



Review

A student achievement strategy for African Americans using the I.T.E.A.M.U.P. Model

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High school education for people of color and sound leadership are critical drivers for the United States to remain competitive on a global scale. The purpose of this paper was to present the current problem in minority high school graduation rates, a literature review of transformational leadership, and a transformational leadership strategy that may help improve graduation rates in students of color. Advances in technology, telecommunications, and transportation are continuing to drag United States industries such as computer programming, high-tech manufacturing, and service sectors into global competition. That said, the advancement of those segments is creating a demand for high-skilled labor around the world. For U.S. businesses to maintain a high level of growth in the global marketplace and realize its full potential, American employers must continue to tap into the talents of its minority workforce.

Key words: Student graduation rates, leadership, student achievement, transformational leadership, African Americans male students.

INTRODUCTION

Advances in technology, telecommunications, and transportation are continuing to drag United States industries such as computer programming, high-tech manufacturing, and service sectors into global competition. That said, the advancement of those segments is creating a demand for high-skilled labor around the world. For U.S. businesses to maintain a high level of growth in the global marketplace and realize its full potential, American employers must continue to tap into the talents of its minority workforce. High school education for people of color and sound leadership are critical drivers for the United States to remain competitive on a global scale. The purpose of this paper was to present the current problem in minority high school graduation rates, a literature review of transformational leadership, and a transformational

leadership strategy that may help improve graduation rates in students of color.

The Problem: Low high school graduation rates for people of color in the U.S.

Because one of the most critical components to economic competitiveness is education (Cooper et al., 2012), preparing tomorrow's workforce requires that all high school students are proficient in reading, math, science, and technology. An indicator of proficiency in those skills is high school graduation rates. At current, high school graduation rates are at an all-time high in the U.S. at 83%. Although graduation rates have grown over the years, African Americans graduate at 74%, which is significantly

lower than the national average. Approximately 75% of African American children attend Title I schools which qualify as poor or low income, and typically, these students have lower achievement than students from higher-income families (Boschma and Brownstein, 2016; Reardon et al., 2014). Low student achievement in minorities has some negative implications such as being six times more likely to receive public aid and are more likely to end up in prison than other ethnic groups in the U.S. (Williams, 2012).

The importance of leadership in schools

Leadership in schools play a prominent role in today's schools as an essential component in improving schools and in giving direction to student achievement (Heck and Hallinger, 2009). Student performance in schools depends on the leadership capacity of designated leaders (Stover, 2005). Studies specifically link school leadership behaviors to students' performance (Valentine and Prater, 2011) and school leadership is a critical component of healthy performance and student success (Wilson, 2011). Ultimately, the principal is responsible for student achievement, and it is their primary responsibility to create and maintain a safe, engaging school environment for their staff and students to achieve (Lumpkin, 2008). Because of this, the principal provides guidance, resources, and support to their staff members. The staff members are then fully-equipped to provide their students with an excellent classroom experience so that they can realize their full potential (O'Donnell and White, 2005; Matos and Agostino, 2006).

Graduation rates are the current measure of school success

The current measure of school success is student achievement, and graduation rates provide a measurement of students' performance (Mintz, 2009). Graduation rates also serve as a source of accountability to ensure that all learners graduate from high school (Richmond, 2009). Graduation rates are an essential measure of the performance of the public-school system and determine resources allocation based on school performance (Richmond, 2009).

The Significance of Graduation Rates

Graduation rates are a substantial requirement for measuring school districts' overall performance, and it provides students the credentials for employment and success in the workplace. Students earning a high school diploma offers a variety of benefits for both the graduate and society. Compared to dropouts, high school graduates earn \$8,000, have a better health and life expectancy, more likely to vote, and are less likely engage in criminal behavior, and depend on less on social services (America's Promise Alliance, 2017).

Literature Review

Transformational Leadership

Because African Americans graduate at a lower rate among other ethnic groups, school leaders may benefit from proven leadership strategies such as transformational leadership. Research has shown that transformational leadership is an ideal leadership style for principals of schools and studies also links this style of leadership to positive outcomes such as improvements in school climate and teacher engagement (Allen et al., 2015). Research studies making use of the Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire revealed that principals favor the transformational style of leadership over other leadership styles such as transactional, Laissez-Faire (Price, 2014).

Early Conceptualizations of Transformational Leadership

James Burns coined the term transformational leadership which refers to a process where leaders and followers work together to advance employee morale and motivation (Anderson, 2017). Burns (1978) stated that transformational leadership transforms individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to a higher realm of motivation. Moreover, the leader inspires followers to rise to a much higher level of achievement and performance (Burns, 1978). For years, business organizations made use of this style of leadership and have proven to have advantageous results on employee job satisfaction, performance, and commitment (Burns, 1978). Concerning teacher commitment, the transformational style of leadership has a positive influence on teacher engagement, performance, and job satisfaction.

Bernard Bass and the 4 I's of Transformational Leadership

Bernard Bass (1985) research on transformational leadership in schools highlighted four specific behaviors that leaders exhibit to improve their organizations' performance which is the following:

Idealized Influence

These types of leaders are willing to share risks with followers and build a climate that is conducive for others to excel. School leaders are successful when they involve all stakeholders such as the school community and parents to help carry out the vision (Bass et al., 2003).

Inspirational Motivation

These types of leaders try to continually stimulate others to buy-in on new ideas through showing enthusiasm, pointing out positive results, and encouraging teamwork. Leaders may hold others accountable to inspire motivation, expect

that all stakeholders meet high expectations, and urging followers to avoid procrastination, learn from what others have done, and work efficiently (Heck, 2014).

Intellectual Stimulation

These types of leaders challenge their followers to be innovative, creative, challenging norms, and taking calculated risks. The intellectually stimulated leader encourages teamwork and collaboration to view problems from a wide variety of angles and come up with new ideas within the company (Bass and Riggio, 2006).

Individualized Consideration

These types of leaders understand the needs of their people and develop them through coaching and feedback. Leaders try to maintain a respectful relationship with others, actively listen, and mentor to build their followers further (Bass, 1997). To provide individualized consideration, leaders must place careful thought into planning and structure (Heck, 2014).

Kenneth Leithwood and Transformational Leadership

Kenneth Leithwood provided empirical research on transformational leadership in a school setting. He suggested that this type of leadership is an enabler of positive change and is well-suited for performance improvement and coping with the demands of the twenty-first century. Moreover, Leithwood asserted that because schools face ever-increasing accountability relative to student achievement, transformational leadership is formidable for school settings because it prepares staff to learn new skills, establish new ways of thinking, break established norms, and create new standards (Leithwood, 1994).

A California School District Application of Transformational Leadership to Improve Student Achievement

Previous research has revealed that the application of transformational leadership principles could be a possible solution to improve graduation rates of students. The direct use of the transformational leadership can increase teacher engagement, and teacher engagement increases the likelihood of student success (Boberg and Bourgeois, 2016).

One researcher who explored transformational leadership in a low-income school district was Timothy Heck of San Diego State University. In his research, he interviewed each head principal from two very underperforming Title I California Schools that once struggled but made use of Bass (1985) 4 I's of transformational leadership to overcome the minimum achievement criteria set by No Child Left Behind (Heck, 2014).

In his study, Heck identified seven transformational leadership strategies that the principals of each school under study used to overcome low student achievement of their students. Below are the approaches that each principal applied and its connection with Bass (1985) 4 I's of transformational leadership:

Teamwork Support and Collaboration (Intellectual Stimulation)

Accountability (Inspiration)

Planning and structure (Individualized Consideration)

Modeling and leading by example (Idealized Influence)

Use of data (Intellectual Stimulation)

Parental involvement (Idealized Influence)

Respect (Individualized Consideration)

I.T.E.A.M.U.P. Model Application

To increase the memorability of Heck's findings, the authors of this paper created the I.T.E.A.M.U.P. model to help others remember the transformational leadership strategies that can improve student achievement.

I- Increased parent involvement (Referred to as "parental involvement" in Heck's research)

T- Teamwork, support, and collaboration

E- Encouraging respect (Referred to as "respect" in Heck's research)

A- Accountability

M- Modeling and leading by example

U- Using data for making decisions (Referred to as "use of data" in Heck's research)

P- Planning and Structure

I- Increased Parent Involvement

Principals and school staff need the support of parents or guardians so that their child can succeed academically. Increased parent involvement means school leaders are keeping the lines of communication open with parents or guardians about their child's performance. For this strategy, school leaders are contacting parents to let them know what is going on with their child. During conversations with parents, school leaders must display concern about students to get the parents behind them. Increased parent involvement will take persistence and when parents agree with what is going on in their child's school, learning for students become easier.

T- Teamwork, Support, and Collaboration

Teamwork, support, and collaboration are vital to student achievement. This driver involves bringing the team and stakeholders together, learning the strengths of individuals, building relationships, and sharing ideas.

E- Encouraging Respect

Respect is an essential element of leadership because it helps build trust. When there is respect between teacher

and student, the student trusts the teacher, and the student wants to produce for that teacher. Promoting respect involves school leaders taking the time to getting to know the student on a personal level. Moreover, school leaders providing extra support for students demonstrates caring and concern while increasing the students' level of trust and respect.

A- Accountability

Accountability entails setting high expectations, being consistent, and following-through on objectives. Principals should set high expectations for staff, for students, and for their community. Accountability encourages the team to get their jobs done, to stop pushing off essential tasks, and to learn from what others had done. Responsibility for students means school leaders are helping students to understand that they oversee their grades and their academic success.

M- Modeling and Leading by Example

Effective leaders should be able to interact with any classroom and model strong leadership. Principals should try to be visible in their schools, going into classrooms, and being aware of what their staff members are doing. Principals should model high energy and drive with their staff. Moreover, modeling and leading by example means that principals should not ask their team to do something they would not do.

U- Using Data for Making Decision

Teachers need the most up-to-date data about their students to create effective lesson plans. Principals should share data such as school exams and standardized test scores with staff, students, and parents to determine where the gaps in proficiency are and for improvement strategies.

P- Planning and Structure

Planning involves identifying the goals and objectives that school leaders and students must achieve and to also formulate strategies to meet them. The structure enables schools to become more consistent, be better organized, and help everyone thrive in a new learning environment.

Conclusion

Student achievement refers particularly to the graduate rate of student of color. The average graduation rate of students of color is 74%. This paper is aimed to explore a leadership strategy to help principals of schools improve the achievement of students of color. This article provided current graduation rates of African American students and its negative implications. The authors believe that transformational leadership is a suitable leadership style

for student achievement and hope schools would consider I.T.E.A.M. U.P. model to ensure that all students, including minorities, thrive in the 21st-century workforce.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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