PRINCIPAL DECISION-MAKING AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

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A Capstone Project

Presented to

The Faculty of the Curry School of Education

University of Virginia

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Education

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By

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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There has been a long association between student participation in extracurricular activities (ECAs) and improved academic performance, motivation, and social/emotional adjustment (Fredericks & Simpkins, 2011; Simpkins, Vest, Delgado, & Price, 2012). Participation in extracurricular activities, however, is not equitable across racial groups. Research demonstrates that minority student participation is often lower than White students (Simpkins, Vest, Delgado, & Price, 2012). This capstone project examined middle school principals' perceptions and decision-making practices regarding extracurricular activities in order to identify factors influencing principal decision-making. Additionally, this study explored how middle school principals' beliefs about the significance of ECA programs and how they factor into the amount of time and resources they devote to their organization and whether these actions lead to increased participation for students of color.

The literature used to frame this study examined practices associated with effective leadership, the construct of connectedness, and the vast research on benefits of student participation in ECAs. Due to the emphasis in the study on ECA participation rates for students of color, literature discussing implications for participation rates for minority students and barriers to ECA participation were also explored.

This mixed-methods study was conducted from October – December 2016 in Walker County Public Schools (a pseudonym), located in a Mid-Atlantic state. This

district is the largest in the state and one of the largest in the United States with students representing over 150 countries and speaking over 130 languages. Lipsky's theory of street-level bureaucracy (2010) was used as a conceptual framework to examine principal discretion in decision-making and how decisions are made regarding extracurricular activities.

Data were collected through a middle school principal survey, principal and assistant principal interviews. A district-level leader was also interviewed. In addition, a review of the schools' and district webpages was conducted to analyze documents related to ECAs. Findings addressed how principal beliefs about extracurricular activities align with their decision-making and the implications of those decisions on students of color. The data revealed insights into how principals make decisions regarding middle school extracurricular programs in WCPS. When making decisions about ECAs, principals use their discretion to offer programs that respond to student interests and staff availability to serve as sponsors. Though principals believe student involvement in clubs and activities after school may have positive benefits, systematic processes differ from school to school. Furthermore, there are little to no district-wide monitoring processes to assess the participation rates for students thereby providing inconsistent equitable access to after school opportunities for students of color.

Based on these findings and the literature on ECAs, connectedness, and effective leadership practices the following recommendations were made:

1. Principals should be directly involved in ECA decision-making. It is at the principal's discretion to designate another leader such as an assistant principal to

lead the daily logistics of the after school program. However, regular
communication and data dialogues are necessary to ensure success.

2. Middle school principals should establish school-based processes to collect and
monitor student participation data. This data should be analyzed regularly and be
used to inform the types of clubs and activities offered at each school and
determine the level of engagement of students of color.

3. WCPS needs to re-evaluate allocation of funds for ECAs. It would benefit school
programs if sponsor stipends were significantly increased. Equitable distribution
of funds will assist schools who do not have active PTA or grant funding to aid in
their ECA offerings. Furthermore, the district should explore opportunities for
expanding current ECA partnerships or pursuing additional, large-scale grant
funding to support middle school programs.

Key words: *extracurricular activities, street-level bureaucracy, principal decision-making*

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APPROVAL OF THE CAPSTONE PROJECT

This capstone project, "Principal Decision-Making and Extracurricular Activities," has
been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Capstone Chair, Michelle D. Young, Ph.D.

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Capstone Committee Member, Pamela D. Tucker, Ed.D.

_____Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mom for being my biggest cheerleader and number one fan.
Thank you for your unending love and support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

along the way. Emily, Julia, Marjie, and Rachel, thank you for your friendship and for helping me stay balanced during this process.

Finally, "To forget one's ancestors is to be a brook without a source, a tree without a root" (Proverb). My heartfelt thanks to those on whose shoulders I stand.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the United States, 57 percent of students ages six through 17 annually

participate in at least one extracurricular activity (ECA) (US Census Bureau, 2014).

These activities, which include school-based programs such as music, theatre, sports

teams, and student government, mostly occur after the end of the regular school day

(Simpkins, Vest, Delgado, & Price, 2012; US Census Bureau, 2014). There has been a

long association between student participation in ECAs and improved academic

performance, motivation, and social/emotional adjustment (Fredericks & Simpkins, 2011;

Simpkins, Vest, Delgado, & Price, 2012). Research studies have noted benefits to

student involvement in school-based ECAs including improved academic identity,

student engagement, feelings of connectedness to the school, and higher graduation and

college attendance rates (Fredericks & Simpkins, 2011).

Participation in extracurricular activities, however, is not equitable across racial

groups. Research demonstrates that minority student participation is often lower than

White students (Simpkins, Vest, Delgado, & Price, 2012). Research also provides some

insight into the reasons behind the participation gap that exists between students of color

and white students (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010; Simpkins et

al., 2012). In addition to the limited availability of activities in the schools where large

populations of students of color attend, Feldman and Matjasko (2005) noted that a lack of

family resources, which can be due to costs associated with the activities and/or increased

familial responsibilities, can serve as an inhibiting factor for adolescents' participation in

extracurricular activities. Furthermore, research on minority and low-income adolescent participation in ECAs is limited. The lack of research on this topic is noteworthy due to the assumption that participation in ECAs will lead to positive outcomes for students of color (Mahoney, Harris, & Eccles, 2006; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010).

Though the literature notes benefits of ECA participation for all students, little is known about the perceptions of principals regarding student involvement in after-school programs. This study was designed to investigate how middle school principals make decisions regarding ECA programs. This chapter includes a description of the problem of practice and discusses the background, purpose and rationale for the study. The information in this chapter will also provide a preview of the research questions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations pertaining to this study.

Background

Walker County Public Schools (WCPS), located in a Mid-Atlantic state, covers over 400 square miles of a large metropolitan area on the East Coast. It is the largest school district in the state and one of the largest in the United States. WCPS is a diverse system with students representing over 150 countries and speaking over 130 different languages. The student demographic breakdown for the 2015-2016 school year was approximately: 30% White, 14% Asian, 22% Black or African American, and 29% Hispanic or Latino. As more African American and Hispanic families moved into the county, the system's demographics shifted from approximately 95% White in 1970 to 30% White today.

WCPS has had the longstanding mission to ensure the academic and social/emotional success of every student. Equity is one of the school system's core values and their strategic plan states that they believe outcomes and student performance

should not be predictable by race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. As mentioned earlier, a noted national research trend is that African American and Latino students are underrepresented in ECA participation. This participation gap may lead to the assumption that students of color are not taking advantage of school-based clubs, activities, and sports after school at the same rates as their White classmates. Given the potential for positive outcomes for minority students participating in ECAs, school systems such as WCPS may benefit from knowing more about the availability and levels of student participation in extracurricular activities as well as factors affecting both availability and participation.

Effective educational leaders have the potential to impact student achievement and engagement in school (Leithwood et al., 2004; Sun & Leithwood, 2012). The effect of positive school leadership on student success is second only to the impact of having a high-quality teacher in the classroom (Balter & Duncomb, 2008; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) explained that effective principals create strong communities in schools:

> A strong sense of affiliation and caring among all students and adults in a school is crucial to engaging and motivating students to learn. This is especially true in school settings where trust and cohesion have been low. School leaders help develop a sense of community in their schools by establishing communal cultures and structures… (p. 9)

Studies have found that effective school leadership influences student engagement and student participation in school. In the Leadership for Organizational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) model, more student engagement and student participation in school lead to higher retention rates (lower drop-out rates) and better academic performance (Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, & Sleegers, 2012).

According to the WCPS 2018 ECA manual, each school principal is responsible for the overall organizational structure of their school's extracurricular program. The principal has autonomy in the execution of the program in terms of how decisions are made regarding assigning sponsors and resources. Each year, WCPS provides funds to secondary schools for an established number of extracurricular activities and also contributes to an account where principals have access to funds for original clubs and activities (see Table 1). Beyond the provision of funding, there is minimal district involvement and monitoring of how funds are used or which students participate in school sponsored activities. Given the system's goal of eliminating any gaps that exist for students and the positive relationship established in the literature between extracurricular participation and student outcomes, there is a need to analyze principal and district-level leaders' understanding and perceptions concerning these programs and their potential benefits to students.

Table 1

2017-2018 WCPS Middle School Extracurricular Activities and Stipends

Activity	Stipend
Drama	$3,990*
Stage Director	$750
Jazz Ensemble	$1,050
Math Olympiad	$1,425
Newspaper Club	$1,500
Student Government Association	$3,150
Boys/Girls Basketball	$1,230
Boys/Girls Soccer	$1,215
Boys/Girls Softball	$1,155
Co-Ed Cross Country	$953
Intramural Sports Director**	$930
Intramural Coordinator	$900

Note. *Stipend for two productions
   **Each school receives an allocation to fund five intramural sports

Problem of Practice and Rationale

A report completed by the Office of Legislative Oversight regarding youth and work in WCPS found that approximately 8,000 youth are disconnected or weakly connected to school (The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region and Betah Associates, 2015). Moreover, the study found that Black and African American youth in the county are three times more likely to be disconnected. Research shows a strong correlation between student participation in ECAs and school connectedness; however, middle school principals in the district have access to limited information about students of color participation in extracurricular activities, which limits their ability to leverage the benefits of involvement for these students. With limited information and competing priorities, principals use discretion to determine how much emphasis will be placed on ECA programs in their schools (Findlay, 2015). As a result, there exists the potential for inconsistencies in program implementation and equitable access to clubs and activities for all students, specifically for students of color.

Purpose of Study

This capstone project examined middle school principals' perceptions and decision-making practices regarding extracurricular activities in order to identify factors influencing principal decision-making. Additionally, this study explored how principals' beliefs about the significance of ECA programs factor into the amount of time and resources they devote to their organization. The study's results and recommendations will be presented to WCPS middle school principals and executive staff. A goal of this study was to heighten district-level awareness of varying levels of extracurricular program implementation in middle schools.

Research Questions

To better understand middle school principals' decision-making regarding ECAs, the following research questions were used:

- Question 1: What are the principal's beliefs, goals and values with regards to ECAs?

    o Question 1.2: How do principals measure the success of the ECA program and its connection to student engagement?

- Question 2: How are decisions made about ECAs?

    o Question 2.2: What processes are used to make decisions about ECAs?

    o Question 2.3: What does the principal consider when making decisions about ECAs?

    o Question2.4: What influences a principal's decision regarding ECA programming?

- Question 3: What is the level of involvement of the district in school-based ECA decision making?

Methodology

WCPS has a total of 41 middle schools with a variety of student populations and needs (only 39 middle schools existed in the district at the time of data collection). All 39 middle school principals were invited to complete a survey about their beliefs and practices for extracurricular activities. In addition, I interviewed principals at four middle schools with varying demographics and years of experience. The interviews focused on principal beliefs and decision-making practices around extracurricular activity programming and its role in providing students with opportunities to connect to the

school. Assistant principals who were designated by the principal to supervise ECA programs were also interviewed.

The district's annual Gallup survey on student engagement was used to gain general information about system-wide trends of student engagement. WCPS partnered with Gallup in 2012 to create a survey to measure employee and student engagement. The goal was to use the information gained from this project to help guide the school system's improvement efforts outlined in the strategic plan. According to the WCPS website, "The Gallup student poll is a survey of students in grades five through 12 that measures hope, engagement and well-being- actionable targets linked to student achievement, retention and future employment. Gallup research showed that the more connected students feel to school, the better chance they have of taking advantage of all that schools have to offer." Gallup survey results were publicly released and available online through the district website. These surveys provided background information about the current state of student engagement for the district during the 2014-2015 school year. This survey is no longer being administered in the district but previous results helped establish a rationale for why this study was important.

Finally, I interviewed a district-level leader to gain their perspective on the current state of middle school ECA programs and the role of the principal in implementing these programs. School and district websites were analyzed for documents that referenced extracurricular activities.

Conceptual Framework

In *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (2010), Michael Lipsky explained the significant role public service workers play in policy implementation. In his seminal book, the term "street-level bureaucrats" was used

to describe public service workers who have substantial discretion in how they choose to carry out their work. The principal as a street-level bureaucrat is a useful conceptual framework for this problem of practice. Though the principal is expected to implement district-wide policies and initiatives, she also has the autonomy to decide the most effective way to meet district expectations at her respective school. In this capstone project, street-level bureaucracy was used to examine principal discretion in decision-making and how decisions are made regarding extracurricular activities.

Limitations

Study limitations are potential weaknesses or problems with the study (Creswell, 2011). For the purposes of this research, the limitations include:

- The data for this study were only collected within a single school district located in a Mid-Atlantic state and only taken from four middle schools out of a total of 39 middle schools. Therefore, the lack of generalizability is a limitation due to the sample size selected for data collection.

- The years of experience as a principal varied for each of the interviewees. This is a limitation because the level of experience can influence how principals make decisions and navigate the requirements of the school system.

Assumptions

This study made the following assumptions about student participation in extracurricular activities:

- Principals have the final decision-making authority to decide how ECA programs will be implemented in their schools. The principal ultimately decides how funds and other resources will be allocated and sets the overall vision for the ECA program.

- Students of color are underrepresented in participation of extracurricular activities in WCPS. This assumption is made based on data and findings in the literature which will be presented in more detail in subsequent chapters of the study. This assumption will be challenged through data analysis of principal interviews and sponsor survey results.

- Student participation in extracurricular activities is beneficial and may be related to positive outcomes such as increased engagement and connectedness to the school.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the parameters or boundaries of the study as determined by the researcher (Creswell, 2011). The following delimitations applied to this study:

- High school principals will not be included in this study. The researcher chose to focus on middle school principals' perceptions and practices regarding ECAs due to the noted lack of research on the topic.

- This study will only focus on school-based extracurricular activities. Community and religious activities will not be included in this study because of the focus on the middle school principal and their decision-making.

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Summary

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This capstone project investigated middle school principals' decision-making practices and beliefs regarding extracurricular activities. The problem of practice was derived from a question of whether middle school principals in WCPS have consistency with ECA program implementation and decision-making. Furthermore, principals execute discretion in decision-making regarding ECAs and the overall organization. I

interviewed four principals and other individuals in the school who influence decisions about ECAs to investigate how discretion is used when making decisions about ECAs. In addition, a district-level leader was interviewed to determine the central office's position on the importance of ECAs and the role of the principal in executing these programs. The information gained from this capstone project will be presented to district-level leaders and principals to build awareness of the current state of ECA program implementation at the middle school level.

In the next section, a review of the literature to discover connections between ECAs, student engagement, and principal leadership is provided. Subsequently, the conceptual framework of the principal as a street-level bureaucrat is explained. In chapter three, the research methodology used to design this study is described. Findings and recommended next steps to the problem of practice are presented in chapters four and five.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section will review literature that helps to clarify the following

questions:

- How do effective leadership practices relate to ECA programming in schools?

- What does the literature say about the significance of ECA participation for all

  students? For students of color and low socio-economic status?

- How does ECA participation relate to student connectedness to school and

  social capital?

This capstone project is focused on principal discretionary decision-making

around ECAs. The problem of practice is that middle school principals lack measurable

data on student participation in extracurricular programs and make decisions about these

programs without sufficient information. The literature review is organized into the

following sections:

- Effective Leadership Practices

- The Construct of Connectedness

- Benefits to Participation in Extracurricular Activities

- Participation Rates for Students of Color and Low Socio-Economic Status

- Barriers to Extracurricular Activities Participation

- Summary

Effective Leadership Practices

Principal leadership directly and indirectly affects all aspects of schooling including culture, classroom instruction, and student engagement (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Following a longitudinal study of schools and principals in Chicago, Bryk et al. (2010) developed a framework of essential supports for school success. They stated that "The framework starts with the leader as the driver for change" (p. 64). The principal is responsible for ensuring that all staff are working in collaboration toward a shared vision that will lead to maximized student learning. Principals often employ one of two models of leadership described by political sociologist James MacGregor Burns: transactional and transformational.

> Transactional leadership refers to the bulk of leadership models, which focus on the exchanges that occur between leaders and their followers. In contrast to transactional leadership, transformational leadership is the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower. (Northouse, 2013, p. 186)

According to Burns and other researchers who have studied this topic, transformational leaders motivate their followers to reach higher levels of motivation and morality by "…developing a vision for the organization, developing commitments and trust among workers, and facilitating organizational learning" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005, pp. 177-178). In their literature review, Sun and Leithwood (2012) highlighted 11 practices frequently identified as being characteristic of transformational leadership and listed them in rank order:

1. Developing a shared vision and building goal consensus

2. Providing intellectual stimulation

3. Providing individualized stimulation

4. Modeling behavior

5. Holding high performance expectations

6. Contingent reward

7. Management by exception

8. Building collaborative structures

9. Strengthening school culture

10. Engaging communities

11. Improving the instructional program

Developing a shared vision, building goal consensus, and providing intellectual stimulation are the practices that appear most frequently in the literature. This is another indicator of the value placed on visioning and collaboration for transformational leaders.

Barnett and McCormick (2003) wrote that vision, in the context of leadership, "…refers to an idealized goal that the leader wants the organization to achieve in the future" (pp. 56-57). The authors conducted a case study based on interviews of principals and teachers at four government high schools in New South Wales, Australia. The study drew the following conclusions,

1. Commitment to a shared vision includes leadership practices such as building relationships and collaboration.

2. Vision is an important part of leadership, but evidence from the study suggested that it must reflect the needs, interests, values, and beliefs of the school community.

3. The vision needs to be practical and relevant. Vision by itself is not enough to influence what most teachers actually do on a daily basis.

The authors also expressed that "Many of these teachers suggested that vision did not influence teaching practices or cause them to question teaching practices as suggested" (Barnett & McCormick, 2003, p. 65). The vision is a tool to help leaders focus on achieving school goals. Having a vision for success is an important practice that should be used in conjunction with various others to improve the learning environment.

Licata and Harper (2001) argued that there is a positive relationship between school vision and teacher perception of the overall health of the organization. Research in the article defined school health as "…the organization's ability to successfully adapt to its environment, maintain cohesion among members, and accomplish goals" (Licata & Harper. 2001, p. 10). The authors state that schools are thought to be healthy when teachers are able to observe the principal taking actions to implement the vision such as working with parents and encouraging teachers to try new things. Furthermore, the authors state that a vision should not simply be a lofty goal or something written on a policy manual that is never used. But rather, a robust school vision is, "…a view of a more desirable future that is relatively high in dramatic content for teachers" (Licata & Harper. 2001, p. 9). Once areas in need of growth have been identified, it is up to the leader to make personal connections with other leaders in the building, in addition to the rest of the staff, to implement a plan of action. The actions and the relationships are what actually facilitate change; the vision is what helps the leader realize what needs to be done.

Successful Leadership Practices

According to Leithwood et al. (2004), visioning is also a component of one of three categories of successful leadership practices. These categories, which include

setting directions, developing people, and developing the organization, overlap

significantly with the 11 practices of transformational leaders mentioned earlier.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) summarize the three categories in the following ways:

setting directions, developing people, and developing the organization.

Setting directions. Effective school leaders develop goals based on the needs of

the students and communicate a vision for the future. In order to create investment from

the people following the leader, the vision should be clearly articulated and shared with

all stakeholders. When principals set directions, they monitor organizational performance

by assessing multiple indicators and use that information to drive improvement (Bolman

& Deal, 2013).

Developing people. Bolman and Deal (2013) developed a four-frame model to

help conceptualize all aspects of organizations. The human resource frame emphasized

"…that people's skills, attitudes, energy, and commitment are vital resources that can

make or break an enterprise" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 117). Because effective leaders

value people and their contributing efforts to the organization, they provide

individualized supports, incentives, and structures to help build capacity.

Developing the organization. Effective school leaders pay close attention to all

aspects of the school as an organization and community. These leaders understand the

importance of developing strong school cultures and productive environments for

students and staff. Collaboration with stakeholders, including parents and community

members, is a key part of managing the environment. Transformative leaders "…pursue

positive interactions with the goals of fostering shared meanings, garnering resources,

and support and establishing productive inter-organizational relationships. To effectively

position their schools within their environments, and to respond to legitimate concerns

from parents and others, educational leaders are client-centered, proactive, and focused"

(Leithwood & Riel, 2003, p. 7).

 Bruggencate et al. (2012) developed a model based on relevant research of how

school leader behavior influences the culture and organization of a school (see Figure 1).

This model "…assumes that the school leader indirectly influences academic

performance via his or her influence on the school culture and school organization"

(Bruggencate et al., 2012, p. 707). According to this model, leader influence affects

teachers' work which, in turn, leads to student engagement and higher academic

achievement.
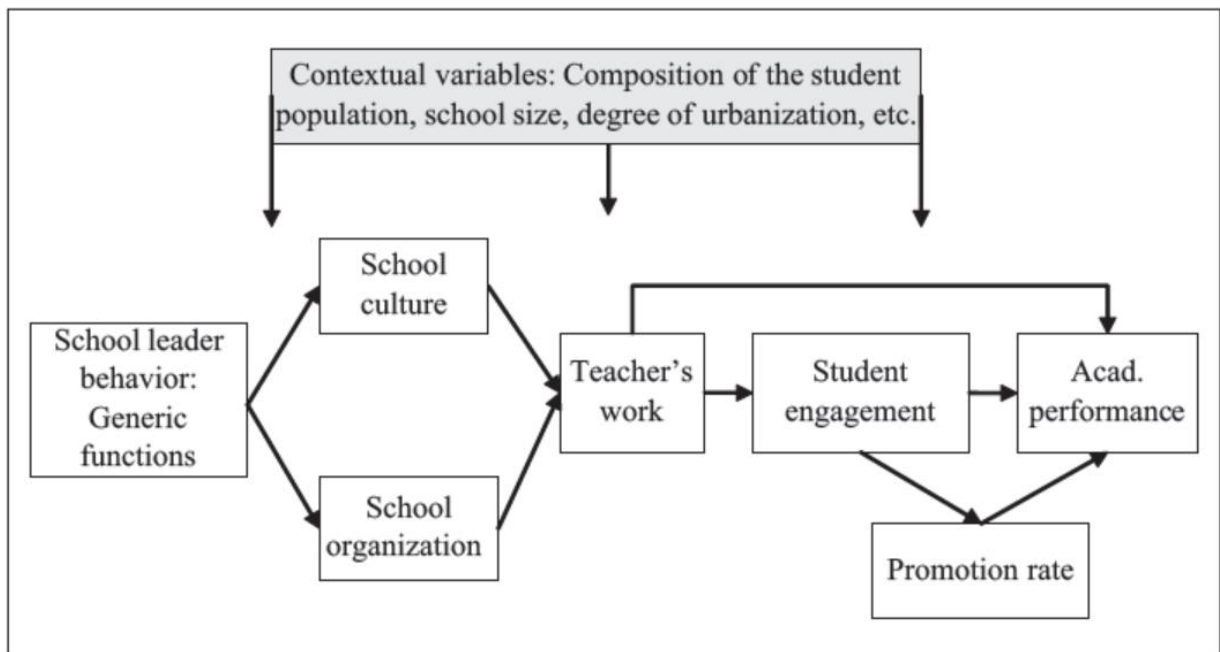
Figure 1. Research Model for Analyzing the Influence of School Leader Behavior
Taken from Bruggencate, G., Luyten, H., Scheerens, J., & Sleegers, P. (2012). Modeling
the influence of school leaders on student achievement: How can school leaders make a
difference? *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(4), 699-732.

Principal Beliefs and Values

A person's beliefs and values inform daily interactions and decision-making. Past research has documented that secondary school principals filter issues through their core values and beliefs prior to making decisions. A mixed-methods study of secondary school principals in the Pacific Northwest by Larsen and Hunter (2014) explored how they use their core values as a "guiding compass" when making daily decisions. The researchers found that patterns in principal decision-making reflected three main core values:

- The needs of the students are the top priority;

- there should be flexibility to meet the demands of variability; and

- relationships are of primary importance.

In relation to the second core value, principals believed they should have the flexibility to make-decisions based on the individual situation and circumstances. The third value about relationships referenced the principals' challenge to consider the impact their decisions have on relationships with various stakeholders.

A study investigating the beliefs and practices of high school principals with large Hispanic student populations supported the finding that principals are committed to making decisions in the best interest of students and building effective relationships (Gerhart, Harris, & Mixon, 2011). Gerhart et al. (2011) reported that the study concluded:

> Effective principals were committed to serving all students regardless of their race or ethnicity. These principals maintained an atmosphere where high standards and expectations are commonplace for themselves, staff members, and students. They take time to build relationships with staff members and students no matter the size of the campus. They also understand that parents are integral to a student's learning and thus make efforts to include them. They provide focused training opportunities for faculty that emphasize cultural proficiency. Finally, these principals do whatever it takes to help students on their campus be successful. (p. 277)

The role of principal is instrumental to student success and has been established through numerous literature reviews. The principals' beliefs and values are as important because they drive the decisions that are made about all aspects of school operations and interactions. More research is needed to explore the impact of principals' beliefs and values on instructional practices and the development of a school's vision for success.

In summary, there continues to be a need for more empirical evidence on whether transformational leadership practices lead to higher student achievement, although much of the literature that currently exists suggests correlational evidence (Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Evidenced in the literature is the fact that the principal's vision for success and how that vision is communicated in words and actions drives the structures, programs, and processes of the school. The principal's leadership also influences teacher work which leads to student engagement and achievement. If extracurricular activity programming is an element of the principal's vision for success, the principal's decision-making will reflect a priority in the organization and resources of these programs.

The Construct of Student Connectedness

The literature includes several overlapping terms and definitions to represent students' relationship to the school. Common terms in educational studies are student engagement, connectedness, bonding, attachment, and involvement (Libbey, 2004). For the purposes of this study, student engagement in school will be examined through the construct of connectedness. In this section, I will share the interrelatedness of student connectedness race, and high school drop-out rates.

School connectedness. Townsend and McWhirter (2005) wrote that researchers describe connectedness as occurring "when a person is actively involved with another person, object, group, or environment, and that involvement promotes a sense of comfort,

wellbeing, and anxiety-reduction" (p. 193). School connectedness occurs when students feel cared for, both as individuals and students (Sulkowski, Demaray, & Lazarus, 2011). Blum (2005) posits three school characteristics that stand out as helping students feel connected while simultaneously encouraging student achievement:

- High academic standards coupled with strong teacher support;
- An environment in which adult and student relationships are positive and respectful; and
- A physically and emotionally safe school environment.

Students who feel connected to their school are more likely to exert effort, develop positive feelings about school, and participate in classroom and school activities (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001; Sulkowski, Demaray, & Lazarus, 2011). These students are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, skipping school, and fighting (Schapps, 2003; Wilson & Elliott, 2003). Rather, when students feel connected to their school they are more likely to succeed academically and graduate (Connell et al., 1995; Wentzel, 1998). Major threats to school connectedness include social isolation, lack of safety in school, and poor classroom management (Blum, 2005).

Social connectedness. In their literature review on the construct of connectedness, Thompson and McWhirter (2005) explained that social connectedness happens when people have strong relationships with the social world. They noted that researchers Lee and Robbins found "…social connectedness includes a sense of closeness to others that is critical to one's sense of belonging and is based on the aggregate experiences of proximal and distal relationships (e.g., parents, friends, peers, strangers, communities, and society)" (p. 193). In the context of schools, social connectedness

emphasizes the benefits of providing opportunities for students to build strong, positive

relationships with teachers and other adults in the building, as well as their peers.

Social Capital Theory

For adolescents, being a member of a group structures what they do with their

time and the kinds of values and norms to which they are exposed (Feldman & Matjasko,

2005). In a review of relevant literature about ECA participation, Feldman and Matjasko

wrote:

> Participating in extracurricular activities helps adolescents come to understand
> themselves by observing and interpreting their own behavior when they are
> engaged in these activities. Thus, adolescents' identity and peer group influence
> subsequent activity choices, shaping the nature of their developmental pathway.
> (p. 162)

Students' social capital becomes an educational asset when it enables them to fit

into school life and successfully perform learning tasks. According to Pierre Bourdieu

(1985):

> Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked
> to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized
> relationships of mutual acquaintance… which provides each of its members with
> the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to
> credit, in the various senses of the word. (p. 88)

Researchers use the term social capital to describe the extent of an

individual's access to people with diverse resources and view it as a resource that

can provide opportunities and psychological and emotional support (Thomason &

Kuperminc, 2014, pp. 816-817). The value of social capital depends in part on

what people in the school choose to count as educationally useful. Knowledge and

values generated by the linguistic, racial, religious or cultural diversity of a

students' social network may be ignored or discounted when in fact they hold considerable potential for influencing learning (Sun & Leithwood, 2012).

Extracurricular activities may serve as a means to build social capital for adolescents because they can provide opportunities for students to build relationships with peers and adults (Simpkins, Vest, Delgado, & Price, 2012). It can be assumed principals want to create opportunities for students to build social capital in various peer groups in school. Thus, extracurricular activity programs and student participation are an important aspect of a school's culture and students' educational experience.

Implications for Students of Color

The "educational achievement gap" represents differences in academic performance between white and non-white students. Though there are several hypotheses about why this gap exists, some researchers have written that a possible contributing factor is that African American and Hispanic students are less engaged in school and see limited opportunities for future success (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001). In their analysis of data from a The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health), Johnson et al. (2001) found that African American and White students are less attached at the middle school level than Hispanic students. They note that their findings may differ from other studies that tend to find greater differences between white and non-white students because of the individual environments of the schools studied. Their findings were influenced by the types of questions asked on the Add Health survey and may not reflect the various factors found in middle and high schools that cause students to be engaged, such as teacher relationships, social networks, and subject interest. The researchers reported:

A major proposition of our study was that the characteristics of schools influence students' engagement and attachment. The educational experiences of young people are firmly embedded within the schools they attend. As an institution, schools are organized around curricular demands, but they also provide a social milieu, involving interactions with peers, teachers, and administrators and the expectations and values of all three. This multi-faceted environment shapes students' feelings and behavior. Moreover, school attachment is, by its very nature, about whether one feels a part of one's school. The people who populate and work at the school, the activities a school offers, and the benefits a school grants are all intricately related to how a student feels about school and where he or she plays an active role in it. (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001, p. 6)

In other words, teachers and school leaders have the power to create environments which make all students, but particularly students of color, feel connected to the school. One way that this can be done is through the organization of structured ECAs. Although the results of this study are limited to questions asked on the Add Health survey and do not include other measures such as academic performance, it is highlighted here because of its recognition of the school environment as an important component influencing a student's level of connectedness.

Race and High School Dropout Rates

In their study on the impact of school organization and structures on high school dropout rates, Bryk and Thum (1989) explained that student demographics are "strongly related" to whether they will earn a diploma (p. 354). The researchers wrote:

Hispanics and Blacks, lower socioeconomic status students, and students from households with few educational resources are considered to be most likely to drop out. Dropouts have lower grades and test scores, they are more often absent, they do less homework, they have more discipline problems, and they are generally alienated from school life. (Bryk & Thum, 1989, p. 354)

The results of Bryk and Thum's national, longitudinal study found that a school's organization and number of opportunities for positive adult-student interactions may lead to increased engagement, particularly for at-risk youth. Though this study was completed

over twenty years ago, it is frequently cited in current research as being seminal in its findings on the significance of the school's organizational structure and its effect on dropout rates.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) website defines the "status dropout rate" as "The percentage of 16 through 24 year olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential" (NCES, 2015). NCES reports that the status dropout rate was seven percent nationally in 2013. The racial breakdown consists of five percent for White students, seven percent for Black students, and 12 percent for Hispanic students.

Though some studies may find limited differences in student perceptions about school connectedness amongst races, the data show that students of color are dropping out of school at faster rates than White students. Alternatively, studies have found that academically engaged students who feel connected to their school are less likely to drop out of high school (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001; Townsend & McWhirter, 2005). The assumption can be made that there is a connection between race and student connectedness that should continue to be studied.

Student Connectedness through Extracurricular Activities

Mahoney and Stattin (2000) wrote that highly structured ECAs are characterized by the inclusion of regular participation schedules, rule-guided engagement, direction by one or more adult activity leader, an emphasis on skill development that is continually increasing in complexity and challenge, activity performance that requires sustained active attention, and clear feedback performance (pp. 114-115). These activities typically occur on school grounds at the end of the regular school day. Unstructured ECAs may be spontaneous in nature and lack formal supervision by an adult (Mahoney & Stattin,

2000). The literature provides a correlational relationship between student connectedness to school and participation in extracurricular activities (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). Students who feel detached from school tend to have lower participation rates in curricular and extracurricular activities and higher absenteeism (Bryk & Thum, 1989). Students spend more than half of their time engaged in activities outside of the school day (Eccles et al, 2003; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). Research on the topic suggests that student participation in out-of-school activities may significantly affect their social, educational, civic, and physical development (Mahoney et al., 2009). The literature discussed in this section focuses on the effects of student participation in school-based, structured ECAs. These activities typically occur on school grounds at the end of the regular school day.

Researchers posit that there are many benefits of student involvement in school-based extracurricular activities, including improved academic identity, performance, and feelings of connectedness to the school (Fredericks, & Simpkins, 2011; Simpkins, Vest, Delgado, & Price, 2012). In the context of this paper, the term participation represents the time spent attending an activity and includes enrollment, attendance, breadth, and engagement (Mahoney, Vandell, Simpkins, & Zarrett, 2009). Much of the literature on adolescent (ages 12-18) participation in ECAs focuses on the importance of analyzing how students use their time due to implications for cognitive development (Mahoney et al, 2006; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). Feldman and Matjasko (2005) wrote:

> It is believed that extracurricular activities offer a means to express and explore one's identity, generate social and human capital, and offer a challenging setting outside of academics. Adolescents form their identity by developing skills, discovering preferences, and associating themselves with others. (pp. 161-162)

Students may choose activities that affirm an aspect of their identity that they wish to develop or that is valued.

ECAs can serve as a venue for students to develop their identity, discover interests, and build networks of peers and adults that can also serve them during the academic school day. For example, a benefit of student participation in ECAs that is often discussed in research is related to high school dropout rates (Mahoney, 2000; Matjasko & Feldman, 2005). Mahoney's (2000) research found that boys and girls with problems adjusting to school who became involved in ECAs were less likely to dropout or engage in criminal behavior. These findings are consistent with the themes in research about ECA participation, which state that when students are actively involved in structured ECAs they are more engaged in school and thus tend to academically outperform their peers who choose not to participate (Matjasko & Feldman, 2005).

It is hypothesized that participation in ECAs is related to improved educational and academic outcomes and ultimately, career success in adulthood (Mahoney, Vandell, Simpkins, & Zarrett, 2009). There is not agreement as to why participants tend to outperform students who do not participate; however, researchers have written that possible reasons include benefits for students who participate in activities where the content is linked to concepts taught during the school day. In addition, activity participants have greater access to teachers, counselors, and other adults associated with the school (Mahoney, Vandell, Simpkins, & Zarrett, 2009).

Other benefits to ECA participation found in the literature include fewer instances of risky behaviors such as drug use and other criminal activities. Adolescents involved in ECAs form peer groups with other students who are less likely to participate in antisocial

behaviors such as smoking, alcohol and/or drug use. These teens eventually form positive lifestyles and habits that carry into adulthood (Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney, Vandell, Simpkins, & Zarrett, 2009). On the other hand, adolescents who associate themselves with peer groups that promote risky behaviors and unstructured after school activities are more susceptible to engaging in such activities themselves.

Mahoney et al. (2009) listed eight features of extracurricular activities that are linked to positive youth development: supportive relationships with adults and peers, appropriate structure, opportunity for skill building, support for skill building, opportunities for belonging, physical and psychological safety, positive social norms, and integration of family, school, and community efforts. Given the positive links between youth development and participation in ECAs, principals should prioritize equitable opportunities for all students to participate in ECAs.

Participation Rates for Students of Color and Low SES

Much of the research on the benefits of student participation in ECAs is based on studies consisting of White, middle class youth (Fredericks & Eccles, 2010). There are limited examples of studies on minority and low-income adolescent participation in ECAs. The lack of research is important to note because of the assumption that participation in ECAs will lead to positive outcomes for students of color (Mahoney, Harris, & Eccles, 2006; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010). In addition, there is evidence in the research conducted on race and extracurricular activity participation that minority student participation is usually lower than White students (Simpkins, Vest, Delgado, & Price, 2012). There are a number of theories about why participation may be lower for minority students. For example, Simpkins et al. (2012) posit that racial/ethnic minority youth tend

to have more limited family resources and reside in communities with fewer activities than their white counterparts (p. 335). The researchers' further note that limited family resources can inhibit adolescents' ability to participate in extracurricular activities through a variety of mechanisms, such as the monetary cost of activities and increased family responsibilities (Simpkins et al., 2012, p. 335).

Despite the many studies proclaiming the benefits of ECAs, the research on the effects of ECA participation by students of color is mixed. Hynes and Sanders (2011) conducted a study to examine the participation gap in after-school programs. Their study found that African American students were more likely to participate in an ECA than White students. The researchers noted that "one pervasive characteristic of the African American community that could explain the race difference in after-school programs is the prominence of single-parent families, making child care needs more acute" (Hynes & Sanders, 2011, p. 473). These types of discrepancies in the data occur because of the variability in the samples analyzed. Further empirical research examining adolescent (middle and high school) participation in school-based ECAs would expand our understanding about how race factors into student participation patterns. Moreover, these types of assumptions about African American families need to be challenged and/or supported with empirical evidence.

Larson, Richards, Sims, and Dworkin (2001) conducted one of the few studies examining time use patterns of African American adolescents from families characterized as having low socio-economic status (SES). In this study, it was found that the urban African American students spent less time in structured after-school activities than a comparison sample of white suburban students. The authors attributed this difference to

restrictive parenting for the African American students to keep their children safe by

limiting activities outside the home. The difference can also be attributed to the

difference in neighborhood location, urban versus suburban. Pedersen and Seidman

(2005) wrote:

> …poor youth evidence different patterns of participation than their wealthier and suburban peers. They are more likely to engage in neighborhood-based youth groups and less likely to participate in school-based programs. In fact, despite the seeming wholehearted support for enhanced out-of-school programming for low-income adolescents expressed by stakeholders concerned with the positive development of these youth, the discrepancy between the rates of participation in school-based activities among the poorest adolescents and the wealthiest adolescents has grown in recent years. (p. 88)

More research is needed to determine why the discrepancy in participation rates

between urban and suburban adolescents exists. This research would also have

implications regarding participation rates of students of color as compared to White

students and may begin the process of closing the participation gap. In addition, future

research should examine the number of activities offered at urban schools in comparison

to suburban schools.

Negative Outcomes for Participation in Extracurricular Activities

The literature surrounding extracurricular activity participation is overwhelmingly

positive. However, prior to 1900 many educators thought participation in school-based

ECAs were recreational and detrimental to the instructional program (Marsh & Kleitman,

2002). More recently, there is some concern around the overscheduling of students' time.

Mahoney, Harris, and Eccles (2006) wrote that some media reports and parenting books

suggest many adolescents are overwhelmed with stress and pressure, partly due to over

involvement in ECAs.

Summary

The principal is the driver for change in a school and is responsible for developing a shared vision for teaching and learning. A component of the principal's vision is establishing a positive school culture where all students feel connected. The literature reviewed above highlighted positive outcomes for student connectedness to school and peers such as higher attendance, academic performance, and involvement in extracurricular activities. An assumption made in the literature is that a school culture that values ECAs and offers opportunities for participation of students of color will help to close the achievement gap. More research is needed on the effects of minority student participation and implications for their future.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This capstone project explored how middle school principals use discretion to make decisions about extracurricular activities in their schools. The problem of practice dealt with differences in the implementation and monitoring of middle school extracurricular activity programs in Walker County Public Schools. These programmatic differences coupled with the autonomy principals have to run ECA programs for their schools may result in low participation levels for students of color in some schools.

This chapter provides an overview of the conceptual framework, research methodology and design for the study. To begin, the conceptual framework selected for examining principals' decision-making regarding ECAs is outlined and an explanation of how this framework was used to analyze the results of the study is discussed. Next, I restate the study research questions and provide insight into how those questions were answered. The heart of the chapter consists of an overview of the design of the research study, including a description of the setting, participants, and methods for data collection and analysis.

The Principal as Street-Level Bureaucrat: A Conceptual Framework

School principals hold the power to make decisions regarding day-to-day operations at their schools. Though they are bound by the standard operating procedures outlined by the board of education and superintendent, principals decide how those procedures will be carried out at their respective schools. Michael Lipsky's (2010) theory of street-level bureaucracy defines street-level bureaucrats as "Public service workers

who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work" (p. 3). According to Lipsky, street-level bureaucrats influence the lives of others by communicating expectations from sources of authority (i.e.: the school board, the superintendent), allocating benefits and funds, and overseeing the treatment of those in their charge (Lipsky, 2010). Like principals, many street-level bureaucrats decide who in the organization will get access to programs and resources (Keiser, 2003). Little is known about what influences street-level bureaucrats in the decision-making process. However, street-level bureaucrats have the power to use discretion, within the confines of the larger organization, to make daily decisions.

Discretionary Leadership

School administrators regularly use discretion in their decision-making, allowing them flexibility to meet the unique needs of their school (Findlay, 2015). Discretion manifests when principals choose how to enact authority (Findlay, 2015). Findlay wrote that "…given the intricacies of modern bureaucracies, discretion may be indispensable in the implementation of policy" (p. 474). Discretion is used in decisions requiring judgment (Findlay, 2015). The leader must choose between different courses of action and have enough evidence to support the choice made. In Findlay's study (2015) of discretionary leadership, school principals "…identified influences that affect their discretionary decision making as expectations of senior administration, expectations of parents and community and the threat of legal action, expectations of staff, personal characteristics of principals, and student-specific circumstances" (p. 483).

Principals use discretion to make decisions about school-level extracurricular activities. Because they have the autonomy to decide how funds will be allocated, who

will sponsor activities, and which activities will be offered, they serve as street-level-bureaucrats of the school's ECAs. As such, this conceptual framework should provide helpful insight not only into what decisions principal's make about ECA's but also why and how principals makes decisions concerning ECAs.

Discretion in Decision-Making

Who influences a principal's decisions? Why do they make certain decisions regarding school programming? Casto and Sipple (2011) wrote "…why principals make decisions is often related to regulations, norms, or deep-seated beliefs in the school or local culture" (p. 134). A goal of this study was to investigate what influences middle school principals when making decisions about ECAs. Does the principal rely on their own beliefs and past experiences regarding ECAs or do they seek the input of other stakeholders such as teachers, sponsors, parents, and students?

Discretion is a key component to principals' decision-making, providing them the flexibility to make decisions as quickly or with as much input as they deem necessary (Findlay, 2015). According to Lipsky, street-level bureaucrats are policy-makers because "They exercise wide discretion in decisions about citizens with whom they interact. Then, when taken in concert, their individual actions add up to agency behavior" (p. 13). Discretion can be defined as any decision requiring judgment that is executed with autonomy (Findlay, 2015). Researchers have found that discretion can be fairly implemented while taking into consideration established rules and the leader's moral compass (Crowson & Porter-Gehrie, 1980; Findlay, 2015). Thus, principals are street-level bureaucrats because they too use discretionary decision-making, established rules, and their moral standard to create and implement school policies regarding ECAs.

When Lipsky originally wrote *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* in 1980, he chose to focus on public service workers who directly interact with citizens, specifically, teachers, police officers, judges, welfare and social workers. School principals also qualify as public service workers who have a great deal of power and autonomy in their positions. As discussed below, this framework proved helpful in analyzing how middle school principals use their power and discretion to make decisions regarding extracurricular activities. As street-level bureaucrats, all principals use discretion.

Research Questions

To better understand middle school principal decision-making regarding ECAs, three research questions were used to focus data collection methods. See Table 2 for a summary of the research questions and data collected to answer each question. The first two questions provided information regarding how the principals use discretion when making decisions regarding ECAs. Question three provided insight into the relationship between district leadership and principal leadership regarding ECAs. The conceptual framework previously discussed was used as a lens to view and analyze the data, address research questions and consider implications.

Table 2

Research Questions and Relevant Data Collected

Research Question	Context	Data Collected to Answer Question
Question 1: What are the principal's beliefs, goals and values with regards to ECAs? Question 1.2: How do principals measure the success of the ECA program and its connection to student engagement?	These questions addressed the principals overall beliefs and current practices regarding ECAs. With this information, I was able to analyze whether the principal's beliefs about ECAs influence their practices.	(a) Middle school principal survey (Appendix A) (b) Middle school principal semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B)
Question 2: How are decisions made about ECAs? Question 2.2: What processes are used to make decisions about ECAs? Question 2.3: What does the principal consider when making decisions about ECAs? Question 2.4: What influences a principal's decision regarding ECA programming?	With these questions, I examined how a principal makes decisions about ECAs. This information helped me to explore influences that may exist in the principal's decision-making process regarding ECAs.	(a) Middle school principal semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B) (b) School staff member semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix D)
Question 3: What is the level of involvement of the district in school-based ECA decision making?	This question was used to determine the system vision regarding ECAs in middle school and how that vision is communicated to principals.	(a) Middle school principal semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B) (b) District-level leader semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix C)

Research Design and Methods

Wolcott (1994) offered three terms that are essential to qualitative inquiry- description, analysis, and interpretation. In this model, Wolcott explained that description addresses the question, "What is going on here?" During the description phase, the researcher objectively gathers data. Next, the analysis phase refers to specific and systematic "…procedures followed in order to identify essential features and relationships consonant with the descriptors noted above" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 24). Finally, the interpretation phase is where the researcher makes sense of the data. This general process of qualitative data collection and analysis was employed for this study.

Description

Setting. The study took place in Walker County Public Schools (WCPS), located in a Mid-Atlantic state. This district covers roughly 400 square miles of a large metropolitan area on the East Coast and is one of the largest districts in the United States with over 150,000 students. WCPS has 41 middle schools (39 at the time of data collection) and principals from four of these schools were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Follow-up interviews were conducted to document the perspectives of assistant principals who have direct involvement in ECA programming and logistics.

Selecting a school containing an existing ECA program was necessary to differentiate these schools from the seven middle school programs run by an initiative called Thrive After School (TAS), a pseudonym. TAS began in 2008 following a report on how students use out-of-school time in the district. This initiative is a collaboration between the county recreation department, school system, and the Council for Children, Youth and Families. These organizations work together to bring community groups into the schools to lead unique clubs and activities with such topics as career exploration, leadership and civil engagement, science,

technology, engineering, math, creative arts, sports, health, and wellness. TAS is located in schools with high rates of students who receive free and/or reduced meals and is offered at no cost to families. The program is offered four days per week and includes transportation and a hot meal. Schools with TAS were excluded from this study because principals and school staff are not heavily involved in the organization and execution of the program.

Participants. Participants for this study were drawn from Walker County Public Schools (WCPS) 39 middle school principals. Criteria for selection as an interviewee included:

- The selected principal serves a middle school that contains an ECA program that is run by school staff at the direction of the principal

- A middle school principal that has been in place at the school for at least one year

- The principal volunteered via the survey to participate in the study

- The principal leads a school with a diverse school population

In addition, each of the principals selected for an interview worked at schools located in different geographic areas of the district to provide variety. Finally, as mentioned above, principals with a TAS program were not included in this study.

During each interview, principals were asked whether they delegate a person to supervise the ECA program. Three of the four principals interviewed indicated they designated an assistant principal (AP) to supervise the program and consult with them regarding program needs. As a result, three assistant principals were also interviewed for this study. This served as a way to gain insight into the APs role and responsibilities regarding the management and decision-making for ECAs at that particular school.

A district-level leader was interviewed to gain insight into the school district's position regarding the implementation of ECAs in middle schools. This leader was selected because of

their position working with and supervising middle school principals. Finally, the schools and district webpages were reviewed. Documents referencing ECAs were analyzed to gauge the types of activities offered, messages about ECAs and other pertinent information.

Data Collection

This mixed-methods study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to establish triangulation of the data (see Figure 2 for an overview of the research methodology). Following the administration and analysis of data from a survey designed to gain general information about principals' beliefs and practices regarding ECAs, four WCPS middle school principals were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview to gain more in-depth insight into their decisions and practices with regard to ECAs. The researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with assistant principals identified by the principal and a district-level leader to gain the district's perspective on principal decision-making regarding ECAs and the current status of various programs in the district.

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                          ┌─────────────────────────┐
                          │          Plan           │
                          │ Design surveys and       │
                          │ protocols                │
                          └─────────────────────────┘
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┌──────────────────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────────────┐
│          Interpret           │  │        Collect Data          │
│ Synthesize the data,         │  │ Middle School Principal      │
│ formulate conclusions to     │  │ Survey                       │
│ answer research questions    │  │ Middle School Principal      │
│                              │  │ Semi-Structured Interviews   │
│                              │  │ District Level Leader        │
│                              │  │ Semi-Structured Interview    │
│                              │  │ School Staff Member          │
│                              │  │ Semi-Structured Interviews   │
│                              │  │ District and School Websites │
└──────────────────────────────┘  └──────────────────────────────┘

                  ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                  │           Analyze            │
                  │ Transcribe interviews, code  │
                  │ the data, identify patterns, │
                  │ themes and structures        │
                  └──────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 2. Overview of Research Methodology

Middle School Principal Survey. For this study, a preliminary questionnaire, the Middle School Principal Survey, was developed to gather general data regarding middle school principals' beliefs and practices around ECAs (see Appendix A). The survey collected basic information which allowed me to gather data from a larger data set. This also served as a means to create triangulation of data through corroboration of other data sources including the semi-structured interviews and analysis of the ECA section of the school websites. The questions, which were designed to determine principals' beliefs about ECAs, utilized a Likert Scale to give

principals the opportunity to select answers that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The survey was emailed to all 39 WCPS middle school principals and they were given a total of two weeks to submit responses.

Semi-structured interviews. The next phase of the data collection process involved conducting semi-structured interviews with four middle school principals. The Middle School Principal Semi-Structured Interview Protocol (Appendix B) was designed with open-ended questions which were intended to gather data about the principals' beliefs and decision-making practices around ECAs. The questions were designed to encourage conversation and contained several probes which were used as follow-up questions to help the principals elaborate, if necessary.

The principals selected for the interview phase volunteered via the survey to be interviewed. After reviewing the survey data, I then personally invited them to interview based on the criteria listed above (i.e.: years' experience as a principal, school demographics, whether or not they had a TAS program, etc.). Each principal was interviewed individually and was made aware of the purpose of the study prior to beginning the interview.

The District-Level Administrator Interview Protocol (Appendix C) was also designed with open-ended questions intended to elicit information regarding the district-level leader's perspective on the role of ECAs at the middle school level and principal autonomy to run their respective programs according to their individual students' needs. Furthermore, the assistant principal interview protocol was designed to gain deeper insight into the school's ECA program logistics, values and practices. The AP protocol was included as possible corroboration of the information provided by the principals.

Website Review. The websites of the four identified middle schools and the school district were analyzed for informational purposes. The mission, core values, and vision statements for each of the four selected middle schools were identified on the school websites, as were lists of ECAs offered. The district website provided the following information:

- Strategic plan (mission, core values, vision)
- Demographics
- ECA staff manual and stipend information
- Gallup survey results

Data analysis

Survey Data

According to Remler and Van Ryzin (2011), a survey can be used to collect information from a larger sample in order to assist with the selection of more focused data sources. All 39 principals were invited to complete a survey designed to gain general information about their beliefs and practices regarding ECAs. For this study, I surveyed all 39 middle school principals in the district to gain general information about their beliefs and practices regarding ECAs. In total, 18 principals chose to participate in the survey (46% return rate). The data was exported to an Excel spreadsheet and the results were organized and analyzed for patterns.

Three principals did not complete the survey, thus their results were not included. The survey data were organized based on the research questions answered by the results. In addition, a question on the survey asked whether principals were willing to be interviewed for the study. Based on their responses, four principals were selected, along with one central office administrator, to participate in the interview stage of this study.

In mixed-methods studies, comparing survey results with open-ended, semi-structured interview responses provides additional insight and greater depth of analysis (Patton, 2002). For this study, survey data was compared to the results from the interviews and assisted with the identification of patterns regarding principal beliefs about ECAs and school-wide practices.

Interview Data

According to Remler and Van Ryzin, (2011, p. 76), the main components to qualitative data analysis include: preparing and organizing the data, reducing and summarizing the data, through a process of coding, and presenting the data, in narrative form, figures, and/or tables. Added components framed by LeCompte (2000) allowed for deeper organization of the data collection, analysis and interpretation. LeCompte outlined five steps for unbiased qualitative data analysis. Being that I myself am employed as an administrator in WCPS, there was a particular interest in ensuring the research methodology was unbiased and complete.

LeCompte's Five Steps to Data Analysis

Step one: tidying up. LeCompte describes the step of organizing and categorizing the data that have been collected as being a "…necessary first step to coding and analyzing" (p. 148). For this study, this included transcribing and creating digital files for each of the interviews conducted. All release forms and paperwork were also digitized and organized into files. In addition, the survey results were converted into a database which provided a format more conducive to analysis. The database was organized by survey question and categorized by respondent. Once data were collected, they were compared against the research questions to determine whether more information was needed.

Step two: finding items. LeCompte describes "items" as being "…specific things in the data set that researchers code, count, and assemble into research results" (p. 148). These items,

or units of analysis, require the researcher to sort through the data to look for patterns. For this study, patterns were identified by the frequency in which they appeared in data. The data were also examined to identify items associated with the conceptual framework. The following terms associated with Street-Level Bureaucracy were identified and used during data analysis:

- Discretion

- Autonomy

- Beliefs

- Influence

- Allocation of Resources

While analyzing the data, whenever evidence to support the existence of one of these terms was found, a quote or excerpt was added to the database. This later assisted in the interpretation phase of the study.

Step three: creating stable sets of items. Coding is a process of marking the text according to categories which emerge during the analysis (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011). Coding involves organizing items into groups (LeCompte, 2000). Grounded theory uses the process of data collection, note taking, coding, constant comparison, categorizing, sampling, and saturation to identify themes in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded Theory was used to allow themes from the units of analysis to emerge and aide the researcher in forming conclusions. The following themes emerged once the data were coded:

- Advocacy

- Creative problem solving

- Equity

- Lack of resources

- Organic

- Outside funding

- Parent involvement

- Participation rates for students of color

- Relationships

- Staff involvement

- Student voice

- Transportation

Step four: creating patterns. Next, LeCompte posits the importance of organizing

themes into patterns or "things that go together" (p. 150). This required the researcher to ask

"How can things be grouped together in order to create meaning?" Figure 3 demonstrates how

the themes that emerged during data analysis were organized into categories. These categories

were identified based on the frequency in which they appeared in the data and whether the item

was corroborated by at least one other data source.
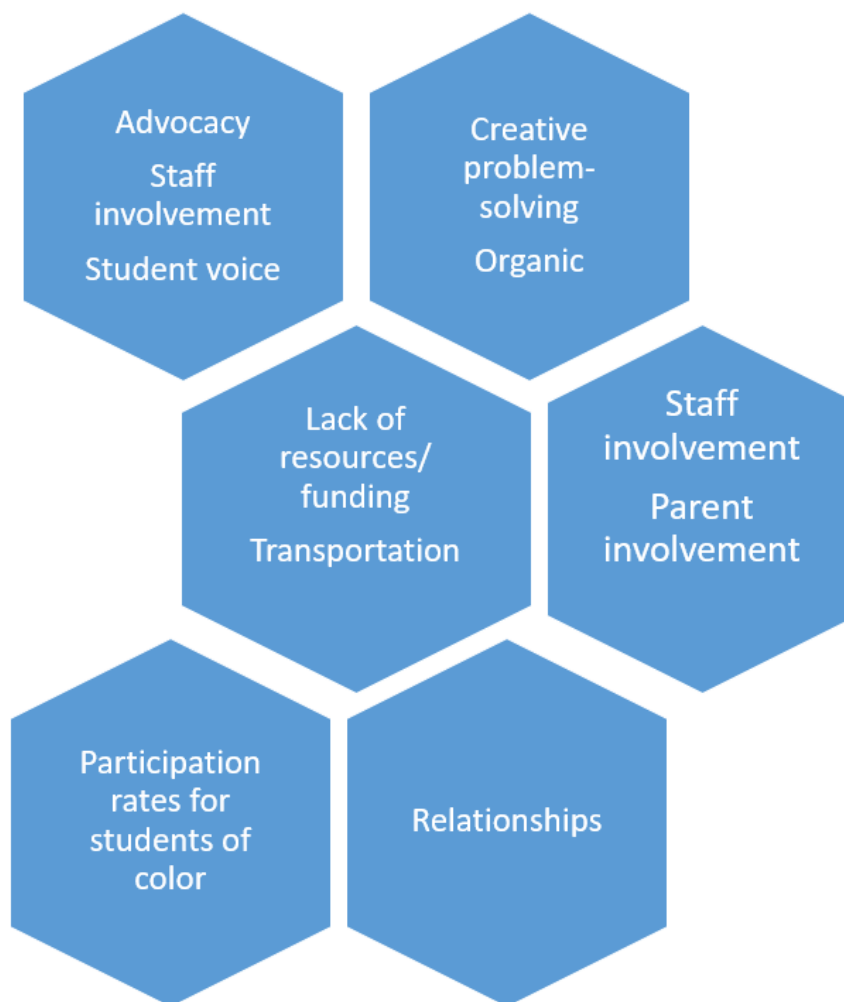
Figure 3. Data Categories

Data Triangulation

To establish triangulation of the data, I interviewed a district leader (Appendix C) to gain

insight into the district perspective on the issue. Furthermore, follow-up interviews were

conducted with assistant principals directly involved with making decisions regarding ECAs.

Appendix D is a brief semi-structured interview protocol which provided the basis for an

interview with someone other than the principal involved in the decision-making process for

extracurricular programming at the respective school. Finally, district and school websites were

reviewed and documents and/or resources referencing ECAs were analyzed. For the school

websites, this included lists and descriptions of clubs, sports, and activity offerings and

information to parents. For the district, this included the extracurricular activities handbook for

staff members and documents related to district-wide demographics and strategic planning.

Interpretation

Interpretation occurs when the researcher takes the description and analysis and begins to

make meaning (Wolcott, 1994). The final element of this study's research methodology was to

interpret the data that was gathered and organized. This coincides with step five of LeCompte's

process.

Step five: assembling structures. "Once patterns have been identified, groups of them

are then assembled into structures, or groups of related or linked patters that, taken together,

build an overall description of the program or problem being studied" (LeCompte, 1994, p. 151).

These structures help to explain and add meaning to the data, a crucial step to interpreting data.

Figure 4 shows themes, grouped into categories and structures: Principal autonomy, outside

factors, and intended results.

The data interpretation phase also included comparing the identified categories and

structures to the conceptual framework and the research questions.
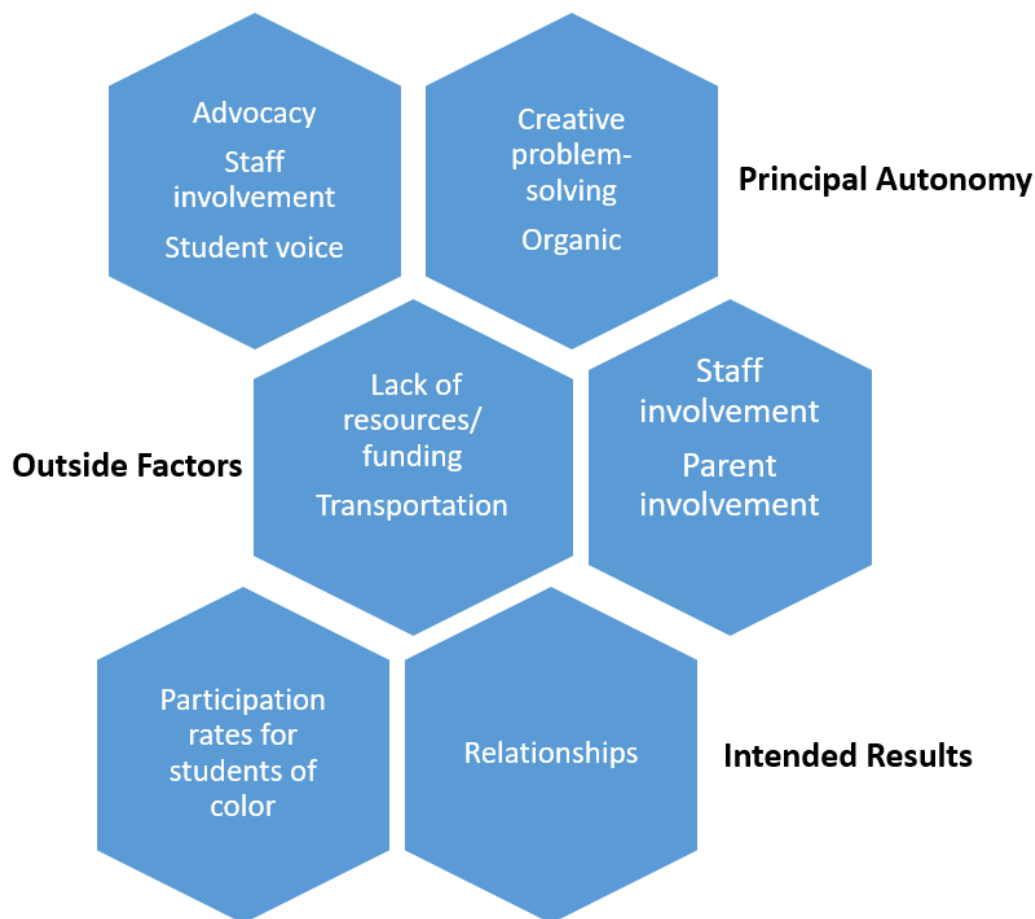
Figure 4. Data Categories and Structures

Researcher Bias

According to Patton (2002), "The neutral investigator enters the research arena with no ax to grind, no theory to prove (to test but not to prove), and no predetermined results to support" (p. 51). At the time of data collection for this study, the researcher worked as an assistant principal in a WCPS middle school. Further, the researcher, at one time, worked in middle schools in the district that implemented both TAS and ECA programs and also has first-hand experience managing these programs as an administrator. The idea for the problem of practice first emerged while serving a middle school in the district with perceived low ECA participation rates for students of color. This led me to question whether this was a district-wide concern and

what data could be used to determine whether students of color were engaged after-school district-wide.

The researcher has worked closely with some of the principals who were surveyed and interviewed. Patton posits that "Empathy develops from personal contact with the people interviewed…" (p. 52). This close association with the people in the study has the potential to create bias and empathy toward their points of view though the researcher's goal was to remain neutral.

Summary

In this section, I have reviewed my conceptual framework, data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes. I provided an overview of the study methodology and design. In the next section, the data will be discussed in greater detail and insights will be provided on their relation to the research questions.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, findings drawn from the analysis of data collected for this study are summarized. The section begins with an overview of the demographics and informative components about the four middle schools from which principals were selected for interviews. Subsequently, findings are organized by the following research questions.

- Question 1: What are the principal's beliefs, goals and values with regards to ECAs?
    - Question 1.2: How do principals measure the success of the ECA program and its connection to student engagement?
- Question 2: How are decisions made about ECAs?
    - Question 2.2: What processes are used to make decisions about ECAs?
    - Question 2.3: What does the principal consider when making decisions about ECAs?
    - Question 2.4: What influences a principal's decision regarding ECA programming?
- Question 3: What is the level of involvement of the district in school-based ECA decision making?

The data collected from principal and assistant principal interviews, the middle school principal survey, district and school websites were analyzed to identify themes and patterns to address each question. In the final section of this chapter, the literature on street-level bureaucracy is used to discuss findings and recommendations for future practice are identified.

Context

As shared in a previous chapter, Walker County Public Schools (WCPS), where this study took place, is the largest school district in the state, and is one of the largest districts in the United States. WCPS is a diverse system and has students representing over 150 countries speaking over 130 different languages. The student population, which in 1970 was 95 percent White, is very diverse today. Today, White students make up only approximately 30% of the district's student population. The four schools, included in this study are representative of the diversity of the broader school district. In the following subsection, a brief overview of each of the four schools is provided, including the school's size, the different demographic groups the school served, and the variety of ECAs the school provided. Table 3 provides details about the four selected middle school's demographics. The demographic information in Table 3 is represented based on state abbreviations: English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Free and/or Reduced Meals (FARMS), Special Education (SPED), Asian (AS), Black or African American (BL), Hispanic or Latino (HI), White (WH), and Two or more races (MU).

Table 3

Selected Middle Schools' Demographics 2015-2016

	ESOL	FARMS	SPED	AS	BL	HI	W	MU
School A	8%	49%	10%	14%	53%	20%	9%	≤5%
School B	11%	37%	11%	11%	18%	36%	30%	≤5%
School C	17%	12%	15%	18%	7%	20%	49%	6%
School D	9%	11%	8%	6%	11%	14%	64%	≤5%

Note. Abbreviations based on state groupings.

Middle School A. School A serves over 800 students. Approximately 49 percent of the students attending School A received free and/or reduced meals, often an indicator of the percentage in the school affected by poverty. School A also included a unique program for

students with Individualized Education Plans whose disabilities present emotional, social, and/or academic needs.

The principal of School A, "Principal A," has six years' experience and shared her school's mission during the interview:

> The mission of our school is for every student to build a very solid foundation for high school, for college, and for career options, to prepare students to have the opportunities of real-world problem-solving and to have a world-class education. That's our primary responsibility -- to make sure they have a challenging and rigorous instructional program to meet their academic, and social and emotional needs.

School A's website included information about the extracurricular activities available to students and the procedures for participating. It read, in part, that School A "…takes pride in offering activities and sports programs that allow students to showcase their abilities, exercise good citizenship and develop teamwork skills." The ECAs offered at School A included intramurals such as Step Team and Flag Football, clubs and organizations such as Cheerleading, Hispanic Culture Club, Peer 2 Peer Tutoring and National Junior Honor Society. According to its website, "The National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) is the nation's premier organization established to recognize outstanding middle level students. More than just an honor roll, NJHS serves to honor those students who have demonstrated excellence in the areas of scholarship, service, leadership, character, and citizenship." The annual fee to retain a charter for NJHS is $385, not including additional costs for items such as certificates, pins, tee shirts, etc. A club such as NJHS comes with costs which need to be accounted for in the annual ECA budget created by the principal. Schools that are fortunate enough to have a Parent Teacher Association or other outside group that can supplement the costs to run unique clubs such as NJHS alleviate some of the financial burden from the school.

Middle School B. School B serves over 500 students. Thirty-seven percent of the students enrolled received free and/or reduced meals. The principal of this school, "Principal B," had three years of experience in the role and shared their school's mission during the interview:

> We want to prepare all of our students to become contributing members of a global society. That's our vision. We are preparing them for life beyond the three years at [B Middle School], college, and career is what I always share with our parent community and other stakeholders.

School B's website included information about over 20 sports, clubs and activities available to students. ECAs offered at B Middle School include activities such as Cheer Club, mentoring groups and Lego League. The Lego League science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) competition required teams to design and build a robot capable of competing on a table-top playing field and research and solve a real-world problem. The Lego League competition had over 255,000 participants representing 88 countries. According to the competition website, new teams pay approximately $900 for team registration and materials. Principal B spoke about the parent interest in ensuring Lego League was offered at B Middle School:

> For Lego League, we had a parent and staff sponsor that worked in tandem for the last, at least, since I have been at [B Middle School]. The parent has since graduated the students out, his two sons. The sponsor has other obligations outside of school that have increased. We had a need for both the staff and the parent sponsor. This year, unfortunately, we weren't able to find a staff sponsor, but we were able to find two parent sponsors who were very involved in our school who stepped forward.

Parental involvement and resources allowed Principal B the opportunity to offer a popular STEM related activity for students.

Middle School C. School C has over 800 students. Approximately 12% of the students enrolled received free and/or reduced meals. Principal C was a veteran administrator having over five years of experience. During the interview, the principal shared the meaning of the school's vision and mission, "Our vision and mission focus around meeting the social-academic

needs of all students in preparation for the next level, their middle school to high school transition, and overall goal of getting them ready for college and career." School C's website included information about over 30 sports, clubs and activities available to students. ECAs offered at School C included activities such as Best Buddies, Model United Nations and Running Club. School C also provided programs for students with Individualized Education Plans whose disabilities presented emotional, social, and/or academic needs.

Principal C stated, "Fifteen percent of our students receive special education services. We have a very large ELL [English Language Learners] population, with our three top groups being Israeli, Brazilian, Japanese, and South Korean." With such a diverse population, Principal C was very interested in bringing the Model United Nations (Model UN) program to the school. According to the website, the "Model UN is a simulation of the United Nations General Assembly, UN Security Council, or other multilateral body, which introduces students to the world of diplomacy, negation, and decision-making." Participation in the Model UN program required a $200 registration fee plus the costs of traveling to conferences.

Middle School D. School D had over 1,200 students. Approximately 11% of the students enrolled receive free and/or reduced meals. Principal D has served as a principal for over 15 years and shared during the interview, "Our school's mission is to educate students in various disciplines in an academic sense, but also to develop their social, emotional learning and their sense of self as young people." School D's website included information about over 20 school-run sports, clubs and activities available to students. ECAs offered at School D included activities such as Creative Writing Club, Literary Magazine and the Service Club. The school website also detailed activities offered through an enrichment club available to students for a fee

after school. The enrichment club, which was offered through an outside organization, offered opportunities such as Lego Robotics, Safe Sitters and Digital Photography.

According to Principal D, Safe Sitters is one of the most popular programs at D Middle School. The Safe Sitters website described the purpose of the program as teaching teens how to be better, safer babysitters. Specifically, the curriculum offered through Safe Sitters focused on life skills, safety skills, and child care training. As a result of their participation, the organization asserted that students would be in better positions to secure babysitting jobs as a means to make money and hone responsibility skills. The cost of participation Safe Sitters and the other clubs ranged between $50 and $60.

Summary

The four principals selected to participate in this study have over 30 years of cumulative experience. Their schools are located in different parts of the district and are comprised of diverse populations of students who participate in various extracurricular activities. Though the percentage of students affected by poverty is different at each school, it is the responsibility of the principal to find funding for ECAs that both interests students and aligns with the school's mission and core values.

<p style="text-align:center;">Findings</p>

For this study, I surveyed all 39 middle school principals in the district to gain general information about their beliefs and practices regarding ECAs. In total, 18 principals chose to participate in the survey (46% return rate). The principal survey results were analyzed along with principal and staff interviews using key concepts associated with street-level bureaucracy (see Table 4). Following the survey administration, interviews were conducted with four principals, three assistant principals, and one district-level administrator. Together, information

from the survey and interviews enabled the triangulation of data around how and why middle

school principals make decisions about their extracurricular activity programs.

As discussed below, each participating principal and assistant principal in this study

made reference, in some way, to one or more of the following themes which emerged as patterns

during data analysis: Discretion, autonomy, beliefs, advocacy, equity and allocation of resources.

Each of these themes are defined in Table 4.

Table 4

Terms Identified as Patterns in Data Analysis

Conceptual Framework Term	Description
Advocacy	When a principal actively seeks support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy.
Allocation of Resources	A stock or supply of money, materials, staff, and other assets that can be drawn on by a person or organization in order to function effectively. Like principals, many street-level bureaucrats decide who in the organization will get access to programs and resources.
Autonomy	Freedom from external control or influence; independence.
Beliefs	A person's beliefs and values inform daily interactions and decision-making.
Discretion	Discretion can be defined as any decision requiring judgment that is executed with autonomy. Discretion manifests when principals choose how to enact authority. Discretion is used in decisions requiring judgment. The leader must choose between different "courses of action" and have enough evidence to support the choice made. (Feldman, 2015)
Equity	A measure of achievement, fairness, and opportunity in education

Next, each of my research questions are addressed in turn using findings from principal, assistant principal, district-level administrator interviews and the Middle School Principal Survey. The first major section unravels the issue of principal beliefs about ECAs. The second major section provides insight into how principals measure the success of their ECA programs. The third section explores how principals make decisions about their ECA programs, including what programs are offered and the allocation of funding. A fourth and final section details district-level involvement in middle school ECA programs.

Principal Core Values and Beliefs about Extracurricular Activities

In this section, I present data to answer my first research question: What are the principal's beliefs, goals and values with regards to ECAs? As discussed in Chapter 2, a principal's beliefs and core values act as a guiding compass during the decision-making process (Larsen & Hunter, 2014). In the survey and interviews, principals were asked about their beliefs regarding the purpose and value of ECAs and professional core values as they related to the ECAs offered at their school. In this section, survey and interview results relating to principal core values and beliefs are presented.

Survey results about core values and beliefs. Table 5 provides a list of the Principal Survey questions pertaining to core values and beliefs. The belief that student participation in ECAs will lead to positive results was further confirmed by the Middle School Principal Survey results. Townsend and McWhirter (2005) explained that social connectedness happens when people have strong relationships with the social world. In the context of schools, social connectedness emphasizes the benefits of providing opportunities for students to build strong, positive relationships with teachers and other adults in the building, as well as their peers. According to the survey results, 93% of principal respondents agreed or agreed strongly that they

believe ECAs provide students with an opportunity to build strong relationships with trusted

adults and 94% felt they are an indicator of school engagement.

Table 5

Middle School Principal Extracurricular Activities Survey Results

Survey Questions About Principal Beliefs	N	%
To what extent do you believe: Extracurricular activities are an important part of the middle school experience.	14 Strongly Agree (SA) 4 Agree (A) 1 Undecided (U) 0 Disagree 1 Strongly Disagree (SD)	72% SA 22% A 5% U 0% D 5% SD
To what extent do you believe: Student involvement in extracurricular activities is an indicator of school engagement.	9 SA 8 A 1 U 0 D 1 SD	50% SA 44% A 5% U 0% D 5% SD
To what extent do you believe: Students have the opportunity to build strong relationships with trusted adults and staff members through extracurricular activity involvement	14 SA 3 A 0 U 0 D 1 SD	77% SA 16% A 0% U 0% D 5% SD
To what extent do you believe: Extracurricular activities should only address academic needs (i.e.: homework club, extended day programs, math club, etc.)	2 SA 0 A 1 U 6 D 9 SD	11% SA 0% A 5% U 33% D 50% SD

In summary, the results to this portion of the survey suggested that principals believed

student participation in ECAs is important. In addition, the survey revealed that 94% of

principal respondents believed there is a connection between student participation and school

engagement. However, 11% of principal respondents believed the main purpose for ECAs is to

address academic needs through activities such as the Homework Club and reading and math intervention support. In the sections to come, survey data were used to corroborate information provided by principals during the semi-structured interviews.

      Semi-structured interviews. During the principal interviews, relationship building and school pride, advocacy, and equity emerged as themes related to principal core values and beliefs about ECAs.

      Relationship building and school pride. When discussing core values, Principal A focused on the importance of motivating each individual student.

> Every kid is special and unique, and deserves our absolute, very best. I believe in respect, human dignity, and providing a kid an opportunity to feel success. That's what they should feel. My core value? Every person, no matter who, where, what, they have a right to a quality education, and to be respected, loved, cared for, and valued.

Principal A went on to say:

> [Students] should have opportunity. I see that with entertaining their interests, and providing them the opportunity to lead, to grow, to be happy, active, and involved. Every kid should be seen. There shouldn't be a kid that walks through our buildings that we haven't connected to, in an extracurricular, beyond the academic setting.

Here, Principal A correlates student participation in ECAs with another emerging theme from this study and the literature on ECAs, relationship building. This Principal, and others, communicated the belief that student involvement in ECAs would lead to a better chance of them establishing and fostering positive relationships with peers and school staff. This finding was corroborated with the principal survey data where 93% of respondents agreed students build strong relationships through participation in ECAs.

      Principal C shared their core values centered on the desire to provide opportunities for students to explore interests and build relationships with adults.

> I think it's critical for children to have an opportunity to explore their personal interests, to find out who they are in terms of the humanities and the academics. I feel that once

students can explore who they are and what their interests are, they're going to be more successful academically, both in middle school and high school. While attending [C Middle School] students should be engaged intellectually and have adults who get to know them so they then can guide them in some of these activities after school, connect with them, and really help kids explore who they are.

Like several other principals, Principal C identified relationship building as a key rationale for providing extracurricular options for students. Here, Principal C described how the ECA program is valued due to its ability to allow students to engage in self-exploration and growth. To help facilitate this growth and self-discovery, students build trusting relationships with the activity sponsors who provide guidance and support. Principal C expressed why they value the ECA program when they shared:

> That's the best feeling after school. When I walk through the building, you hear kids laughing, kids just having a good time. I think that's the beauty of it. We go back to the core values. I want students to be happy at [C Middle School]. I want them to look back 25 years from now and say, "[C Middle School] was a nice place." That sense of pride, when they're able to come to me and show me the things that they made and how they're making things at home now. They're excited about school.

Here, Principal C espouses the belief that student happiness at school can be enhanced by their participation after school. This principal also believed that student participation can lead to a stronger sense of school pride and excitement about school. Principal C's value of giving students opportunities to build positive relationships is aligned with the student feeling good about school. Students feeling that school is "a nice place" will likely lead to stronger connectedness during the school day.

   Advocacy for ECA programs. Principal B shared that their personal core values were respect, advocacy, and persistence. Advocacy was an emergent theme identified across the principal interview data. As explained in Table 4, a principal advocates when they actively seek support for a particular cause or policy. If a principal believes in a program or policy they are likely to advocate to ensure that it is made available to students. Principal B provided an

example of how advocacy was used for their ECA program. At B Middle School, transportation

was a barrier to student participation in ECAs. Principal B discussed the problem when he

shared:

> We see an ever increasing amount of our minority students who want to stay for
> extracurricular activities. We had to turn them away. We just simply didn't have the
> transportation for them. That definitely presented a challenge for us. Most schedules for
> after-school activities are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. We only have activities
> on Tuesday and Thursday [due to limited busses to transport students]. That's the
> significance of what we're dealing with. We figured, we were going to have a program no
> matter what, but just had to look for alternate ways to make that work.

Principal B went on to discuss that in order to overcome this barrier to student

participation, there was a need to advocate for additional funds for ECA transportation with

supervisors in the central office. One major point of contention was the fact that School B was

only able to offer ECAs on Tuesdays and Thursdays due to limits with transportation and the

high number of bus riders. Most middle schools in WCPS offer extracurricular programming on

Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Principal B's advocacy and persistence led to success:

> I have been advocating through our Director and also through the Director of
> Transportation, I'm pleased to share—I just found out so this is hot off the press—we
> were able to get additional allocations so that we'll be able to reinstate transportation for
> Wednesday activities. When we talk about equity as a core value of our system, does it
> transcend our allocations?

Principal B's choice to advocate for additional transportation for students at B Middle

School exemplifies their beliefs and values in action, specifically as it pertains to ECAs.

Equity and access to ECA programs. Principal D explained, "My core values are about

kids having a voice, being curious, having adults they respect and trust and can help them find

answers to their questions, academic or otherwise. An inclusive community where kids feel safe

and can take risks." When asked how their core values are exemplified in D Middle School's

ECA program, Principal D's reply seemed to downplay the importance of ECAs:

It's just a "Big rock" question or, looking at the urgency of the work. For me, I mostly feel the most urgent work is supporting teachers and supporting kids in academic settings. I use academic way more broadly than most people do, but I'm talking about in all of my classroom settings. But I just feel like my greatest energy and my greatest priority has got to be about those 45 minutes that kids are getting the curriculum or the variances of the curriculum, and I've treated the extracurricular activities as extras.

Although the above response emphasized academics over ECAs, several stories and anecdotes shared during the interview provided deeper insight into Principal D's value for ECAs. For example, Principal D shared that as a new principal of D Middle School, there was an established practice of pulling students out of the stands at sporting events after school if they were struggling academically.

We pulled kids out of the stands watching as spectators if they were ineligible. It was terribly embarrassing on every level. The kids were predominately kids of color. The kids predominantly rode activity bus three which served our [low income area]. I understood that my predecessor's belief was, you need to be in Homework Club on Wednesdays and not be at the game on Wednesdays, because we're offering you this service, go get help for your homework and get up to speed.

While I completely respect that, and I do know we have to do some ear tugging in order to get kids to do something about their academics, I want kids to be able to watch their friends play. There are so few things in middle school that build a school culture. The high school is so alive with activities, so alive with culture, so alive with life and the middle school has so little. It seemed counter-intuitive to me that we would pull a kid that was already potentially disengaged academically and then also have them be disengaged from being a spectator. Needless to say, we don't do that anymore.

Principal D's actions demonstrate a value of equity, culture, and community for all students. Though this principal indicated a need to make the academic program during the school day a priority, their core values and position as a street-level bureaucrat allowed them to also make access to attending sporting events available to all students.

Measuring the Success of Extracurricular Activities

Complementing research question 1, which explored the core values of principals vis-à-vis ECA's, was research question 1.2: How do principals measure the success of the ECA program and its connection to student engagement? This question was intended to explore

whether and how principals measured student participation in ECAs. This question also sought
to answer whether principal actions were aligned with the values and goals they articulated. To
investigate this research question, interview participants were asked how they measure or judge
the success of the extracurricular activities program. Based on the school district's core value of
equity, ECA program success can be defined by student participation rates being representative
of the school demographics.

Findings indicated that the primary way principals determine the effectiveness of ECAs is
by monitoring afterschool attendance rosters. Table 6 presents the findings from the Principal
Survey which shows that the principals who responded reported they do not always monitor
student ECA participation data. Fifty percent of respondents do monitor ECA participation data
yet 11% do not know the participation rates for African American and Latino students in the
school.

Table 6

Middle School Principal Extracurricular Activities Survey Results

Survey Questions About ECA Data Monitoring & Analysis	N	%
Do you monitor student extracurricular activities participation data?	9 Yes 8 Sometimes 1 No	50% Yes 44% Sometimes 5% No
What is the extracurricular activity participation rate for African American and Latino students in your school?	12 Representative of Population 4 Underrepresented 2 Unknown	66% Representative of Population 22% Underrepresented 11% Unknown

Interview data also emphasized attendance taking as a key evaluation method used to
determine ECA program success. Principal D shared that ECA sponsors submitted attendance
daily and the school kept a running list of attendance for each club and activity. In addition,

Principal D collected attendance for accountability purposes. When asked if the after-school

activities are well attended, Principal D responded, "They are well attended. That's a really

qualified answer. I believe that they are, but it is completely anecdotal. We do not tally their

attendance." Assistant Principal D, who was identified as the designated supervisor of the

school's ECAs, noted:

> We don't really have a lot of data that we gather. We have watched the number of kids
> attending after-school activities rise. The number of clubs that we offer has expanded a
> little bit. Other than that, we're not really crunching the numbers. We know how many
> kids eat meals after school. Other than that, we're not really mining the data to see, are we
> getting more sixth graders, seventh graders, or eighth graders? Are we getting more boys
> or more girls or African American versus Latino? That we're not doing, but it would be
> probably an interesting thing to undertake.

Principal A shared that their school required the collection of attendance daily as a safety

measure as well as a way to gauge whether students were engaged after school. Principal A

reported:

> Every individual sponsor must publish when they're going to meet. They must take
> attendance for that day, and submit that attendance at the end of the day before kids are
> dismissed. A part of that is not just to judge the success of the program. It's student
> accountability. It serves multiple purposes for us. We also get a good sense, when we
> analyze and look at what's happening. Are kids coming to this program, regularly? If not,
> we can have a conversation, not at the end, but we're watching all along. The AP collects
> the attendance, watches the attendance, and brings it up in our administrative team
> meetings.

Similarly, Principal C used informal visits and feedback from students and staff to judge the

success of the ECA program at C Middle School-- "I've noticed that most of our clubs, the

attendance increases throughout the course of the year." However, the principal based this

statement on their observations rather than actual data. These types of observations and

anecdotal accounts of ECA success were a pattern amongst the principal interviews.

The data revealed that principals used informal measures to determine the success of their

ECA programs. Those informal measures included using observations and anecdotal data to

determine participation rates and student interest in certain activities. Without formal data collection and analysis, principals were not able to say with certainty the number of students who participated after school on a regular basis and how that may or may not relate to student engagement during the day. Though the Principal Survey data indicated that 94% of those surveyed believe student participation in ECAs are an indicator of student engagement, strong evidence of practices to measure the connection between student participation and engagement are not heavily represented.

Summary. The above sections addressed findings to the following research questions: Question 1: What are the principal's beliefs, goals and values with regards to ECAs? Question 1.2: How do principals measure the success of the ECA program and its connection to student engagement? The Middle School Principal Survey corroborates this finding with the high percentage of principal respondents who indicated student participation provided an opportunity to build relationships with staff members. The principal interviews and survey indicate that principals valued students engaging in extracurricular activities as evidenced by their advocacy of programming and allocation of resources to fund high-interest programs. Principals in WCPS have the autonomy to allocate resources to programs and use discretion to determine how they will be used for ECA programs. They also have the autonomy to measure the success of these programs. Data reveal that these measures were largely site-based and focused on informal measures of global student attendance. There was minimal data suggesting that principals or the district looked at student demographic representation, or the influence of ECA participation on positive social relationships with peers and adults.

Principal Decision-Making

In this section, findings that address the second set of research questions around how principals make decision with regards to their ECA programs are shared. Specifically, this section addresses the following research questions: Research Question 2: How are decisions made about ECAs?

Question 2.2: What processes are used to make decisions about ECAs?

Question 2.3: What does the principal consider when making decisions about ECAs?

Question 2.4: What influences a principal's decision regarding ECA programming? Understanding how decisions are made about these programs gets to the heart of my research interests and specifically speaks to how the principal serves as a street-level bureaucrat. First, survey data about principal decision-making is presented. Next, subsections including the role of the assistant principal designee, staff availability, student interest, and stakeholder involvement in decision making regarding ECAs are discussed.

Survey data. According to Lipsky, as a Street-Level Bureaucrat Principals may be influenced by many factors when making decisions. These factors may include their personal beliefs and core values, others within the organization, or available resources (Lipsky, 2010). As indicated on the Middle School Principal Survey (see Table 7), students, staff, parents, and district goals/objectives all may influence the opportunities a principal decides to offer after school.

Table 7

Middle School Principal Extracurricular Activities Survey Results

Survey Questions About Principal Decision-Making	N
How do you make decisions about your school's extracurricular activity program? Please select all that apply.	18 Gather input from students 16 Gather input from staff 12 Monitor student participation data 8 Gather input from parents 10 Based on district goals/objectives 5 Other*

Note. The following responses were given as 'Other':
  a) Parent requests
  b) Opportunities from community partnerships
  c) Available stipends
  d) Suggestions from other schools
Based on funding and staff interest in sponsoring

Principals noted that available funds and resources also influenced their ability to make decisions about ECAs. The survey question: How do you make decisions about your school's extracurricular activity program, allowed principals to select all responses that applied. According to the survey, the most popular method principals employ to make decisions about ECA programming was gathering input from students. Principals must balance student interest with the availability of staff sponsors to lead the most popular activities.

The role of the assistant principal designee. Three of the four principals interviewed indicated they delegate the responsibility of running the day-to-day operations of the ECA program to an assistant principal. As a result, assistant principals have significant influence and input regarding the overall program.

All data points suggested middle school principals believed that student participation in ECAs was important and an indicator of school engagement. This is further supported by the three Assistant Principals (APs) interviewed because their principals appointed them as their designee to supervise the ECA program at the school. When asked to describe their role as the designated head of the after school program, the AP at B Middle School said:

> I have to do the contract deadlines and make sure the protocol is followed.
> I try to be a spokesperson for the benefits of these clubs. Anybody [sponsors] who is wavering about whether they have the time, or do they really want to get involved, I try to explain to them, "This is the commitment level, one day a week, two days a week, whatever you want to do."
> I have to coordinate the after-school activity buses. All those hats lead to my answering a lot of questions, concerns, organizing the meal program -- because we have snacks after school -- putting together a schedule so that not all 150 kids show up at the same time. A lot of what it is just providing information to staff members who haven't done a club before, are thinking about it, are nervous, should they commit to that kind of thing. Any parent and student questions, they all come to me.

Similar responses were given by the APs at A and D Middle Schools. The Assistant Principal Designees who oversee the ECA programs all indicated that there is a high level of attention needed to effectively recruit staff and students and complete the necessary paperwork to run the after school program.

The person recommended for the interview by Principal D was a former Assistant Principal at the school and ran the ECA program the previous school year. Principal D felt as though this AP would be able to offer more insight than the new AP running the program who had not yet gained the necessary experience. While describing their role and responsibilities, AP D said,

> Trying to recruit folks, walking around during the day or in the afternoons to make sure the kids were under supervision, etc. The paperwork side of it- Collecting the names, submitting the names, etc. Working for the intramurals there's a separate coordinator for that so working with her again in coordinating and looking at the calendar. I'd have to make sure the rooms were available. The recruiting part I think was the most challenging.

Principals and designees who supervise ECA programs indicated the desire to provide after-school opportunities for middle school students that were engaging and presented a wide range of opportunities for varied interests. Principals, however, are forced to prioritize their desire to provide dynamic after-school programs with the competing interest of leading and monitoring the school's daily instructional program.

When a principal designates an assistant principal to supervise the ECA program, strong communication and a clear vision for the program are needed. These elements will ensure the program is being implemented according to the principal's vision despite the many challenges that may present as barriers to the success of the program. The designee is faced with several barriers that may limit the success of the ECA program including the recruitment of enthusiastic staff members to lead the activities.

Staff availability and student interest. The AP designees who oversee the ECA programs all discussed the challenge of finding sponsors to lead clubs/activities after school. While some teachers volunteer their time to lead an activity in which they are passionate, others are deterred by the low hourly rate for the stipend. AP D shared, "The money was not a motivator for staff. I don't know if increased funds would encourage teachers to participate." The program's success was largely dependent on the enthusiasm of the sponsor. AP B shared, "A lot of it is the adult that's connected to the program and whether they can sell it; whether they're well known and respected among the students."

A pattern in the data indicated the Principals' primary motivation behind each decision made regarding the ECA program is student interest. Principals use a combination of the district allocated funds and outside resources, which may be provided via grants and/or the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), to fund ECA programs. For example, Principal A discussed their

desire to keep traditionally popular clubs active from year to year by being creative in how

sponsorship is solicited:

> Those clubs which are rooted and grounded here, they will continue as long as there's interest in those particular clubs and programs. What I have to do is be very, very creative. I don't really limit it if we have a sponsor. If we don't have a sponsor, I have to solicit volunteer support. We have to do whatever we can. This is the kids, and this is their upbringing, their childhood, their growth, their development. We have to find ways to make it happen.

> The availability of sponsors to lead the after school activities was identified as a barrier

by all interviewees. Principal B shared that time is a particular barrier to staff sponsorship of

ECAs and those people with availability sponsor multiple activities.

> There are a few [staff] who do the heavy lifting. We're really trying to get other staff members to be involved [after school]. I know we have certain staff members who have family obligations. They're battling with their own health, graduate school, and a myriad of other obligations. It's about really getting them to see how it connects to our vision and to our mission, and that you don't have to do it alone.

Principals make decisions based on the staff members and/or volunteers availability to lead

activities after school. Without sponsors, the after school program would not be possible.

Principals and staff interviewed felt the 14 dollars per hour stipend offered to staff was

insufficient considering the time and effort devoted to leading an after school activity.

Therefore, Principals have to convince sponsors their time will greatly impact students and

support the school's mission. Principal C explained:

> I feel that as a school and a community, the center to our community, it's essential for our kids to have opportunities here at school that do not have to be supported by their families. I worked really hard in hiring teachers, working with teachers, and encouraging teachers to do the extracurricular activities. The teachers who do the regular clubs -- this year we have 15 of them, which is the biggest number we have ever had in my tenure here, those teachers get about $14 an hour. If you put into the equation that they wait for an additional half an hour for the activity bus [to pick up students], then they get stuck in traffic going home. It really speaks to their commitment to meeting the social-emotional needs of the kids and to create those relationships with students.

According to data collected during principal interviews, creativity appears to be essential to ensuring sponsors are available to lead interesting and engaging programs after school. Principal D explained that they make the decision to allocate additional hours to sponsors so that the final stipend is comparative to the time and effort provided. This Principal noted, "It is insulting what the pay rate is for stipend activities for people who are moms and dads or aunts and uncles who have daycare needs and who are taking graduate classes and have mortgages to pay." Principal D went on to express that the sponsor stipend must be increased to provide leverage to encourage staff to lead activities.

> …extending the day by an hour for only 14 dollars means getting on the road with more traffic and paying extra for...I have a teacher who wouldn't run an art club because extending her dog's daycare by that hour was more expensive. If we really want the extracurricular activities to be an extension of the day and not just a homework club not just a baby-sitting service and for them to actually have some learning going on, we have to change the rate.

However, assigning additional hours to sponsors means there are fewer overall hours to allocate to potential new activities. Principals are forced to weigh these options when making decisions about their ECA program. Though Principals would like student interest to be the driving force behind how they make decisions about ECAs, staff availability and willingness to participate is actually the determining factor of which clubs happen from year to year.

The role of parent involvement. When making decisions about ECA programs, principals weigh several factors to determine whether they will be able to offer an activity with expressed interest from students. There must be available funds to pay a sponsor or to purchase possible materials for the activity. Those principals with active PTAs are able to work with parents to supplement their programs with additional funding or the inclusion of outside organizations. Principal C shared that the PTA is very supportive of the school's ECA program and helps to fund various school initiatives during the day and after school.

My PTA is incredibly supportive and is able to fund different programs as needed. One of the things that we did have was done during the academic time, but it's an example, and it's an important one. The reason that I did it during the day is because many of my students cannot stay after school. I do have students who have responsibilities for younger siblings. I have other students who do have extracurriculars outside of school they are involved in such as soccer. It's hard to have the bigger group stay. Students were not able to stay even after school. I do feel like I do have to be creative in thinking what we can offer during the day. One of the pieces that the PTA pays for; we have performances during the day and then a local artist has come in many times.

You can see murals throughout the building [that students produced]. Those are all done by hand. I'm also very mindful of giving students opportunities to engage during the day because I know that not all kids, for a variety of reasons, have the luxury to stay after school. The PTA has helped me fund all of that.

Principal A and the assistant principal at A Middle School both talked about the willingness of the PTA to step in and find funds to support staff interest in beginning activities with student interest no matter when the ideas materialize. Principal A explained how she worked with the PTA to fund a club mid-year. "Two teachers came up to me and said, 'We'll do it for free.' I talked to my PTSA, and I said, 'Fundraise for Spy Kids, so that we can compensate, and make this fair and equitable for sponsors, as well.' We find the ways. We find the means to simply make it happen. Assistant Principal A added, "Last year, we worked with the PTA to get additional funding because we had two more sponsors mid-year that said, 'I have an idea. Can we work with this?' We said, "OK, let's work with PTA to make it happen."

Principals A and C are fortunate to have an active PTA that they can leverage to meet the needs of their students, both during the day and after school. However, not all middle schools have access to additional funding through the PTA, particularly schools with high poverty rates. This creates inequities in the types of clubs and activities schools are able to provide for students.

Section summary. The above sections addressed the following research questions:

- Question 2: How are decisions made about ECAs?

- Question 2.2: What processes are used to make decisions about ECAs?

- Question 2.3: What does the principal consider when making decisions about ECAs?

- Question 2.4: What influences a principal's decision regarding ECA programming?

Principals must balance several factors when making decisions about ECA programs. The data from this study indicated principals rely on the needs and interests of students as the primary driving force behind their decisions. However, student interest can only be accommodated when there is staff member availability to sponsor the ECAs. Principals advocated to provide high interest activities to students but this often involved enacting creative means to acquire the necessary funds to increase pay for sponsors or allocate the required funds for entrance fees and other requirements. Schools with highly active and capable PTAs may have the advantage of an additional funding source which creates inequity amongst schools.

District-Level Involvement

This section addresses Research Question 3: What is the level of involvement of the district in school-based ECA decision making? This research question is important in helping to understand the messages sent to middle school principals about extracurricular programs from the district. Though principal autonomy is essential to their ability to meet the unique needs of the school, it is the role of the district to establish the guidelines and accountability measures to ensure there is consistency from school to school.

To gauge the perspective and level of involvement of the district in influencing principal decision-making about extracurricular activities, an interview was conducted with a district leader, Dr. Cameron (a pseudonym), who worked closely with middle school principals. As part of the triangulation of the data, principals were also asked about their perceptions of district involvement during the interviews and I reviewed public district documents about the ECA program found on the internet. This section is divided into three subsections, district goals for

ECAs and allocation of funding, principal perspective on district involvement, and participation

rates for students of color.

      District goals for ECAs and allocation of funding. The Extracurricular Activities

Program guide for the 2018 school year states, "It is the intention of [Walker] County Public

Schools to provide instruction and supervision by fully qualified coaches and sponsors in a

variety of extracurricular activities for students, subject to available funds." Dr. Cameron

provided context as to the district's goals for ECAs at the middle school level:

> When we think about the middle school philosophy, we're thinking about the whole child. How do you provide academics, meeting the needs of kids, meeting the interest of students, pushing the rigor? Also thinking about, if we coin this to soft skills or qualities where there is that engagement. There is the music, the arts, the teaming, the extracurricular activities related to such. There's the non-negotiables for middle schools, and then there's the needs of each individual school with interest of kids and staff to create their own extracurricular activity program.

Dr. Cameron went on to explain that middle school principals really have the autonomy to create

the ECA programs they see as necessary to meet the needs of their students. The district's

responsibility was to allocate three types of funding:

- Class I: Every school was allocated a number of hours to be used for after school clubs

  and activities. These hours were disbursed at the discretion of the principal but may not

  exceed 100 hours for a single activity.

- Class III: Those funds that were allocated as a set stipend amount that is uniform for

  every middle school in the district. For example, all middle school soccer coaches

  receive the same stipend. The district decides which activities are available for Class III

  funding.

- Transportation: The district allocates a certain number of buses to each middle school and

  principals decide how those buses will be assigned (dates, number of buses to use each

day, etc.). Once schools have used the allocated number of buses, principals may use

outside funding to purchase additional buses if they choose.

Dr. Cameron further explained:

> Every school is allocated a certain bank of types of activities at a school. The expectation
> is that the principals will find a sponsor, preferably someone in the building but there are
> times where you have to go outside of the building, then to have a robust program where
> it involves a variety of students. The individual schools may monitor that differently, but
> there's always the end of the year, end of the season type of review -- How did things go?
> What might be some informal goals for the next season or the following year?
> Then there's a bank of resources where principals can decide what activities he or
> she wants to have at the middle school. Robotics is one extracurricular activity that there
> seems to be a lot of interest. That requires a lot of resources, particularly for the
> competitions, as well as the equipment for students to participate. Right now, we're
> trying to study that a little bit more to see, should all schools have a robotics team? Right
> now, we have some of our schools with resources or partnerships with community or the
> PTA are able to fund.

> **Principals' perspective on district involvement.** During the interviews, principals

shared that the district allowed them autonomy to run their ECA programs based on student

needs. When asked about the direction from the district regarding ECAs, Principal D responded,

> We have a lot of freedom with the funds to spend them in a way that we feel will be
> enriching for our students. The only things that have limits are around in what order
> someone can take a particular job.

Principal D referred to the stipulation that stipends be first offered to staff who are members of

the teaching staff prior to opening it up to support staff members. Principal C shared:

> I feel like the direction [from the district] has been minimal at best. They have very clear
> expectations for sports and intramurals. I think that's as clear as can be. I have been given
> the allocation for the math and the reading class after school, but that's basically it. I feel
> that everything else has really been up to me as the principal to explore and expand.

Principal B summarized the directives from the district about ECAs by expressing:

> Number one, it's a non-negotiable that we have an extracurricular activity program. We
> are garnered by the allocation, of course, that we receive and the hourly allocation and
> also the flat-fee stipend allocation. But really the direction I see is that it must support,
> once again, the vision, the mission, your school improvement plan, and any of the

activities that you're doing. Also student interest should definitely be in alignment with [the activities offered].

Participation rates for students of color. With equity being one of the school district's core values, Dr. Cameron was asked to share any information regarding the current status of ECA participation rates for students of color. Though Dr. Cameron did not have specific data nor did he know of any district-wide collection of participation rates in ECAs, it was a topic that sparked interest:

> I don't have the statistics. I would be interested to see. But just the anecdotal information, hearing from parents, hearing from our leaders, and observing, they're not seeing full participation. For a school that has a population of 900, not all 900 students are staying after school and being a part of extracurricular activities associated with the school. That's probably an area that we need to do some further research.

Finally, Dr. Cameron acknowledged that there were variants across the district due to the high level of flexibility provided to the principals to run their school programs. Dr. Cameron responded:

> Sometimes that's a good thing, but then sometimes it is a difference between the haves and the have-nots. I'll go back to robotics. Not everybody can have a robotics team because it requires so much in terms of resources and the cost for the competitions.
>   Some schools can have it because they have a strong PTA that's funding a portion of it or parents who don't mind raising the funds to support. You do have this variance, which is concerning.

Summary of findings about district-level involvement. The above section addressed Research Question 3: What is the level of involvement of the district in school-based ECA decision making? District leader, Dr. Cameron, discussed the district's hope that students participate in ECAs and recognized that in doing so students could potentially build positive relationships with staff. He also acknowledged that the district trusts principals with the autonomy to run ECA programs that meet the needs of their students. Dr. Cameron's responses aligned with themes found in principal interviews regarding the importance of ECAs. They also

touch on other themes in the data including principal autonomy, with an emphasis on allowing principals discretion to allocate funds as necessary.

Summary

The preceding sections presented findings in response to the three sets of research questions guiding this study. The data revealed insights into how principals make decisions regarding middle school extracurricular programs in Walker County Public Schools district. Each principal and assistant principal spoke in some way to one or more of the following themes which emerged as patterns during the coding stage of data analysis: Discretion, autonomy, beliefs, advocacy, equity and allocation of resources.

When making decisions about ECAs, principals used their discretion to offer programs that respond to student interests and staff availability to serve as sponsors. Though principals believe student involvement in clubs and activities after school may have positive benefits, there are no systematic processes in place from school to school or district-wide to monitor the participation rates for students nor are there systemic consistencies ensuring equitable access to after school opportunities from school to school. Next, I will discuss these themes as they relate to the literature on street-level bureaucracy and other themes presented in the literature review.

Discussion

In the previous section, I shared findings for each of the research questions addressed in this study. In this section, I discuss the major findings concerning my three research questions, including the implications of:

1. Principals' work as street-level bureaucrats for ECAs,

2. Principals' discretion around ECAs for equity, and

3. District involvement for principal autonomy.

In each section, I discuss the ways these findings relate to the literature presented in chapter two and the conceptual framework in chapter three, and I provide three recommendations for future actions and possible barriers to progress. Finally, I discuss the implications of my findings for further research.

Principal as a Street-Level Bureaucrat

According to Lipsky (1980), street-level bureaucrats use their influence to exercise discretion in the execution of their work. Principals use their influence and autonomy to carry out their work in a way that benefits their school. A principal's influence is essential to creating a school environment conducive to student learning and achievement (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). As stated in chapter two, the principal is responsible for ensuring that all staff are working in collaboration toward a shared vision that will lead to maximized student learning (Bryk et al., 2010). Furthermore, effective leaders constantly evaluate whether their decisions are having an impact on those whom they lead (Sun & Leithwood, 2012). If we view the role of the principal through the lens of the street-level bureaucrat, they hold the power and influence to develop highly engaging extracurricular programs that allow all students to establish important, positive relationships with staff.

Data from this study revealed middle school principals believe student participation in ECAs to be beneficial to their social/emotional development and connectedness to the school. It is likely the principals who chose to participate in this study did so due to their positive beliefs about student participation in ECAs. We are not able to know the feelings of the 21 middle school principals who did not respond to the survey or participate in an interview.

The literature emphasizes that student participation in organized ECAs helps "…cultivate the skills, habits, connections, and knowledge that prepare children for lifelong success:

academic success in school, graduating from high school, going to college, getting a job, and

participating in civic life" (Snellman, Silva, & Putnam, 2015). Past research has documented

that secondary school principals filter issues through their core values and beliefs prior to making

decisions. Principals use their core values as a "guiding compass" when making decisions

(Larsen & Hunter, 2014). When discussing personal values, Principal B stated:

> I strongly believe our extracurricular activities program is a wonderful way [for students] to have a sense of belonging, a sense of climate. Like I said, there's so much that they learn from being a part of a club or an activity -- the time management, the goal setting, team participation, group dynamics, how to work with others.

As street-level bureaucrats, principals use their discretion when making decisions about

how much of their time and attention will be devoted to the running of the ECA program. With

competing demands on principals' time and attention, three of the four principals interviewed

designated logistical operations of the ECA program to an assistant principal. According to the

APs, the level of principal involvement varied from discussing the progress of the program

during administrative team meetings to, as the AP from School D phrased, "It was really just a

delegation." Nonetheless, participants emphasized the importance of having principals engaged

at some level in leading ECAs.

Findings from this study suggest misalignment of principal beliefs and actions regarding

ECA program implementation. Participants in this study espoused beliefs that student

participation in ECAs can lead to stronger connectedness to the school and positive relationships

with staff members. However, when principals have a hands-off approach to the actual running

of the program they are unaware of the actual benefit to students. ECA program success is

attained when student participation in the clubs, sports, and activities offered is representative of

the school's demographics. Taking that basic definition for success, schools may choose to set

participation targets based on the individual needs of the school, for example, aiming to have

higher participation rates for African American and Latino students who may not be engaged in community activities outside of school.

Thus, recommendation one is as follows:

> **Recommendation One:** *Principals need to be directly involved in ECA decision-making. It is at the principal's discretion to designate another leader such as an assistant principal to lead the daily logistics of the after school program. However, regular communication and data dialogues are necessary to ensure success.*

Equity and Participation of Students of Color

All of the principals and APs interviewed for this study mentioned having an interest in learning more about the participation rates for their students of color. While many expressed that their programs seem to be representative of their student body, they also shared that this was largely based on observation and anecdotal evidence. When asked during the interview about participation rates for students of color, Principal C responded, "That's an interesting question and I can't answer that off the top of my head. We have not looked at the student attendance based on race. We have not." Principal C went on to say that they are very cognizant of any groups that lack diversity after school, "The clubs overall represent [C Middle School]."

Principal D explained:

> Our extracurricular participants do not reflect the demographics of the school. When I say demographics in this specific context, I'm really only speaking to race and ethnicity. I've spent a lot of time looking at our special education student participation and our male students, but from a phenomenological perspective. I can tell you that our kids of color are not as often participating.
>
> I just recently talked to the year book sponsor who did a selective process for year book participants this year. She got our students to sign up and get a teacher reference. I specifically asked this question to her, "Do we have a diverse group of students who applied to the list?" She said, "No. I haven't really looked at that." I said to her, "I would like for you to look at that." She made a conscious decision to move yearbook from after-school, to during the day, during our advisory program. To me, that's a prime

opportunity to catch any kid that an after-school conflict would never impinge upon their participation. I understand that her perspective was she wanted to be interest-driven.

[Our school is] very geographically isolated from a bulk of our community, and considerably distant from where most of our working class families live. The distance, in terms of where we're located relative to our families, I think is a hindrance. I'm not saying that is the reason. That is something that we're up against.

The data report that principals communicated an interest in having student participation rates to be representative of their school demographics. Research supports the benefits during the academic school day for students of color who are engaged after school (Mahoney, Harris, & Eccles, 2006; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010). However, the data collected in this study did not reveal systematic processes in place to actively monitor student participation rates disaggregated by race, ethnicity and/or other demographic groups. This is not to say this type of data analysis does not exist district-wide. If there is a school that monitors and analyzes the rate of involvement after school for students of color, the decision to monitor that data was at the discretion of the principal.

The data gathered from this study indicated that principals do not have enough concrete evidence to accurately evaluate the success of their after school programs and whether those programs are equitably being accessed by students of color. The "educational achievement gap" represents differences in academic performance between White and Non-White students. Though there are several hypotheses about why this gap exists, some researchers have written that a possible contributing factor is that African American and Hispanic students are less engaged in school and see limited opportunities for future success (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001). Principals have the power to create environments which make all students, but particularly students of color, feel connected to the school. One way that this can be done is through the organization of structured ECAs (Townsend & McWhirter, 2005).

If principals truly see value to student participation in ECAs they will establish measures to determine program success through evaluation. There was evidence in the data that principals collected after school participation data by requiring sponsors to take attendance every day. Furthermore, the middle school principal survey data demonstrated that 44% of principals who participated "sometimes" monitored student participation in activities. Five percent of principals reported they did not monitor participation data at all.   In addition, principals make decisions about the ECA program primarily based on available sponsors to lead the activities.

Many of the principals interviewed noted the importance of student voice in determining which activities to offer. When students have input in the activities there is a higher chance of them feeling connected and engaged with the activity (Snellman, Silva, & Putnam, 2015). School connectedness can be described as occurring "…when a person is actively involved with another person, object, group, or environment, and that involvement promotes a sense of comfort, wellbeing, and anxiety-reduction" (Thompson & McWhirter, 2005, p. 193). The pivotal role student connectedness plays on school engagement and academic progress is documented across racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups. However, students of color are more likely to be disconnected and disengaged with the school (Daly et. al., 2010).

This research, along with the WCPS district-wide core values of equity and excellence for all students makes the case for taking a closer look at the level of engagement that exists across middle schools regarding student participation after school. Every leader who was interviewed expressed an interest in knowing more about which students were staying after school and why. Due to the variation that exists with how after school programs are run at the middle school level, a district-wide expectation for data collection and monitoring would ensure uniformity in the data collection process. This means, the data would also be available for

monitoring at the district level and could be used as a measure of the systematic implementation of the value on equity. Given the above, recommendation two is as follows:

Recommendation Two: *Middle school principals need to establish school-based processes to collect and monitor student participation data. This data should be analyzed regularly and be used to inform the types of clubs and activities offered at each school and determine the level of engagement of students of color.*

Principal Autonomy and District Involvement

The Thrive After School program, which exists in seven WCPS middle schools with a high percentage of students receiving free and reduced meals, should be celebrated. This partnership between the school district and community organizations brings highly engaging, non-profit organizations into the schools, provides transportation, and a hot meal for students. TAS can serve as a model for providing additional funding sources to middle school ECA programs.

The role of the district with helping principals offer engaging ECA programs includes the incorporation of additional accountability measures to evaluate program success. This includes, establishing the expectation that schools identify targets for African American and Latino student participation rates.

The question of equitable access was also called to light in the data in reference to the variable access to funding from school to school. A barrier to the principal's ability to effectively provide highly engaging ECAs is whether or not they can obtain additional funding to offer highly popular clubs that may require fees (i.e.: registration fees, competition, fees, etc.). Many principals in this study spoke of having to be "creative" in establishing additional funds and resources. This creativity includes advocating with district leaders, grant writing, allocating

Parent Teacher Association funds, and using outside organizations to supplement activity offerings. The additional funding sources creates an additional inequity for middle school principals for various reasons, including, lack of PTA resources and time to seek funding elsewhere.

Principals and district leadership noted the high level of autonomy allotted to principals to lead and make decisions that meet the needs of their individual schools and students. Principal autonomy is both welcome and necessary due to the many unique qualities and needs of each school. With regards to extracurricular programming, there seems to be a need to revisit the types of activities available for Class III stipends at the middle school level. In addition, the principal's ability to make decisions was limited by the number of sponsors available to lead the students. A barrier that arose as a theme in the data was the low stipend of fourteen dollars and fifty cents per hour available to sponsors. This is certainly an area worth exploring in greater depth in the future.

In light of the above discussion, recommendation three is as follows:

Recommendation Three: *WCPS needs to re-evaluate allocation of funds for ECAs. It would benefit school programs if sponsor stipends were significantly increased. Equitable distribution of funds will assist schools who do not have active PTA or grant funding to aid in their ECA offerings. Furthermore, the district should explore opportunities for expanding current ECA partnerships or pursuing additional, large-scale grant funding to support middle school programs.*

Future Considerations

This study focused on how middle school principals make decisions regarding extracurricular activities. More information is needed on the ECA participation rates of students

of color in the district. In addition, the voice of the activity sponsor would provide important

insight into their roles and reasons for choosing to lead activities after school. A future study

involving both student and sponsor perspectives would provide additional insight into the

barriers principals face when making decisions about ECAs.

Also, additional empirical studies are needed regarding the impact of participation in

ECAs for middle school students. Much of the research is centered on high school students

while programs at the middle school level exist and provide many positive opportunities for

students. I have defined ECA program success as being evident when student participation is

representative of the school's demographics. A longitudinal study on students who do and/or do

not participate in middle through high school would provide a wealth of information regarding

long-term effects of participation on student academic performance, social/emotional well-being,

and overall school engagement and connectedness.

Conclusion

The principal has the power and influence to implement a vision that fosters a positive

school culture and facilitates student engagement and achievement. A positive school culture is

the building block for effective instruction, student engagement, and achievement. Gerhart et al.

(2011) noted that:

> Effective leaders build a culture that positively affects teachers who in return have a
> positive effect on students. In this way, leaders work through other people. While
> sometimes the words or actions of leaders directly affect the goals of the group, more
> frequently, the leader influences the thoughts and actions of others. This leads to
> establishing policies that enable greater effectiveness to occur within the organization (p.
> 268).

A recent report completed by the Office of Legislative Oversight in WCPS found that

approximately 8,000 youth are disconnected or weakly connected to school (The Community

Foundation for the National Capital Region and Betah Associates, 2015). One of the means

schools have used to engage students, is through extracurricular programming. Indeed, research shows a strong correlation between student participation in ECAs and school connectedness and a positive school culture.

This capstone project examined middle school principals' perceptions and decision-making practices regarding extracurricular activities in order to identify factors influencing principal decision-making. According to Lipsky (2010), principals serve as street-level bureaucrats because they use their power and their discretion to execute their daily work. This research revealed that principals have a great deal of discretion in how they manage and implement the ECAs offered at their schools.

As street-level bureaucrats, principals use their autonomy to implement the ECA programs according to what they believe is appropriate and necessary given the needs of their respective schools. Due to the level of autonomy and decision-making authority concerning ECAs at the school level, there exists the potential for inconsistencies across the district with regard to program implementation and equitable access to clubs and other ECAs. Although autonomy can help principals meet the needs of their particular student populations, if principals are unaware of the relationships between ECA participation and positive student outcomes or if other considerations (e.g., available staff) are placed above concerns for equity, student needs may go unmet.

The purpose of this capstone project was to investigate middle school principal perceptions and decision-making practices regarding extracurricular activities in order to identify factors influencing principal decision-making. Additionally, this study explored how principal beliefs factor into the decision-making process. This study was intended to heighten district-level awareness of varying levels of extracurricular program implementation in middle schools.

CHAPTER 5: ACTION COMMUNICATIONS

In the previous section, I discussed findings from this study as well as recommendations for practice and future research on the topic. In this section, I provide an explanation of how my results and recommendations will be communicated to pertinent leadership in WCPS.

I have selected two forums to communicate my findings. First, I will share my findings and recommendations in writing to an appropriate district leader and middle school director of instructional programs. Second, I will communicate my findings in person to middle school principals during a Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting. During these meetings, I will share the executive memo and Power Point presentation below. The presentations will emphasize findings from principal and assistant principal interviews and the middle school principal survey as they relate to relevant literature. In addition, I will communicate how these findings have led to recommendations for principals and district leadership.

The memo and presentation will be made available to district leadership and middle school principals during the meeting in which the information is being shared.

Principal Decision-Making and Extracurricular Activities

MEMO TO: District Associate Superintendent, Directors of Instructional Programs, Middle School Principals

FROM: Kisha Logan, Doctoral Candidate, University of Virginia Curry School of Education

Background

In a report done by the Office of Legislative Oversight on youth and work in WCPS, it was found that approximately 8,000 youth are disconnected or weakly connected to school (The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region and Betah Associates, 2015). The study found that Black and African American youth in the county are three times more likely to be disconnected. Research shows a strong correlation between student participation in extracurricular activities (ECAs) and school connectedness, however, middle school principals in the district have access to limited information on the participation of students of color in extracurricular activities, which limits their ability to leverage the benefits of involvement for these students. Furthermore, the size of the school district and the lack of district monitoring means that principals have a great deal of autonomy with the design and implementation of extracurricular programs. With limited information and competing priorities, principals use discretion to determine how much emphasis will be placed on ECA programs in their schools (Findlay, 2015). As a result, there exists the potential for inconsistencies in program implementation and equitable access to clubs and activities for all students, specifically for students of color.

Purpose of Study

This capstone dissertation examined middle school principal perceptions and decision-making practices regarding extracurricular activities in order to identify factors influencing principal decision-making. Additionally, this study explored how principal beliefs about the significance of ECA programs factor into the amount of time and resources they devote to its organization. A goal of this study was to heighten district-level awareness of varying levels of extracurricular program implementation in middle schools.

Research Questions and Methodology

In order to better understand middle school principal decision-making regarding ECAs, I proposed the following research questions.

- Question 1: What are the principal's beliefs, goals and values with regards to ECAs?
  - Question 1.2: How do principals measure the success of the ECA program and its connection to student engagement?
- Question 2: How are decisions made about ECAs?
  - Question 2.2: What processes are used to make decisions about ECAs?
  - Question 2.3: What does the principal consider when making decisions about ECAs?
  - Question 2.4: What influences a principal's decision regarding ECA programming?
- Question 3: What is the level of involvement of the district in school-based ECA decision making?

Methodology

WCPS has a total of 41 middle schools with a variety of student populations and needs (39 schools existed at the time of data collection). I interviewed principals at four middle schools with varying demographics and years of experience. The interviews focused on principal beliefs and decision-making practices around extracurricular activity programming and its role in providing students with opportunities to connect to the school. If principals indicated an assistant principal designee whom they charge with supervising the ECA program, they were also interviewed. In addition, a survey of middle school principals was conducted to gauge district-wide beliefs and practices for ECAs. School and district websites were reviewed and documents referencing ECA programs were analyzed. Finally, I interviewed a district-level leader to gain their perspective on the current state of middle school ECA programs and the role of the principal in implementing these programs.

Findings

The data revealed insights into how principals make decisions regarding middle school extracurricular programs in Walker County Public School district. Each principal and assistant principal spoke in some way to one or more of the following themes which emerged as patterns during data analysis: Discretion, autonomy, beliefs, advocacy, equity and allocation of resources. When making decisions about ECAs, principals use their discretion to offer programs that respond to student interests and staff availability to serve as sponsors. Though principals believe student involvement in clubs and activities after school may have positive benefits, there are no systematic processes in place from school to school or district-wide to monitor the participation rates for students nor are there systemic consistencies ensuring equitable access to after school opportunities from school to school.

Recommendations

The findings led to the following recommendations:

1. Principals should be directly involved in ECA decision-making. It is at the principal's discretion to designate another leader such as an assistant principal to lead the daily logistics of the after-school program. However, regular communication and data dialogues are necessary to ensure success.
2. Middle school principals should establish school-based processes to collect and monitor student participation data. This data should be analyzed regularly and be used to inform the types of clubs and activities offered at each school and determine the level of engagement of students of color.
3. WCPS needs to re-evaluate allocation of funds for ECAs. It would benefit school programs if sponsor stipends were significantly increased. Equitable distribution of funds will assist schools who do not have active PTA or grant funding to aid in their ECA offerings. Furthermore, the district should explore opportunities for expanding current ECA partnerships or pursuing additional, large-scale grant funding to support middle school programs.

Principal Decision-Making and Extracurricular Activities

Research Findings and Recommendations
Kisha N. Logan

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Contents

- Problem of Practice
- Research Questions
- Methodology
- Findings
- Recommendations
- Future Considerations
- Discussion

Problem of Practice

- Black and African American youth in WCPS are three times more likely to be disconnected

- Approximately 8,000 youth in the district are disconnected or weakly connected to school (The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region and Betah Associates, 2015)

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Problem of Practice

Research studies have noted benefits to student involvement in school-based extracurricular activities (ECAs):

- Academic identity
- **Student engagement**
- **Feelings of connectedness** to the school
- Higher graduation and college attendance rates (Fredericks, & Simpkins, 2011)

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Problem of Practice

- Limited information on student participation rates in ECAs

- Principal autonomy with ECA programming

- Potential for inconsistencies in programming and equitable access to ECAs

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Purpose of the Study

- Understand middle school principal decision-making practices regarding ECAs

- Understand principal beliefs about ECAs

- Understand the school district's perceptions and policies about middle school student involvement in ECAs

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Research Questions

- **Question 1:** What are the principal's beliefs, goals and values with regards to ECAs?
  - **Research Question 1.2:** How do principals measure the success of the ECA program and its connection to student engagement?

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## Research Questions

- **Question 2:** How are decisions made about ECAs?
  - **Research Question 2.2:** What processes are used to make decisions about ECAs?
  - **Research Question 2.3:** What does the principal consider when making decisions about ECAs?
  - **Research Question 2.4:** What influences a principal's decision regarding ECA programming?

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Research Questions

Question 3: What is the level of involvement of the district in school-based ECA decision making?

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Literature Review
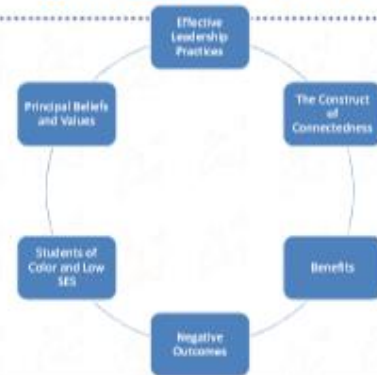
Principal Beliefs & Values

- Principals use their core values as a "guiding compass" when making decisions
- Principal decision-making reflects three main core values
  - The needs of the students are the top priority;
  - There should be flexibility in decision-making
  - Relationships are important

Larsen & Hunter, 2014

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Connectedness

- Students who feel connected to their school are more likely to exert effort, develop positive feelings about school, and participate in classroom and school activities (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001; Sulkowski, Demaray, & Lazarus, 2011)

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Extracurricular Activities

- "It is believed that extracurricular activities:
  - Offer a means to express and explore one's identity,
  - Generate social and human capital, and
  - Offer a challenging setting outside of academics.

- Adolescents form their identity by developing skills, discovering preferences, and associating themselves with others" (Feldman & Matjasko, pp. 161-162).

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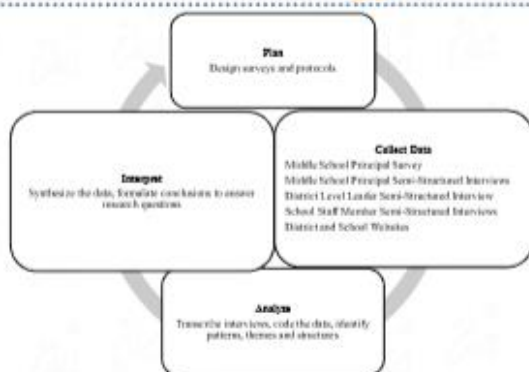
Students of Color & Low SES

- A study by Larson, Richards, Sims, and Dworkin (2001) found that urban African American students spent less time in structured after-school activities than a comparison sample of white suburban students.

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Overview of Research Methodology

Plan
Design surveys and protocols.

Collect Data
Middle School Principal Survey
Middle School Principal Semi-Structured Interviews
District Level Leader Semi-Structured Interview
School Staff Member Semi-Structured Interviews
District and School Websites

Interpret
Synthesize the data, formulate conclusions to answer research questions

Analyze
Transcribe interviews, code the data, identify patterns, themes and structures

Conceptual Framework

As street-level bureaucrats, principals use **discretion** to make decisions about school-level extracurricular activities because they have the **autonomy** to decide how funds will be allocated, who will sponsor activities, and which activities will be offered (Lipsky, 2010).

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Findings RQ1

- Principals believe student involvement in ECAs will lead to fostering positive relationships with peers and school staff

- Success is measured anecdotally and by observations of student interest and involvement

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Findings RQ 1

According to the survey results, 93% of principal respondents agreed or agreed strongly that they believe ECAs provide students with an opportunity to build strong relationships with trusted adults and 94% felt they are an indicator of school engagement.

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Findings RQ 1

Principal D's reply seemed to downplay the importance of ECAs:

It's just a "Big rock" question or, looking at the urgency of the work. For me, I mostly feel the most urgent work is supporting teachers and supporting kids in academic settings.

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Findings RQ 2

- Decisions are largely based on student interest and sponsor availability

- The assistant principal designee who supervises the program heavily influences the principal

- Limited funding sources influences the principal's ability to offer certain activities

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Findings RQ 2

When discussing staff availability to sponsor ECAs, Principal C explained:

> The teachers who do the regular clubs -- this year we have 15 of them, which is the biggest number we have ever had in my tenure here, those teachers get about $14 an hour.

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Findings RQ 3

- Principals have autonomy to offer an ECA program that meets the needs of the school

- The district is responsible for allocating funds for transportation and stipends

- District involvement is minimal

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Findings RQ 3

Dr. Cameron, a district-level leader, shared:

> Robotics is one extracurricular activity that there seems to be a lot of interest. That requires a lot of resources, particularly for the competitions, as well as the equipment for students to participate.

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Findings RQ 3

Dr. Cameron was asked to share any information regarding the current status of ECA participation rates for students of color:

> I don't have the statistics. I would be interested to see. But just the anecdotal information, hearing from parents, hearing from our leaders, and observing, they're not seeing full participation.

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Recommendations

1) Principals should be directly involved in ECA decision-making. It is at the principal's discretion to designate another leader such as an assistant principal to lead the daily logistics of the after school program. However, regular communication and data dialogues are necessary to ensure success.

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Recommendations

2) Middle school principals should establish school-based processes to collect and monitor student participation data. This data should be analyzed regularly and be used to inform the types of clubs and activities offered at each school and determine the level of engagement of students of color.

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Recommendations

3) WCPS needs to re-evaluate allocation of funds for ECAs. It would benefit school programs if sponsor stipends were significantly increased. Equitable distribution of funds will assist schools who do not have active PTA or grant funding to aid in their ECA offerings. Furthermore, the district should explore opportunities for expanding current ECA partnerships or pursuing additional, large-scale grant funding to support middle school programs.

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Future Considerations

- Assess ECA participation rates of students of color in the district

- The role of the activity sponsor would provide important insight into their roles and reasons for choosing to lead activities after school.

- A longitudinal study on students who do and/or do not participate in middle through high school

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Appendix A: Middle School Principal Survey Protocol

Dear Middle School Principals,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Virginia Curry School of Education. I am conducting a study on how middle school principals make decisions regarding extracurricular activities in their schools. The information collected will be used in my capstone dissertation project and recommendations will be shared with middle school principals in the county. This study has been approved by the University of Virginia and Montgomery County Public Schools Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The following survey will require about 15 minutes of your time. I will use the information collected for my study and to determine which principals will be invited for a follow-up interview. This study will be published however individual results will be kept confidential. All participants will be referred to with a pseudonym.

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey.

Sincerely,

Kisha Logan

1. What is the name of your school?

2. How long have you served as a middle school principal?
    a. This is my first year
    b. 2-5 years
    c. 6 years or more

3. To what extent do you believe the following:
    a. Extracurricular activities are an important part of the middle school experience.

        Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Undecided   Agree   Strongly Agree

    b. Student involvement in extracurricular activities are an indicator of school engagement.

        Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Undecided   Agree   Strongly Agree

    c. Students have the opportunity to build strong relationships with trusted adults and staff members through extracurricular activity involvement

        Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Undecided   Agree   Strongly Agree

d. Extracurricular activities should only address academic needs (i.e.: homework club, extended day programs, math club, etc.)

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Undecided   Agree   Strongly Agree

4. Does your school have a Thrive After School partnership?
    a. Yes
    b. No

5. As principal, do you monitor student extracurricular activities participation data?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Sometimes

6. As principal, do you currently supervise the extracurricular activity program or does a designee?
    a. I directly supervise the program.
    b. A designee supervises the program

7. Are you willing to participate in a semi-structured interview about your school's extracurricular activity program?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Maybe, I'd like more information first

8. Please write anything you would like about how you make decisions about your school's extracurricular activity program.

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this survey.

Appendix B: Middle School Principal Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Principal_____, thank you for taking the time to talk to me today about your extracurricular activities program and decision-making practices regarding that program. I am a doctoral student at the University of Virginia Curry School of Education. I am conducting a study on how middle school principals make decisions regarding extracurricular activities in their schools. The information collected will be used in my capstone dissertation project and recommendations will be shared with middle school principals in the county. This study has been approved by the University of Virginia and Montgomery County Public Schools Institutional Review Board (IRB).

This is a semi-structured interview and you have the freedom to skip questions, ask for clarification, and ask questions of me at any point. I would like to record this interview so that I may accurately refer to your responses when writing my paper. Do I have your permission to record this interview? Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Tell me about your extracurricular activities program?
    a. Possible follow-ups: Who oversees the program?
    b. What types of activities do you offer?
    c. Is it well attended? How do you know?
    d. What written plans and/or policies have you established about ECAs (ask the principal to provide copies)?

2. Do you believe it is important for students to be involved in activities/clubs/sports after school? Why/why not?

3. What is your vision for your school's ECA program?

4. How do you make decisions about what programs to offer and which sponsors to accept?

    a. Who else influences the decision-making process?
    b. What types of decisions do you typically need to make about ECAs?

5. What direction have you been given by the district about managing the ECA program?
    a. What resources are made available by the district?
    b. Do you receive additional resources from the PTSA or other organizations? How are they allocated?

Probes (initial & final)…
- I think I understand what you mean when you say _____, can you unpack that for me?
- Can you give me an example of _____?
- Could you clarify what you have in mind when you say _____?
- Can you tell me a bit more about why ____ is important here?
- What led to that conclusion/decision?
- Could you tell me more about _____?
- What is significant about __?
- How is ____ done?
- What would ____ look like?
- How did that come about?
- That's helpful, could you provide some more detail about _____.
- Could you say more about _____?

    c.   What influences your decision about how to allocate the resources?

6. How do you measure the success of the ECA program?
    a. Do you currently collect data on any aspect of the ECA program?
    b. Have you collected student voice data regarding the ECA program at your school (i.e.: What types of clubs do they want? What are their interests?)

7. In what ways, if any, does student involvement in ECAs affect their connectedness to the school during the regular school day?

Appendix C: District-Level Leader Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Dr. Williams, thank you for taking the time to talk to me today about the county's extracurricular activities program at the middle school level. I am a doctoral student at the University of Virginia Curry School of Education. I am conducting a study on how middle school principals make decisions regarding extracurricular activities in their schools. The information collected will be used in my capstone dissertation project and recommendations will be shared with middle school principals in the county. This study has been approved by the University of Virginia and Montgomery County Public Schools Institutional Review Board (IRB).

This is a semi-structured interview and you have the freedom to skip questions, ask for clarification, and ask questions of me at any point. I would like to record this interview so that I may accurately refer to your responses when writing my paper. Do I have your permission to record this interview? Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Tell me about the county's extracurricular activities program at the middle school level?
   a. What are the expectations for principals?
   b. What types of activities are offered?

2. Do you believe it is important for middle school students to be involved in activities/clubs/sports after school? Why/why not?

3. Tell me about middle school student participation in ECAs as it relates to school connectedness and engagement.

4. What types of resources are made available to principals for ECAs and how is distribution of those resources monitored?

5. How does the district measure the success of ECA programs at the middle schools?

6. In what ways, if any, does student involvement in ECAs affect their connectedness to the school during the regular school day?

Probes (initial & final)…
- ☐ I think I understand what you mean when you say _____, can you unpack that for me?
- ☐ Can you give me an example of _____?
- ☐ Could you clarify what you have in mind when you say _____?
- ☐ Can you tell me a bit more about why _____ is important here?
- ☐ What led to that conclusion/decision?
- ☐ Could you tell me more about _____?
- ☐ What is significant about ___?
- ☐ How is _____ done?
- ☐ What would _____ look like?
- ☐ How did that come about?
- ☐ That's helpful, could you provide some more detail about _____.
- ☐ Could you say more about _____?

Appendix D: School Staff Member Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today about your extracurricular activities program. I am a doctoral student at the University of Virginia Curry School of Education. I am conducting a study on how middle school principals make decisions regarding extracurricular activities in their schools. The information collected will be used in my capstone dissertation project and recommendations will be shared with middle school principals in the county. This study has been approved by the University of Virginia and Montgomery County Public Schools Institutional Review Board (IRB).

This is a semi-structured interview and you have the freedom to skip questions, ask for clarification, and ask questions of me at any point. I would like to record this interview so that I may accurately refer to your responses when writing my paper. Do I have your permission to record this interview? Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Tell me about your extracurricular activities program?
   a. Possible follow-ups: Who oversees the program?
   b. What types of activities do you offer?
   c. Is it well attended? How do you know?

2. What is your role and responsibilities with the extracurricular program?

3. Tell me about the role of the principal with regards to the program.

4. How do you measure the success of the ECA program?
   a. Do you currently collect data on any aspect of the ECA program?
   b. Have you collected student voice data regarding the ECA program at your school (i.e.: What types of clubs do they want? What are their interests?) Why or why not?

5. In what ways, if any, does student involvement in ECAs affect their connectedness to the school during the regular school day?
   a. How do you know?

Probes (initial & final)…
- ☐ I think I understand what you mean when you say _____, can you unpack that for me?
- ☐ Can you give me an example of _____?
- ☐ Could you clarify what you have in mind when you say _____?
- ☐ Can you tell me a bit more about why _____ is important here?
- ☐ What led to that conclusion/decision?
- ☐ Could you tell me more about _____?
- ☐ What is significant about ___?
- ☐ How is ____ done?
- ☐ What would ____ look like?
- ☐ How did that come about?
- ☐ That's helpful, could you provide some more detail about _____.
- ☐ Could you say more about _____?