

Final Assignment Practical Understanding of the Literature

1. *Read the Introduction (pages 1-5). Based on the Research Questions on page 5, what are the Null Hypotheses of this research? Pay attention to the first paragraph (under Figure 2) on page 7.*

The null hypotheses of this research are based on the following research questions:

Research question #1:

‘How much variation in school site aggregate resources is explained by variation in district resources, among districts at similar poverty concentrations and for schools serving similar grade ranges and of similar size?’ – **The null hypothesis would state that there is no significant variation in school site aggregate resources explained by variation.**

Research question #2:

‘To what extent does variation in district-level spending influence variation in specific school site resources including a) total school site staffing expenditure, b) school site instructional expenditure, c) competitiveness of school site teacher salaries, d) average teacher salaries, and e) school staffing ratios?’ – **The null hypothesis would state that there is no significant influence of variation in district-level spending on different school site resources.**

Research question #3:

‘To what extent does inter-district funding progressiveness explain statewide, inter-school resource progressiveness?’ – **The null hypothesis would state that there is no significant relationship between inter-district funding progressiveness and statewide, inter-school resource progressiveness.**

The paragraph below the figure on page 7 discusses the authors’ intent to evaluate connections between how much money is spent on schools and how fairly teachers are distributed, as well as to determine that, in states with larger disparities in school funding, if there’s greater inequality in students’ access to excellent teachers. The null hypotheses for this study would be statements that suggest there is no significant connection or relationship between district-level spending and equitable resource distribution at the school level.

2. *What are the Dependent Variables in this research? Look on page 12 for a hint.*

The dependent variables – the measures that are being studied – are school resource measures. There are several, including: Instructional Salaries per Pupil; Total Salaries per Pupil; School

Certified Staff per 100 Pupils; Average Teacher Salary; etc. The study is seeking to examine how these variables are varying across schools and school districts, and how they correlate with poverty rates and district spending.

3. *On page 13, this research describes a sampling issue where they "focus only on those districts with sufficient numbers of schools (10+)." Because of that decision, what type of sampling is this research? Explain your logic.*

Based on the researchers' best judgment of which districts are the most relevant to their research objectives, they chose only a select number of districts that they believed would "...[have] sufficient numbers of schools to display within district variation... focusing on within-district, between-school variation is of little value for those districts not large enough to have multiple schools serving any particular grade level or range." (p. 12). This type of sampling, where researchers are selecting units for inclusion into a sample due to their characteristics, is a type of non-probability sampling method.

4. *At the top of page 16 is this statement:*

" We then evaluate the correlations between district-level fairness in the distribution of current spending per pupil (inter-district spending fairness), and our fairness indices for school-level resource measures. That is, we ask: to what extent is fairness of resources across schools statewide correlated with fairness of district spending statewide? "

In your own words, can you explain the purpose of the "correlations" or what the authors are examining?

The "correlations" (or fairness) are the relationship between two different types of measures: one related to the distribution of current spending per pupil at the district level, and the other related to school-level resource measures. Essentially, the purpose of examining these correlations is because the authors are seeking to understand the extent to which the fairness of resource distribution across schools statewide is associated with the fairness of district spending statewide. Is there a negative correlation or a positive correlation? Are states with fair district spending translating that spending into equitable resource distribution at the school level?

5. *On pages 17-18 is the following statement,*

"District spending variation adds little to the explanation of school site spending variation in Florida, for example"

Find Florida in Figure 3. Why is Florida in the bottom corner?

Florida rests in the bottom left corner because there is relatively little variance in school site spending in this state explained by school structural characteristics (size and grade levels) and/or district spending alone.

6. Again, before Figure 4 we read,

"Still, very little statewide variation in inter-school spending is explained in Florida...This might include some districts, on average, allocating significantly more or less to school site spending."

Florida is again in the bottom corner. What does this say about Florida? What does it mean when Florida schools are an outlier on these scatterplots of spending per district?

Figure 4 – the scatterplot following Figure 3 – accounts for additional variance by applying a district fixed effect. This effect would reveal if there are any district characteristics that would explain statewide, inter-school disparities. Once again, Florida is in the bottom left corner. This placement of Florida says that in the state, district spending does not seem to have a strong influence on the variations in school site spending.

7. Again, look at Figure 5 and this statement that precedes the figure,

"Like school size and grade configurations, distributions of special education programs and children may be influenced by district policy choices, though the aggregate numbers of children to be served district-wide may not be."

How would you interpret the location of Florida?

Figure 5 accounts for additional variance explained by school-level needs, including school-level cost factors such as the distribution of special education programs and children. Similar to the previous scatterplot that accounted for school size and grade configurations, distributions of special education programs and children can also be influenced by district policy choices. Florida's location on this scatterplot, on the far bottom left, indicates that the variation in school site spending in Florida is not significantly influenced by factors such as the distribution of special education programs and children within its districts.

8. Overall, from figures 3,4, and 5, what can you say about Florida spending on students? You can make an individual statement about each of the three figures, or a global statement that explains all three.

From the latter three figures that were examined, we can reasonably say that Florida is a state where school site spending has relatively little variance either explained by school structural

characteristics (size and grade levels) and/or district spending, district characteristics, or factors such as the distribution of special education programs and children within its districts. In other words, Florida seems to be a state that's less affected by factors such as school size, grade configurations, district policies, and student population characteristics compared to other states.

9. *On page 25 are Figures 6, 7, and 8. Florida is not as much an outlier in these figures. Read the preceding explanation on page 24 and state your explanation of Florida's progressiveness with regard to salaries per pupil (of faculty and staff).*

In Figures 6, 7, and 8, Florida aligns more closely with the general trend followed by other states – Florida's placement indicates that progressive district-level funding tends to lead to progressive distribution of school site resources. We can observe in Florida a positive relationship between district spending per pupil in higher poverty districts and school-level total salaries per pupil in schools serving more low-income children.

10. *Look at the Conclusions and Policy Implications starting on page 26. Comment on the following statement, and add your personal observations of the impact on Florida if possible:*

"Absent any ability to improve inter-district spending equity, state education agencies have little ability to create the conditions necessary to improve the distribution of teaching resources across higher and lower poverty schools."

The authors highlight here how state education agencies lack the power/substantial authority to make decisions that would achieve greater progressiveness of state school finance systems that could direct resources to schools with high shares of low income students who desperately need these funds.

11. *Look at the Conclusions and Policy Implications starting on page 26. Comment on the following statement, and add your personal observations of the impact on Florida if possible:*

"While relevant and important, this policy objective misses the larger picture of persistent disparities in total resources between local public school districts that are highly segregated both socioeconomically and racially." (Baker, Sciarra & Farrie, 2015; Reardon & Owens, 2014).

This passage is emphasizing that focusing solely on within-district disparities overlooks the broader context of inequities that exist between districts. I am not a classroom teacher, and cannot offer any personal experiences from the impact inequitable spending might've had on Florida schools. However, if the most significant discrepancies exist between districts due to state school finance systems that provide funding to districts as a whole, focusing on pressuring

individual districts to address disparities will have little success. In Florida, I've read that districts with fewer resources are expected to be more creative with their spending on equity – which is not the right solution, and is a deflection from the larger issue of the state providing adequate funding in the first place. It's unreasonable to assume that schools working with less of a budget can attract and retain skilled teachers, who would be working under more challenging conditions.

12. Look at the Conclusions and Policy Implications starting on page 26. Comment on the following statement, and add your personal observations of the impact on Florida if possible:

"The findings herein also raise questions regarding the validity of claims that state laws regarding teacher tenure and due process protections are a significant cause of disparities in teaching resources available across differing poverty and minority concentration settings. It seems unlikely at best (or even entirely illogical) that contractual protections applied uniformly across all local public school districts within a state could be a significant factor in creating these disparities."

In the authors' conclusions, they discuss and doubt the validity of claims such as that conceptual protections like teacher tenure and due process play any significant role in causing disparities in teaching resources across higher and lower poverty schools. In other words, the authors are questioning whether contractual protections afforded to teachers could lead to significant differences in teaching resources between schools serving different student populations, and goes as far as to say this might be 'entirely illogical'. Conversely to what some might believe, from my limited personal perspective, I would assume that tenure and teacher protections would aid in attracting, retaining, and supporting excellent teachers in disadvantaged and hard-to-staff schools.

13. Look at the Conclusions and Policy Implications starting on page 26. Comment on the following statement, and add your personal observations of the impact on Florida if possible:

"Where inter-district inequities persist – especially where districts serving needier student populations have substantially lower spending – so too will inequities in the various indicators suggested for review by the U.S. Department of Education. Regulatory intervention without more substantive changes to state school finance systems will likely achieve little. So too will legal challenges to statutes and regulations which fail to correct inter-district disparities in available funding."

This statement draws attention to where inter-district inequities are persisting most significantly – in districts that are primarily serving low-income students and students with needs, including children with disabilities. The authors restate that, without intervention at a state-level that can

directly target changes to the state school finance systems, regulatory interventions from the Department of Education will do little to correct inter-district spending disparities.

14. After reading this article, what advice might you give to the Florida legislature about the following:

equitable school funding:

a.) address inter-district funding inequities by implementing measures to ensure that funding is being distributed equitably and adequately

b.) ensure that equity provisions are integrated into state aid formulas, that are designed specifically to direct funds to districts and children with greater needs and are being effectively translated into district allocation strategies

teacher and staff salaries:

a.) offer teacher and staff salaries that are competitive to attract and retain qualified educators, particularly for schools in needier districts, where students may face additional academic challenges and need excellent teachers

b.) the remedy to teacher equity between higher and lower poverty schools is **not** the elimination of contractual protections (in state laws)

state and federal regulations:

a.) federal policy needs to focus less attention on placing pressure on state education agencies, who hold relatively little power in regulating these inequities

b.) the state bears the responsibility of adequately funding public education and ensuring best utilization of these resources by local school districts

15. The Pinellas County schools have been in the news in recent years because of "failure factories" even though such situations can be found in other communities in the US.

Visit the Tampa Bay Times site to read the article: Failure Factories

Describe any funding or spending inequity you may have experienced or observed in your personal educational experience.

As I am not an educator, I have not directly experienced or dealt with funding/spending inequities. However, the series from the Tampa Bay Times that traced the decline of these five schools in the county's black neighborhoods was eye-opening; to realize that the city I call home is also home to one of the most concentrated sites of academic failure due to the neglect and re-

segregation of struggling schools is deeply disturbing. The words from Goliath Davis – “What happens to all these kids? What do they do? Every time we fail one, the criminal justice system is a winner. And you’d rather pay to keep them incarcerated than try to straighten out the system?” captures the harsh reality of the school-to-prison pipeline which runs through under-resourced schools and neighborhoods. The article from Baker and Weber presents empirical analyses on district-level spending variations, confirming districts serving more children in poverty have fewer total resources, while The Tampa Bay Times series lays bare the consequences of neglecting such schools.