the researcher of processes and systems that make up the aspects of an effective lab school while examining the perceptions of teacher day-to-day responsibilities, the teacher evaluation process, and the types of assessment and data collection a lab school uses to ensure a well-rounded and purposeful trajectory of improved academic and behavioral outcomes for low-achieving students.

This methodology was used to determine positive factors in the lab school program as well as any weaknesses that may emanate from the lab school setting. The data compiled from this study were displayed as a narrative story depicting the perpetual transformation of the lab school as a living, breathing entity. Notes will be kept on all aspects of the lab school transition and process in working under the full authority of a North Carolina university and its influence on the lab school. These notes were utilized in the development of a compilation of data that were analyzed for tracking trends and emerging themes.

Role of the University

New Beginnings is a university-run school that maintains a partnership with the local education unit. The university governs and operates every aspect of the school by marketing the school, securing funding, providing curriculum resources, and hiring the school's administrative leadership, teachers, and staff. The university provides support for teachers and administrators through professional development experiences and coursework. The lab school model includes professors and teachers working hand in hand on curriculum and instructional strategies. Teachers attend professional learning team

meetings with the director of curriculum and instruction and attend professional development and coursework specifically designed to enhance their understanding of the thematic units across educational strands. The university uses a shared leadership approach to support the school administration.

Professors were invited to participate in the discussion of how these partnerships benefitted and posed challenges specific to them. Information was gathered on the inner workings of relationships between teachers and professors as colleagues as well as the relationships between professors and teachers as students enrolled in graduate-level coursework. At New Beginnings, staff who are employed by the lab school have the opportunity to enroll in coursework, up to 6 credit hours a semester, and are provided tuition waivers by the university. This coursework is, at times, led by professors who also serve as their administrators and/or coworkers. The study examined what this dual relationship may look and feel like. It may also provide further insight into teacher support models used by the university and its professors in conjunction with administrators at the university and lab school level.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study lies in the fact that I was also the principal/evaluator. In other words, the journalist was also the supervisor; therefore, there may have been reluctance from participants. Participants may not have felt comfortable speaking freely about the university and its governance of the school due to the positioning of the staff member and the expectations of university leadership. Another limitation of the study exists from the limited amount of research currently available on lab schools in the state of North Carolina. There are so few lab schools in operation within the state of North

Carolina that anonymity was difficult to preserve within the body of this narrative analysis study. Furthermore, there was a gap in community and parent understanding of a lab school and how it works with a district in which their child or children currently reside.

In these uncertain times, when schools across the country are dealing with the effects of the coronavirus, I considered this also to be a limitation that impacted the research in this study. The impact of remote teaching and learning and using electronic platforms to conduct research and meetings and to narrate the inner workings of the lab school as it moves forward with meaningful work in the year 2020-2021 were considered in relation to this study. Plans were made by university leaders and school administration that determined when teachers, staff, and students would return to a face-to-face learning environment.

Delimitation of the Study

A delimitation of this study was that there was only one lab school for which the research took place. This limited the amount of feedback gathered about how North Carolina lab schools are operating, including their impact on student achievement. The roles and responsibilities of other lab school leaders and constructs of innovative practices were excluded from this research study.

Summary

In this research study, a narrative analysis evaluation was conducted with schoolteachers, school and university leaders, students, families, and community-based partners. Focus group sessions were implemented by me to identify trends and themes as perceived by the participants. Moreover, this study investigated the teaching, school and

community relationships, research, public service, and partnerships of a single university lab school in North Carolina. Within the narrative research design of this study, chronological sequencing of events and evidence of collaboration with the participants helped to frame the story of the lab school as it pertains to its use of nontraditional methods of teaching and learning. This, in turn, supported the study's purpose and questions. This study sought to contribute to the body of research and to provide advocacy for ensuring that students existing in at-risk educational environments have the resources to be successful across the academic curriculum. Stakeholders in the educational arena are charged with ensuring that students receive the most efficacious approaches to best practices in teaching and learning.

Chapter 4: Results

The experiences of those engaged in supporting high-risk students for improved academic outcomes in partnership with an urban school district of North Carolina are involved in this study. Through their participation in this narrative analysis of the inner workings of a lab school infrastructure, emergent themes and trends have been captured and are discussed hereafter.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether a lab school is more effective than the traditional school setting and if it has a greater impact on student achievement and overall school culture. Findings inform educational leaders and stakeholders of the most efficacious approaches for improving outcomes for children existing within at-risk educational environments.

Collection of Data

This chapter presents data gathered from lab school leaders and staff, lab school community partners, and lab school parents of students enrolled at New Beginnings School; these individuals agreed to serve as participants in this research study. This chapter organizes the data according to the research questions provided in Chapter 1 of this study. The research methodology consisted of subjects participating in interviews conducted via face-to-face and/or virtual conferencing lasting approximately 15-30 minutes per session. The results of the study are detailed in the following section.

Presentation of the Data

This section is devoted to presenting the data gathered through individual interviews relevant to respondent perceptions of the inner workings of an elementary lab school fully operated by a university in North Carolina. As mentioned in the

methodology chapter, this study centers around transitional leadership considerations for lab school implementation in partnership with an urban school district in North Carolina. Information regarding this variable is based on participant responses to a total of seven items in the questionnaire utilized in the individual interview sessions. In each of these, respondents were asked to share their perceptions and opinions of characteristics, attributes, and observations of the K-5 New Beginnings lab school through a series of questions related to the following research questions:

1. What perceived benefits result from teaching and learning in a university lab school setting?
2. How does a university lab school provide support for teachers?
3. Which aspects of a university lab school allow for innovative approaches to improving failing schools and failing student outcomes in comparison to traditional public-school units within low-income areas?
4. What are the perceived areas of strengths and/or challenges that exist between the community-based LEA and the newly formed lab school?

This section presents the results from the data arranged in thematic categories from the individual interviews of subjects. As the structure of the interview questionnaires follows a specific format, the categories included are concurrent with the trends identified which include those mentioned across categories within each of the subgroups (teachers, staff, parents, community partners, and lab leaders). Responses, statements, or expressed perceptions or thoughts, otherwise referred to as *common relevant invariant constituents* of the interviews were coded and then documented to calculate the rate of frequency. Inductive coding was used to draw from participant

responses allowing the narrative to emerge organically from the raw data.

In vivo coding allowed for interaction between me, as the researcher, and participants within the lab school culture to, according to Manning (2017), highlight the voices of participants and reliance on the participants themselves for giving meaning to the data. High-frequency invariant constituents were used in correlation with the discovered thematic categories to provide conclusions for this research study. Note that not all common invariant constituent responses represent a particularly high rate of frequency due to the participant size within each subgroup. The distribution of respondents is based on their responses to the questions according to participant groupings (as identified in Appendix C).

There are seven major categories in which lab school responses were assigned. Categories include benefits of teaching and working, support strategies, benefits of instruction on diverse learners, overall lab school effectiveness, weaknesses of the university lab school, strengths of the LEA partnership, and weaknesses of the LEA partnership. It should be noted that in some cases, there are more responses than the number of participants because the respondents were able to make multiple comments on each topic introduced.

Major Category 1: Benefit of Teaching and Working

The first thematic category includes data obtained from all interviews and demonstrates the participants' general perceptions, opinions, and ideas regarding the benefits of teaching and working in a lab school. The thematic category was created based on invariant constituents' understandings of any notable "benefits" of working in a lab school environment. While several participants cited "feeling a sense of community,"

other responses included those benefits related to lab school employment "offered more professional development" as well as "having the freedom to experience something new." One subject described the benefit as "also having an opportunity to go to grad school; before, I didn't think I'd ever go back to school, but being a part of this made me want to keep learning," further noting, "With smaller class sizes, I feel like I can reach more students. I can build connections with my students."

Table 1 represents all responses given by subjects interviewed in this thematic category, along with the number and percentage of participants in each group who replied. Two common strengths were cited across all participant groups: (a) "lower student-to-teacher ratio" and (b) a "sense of community." However, other than the sense of community and lower student-to-teacher ratio, no other response generated more than 25% favorability from community partners/LEA. Contrarily, in addition to the sense of community and lower student-to-teacher ratio, 80% of teachers reported the "availability of professional development" as a benefit of working within a lab school, and 60% cited the availability of "more resources than a traditional school." Lab school leaders unanimously (100%) cited "autonomy/uniqueness" and "sense of community" as the greatest benefits of working in a lab school. "Support from university faculty" (67%) and "higher learning opportunities" (67%) were other benefits reported by school leaders. Parents were more in synchrony with their perceived benefits of the lab school. Specifically, among parents participating in the interviews, 75% reported "a sense of community" as the greatest benefit of a lab school, followed by a "lower student-to-teacher ratio." The full range of benefits reported by participants is reflected in Table 1.

Table 1

Benefits of Teaching/Working Within a Lab School

Participant groups (n)/responses	*n*	%
Teachers (*n*=5)		
Availability of professional development	4	80%
Support from university faculty	2	40%
Sense of community*	2	40%
Autonomy/uniqueness	2	40%
Increased collaboration among teachers and staff	1	20%
More resources than a traditional school	3	60%
Increased teacher efficacy	2	40%
Higher learning opportunities	1	20%
Lower student-to-teacher ratio*	3	60%
Staff (*n*=2)		
Sense of community*	1	50%
Autonomy/uniqueness	1	50%
Lower student-to-teacher ratio*	1	50%
Community partners/LEA (*n*=4)		
Increased collaboration among teachers and staff	1	25%
Sense of community*	2	50%
Lower student-to-teacher ratio*	2	50%
More resources than a traditional school	1	25%
Lab school leaders* (*n*=3)		
Availability of professional development	1	33%
Autonomy/uniqueness	3	100%
Increased collaboration among teachers and staff	1	33%
Sense of community*	3	100%
Support from university faculty	2	67%
More resources than a traditional school	1	33%
Higher learning opportunities	2	67%
Parents (*n*=4)		
Sense of community*	3	75%
Lower student-to-teacher ratio	2	50%
More resources than a traditional school	1	25%

Note. *Denotes recurring themes across participant groups.

Major Category 2: Support Strategies

The second thematic category under the major heading of *support* includes strategies identified by respondents as being the most impactful benefit of working and learning in a university lab school. Participants noted the importance of support for teaching and learning through increased reading and writing assistance. Participants from four of the five subgroups noted, "Teachers provided prompt and in-depth feedback and were focused on students' needs." This was exemplified by one participant who stated, "as for teachers, for my daughter, they have been prompt with her progress and learning"; another noted, "I love the way the teachers give you feedback on how your kid is doing in school, what you need to be focused on."

Table 2 represents all responses given by subjects interviewed in this thematic category, along with the number and percentage of participants in each group who replied. Two common strengths, "teacher feedback focused on students' needs" and "increased reading and writing for students" were cited across participant groups. However, other than the teacher feedback focused on student needs, no other response generated more than 25% favorability from community partners/LEA. Contrarily, in addition to the teacher feedback focused on student needs and increased reading and writing for students, 80% of teachers reported the use of "formative assessments/early detection" as a major support strategy of New Beginnings lab school, and 60% cited that the lab school "provides more exposure to areas kids are lacking." Parents were more in synchrony with their perceptions of support strategies of the lab school. Specifically, among parents participating in the interviews, 75% reported "teacher feedback focused on students' needs" as the greatest benefit of a lab school, as well as opportunities for

students through “COVID/virtual learning.” The full range of benefits reported by participants is reflected in Table 2.

Table 2

Support Strategies

Participant groups (*n*)/responses	*n*	%
Teachers (*n*=5)		
Covid/virtual learning	2	40%
Teacher feedback/focused on student needs*	2	40%
Provides more exposure to areas in which kids are lacking	3	60%
Literacy cast/reading dept.	1	20%
Formative assessments/early detection	4	80%
Increased reading and writing for students*	4	80%
Staff (*n*=2)		
Formative assessments/early detection	1	50%
Teacher feedback/focused on student needs*	2	50%
Provides more exposure to areas kids are lacking	1	25%
Literacy cast/reading dept.	1	25%
Increased reading and writing for students*	1	25%
Parents (*n*=4)		
Covid/virtual learning	3	75%
Teacher feedback/focused on student needs*	3	75%
Provides more exposure to areas kids are lacking	1	25%
Literacy cast/reading dept.	1	25%
Increased reading and writing for students*	1	25%
Lab school leaders (*n*=3)		
Teacher feedback/focused on student needs*	1	33%

Note. *Denotes recurring themes across participant groups.

Major Category 3: Benefits of Instruction on Diverse Learners

Thematic Category 3 reveals participant ideas on the benefits of instruction for diverse learners. Relevant data were provided in each interview with emphasis placed on lab school students having access to exposure to university life as a recurring theme across participants along with students being exposed to opportunities to learn at their own pace. Some described their personal notion of benefits, stating, "I think our lab school, we do a good job. Our curriculum, our administration, and teachers, the tone sets the stage emotionally, and the kids are affirmed." Another participant stated, "They focus on where she [our daughter] needs to be. Reading workshops, tutoring, and the summer literacy program to this point has helped them." Another respondent commented,

> So many literacy things from the university that the district doesn't get for their schools. To see first-hand what a university setting is like, it is interesting to see what they [the student] will do if they go on to a university because of this lab school experience.

Student efficacy was also trending among participants, as one shared, "She [daughter] loves to go to school, and she makes sure she does all her assignments; she doesn't want to disappoint her teacher."

Table 3 represents all responses given by subjects interviewed in this thematic category, along with the number and percentage of participants in each group who replied. Three common strengths were cited across participant groups: (a) "students learning at their own pace," (b) "students exposed to university life," and (c) "increased academic growth." Contrarily, in addition to the previously mentioned responses of students learning at their own pace, students exposed to university life and increased

academic growth, 33% of lab school leaders responded, “the lab school provides more structure.” Parents were less uniform in their response with 50% citing the lab school as contributing to “increased student efficacy.” The full range of benefits reported by participants is reflected in Table 3.

Table 3

Benefits of Instruction on Diverse Learners

Participant groups (*n*)/responses	*n*	%
Teachers (*n*=5)		
Students learning at their own pace*	2	40%
Students exposed to university life*	2	40%
Increased academic growth*	3	60%
Staff (*n*=2)		
Students learning at their own pace*	1	50%
Students exposed to university life*	1	50%
Community partners/LEA (*n*=4)		
Students learning at their own pace*	1	25%
Students exposed to university life*	1	25%
Increased academic growth*	3	75%
Increased student efficacy	1	25%
Provides more structure	1	25%
Parents (*n*=4)		
Student exposure to others-students/diversity	1	25%
Increased academic growth*	3	75%
Increased student efficacy	2	50%
Lab school leaders (*n*=3)		
Students exposed to university life*	1	33%
Provides more structure	1	33%

Note. *Denotes recurring themes across participant groups.

Major Category 4: Overall Lab School Effectiveness

Thematic Category 4 reveals the thoughts and opinions of participants of the overall effectiveness of the lab school. Cross categorically, most participants noted that leading factors included the use of a new curriculum, increased family outreach, teacher autonomy, and direct support from the university were essential components of overall university lab school effectiveness. One stated, “We have had less turnover, and staffing has been consistent. Because of classroom management, students are less needy and enjoy classes”; another commented, “Teacher training, more highly qualified teachers, more resources, more autonomy, and flexibility, less external interruptions [because we are small and are more focused and we have school-specific training].” Learning to adapt to a COVID learning environment was another area in which the participants felt the school was effective. One participant shared their experience in receiving assistance from the school staff, stating, “As a parent, I’ve had to learn how to get on the computer during the pandemic.” The ability to spend time working together was also noted: “Definitely there is more time in a lab school setting to collaborate, support each other and reflect.” Administration was also noted as being supportive of staff and families; one participant shared, “there has not been a time where I’ve asked administration if I could do something, and it not be heard.”

Table 4 represents all responses given by subjects interviewed in this thematic category, along with the number and percentage of participants in each group who replied. Two common strengths were cited across all participant groups: “direct support from the university” and “feeling positive about the lab school environment.” However, other than the direct support received from the university and feeling positive about the

lab school environment, only one other response, “teacher and leader innovation and commitment,” generated more than 25% favorability from community partners/LEA. Contrarily, 40% of teachers reported “family outreach” and having “supportive school administration” as benefits of overall lab school effectiveness. Lab school staff were split in their responses with 50% citing “effective student management” as an effective attribute of New Beginnings lab school, while lab school leaders unanimously (100%) cited “direct support from the university partnership,” “feeling positive about the lab school environment,” and “supportive school administration” as the greatest strengths of overall lab school effectiveness.

Table 4

Overall Lab School Effectiveness

Participant groups (*n*)/responses	*n*	%
Teachers (*n*=5)		
Direct support of university partnership*	2	40%
Freedom and flexibility in teaching	2	40%
Family outreach*	2	40%
Feel positive about the lab school environment*	2	40%
Supportive school administration	2	40%
Teacher and leader innovation and commitment*	1	20%
Community partners	1	20%
New curriculum*	3	60%
Staff (*n*=2)		
Feel positive about the lab school environment*	1	50%
Effective student management	1	50%
Community partners/LEA (*n*=4)		
Direct support from university partnership*	3	75%
Freedom and flexibility in teaching	1	25%
Family outreach*	1	25%
Feel positive about the lab school environment*	2	50%
Effective student management	1	25%
Teacher and leader innovation and commitment*	2	50%
Community partners	1	25%
New curriculum*	1	25%
Parents (*n*=4)		
Direct support from university partnership*	1	25%
Freedom and flexibility in teaching	1	25%
Family outreach*	1	25%
Feel positive about the lab school environment	3	75%
Supportive school administration	1	25%
Teacher and leader innovation and commitment*	2	50%
Community partners	1	25%
New curriculum*	1	25%
Lab school leaders (*n*=3)		
Direct support from university partnership*	3	100%
Freedom and flexibility in teaching	1	33%
Family outreach*	1	33%
Feel positive about the lab school environment*	3	100%
Supportive school administration	3	100%
Teacher and leader innovation and commitment*	2	67%
New curriculum*	2	67%

Note. *Denotes recurring themes across participant groups.

"Teacher and leader innovation and commitment" (67%) and "new curriculum" (67%) were other benefits reported by school leaders. Parents were more in synchrony with their perceived benefits of the lab school. Specifically, among parents participating in the interviews, 75% reported "feeling positive about the lab school environment" as the greatest benefit of overall lab school effectiveness, followed by "teacher and leader innovation and commitment" (50%). The full range of benefits reported by participants is reflected in Table 4.

Major Category 5: Weaknesses of the University Lab School

Thematic Category 5 captures participant understandings of areas in which the university lab school could grow and improve its overall effectiveness. Cross categorically, the majority of participants noted limitations of transportation for both enrolled students and prospective families interested in attending. Additionally, lack of resources as a stand-alone school and lack of diversity among staff were noted. One participant expressed, "I would love to see a Hispanic teacher and an African American male teacher"; another stated, "We need mentors, especially in a school like this. We don't have Black representation." In regard to school operations, one participant shared, "the University not knowing how to run a school and the state not giving a lot of guidance" as factors that led to delays and confusion relevant to certain aspects of school operations.

One other participant noted, "We do not have the support of a central office. The university is not a school district. The university is not equipped to be a school district." Further alignment of similar perceptions included a participant sharing, "Any perceived weaknesses would come from not having a clear understanding of the lab school or

agreement on the other side." In terms of professional development and support, one participant noted,

> PD at a district level is different because it's more relevant to student needs. A university is looking at PD at a higher university learning level as adult learning as opposed to how you're taking that and applying it towards students.

More found the lack of support for groups within the school to be a weakness, as a participant shared, "EC/administrators don't benefit from the structure or depth of human resources."

Table 5 represents all responses given by subjects interviewed in this thematic category, along with the number and percentage of participants in each group who replied. Three common weaknesses of the lab school were cited across all participant groups: "lack of resources as a set alone lab school," followed by a "lack of diverse staff" and "transportation limitations for students." Aside from the lack of resources, lack of diversity in lab school staff, and transportation limitations, it was also cited that there was "limited state guidance and confusion," at a response rate of 50% favorability from community partners/LEA. Contrarily, in addition to the lack of resources, lack of diversity in lab school staff, and transportation limitations, 40% of teachers reported the "exceptional children's team/staff lacks support" as a weakness of working within a lab school. Lab school leaders (67%) cited "limited state guidance/confusion" (67%) and "transportation limitations for students" (67%) as the greatest weaknesses of New Beginnings lab school. Parents were less in synchrony with their perceived weaknesses of the lab school. Specifically, among parents participating in the interviews, 50% reported "discipline and attitude of parents/non-collaborative" as the greatest weakness of the lab

school, followed by the "exceptional children's team/staff lacking support." The full range of weaknesses reported by participants is reflected in Table 5.

Table 5

Weaknesses of the University Lab School

Participant groups (*n*)/responses	*n*	%
Teachers (*n*=5)		
Lack of resources as a set alone lab school*	2	40%
Lack of diverse staff*	1	20%
Transportation limitations for students*	2	40%
Exceptional children team/staff lacks support	2	40%
Certain groups lack access/recognition	1	20%
Staff (*n*=2)		
Transportation limitations for students*	1	50%
Community partners/LEA (*n*=4)		
Lack of resources as a set alone lab school*	1	25%
Lack of diverse staff*	1	25%
Limited state guidance/confusion	2	50%
Transportation limitations for students*	2	50%
Parents (*n*=4)		
Exceptional children team/staff lacks support	1	25%
Discipline and attitude of parents/non-collaborative	2	50%
Lab school leaders (*n*=3)		
Lack of resources as a set alone lab school*	2	67%
Lack of diverse staff*	1	33%
Limited state guidance/confusion	2	67%
Shifting of principal's role to people management	1	33%
Transportation limitations for students*	2	67%
Relative newness	1	33%

Note. *Denotes recurring themes across participant groups.

Major Category 6: Strengths of the LEA Partnership

Thematic Category 6 captures participant ideas of the strengths of the partnership with the community and LEA. Across participant groups, transportation was mentioned

as a viable strength of the partnership. Equipment and child nutrition services were also noted by participants, stated by one as, “I think they work well in regard to nutrition and transportation.” It was also noted that having a school social worker and school nurse was a provision of the district to the university lab school.

Table 6 represents all responses given by subjects interviewed in this thematic category, along with the number and percentage of participants in each group who replied. One common strength cited across participant groups was “transportation.” However, other than the strength of transportation, “the equipment and technology provided by the district” generated 50% favorability from community partners/LEA. Lab school leaders reported “child nutrition services” and the “provision of consistent services/resources” as strengths of partnership at a rate of 33%. Contrarily, no other response rate generated more than 25% favorability from any other participant groups. The full range of strengths of partnership with the community/LEA reported by participants is reflected in Table 6.

Table 6

Strengths of Community/LEA Partnership

Participant groups (*n*)/responses	n	%
Teachers (*n*=5)		
Use of school buses and equipment	1	20%
Child nutrition services	1	20%
Transportation*	1	20%
Staff (*n*=2)		
Community partners/LEA (*n*=4)		
The equipment and technology provided by the district	2	50%
Resources	1	25%
Transportation*	1	25%
Provision of social worker and school nurse	1	25%
Parents (*n*=4)		
Lab school leaders (*n*=3)		
Provision of consistent services/resources	1	33%
Transportation*	1	33%
Child nutrition services	1	33%

Note. *Denotes recurring themes across participant groups.

Major Category 7: Weaknesses of the LEA Partnership

In this section, findings are reported on the partnership of the LEA and New Beginnings lab school. Participants were asked to share their individual perceptions of any weaknesses of the partnership. When factoring in transportation, a notable comment from one participant included the restrictions that limit innovation:

> It makes the lab school have to conform because there were several things the lab school wanted to do but couldn't do because of lack of transportation. It [the partnership] causes the lab school to have to conform to the district or establish their own transportation in their budget.

Regarding the partnership, another participant stated, “The partnership has not been so great. They haven’t done their part. The university invested a lot of time and money despite the district not cooperating.” Others expressed similar opinions, including, “The lack of partnership is the biggest weakness because the support is not there as we anticipated.” Revealing other similar perceptions on the impact of the partnership, one noted, “Having friends to hear the conversations is good. I don’t want us to be isolated, we need to stay connected.”

Table 7 represents all responses given by subjects interviewed in this thematic category, along with the number and percentage of participants in each group who replied. One common weakness, “no involvement/no true partnership,” was cited across all participant groups. However, other than the aforementioned lack of involvement of a true partnership reported unanimously at a rate of 100%, no other response generated more than 25% favorability from the community partners/LEA. Contrarily, in addition to the lack of involvement and a lack of true partnership, teachers cited “not having access to certain PD opportunities” (40%) as a notable weakness. Lab school leaders (67%) reported “no involvement/no true partnership” and “transportation issues” as the greatest weaknesses of the partnership. In unanimous agreement with lab school leaders, school staff (100%) agreed that “no involvement/no true partnership” was a challenge and added that the other weaknesses of the partnership were the “transportation issues” (50%). The full range of benefits reported by participants is reflected in Table 7.

Table 7

Weaknesses of Community/LEA Partnership

Participant groups (*n*)/responses	*n*	%
Teachers (*n*=5)		
Not having access to certain PD opportunities	2	40%
No involvement/no true partnership*	3	60%
Staff (*n*=2)		
No involvement/no true partnership*	2	100%
Transportation issues*	1	50%
Community partners/lea (*n*=4)		
No involvement/no true partnership*	4	100%
Lack of flexibility for transportation needs for families	1	25%
Parents (*n*=4)		
Lab school leaders (*n*=3)		
No involvement/ no true partnership*	2	67%
Transportation issues*	2	67%

Note. *Denotes recurring themes across participant groups.

Summary

My experience with the research has shown a diversity of opinions. Participants in this study were not all in agreement, as some agreed that transportation and resources are a benefit of the partnership with the LEA, while others saw these areas as weaknesses. Variations of strengths of the lab school included professional development and a positive lab school environment, while others reported lack of unity among parents and lack of diverse staff. There was a noticeable connection between participants in reporting student benefits from the university lab school experience with enhanced literacy strategies contributing to academic growth in diverse learners; it may also be noted that teacher and staff focus on the needs of students is a strength of the lab school. This

information resulted in an extensive look into the staff, students, leaders, and community partnerships of a university lab school such as New Beginnings. The data revealed several strands of perceptions that align with one or more participants' ideas and suggestions regarding the lab school experience and effectiveness as well as the transitional leadership considerations for effective implementation of an innovative university lab school design.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to evaluate whether a lab school is more effective than a traditional school setting and if it has a greater impact on student achievement and the overall school culture. This chapter presents conclusions drawn from the analysis and interpretation of the data presented in the preceding chapter; it also links these conclusions with major findings in the literature relative to university lab schools yielding high-quality results for at-risk students. Feedback from the findings will inform educational leaders and stakeholders of the most effective approaches identified in the lab school setting for improving outcomes for at-risk children within low-performing educational environments.

Restatement of the Problem

As the need for learning increases, the consequences of not meeting our present challenges become more apparent in ongoing cycles of poverty, insufficient literacy, and lost opportunities (Beverstock & Newman, 1991). Lab schools were created by North Carolina lawmakers through a provision in the 2016 budget. The stated purpose of a university lab school is to

> improve student performance in local school administrative units with low-performing schools by providing an enhanced education program for students residing in those units and to provide exposure and training for teachers and principals to successfully address challenges existing in high-needs school settings. By design, a laboratory school shall provide an opportunity for research, demonstration, student support, and expansion of the teaching experience and evaluation regarding management, teaching, and learning. (Public Schools First

NC, n.d.b, para. 1)

This study collected qualitative data from school constituents (teachers, parents, school staff/administrators, and community partners) that may provide a unique perspective on the value of a university lab school relative to traditional schools serving at-risk students and thereby support the future application of the lab school concept. Data were collected through journaling and individual interviews with participants from each of the identified groups. Results may provide valuable information to university and school leaders as they strive to hone teacher preparation programs, establish and strengthen school and community partnerships, and validate systems of support for serving underperforming students. The data gathered in this study are relevant to the following research questions:

1. What perceived benefits result from teaching and learning in a university lab school setting?
2. How does a university lab school provide support for teachers?
3. Which aspects of a university lab school allow for innovative approaches to improving failing schools and failing student outcomes in comparison to traditional public-school units within low-income areas?
4. What are the perceived areas of strengths and/or challenges that exist between the community-based LEA and the newly formed lab school?

The true value of laboratory schools stems from unique opportunities not afforded in traditional schools. Teachers, administrators, parents, and community partners all acknowledged the value of small class sizes, a strong sense of community, and a greater degree of autonomy to augment student success. More specifically, teachers valued the

support they garnered from partnering with the university. That support was in part manifested through professional development and reimbursed tuition for graduate-level courses. Administrators valued the flexibility teachers had to try innovative approaches to teaching. This allowed them to utilize nonstandard assessments that led to data-driven interventions. Furthermore, they were supported in this process by the university's faculty. Although not without challenges (e.g., transportation and differences in management style), clearly the benefits of the university lab school partnership with the local LEA far outweighed the hindrances.

Summary of the Findings

Five groups of participants (teachers, staff, lab school leaders, parents, and community-based LEA partners) shared their perspectives on whether lab schools are more effective than traditional schools in meeting the needs of low-performing students. The findings from each of the research questions are presented below.

Research Question 1: What Are the Perceived Benefits From Teaching and Learning in a University Lab School?

Within a traditional school, classroom sizes can span from 22 students upward. According to Schanzenbach (2014), a greater benefit exists from class-size reduction for low-income, low-performing, and minority children, and any increases in class size will likely be most harmful to these populations. The value of small student-to-teacher ratios resonated across survey participant groups (see Chapter 4, Table 1). Typical lab school classes range from 12 students (K-2) to no more than 18 students in Grades 3+, thereby allowing students to receive direct support from teachers. Both parents and teachers noted this as a huge benefit for improving student learning. A few examples of comments

expressed by participants noted, “smaller class sizes in lower grades are helpful.” Another reported, “the small class sizes are a benefit for the students where we can reach beneficial needs,” and one shared, “I believe students’ needs are being met. We have the time and resources to impact students. I think it’s just personalized because of the smaller class setting.”

Second, a strong sense of community that resulted from the inclusive environment generated within the laboratory school was a stated benefit. The following expresses the sentiments of one participant: “As a community, we are a staff close to each other, building stronger relationships.” The feeling of belonging and togetherness was distinctly discussed in the data as shared by other participants: “Lab school teachers really want to be there”; and “What I enjoy is to have a community like this. It’s a learning environment. I’ve learned so much from the teachers and students. I have learned to have more compassion for students.” Having a sense of community as a benefit of teaching and learning directly correlates with this research-based theory and is consistent with what is in the literature. Strong communities have members who have shared goals, identify with the experiences of others, share trust, have a voice in decision-making, and feel understood, confident, and included as individuals (Kane, 2016). One participant stated, “It is important for us to partner and share in how to understand our students.” Another replied,

> Another strength is the community of teachers, like fifth grade; they talk about those students. It is interesting to see them talk about the students, what’s working and what’s not. Which children have problems at home, strength of this type of environment where other schools don’t have or have limited opportunities to do

this.

These data also connect literature on the collective efficacy of teachers and staff and how it impacts at-risk students when schools function as a collective community. John Hattie determined that collective teacher efficacy has proven to be greater than three times more powerful and predictive of student achievement than children's socioeconomic status (Donohoo & Katz, 2017). Given the potential effect of collective efficacy on achievement for vulnerable student populations, this concept is regarded as a leading indicator for increased student achievement.

The availability of professional development for teachers and staff was also seen as a benefit to improving teaching and learning within a lab school setting. The vast majority of teachers (80%) valued the availability and accessibility of cost-free professional development. Lab school leaders were unanimous in acknowledging the autonomy/uniqueness afforded them through the lab school. Over two-thirds (67%) referenced the availability of university support and greater opportunities to hone their professional acumen and felt that having more access to various resources in a lab school setting in comparison to a traditional school was a significant benefit for improved teaching practices. According to Mizell (2010), teaching quality and school leadership are the most significant contributors to raising student achievement. This is a significant factor not only for teachers but for school and district leaders as well. To maximize their potential, teachers and school leaders continually expand their knowledge and skills to better utilize best educational practices. Through their lab school partnerships, universities help facilitate these opportunities.

Research Question 2: How Does a University Lab School Provide Support for Teachers?

Support strategies were identified by respondents as being the most impactful for the overall success of the lab school in this research question. Teachers reported the following three major support strategies garnered from the lab school: (a) formative assessments for early detection, (b) increased reading and writing for students, and (c) the university "provides more exposure to areas students are lacking." Eighty percent of teachers felt that the university provided support for learning through "formative assessments and early detection" methods (see Table 2 in Chapter 4). The university provided professional development relative to research-based formative assessments and early intervention strategies; funded classroom libraries, technology hand-held devices, smartboards, laptops, and chrome books; and upgraded media resources for students and teachers to access books, learning software, and literacy materials. Additionally, the university's reading, math, science, and social studies departments worked alongside teachers to develop thematic interdisciplinary units that supported teaching strategies and classroom instruction. Students gained opportunities to write, create poetry, read with peers, and meet authors and illustrators through the university's reading department.

Teachers also acknowledged that university support led to "increased reading and writing for students." One teacher shared, "The grouping is beneficial whether it's math or reading and we have resources. The first of the year we used leveled readers and Letterland. We have a lot now [resources]. We have constant assessments within each unit." Another teacher shared,

Support is coming directly from someone within the university. Support received

> from lab school resources provides you with more direct support from the people influencing what's happening, and I don't know that you can get that in a non-lab school setting.

A third shared,

> I have truly enjoyed working for the lab school. It has grown me as an educator. Like the university professors helping me with social studies and even the interns and student teachers have allowed me to grow and learn as an educator. I felt so boxed in at the county; I like the freedom.

The university reading and special education departments collected data on student progress and provided guidance to lab school teachers and school administrators for literacy-based strategies, thereby aiding the teachers in making data-based intervention decisions. Teachers enrolled in master-level courses through the university were trained on early detection strategies for improving literacy for underperforming students. By identifying gaps in learning sooner, teachers were able to group students by ability and tailor instruction in small groups for intensive support. The culmination of all these efforts created targeted support and interventions for improving literacy across grade levels.

A review of the literature affirms university partnerships as beneficial to students and universities alike. Students benefit from the extra support provided by university staff in classrooms, additional reading instruction and intervention, and small group and personal instruction. Strategies of this nature can help close achievement gaps and alleviate teacher burnout. Additional benefits from university partnerships include instructional technology resources, data analysis, access to student teachers, and a teacher

pipeline (Harper, 2019). Literature regarding university lab school partnerships has been available for a long period of time in the United States and globally. John Dewey, the founder of the first lab school in 1896, strove to close the gap in theory and practice for educators (Smith et al., 2016). Professional development schools were introduced in the late 1980s by the Holmes Group as a ubiquitous type of partnership between schools and universities as a teacher preparation partnership (Smith et al., 2016). In a study conducted on the impact of school and university partnerships, results revealed improved high school completion rates and access to colleges for underrepresented school children (Smith et al., 2016). Literature further supports the findings for partnerships with schools, districts, and universities, as Ferreira (2007) indicated that partnerships between K-12 teachers and university professors help in creating a sense of community for involved partners.

Research Question 3: Which Aspects of a University Lab School Allow for Innovative Approaches to Improving Failing Schools and Failing Student Outcomes in Comparison to Traditional Public-School Units Within Low-Income Areas?

As research indicates, pacing guides tend to increase pressure on teachers through the demands and expectations to cover all content material identified. As teachers attempt to match this demand, more time becomes devoted to subject-content testing (David, 2008). The data suggest that the freedom and flexibility afforded teachers in a lab school setting culminates in innovative approaches to teaching. For example, instead of focusing strictly on the content that will be tested, lab school teachers can devote time to assessing individual learner needs and developing approaches that work best for that student. Across all participant groups, the following themes emerged relative to benefits of

instruction to diverse learners. These strands included the following: (a) students learning at their own pace, (b) students exposed to university life, and (c) increased academic growth across the academic curriculum as benefits of instruction on diverse learners. Data revealed that by allowing teachers to teach at a pace best matched to student understanding and skill levels, students who were behind in grade-level achievement became more confident in their abilities and more engaged and in turn demonstrated more effort on tasks. A majority of teachers (60%), partners (75%), and parents (75%) felt increased academic growth was a significant factor for children attending the lab school (see Chapter 4, Table 3).

Participants expressed, "the teachers in the lab school, the autonomy in their flexibility and scheduling and curriculum than in a traditional K-5 school" and

> so many literacy things from the university. The district doesn't get it [offer these resources or this flexibility] for their schools. To see first-hand what a university is like is interesting [in terms of opportunities and] to see how they [the students] will do if they go onto a university because of this lab school experience.

Eliminating pacing guides allowed for expanded teacher leadership in decision-making for individual student needs. This provided opportunities for students to participate in targeted academic enrichment strategies and small group instruction. One parent noted, "Her reading is off the wall. She was reading at a barely middle first-grade level coming in as a second-grader and since this is a literacy-based lab school they focus on where she needs to be." Furthermore, students were in direct contact with university professors and the reading department and had the opportunity to visit the main university campus. Students attending the lab school can participate in formal graduation ceremonies as fifth

graders, receiving their "first" diplomas from the university. They also learn from student council members at the university level about the election process and duties of the council at an earlier stage in their academic careers. Attendance at university homecoming events, lunch with the chancellor, and tours of the university bookstore and campus grounds are examples of ways students are exposed to university life.

Research Question 4: What Are the Perceived Areas of Strengths and/or Challenges That Exist Between the Community-Based LEA and the Newly Formed Lab School?

The findings related to Research Question 4 identified three major strengths and three major challenges for the lab school (see Tables 4 and 5 respectively) and several strengths (see Table 6) and a few challenges for the community-based partnership (see Table 7).

Strengths of the University Lab School

Major strengths of the lab school include (a) new curriculum development, (b) direct support from the university, and (c) feeling positive about the lab school environment. Across all participant strands, 60% of teachers and 66% of lab school leaders identified the new curriculum as a strength. The findings showed that the new curriculum and direct support from the university were extremely positive elements within the lab school and indicated a positive perception of the lab school environment; this was unanimously reflected by lab school leaders (100%). All of the lab school leaders along with 75% of LEA/community partners identified "direct support from the university partnership" as a significant strength of the lab school. One participant noted, "The university invested a lot of time and money despite the district not cooperating." Participants also felt the school administration leading the lab school was supportive. As

stated by one participant, “To me, the school being so successful, the teachers, staff, and administration and the work of the principal and director of curriculum is empowering.”

In terms of university partnerships and support for K-12 institutions, literature identifies working together as a benefit in that they support opportunities for preservice candidates to explore real-world applications of teaching while allowing schools additional resources for exposing students to richer experiences gained through collaborative approaches to teaching and learning (Gimbel, 2018). As students engage more in school-based activities and opportunities, they and their peers develop a deeper sense of self and community, which in turn adds to a sense of shared vision (Council for Children’s Rights, 2019).

Challenges of the University Lab School

Across participant groups, three themes emerged from the data analysis regarding challenges of the lab school. These themes included (a) a lack of resources as an independent lab school (67% of lab school leaders and 40% of teachers), (b) a lack of diversity of teachers and staff, and (c) limitations of transportation for students (67% of lab school leaders, 50% lab school staff, 50% of community-based LEA partners, and 40% of lab school teachers). Lab school leaders provided additional limitations which included “lack of clear guidance from the legislators regarding roles and responsibilities of the university and the partnering LEA.” Participants communicated, “Weakness comes from lab schools being relatively new and with this new undertaking or legislation signed…without a previous model” and “forcing lab schools to be responsible for framing the identity or advertise it in a way that people would know what it is capable of being or the specific services offered.” As the undertaking of the lab school progressed,

the newly established lab school principal and school administrators, under the guidance and direction of university leaders, were under a pressed timeline for numerous school logistics. One participant noted,

> When the universities are partnering to open a lab school, it would be better to gather a pool of people to develop best practices at least 6 months to 1 year before opening the lab school. You won't have as many hiccups.

Some examples for decision-making that occurred as the school was opening included enrollment and marketing for students, lab-staff understanding legislative guidelines and the partnership memorandum of agreement, negotiating district support for child nutrition, building fees and transportation, hiring and salary matching for teachers transferring from the district, staff/teacher training, establishing school guidelines, arranging transportation, and providing parents with information and understanding that this was a stand-alone school and not a district school. In a lab school, there are additional responsibilities that are required of the principal.

For the principal, learning fiscal and human resource management under university guidelines provided a learning curve without the university finance team understanding policies for funding sources for K-12 schools identified as Title I and low performing and the mandates related to federal funding. Principals of traditional schools are not responsible for writing grants, performing duties of the director for exceptional children's services, or for attending state-level meetings on finance or legal requirements and are not required to seek funding opportunities for school operations. Forty percent of teachers reported a lab school weakness as the "exceptional children's team/staff lacks support."

Literature reflects the benefits of a diverse staff on diverse students. One study concluded that in classrooms where students share gender and/or racial characteristics with their teachers, students felt happy and cared for and were more motivated to learn and to communicate more with their teacher. Students also reported putting forth more personal effort and an increased desire to attend college (Boser, 2011). For the lab school, lacking diversity in staff was identified as a weakness. Participants noted, "coming from the university, we have Whites to rescue low-performing school with mostly Black and Brown children and low-income school with mostly children of color" and "for these students, they need to see people who look like them; a more diverse staff would go far."

Data from the study identified transportation as a challenge and limitation for the lab school. Participants responded that the lab school lacked control over transportation for students who were enrolled as well as potential families who desired to attend but had no means outside of the lab school providing this accommodation. Participants commented on this challenge, stating, "Transportation was an obstacle for parents and administrators and had the partnership been more planned and opened, we wouldn't have had that issue. Lack of planning makes it so much worse" and "It [transportation]seems like it is out of our control. I know when before COVID started, we had issues with kids not being picked up. Students at homeless shelters had trouble getting picked up even before the year of COVID." Literature identifies the reliance of low-income families on public transportation. Low-income working families rely on public transportation to access work and the many life tasks that are required to maintain employment, such as traveling to childcare providers, obtaining medical care, and job training sites (Zhao & Gustafson, 2013). Consequently, the disparity lies in the location of basic amenities and

the areas in which low-income families reside. Access to transportation has become limited as the majority of low-income households live in rural and central cities, while basic amenities are increasingly located in the suburbs (Criden, 2008). Lab school parents could enroll students from across the county. Transportation was intended, by the university and lab school leaders according to the legislation, to be available to those who needed it.

Strengths of Community LEA Partnership

Oddly enough, at least some participants in each group listed transportation as a strength of the partnership between the lab school and the community-based LEA. Fiscally, the lab school benefited from reliance upon the partnering LEA for bus transportation for enrolled students; however, it should be noted that some participants found the reliance upon the partnering LEA to be a hindrance to enrolled families who lived outside of zoned areas designated for the lab school students. Additionally, the community partners expressed that the provision of equipment and technology were strengths in that these resources were made available for lab school staff and students to access.

Challenges of the Community/LEA Partnership

Across participant groups, two common themes emerged: (a) no involvement/no true partnership and (b) transportation. According to the data, no involvement/no true partnership was the most significant factor in the lack of success of a community-based LEA partnership with the lab school. There was agreement of lab school teachers (100%) with lab school leaders (67%) that “no involvement/no true partnership” was the greatest challenge of the partnership. Participants noted, “If we had more support and structure

from the district, other administrative structures in place, people you can visit with, an administration…it would be a benefit" and "the university didn't have the experience running a school and the district didn't know how to tell them…the state not providing a lot of guidance, there was a lot of confusion." Teachers shared similar perceptions: "There is a disconnect [between the district and the lab school], a bill for two teachers [lab school] to attend a district training and supposed to be partnering." According to Russell (2009), where communities participate, improvements to school facilities, increased accountability among school personnel, and improved capacity of participants exist. Russell further identified partnerships as important factors leading to increased student access, retention, and academic performance of students. The lab school is designed to improve student learning and foster whole child development for at-risk students. By engaging with a vested partner, such as a community-based LEA, the lab school would be better equipped to serve the needs of the population they serve.

Transportation as a weakness of the partnership was cited by 67% of lab school leaders and 50% of the lab school staff. This at times prevented families from remaining enrolled, while waiting for approved bus stops or due to a lack of adequate transportation to arrive at designated hubs within the county. Families had to find another school to enroll in that met the guidelines (zoning) of the partnering district after children were introduced to the lab school culture. One participant reported, "It [the partnership] makes the lab school have to conform because there were several things the lab school wanted to do but couldn't because of lack of transportation." Literature supports this correlation of the need for transportation access for lower-income families and their ability to access schools of choice. Cities nationwide have adopted policies allowing families to opt into

school choice, including schools outside of their neighborhoods. Providing this type of access extends increased chances for at-risk students to attend high-quality schools. Accessibility depends largely on the ability of the parents to get their children to these locations. Families without reliable transportation suffer because it lessens the opportunities to make high-quality schools a viable option and can create new challenges as a result (Urban Institute, 2017).

Conclusions

In evaluating the results of the data collected for this study, the results for each research question indicate New Beginnings university lab school benefits do align with the cumulative strands of data. The conclusions from this study include the following:

1. University involvement in teacher professional development has had a positive impact on teacher development and instructional practices. This includes providing resources for teachers to participate in professional development with university professors as well as training offered by outside resources, regionally and abroad. Thus, it is worth noting teacher confidence in the use of new curriculum and instructional resources were areas where they felt more supported in comparison to previous experiences within traditional school settings.
2. Findings in this study illustrated that the culture of the school deepened staff relationships and student and parent engagement and provided a true sense of community for lab school stakeholders. Further research could be done to analyze true partnership efforts between lab schools and community partners.
3. Students are able to learn and grow with the innovative practices utilized by

teachers, with teachers having the freedom and flexibility to meet students where they are in their learning and thus design lessons specific to addressing gaps as identified through formative assessment tools designed and supported by the university. As a result, parents feel a sense of satisfaction with the lab school curriculum, teacher communication and feedback, and student achievement outcomes.

4. Students are exposed to a variety of experiential learning opportunities through field trips, visits to the university campus, and involvement in campus activities as well as exposure to authors, illustrators, and literacy projects offering increased exposure to reading and writing.
5. Lab school and community-based partnership strengths included the use of technology and Internet resources and access to child nutrition and some transportation services, yet challenges as identified through the analysis of the data also presented transportation issues and limitations in the flexibility and creativity for the lab school programming and revealed limited collaboration efforts involving the lab school and the LEA.

Implications of the Study

The primary focus of this study was to determine whether a lab school is more effective than a traditional school setting and if it has a greater impact on student achievement and the overall school culture. As the researcher, it was concluded that while there were some differences in perceptions among the five participant groups, overall, the perceptions across groups were relatively similar regarding the major strands that emerged from the collected data.

The results of this study support the efforts of the state's higher education systems to create university lab school partnerships with local school districts to promote evidence-based teaching and school leadership while offering real-world experience to the next generation of teachers and principals (UNC System, 2021). The concept that teachers and students thrive in an environment that is reflected in the lab school experience in terms of providing resources and exposure for students to life outside of neighborhood experiences and smaller class sizes is supported in this study. Furthermore, this study yielded findings that participants flourish when instructional needs are met through engaging curriculum, meaningful professional growth opportunities, consistent and supportive feedback from teaching staff for students, and feeling a sense of community.

The findings identified a need for increased diversity among teachers and increasing collaboration and transportation for students who would benefit from a lab school setting. It was also noted that more support for a lab school is necessary as a stand-alone school in order to provide optimal support and resources for school administrators, exceptional children's staff, and support specialists. These findings also provide both theoretical and practical implications for all who are in the field of innovative schools for primary and secondary education.

For Those in the Field of Education

The implications are as follows:

1. This study has shown that factors such as flexibility in the pacing of teaching the curriculum and support for professional development in areas in which teachers are lacking must be addressed.

2. It is also important that the school maintains open communication with families to provide relevant and timely feedback on student progress; this creates more effective outcomes for improving achievement for at-risk students.
3. University lab school practices yield high stakeholder satisfaction and engagement. This is due to teacher autonomy, creating a sense of community, and exposing at-risk students to diverse learning opportunities to provide context and self-efficacy for lifelong learning through college and career readiness.

Furthermore, it should be noted that more diversity among staff and increasing opportunities for collaboration with community partners were items to improve upon in terms of providing effective practices for promoting student achievement. Consequently, this study showed that providing more exposure for at-risk students to the arts, university life, literacy, and social interaction with adults and peers creates learners who are more engaged and interested in school.

For Institutes of Higher Learning

The findings revealed various perspectives and viewpoints from participants who contributed to this research study. In line with this premise, educators, especially in the fields of education and school administration, should be open to different interpretations other than their own in order to understand the needs of an at-risk student and how to support and develop the whole child. Additional findings revealed that other external factors contribute to the opinions and feelings of overall lab school effectiveness and contributions to the lab school/LEA partnership. Therefore, it would be in the best

interest of the students if teachers and counselors understand the needs of students and families of at-risk populations. It has been echoed throughout the data analyzed that university support provides resources and advanced learning opportunities for students, staff, teachers, and school leaders. Benefits include working with university professors for curriculum development, experiential learning opportunities for students and teachers, and the creation of a broader scope of the role of school leadership through management of human and fiscal capital.

Recommendations for Further Studies

This study contributes to the understanding of lab school practices that impact teacher development, student achievement, and overall school culture. Limitations of this study included a small cluster of participants (18), the use of only one lab school, and the principal also serving as the researcher; the latter of which may have prevented some participants from being transparent due to the nature of the relationship (employer-employee) between the researcher and some of the participants. Using multiple lab schools and university partnerships would have provided a more in-depth understanding of lab schools and any variations of teaching and learning practices and partnerships employed by multiple units. As the principal, it was obvious in my role as researcher that certain stakeholders could only speak to their understanding of lab school operations, seemingly from the outside looking in. This was most obvious in the responses related to interviews relative to the community-based LEA partnership and the management of lab school operations.

As the study progressed, a few areas surfaced as recommendations for future studies. The recommendations are as follows:

1. An expansion of the research to include other lab schools and lab school principals would be optimal for conclusively identifying what makes a lab school more effective for improving student achievement and in comparison, to the findings in this study. Adding the lens that lab school principals provide could reveal additional data on effective practices in lab schools in relation to traditional schools. Their perspectives could also shed light on the partnership aspect of university support. In this respect, teachers and parents were limited in scope on specific interactions that may or may not occur between the two entities.
2. Additional research around lab school partnerships would benefit educators and institutes of higher learning who have an interest in improving student outcomes.

Overall Summary

Lab schools are intended to support at-risk students in underachieving areas to grow student academic achievement. This study is meaningful in that it pursues the need to identify key components of effective university lab school operations that support innovative approaches and benefits to teaching and learning for advancing academic achievement for at-risk students. This study provides additional knowledge relative to innovative teaching, leading, and learning within a newly formed university lab school in North Carolina.

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Appendix A

Confidentiality Statements/Information Forms

Dear Lab School Leader,

I want to thank you for considering participation in this research study. Your assistance would be truly appreciated.

This research project is for my dissertation on Transitional Leadership Considerations for Lab School Implementation in Partnership with an Urban School District in North Carolina. The purpose of this study is to evaluate if operating a lab school is more effective and has a larger impact on student achievement and overall school culture. This study has an aim of improving academic outcomes for at-risk students by providing insight and suggestions on non-traditional methods to frame lab school use of evidence-based practices of teaching, learning and leadership. To better understand the perceptions of lab school teaching and learning outcomes, a diverse group of participants have been invited to be included in this study.

Participants in this study have experience and/or familiarity with at-risk student populations, at-risk school settings including the climate and culture of those who receive services, and teach or lead within a lab school setting. This data can play an essential role in improving preparation programs, professional development, recruitment, and retention and expansion of innovative teaching, learning and leadership practices that support student achievement.

There is no known risk in participating in this qualitative study. Confidentiality will be ensured by a coding system created by the researcher. No participant's identity will be reported, and all participants have the right to withdraw or refuse to participate without penalty.

An interview will be conducted with each participant via face-to-face and/or virtual conferencing and will last approximately 15-30 minutes per session. A second interview will take place if more information might benefit the research or if the participant requests a follow-up interview.

Upon receiving a response from you to this email, I will contact you regarding your participation in the study. An Informed Consent Form will be provided to you with further details of the study.

If you are interested in receiving data results after the study concludes, you may contact me, Tasha Hall-Powell at XXXXXX. Thank you for your participation. What is learned in this study can improve: (1) student outcomes, (2) school cultures, (3) teacher and principal preparation programs and (4) professional development, therefore your responses are valuable.

Tasha Hall-Powell
Doctoral Candidate
Gardner-Webb University

Dear Lab School Staff,

I want to thank you for considering participation in this research study. Your assistance would be truly appreciated.

This research project is for my dissertation on Transitional Leadership Considerations for Lab School Implementation in Partnership with an Urban School District in North Carolina. The purpose of this study is to evaluate if operating a lab school is more effective and has a larger impact on student achievement and overall school culture. This study has an aim of improving academic outcomes for at-risk students by providing insight and suggestions on non-traditional methods to frame lab school use of evidence-based practices of teaching, learning and leadership. To better understand the perceptions of lab school teaching and learning outcomes, a diverse group of participants have been invited to be included in this study.

Participants in this study have experience and/or familiarity with at-risk student populations, at-risk school settings including the climate and culture of those who receive services, and teach, work within a lab school setting. This data can play an essential role in improving preparation programs, professional development, recruitment, and retention and expansion of innovative teaching, learning and leadership practices that support student achievement.

There is no known risk in participating in this qualitative study. I want to ensure your anonymity and confidentiality. Confidentiality will be ensured by a coding system created by the researcher. No participant's identity will be reported, and all participants have the right to withdraw or refuse to participate without penalty.

An interview will be conducted with each participant via face-to-face and/or virtual conferencing and will last approximately 15-30 minutes per session. A second interview will take place if more information might benefit the research or if the participant requests a follow-up interview.

Upon receiving a response from you to this email, I will contact you regarding your participation in the study. An Informed Consent Form will be provided to you with further details of the study.

If you are interested in receiving data results, you may contact me, Tasha Hall-Powell at thallpowell@gardner-webb.edu. Thank you for your participation. What is learned in this study can improve: (1) student outcomes, (2) school cultures, (3) teacher and principal preparation programs and (4) professional development, therefore your responses are valuable.

Tasha Hall-Powell
Doctoral Candidate
Gardner-Webb University

Dear Lab School Parent,

I want to thank you for considering participation in this research study. Your assistance would be truly appreciated.

This research project is for my dissertation on Transitional Leadership Considerations for Lab School Implementation in Partnership with an Urban School District in North Carolina. The purpose of this study is to evaluate if operating a lab school is more effective and has a larger impact on student achievement and overall school culture. This study has an aim of improving academic outcomes for at-risk students by providing insight and suggestions on non-traditional methods to frame lab school use of evidence-based practices of teaching, learning and leadership. To better understand the perceptions of lab school teaching and learning outcomes, a diverse group of participants have been invited to be included in this study.

Parental participation is essential in the efforts to assess the impact of the lab school experience; thus participation of parents is extremely important and beneficial to this process. This study will only be conducted with adults. This data can play an essential role in improving preparation programs, professional development, recruitment, and retention and expansion of innovative teaching, learning and leadership practices that support student achievement.

There is no known risk in participating in this qualitative study. I want to ensure your anonymity and confidentiality. Confidentiality will be ensured by a coding system created by the researcher. No participant's identity will be reported, and all participants have the right to withdraw or refuse to participate without penalty.

An interview will be conducted with each participant via face-to-face and/or virtual conferencing and will last approximately 15-30 minutes per session. A second interview will take place if more information might benefit the research or if the participant requests a follow-up interview.

Upon receiving a response from you to this email, I will contact you regarding your participation in the study. An Informed Consent Form will be provided to you with further details of the study.

If you are interested in receiving data results, you may contact me, Tasha Hall-Powell at thallpowell@gardner-webb.edu. Thank you for your participation. What is learned in this study can improve: (1) student outcomes, (2) school cultures, (3) teacher and principal preparation programs and (4) professional development, therefore your responses are valuable.

Tasha Hall-Powell
Doctoral Candidate
Gardner-Webb University

Dear Lab School Community Partner,

I want to thank you for considering participation in this research study. Your assistance would be truly appreciated.

This research project is for my dissertation on Transitional Leadership Considerations for Lab School Implementation in Partnership with an Urban School District in North Carolina. The purpose of this study is to evaluate if operating a lab school is more effective and has a larger impact on student achievement and overall school culture. This study has an aim of improving academic outcomes for at-risk students by providing insight and suggestions on non-traditional methods to frame lab school use of evidence-based practices of teaching, learning and leadership. To better understand the perceptions of lab school teaching and learning outcomes, a diverse group of participants have been invited to be included in this study.

Community partner participation is essential in the efforts to assess the impact of the lab school experience; thus, participation of our community partners is extremely important and beneficial to this process. This data can play an essential role in improving preparation programs, professional development, recruitment, and retention and expansion of innovative teaching, learning and leadership practices that support student achievement.

This data can play an essential role in improving preparation programs, professional development, recruitment, and retention and expansion of innovative teaching, learning and leadership practices that support student achievement.

There is no known risk in participating in this qualitative study. I want to ensure your anonymity and confidentiality. Confidentiality will be ensured by a coding system created by the researcher. No participant's identity will be reported, and all participants have the right to withdraw or refuse to participate without penalty.

An interview will be conducted with each participant via face-to-face and/or virtual conferencing and will last approximately 15-30 minutes per session. A second interview will take place if more information might benefit the research or if the participant requests a follow-up interview.

Upon receiving a response from you to this email, I will contact you regarding your participation in the study. An Informed Consent Form will be provided to you with further details of the study.

If you are interested in receiving data results, you may contact me, Tasha Hall-Powell at thallpowell@gardner-webb.edu. Thank you for your participation. What is learned in this study can improve: (1) student outcomes, (2) school cultures, (3) teacher and principal preparation programs and (4) professional development, therefore your responses are valuable.

Tasha Hall-Powell
Doctoral Candidate
Gardner-Webb University

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study
Transitional Leadership Considerations for Lab School Implementation in Partnership with an Urban School District in North Carolina.

Researcher
Tasha Hall-Powell, Educational Leadership

Purpose
The purpose of this qualitative study is to provide insight into the inner workings of an innovative university lab school in North Carolina, as it works with at-risk primary age children in a failing school in partnership with a low-performing public school district. This study aims to assess the lab school impact of evidence-based teaching, learning and school leadership while offering real-world experiences for future teachers and principals.

Participants
Lab School Administrators, District partners, University professors and leaders, Lab school teachers, staff and parents of students attending the lab school

Procedure
What you will do in the study: Lab School Administrators, District partners, University professors and leaders, Lab school teachers and parents of students attending the lab school will be invited to complete a two-session interview session via an email invitation that includes the invitation to participate/informed consent form. After one week, a reminder email will be sent to all participants.

Participants will have one week to respond to the interview request after the email reminder has been sent. Upon receipt of the email, this will serve as the participants informed consent to participate in this study.

Step 1: The participants of the study will be provided with an explanation of the purpose of the study.
Step 2: Once the participants are provided with the purpose of the study, the interview procedure and process will be explained.
Step 3: A semi-structured interview will be conducted with the participants which will allow themes and trends to emerge from the set of interview questions presented. Semi-structured interviews are flexible interviews that begin with a predetermined set of questions but may add or replace questions based on the flow of the interview and what information is given during the interview.
Step 4: The participants will respond to a series of six questions. These questions will focus on the following areas:

- Potential benefits that result from teaching and learning in a university lab school setting;
- Support system processes for students and families enrolled in a university lab school;
- Impact of a lab school on low-performing students;

- Perceived strengths and/or challenges that impact lab school initiatives in partnership with community based Local Education Agency (LEA).

Step 5: Each participant will provide their responses to the questions over a one or two session interview process. The initial interview session will provide the participants an opportunity to respond to the six interview questions. The second interview session, if needed, will provide the participant the opportunity to discuss and provide further qualitative feedback relative to the initial six interview questions. The participant can provide anecdotal feedback that will be utilized by the researcher using the narrative analysis research design to extract common trends and themes noted.
Step 6: Once the participants' responses have been provided, the researcher will analyze the responses through a coding process to identify trends and themes that emerge from the interview sessions.
Step 7: A narrative research design will be utilized to determine common themes and trends identified during the interview process. A narrative analysis approach focuses on gathering data through a collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual.

Time Required
It is anticipated that this study will be conducted over one or two interview sessions with an allotted time of about 15-20 minutes per session.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without liability. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data, which has been collected, be destroyed unless it is in an unidentified state.

Confidentiality
Confidentiality will be maintained by discussing with participants the method for data collection and the assurance that what is collected will remain confidential to the greatest extent possible. As the researcher, I will protect confidentiality by keeping notes on participants, using coding for names. Participants will be coded by a number system without revealing actual names within the study. A log will be kept on who is associated with the number assigned solely for the purpose of tracking the data and its source. Information will be disclosed to participants prior to participating on how data will be collected, how data will be shared, and how data will be disposed.

In this study:

1. Data will be collected through journaling and recording of accounts and day-to-day happenings within the lab school based on the interviews of participants in the study.

2. Data will be shared in a detailed report at the conclusion of the study without exposure of participant names or identifiable information that could reveal who they are in the study.
3. Data collected will be kept by me on external drive which will be maintained in a secured file cabinet for a span of 3 years after final publication of the study.
4. Data collected for this study will be disposed of after a 3-year period by shredding journals and deleting audio recordings and electronic files that contain any and all personal data from participants.

The data will be shared with the university in a written summary report at the conclusion of the study. Participants may email me to request a copy of the written summary report.

Data Linked with Identifying Information
The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Anonymous Data
Only the researcher will know the names of the participants in this study, thereby making the identification of these participants anonymous to any other parties. The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be confidential, which means that your name will not be included or linked to the data but will be replaced by a participant number.

Risks
There are no anticipated risks in this study. No impact on employment or career status will occur by participating or choosing not to participate. In this study.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. This study has the potential to improve academic outcomes for at-risk students by providing insight and suggestions to non-traditional methods to frame lab school use of nontraditional methods of teaching, learning and leadership. This proposed study seeks to contribute to the body of research and to provide advocacy for ensuring that students existing in at-risk educational environments have the resources to be successful across the academic curriculum, therefore your responses are extremely valuable.

Payment
You will receive no payment for participating in the study; snacks or a meal or a meal card may be provided during the interview sessions.

Right to Withdraw from the Study
You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

How to Withdraw from the Study

If you want to withdraw from the study before completing the interview, you do not have to participate. If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact the researcher, Tasha Hall-Powell, by email at thallpowell@gardner-webb.edu, and request that your data be removed from the study's results.

Voluntary Consent by Participant

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had an opportunity to ask any questions concerning this study, and they have been answered for me.

_____ I agree to participate in the confidential interview or interviews.

_____ I do not agree to participate in the confidential interview.

_____ Date: _____

Participant Printed Name

_____ Date: _____

Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix C

Participant Interview Questions

Lab School Staff Questionnaire

1. As a classroom teacher providing instruction to students at a lab school, please describe some benefits for your teaching practice?
2. What do you perceive as benefits for students regarding differential learning styles and instruction who attend a lab school?
3. What are some specific teacher support strategies that you have participated in as a teacher at a lab school that differs from the traditional school district?
4. What perceived benefits regarding student academic growth have you recorded as a teacher at a low performing lab school?
5. What do you see as perceived strengths that impact lab school and community based local education agency (LEA) partnerships and school initiatives?
6. What do you see as perceived weaknesses that impact lab school and community based local education agency (LEA) partnerships and school initiatives?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience with the lab school that you feel would benefit this study?

Lab School Leaders Questionnaire

1. What do you feel are benefits of working in a lab school as opposed to a traditional K-5 public school? Weaknesses?
2. How has working in a university led lab school setting impacted the specific work you do for and with the lab school teachers and support staff?
3. Describe differences between working with teachers and support staff in a lab school as opposed to a traditional K-5 public school?
4. How effective do you feel lab schools are overall when it comes to growing students and their achievement?
5. In your opinion, how has the community-based LEA and the lab school worked together during the lab school partnership?
6. What do you see as perceived weaknesses that impact lab school and community based local education agency (LEA) partnerships and school initiatives?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience with the lab school that you feel would benefit this study?

Parents of Lab School Students Questionnaire

1. What do you think have been benefits for your student attending a lab school versus a traditional public school?
2. What do you perceive as benefits for the classroom and learning environment for your student attending a lab school versus a traditional public school?
3. How beneficial and accessible have teachers been when providing feedback regarding your student's academic performance?
4. What perceived benefits have you observed regarding your student's academic growth since attending the lab school?
5. What perceived strengths have you observed that impact the effectiveness of a lab school versus a traditional public school?
6. What perceived weaknesses have you observed that impact the effectiveness of a lab school versus a traditional public school?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience with the lab school that you feel would benefit this study?

Lab School Community and LEA Partners Questionnaire

1. How has working with a university led lab school setting impacted the specific work you do for and with the lab school students, teachers and leaders?
2. What do you see as perceived strengths that impact lab school and community based local education agency (LEA) partnerships and school initiatives?
3. What do you see as perceived weaknesses that impact lab school and community based local education agency (LEA) partnerships and school initiatives?
4. How has the partnership between the university lab school and the local LEA impacted the oversight of operations, transportation and child nutrition services?
5. Describe the overall impact of community-based LEA and lab school partnership as it relates to improving student outcomes?
6. What advice would you offer for implementation of a partnership with a university led lab school?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience with the lab school that you feel would benefit this study?