

Responding to Demographic Change: What Do Suburban District Leaders Need to Know?

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This study examined the demographic shifts in a medium-sized school district in West Michigan and the responses developed as a result of these changes during the last two decades. Findings indicated that the district's school demographics changed from being European American to minority dominant. As a result of these changes in student population composition, the district status shifted to Titles I and III and had to comply with federal policy mandates. The researchers identified and analyzed specific responses the district developed for meeting not only federal policy requirements, but also for responding to students' academic and social needs. Recommendations for central office, school principals, and classroom practitioners are included.

Introduction

During the last three decades, suburban school districts have experienced demographic shifts within their student populations. These changes can be attributed to a movement of populations traditionally inhabiting cities and urban neighborhoods in search of better educational opportunities for their children (Larson, 2003), domestic migration, and immigration (Hodgkinson, 2002). Demographic change remains one of the most powerful factors compelling national, state, local, and district decision makers to develop educational policies that inevitably have consequences on curricula and approaches to teaching and learning. At the national level, demographic pressures have often resulted in the enforcement of existing inclusive laws and the creation of new policies to accommodate newly arrived immigrants and to support struggling disadvantaged learners and their families. Although there may be disagreements regarding the application of educational laws in the United States, nonetheless they remain the basis for integration and the promise of a quality education for disadvantaged learners — including those from low socioeconomic class, marginalized minorities, and culturally and linguistically different students.

In spite of the fact that the events of September 11, 2001, have triggered or exacerbated anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States, immigration has been on the rise, mainly from war-torn countries the world over. This influx of new immigrants from distressed countries, referred to as refugees, has modified the American demographic composition not only in urban areas, but also in the metropolitan suburbs usually inhabited by middle and upper middle class European Americans. The resettlement of these newcomers in communities that were once almost homogeneous has called for a number of reforms at the school district level.

In light of these changes, this qualitative descriptive case study examined population changes in the city of Kentwood, Michigan, and the influence of these changes on its public school district/system. Two major questions guided this research: (a) what demographic changes have occurred in the Kentwood Public Schools District during the last 25 years, and (b) how has the school district been responsive to these demographic shifts, either in response to federal and state laws/requirements or as policies were independently developed?

Background

Public schools have always known demographic changes, particularly after desegregation in the late 1950s onward. The initial landmark for these changes was the *Oliver Brown, et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, et al.* case, during which the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the doctrine of “separate but equal” should not exist in public education and that the plaintiffs were denied the equal protection of the laws promised by the Fourteenth Amendment (Katzman, 1980). However, as schools integrated African Americans and other culturally different learners, European Americans left schools where there was much diversity in student population; they either enrolled in private schools or moved to suburban neighborhood schools (Caldas & Bankston III, 2001).

Demographic Trends in Suburban Schools

Recent literature on demographic shifts in suburban school districts shows a number of new trends, including an increase in racially, culturally, and linguistically different learner

populations and a decline in the European American population. Gillum (2009), quoting Richard Fry from the Pew Hispanic Center, reported that whereas the enrollment of White students constituted 75% of students enrolled in suburban schools prior to the 1990s, that population fell to 59% from 1993 to 2007. Among culturally and linguistically different students, the Latino population constitutes the largest group that has expanded in suburban school districts. Black and Asian students have also increased their enrollment in these districts (Gillum, 2009). Holme, Diem, and Welton (2013) reported that from 1990 to 2010, the European American population in suburban communities decreased from 81% to 65%, whereas the Hispanic population grew from 8% to 57% and the African American population went up to 10%. These findings are corroborated in studies by Evans (2007); Caldas and Bankston III (2001); Shodavaram, Jones, Weaver, Marquez, and Ensle (2009); and Huyser, Boerman-Cornell, and Deboer (2011), which have demonstrated that the enrollment of culturally, linguistically, and racially different students has significantly grown in suburban areas. Thus, what once constituted homogeneous communities mostly inhabited by European Americans has shifted from homogeneity to heterogeneity. A number of factors have contributed to this change.

Causes of Demographic Shifts

Studies accounting for the increasing demographic diversity of suburbia have identified four major contributing factors: (a) an historical combination of demographic, social, and policy forces; (b) the desire to provide children with quality education; (c) the aging population; and (d) comfortable living conditions. Holme et al. (2013), in a study about demographic changes in suburban schools and how district leaders respond to those changes, stated that modern suburban communities were created from a combination of demographic, social, and policy forces that occurred from the mid-20th century to the mid-1990s. During that period, White middle class families benefitted from federally insured mortgages and federally funded means of communication, mainly roads. Thus, they constituted insulated homogenous communities.

However, in recent years, these neighborhoods have seen demographic changes. Some of these changes have been accelerated by the deterioration of social conditions in inner cities, where poverty and violence have increased. The culturally, linguistically, and racially different people who could afford to live in the outskirts have moved away from central cities. Also, many of the non-White populations moving to suburbia are relatively young and have school-age children; at the same time, many of the European Americans no longer have children in school (Holme et al., 2013). In a related vein, Rury and Saatcioglu (2011), in a study of advantages procured by suburban schools, stated that the search for better schools is one of the reasons families leave cities for suburbs. Not only are suburban schools racially and ethnically diverse, but they are also heterogeneous socioeconomically (Holme et al, 2013; Caldas & Bankston III, 2001; Lassiter & Niedt, 2013.)

Holme et al. (2013) have contended that the percentage of low-income learners has almost doubled during the last 35 years and that the number of low-income families living in the suburbs is approximately the same as that of central cities. Lassiter and Niedt (2013) have argued that the characterization of suburban areas as homogenous and mostly populated by the middle and upper middle classes is a myth. Not only are these communities racially and ethnically diverse, but they are also socioeconomically dissimilar. This diversity in areas could be explained by the fact that many businesses have relocated to the outskirts of central cities,

bringing with them people of varying socioeconomic status. Nonetheless, communities and schools have responded in a variety of ways to this heterogeneity.

Suburban School Districts' Responses to Demographic Changes

As a result of the influx of racially, culturally, socioeconomically, and linguistically different learners in suburban schools, district- and school-level leaders could not remain unresponsive. In addition to racial, linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic challenges, schools and local educational decision makers have to meet federal and state mandates.

Researchers who have investigated suburban school districts' and schools' responses to demographic changes have been consistent regarding a number of findings, including (a) acceptance or resistance to change; (b) perceptions of racially, culturally, and socioeconomically different learners; (c) power relationships; and (d) compliance with federal laws and court rulings.

Accommodating Culturally and Linguistically Different Learners

As suburban population characteristics have been changing — and schools cannot legally discriminate against anyone based on visible, invisible, or nationality of origin traits — educational institutions have been compelled to implement adjustments to meet the needs of racially, culturally, socioeconomically, and linguistically different learners. Evans (2007), in a study about the responses of high schools to a growing number of African American students in communities once overwhelmingly inhabited by European Americans, found that some of the schools studied implemented inclusive policies and took initiatives to meet the needs of this population. Some of these changes included hiring new minority teachers and school administrators, providing teachers with professional development in multicultural education, consulting with experts in multiculturalism, and integrating African American social issues in the curricula. In a similar vein, Holme et al. (2013), in their study related to changes implemented by a San Antonio, Texas, suburban school district to accommodate learner diversity, found that district leaders adopted a number of changes: hiring content and reading specialists, administrative staff, and family outreach personnel; extending teacher duties before and after school; and providing training in differentiated learning and cultural responsiveness.

Often, adjustments have consisted of an increase in materials such as instructional technology tools — mainly computer equipment, science kits, and computer-assisted language learning programs (Larson, 2003). Inclusive policies and practices have often resulted in not only making adjustments to curricula and professional development training for staff and leadership, but also in connecting racially, culturally, and linguistically different parents to individual school and district central office leaders (Ishimaru, 2013). This was the case for one Christian school studied by Huyser et al. (2011), who examined the ways in which two Christian schools responded to demographic changes. In the same vein, in Evans' (2007) study, a school district hired African Americans as administrators.

Resistance to Change

In spite of the fact that some of these adjustments were incorporated in good faith, European Americans (parents, school and district leaders, and teachers) often resisted or opposed inclusive

policies and adaptations carried out to accommodate newcomers. From district leaders to European American parents, it seems that diversity in school districts was welcome as long as it did not infringe on their privileges and power. Often, opposition was based on perceptions of racially, culturally, and linguistically different people (Shodavaram et al., 2009). In general, there were two broad types of opposition: passive and active. Passive opposition was reflected in what researchers have called “White flight,” during which European American parents withdrew their children from schools as culturally and linguistically different learners in suburban schools reached a significant number.

School rezoning has also been a contentious factor (Smith, 2010; Caldas & Bankston III, 2001; Huyser et al., 2011; Holme et al., 2013). White parents threatened to withdraw their children if culturally different students had to be in the same schools with their children, particularly if the newcomers were African Americans. Even when schools designed inclusive policies and adjusted curricula to meet newcomers’ needs, their implementation and enforcement posed problems. In Evans’ (2007) study, for instance, African American students were disproportionately punished and were perceived as problematic. Similarly, in a mixed result study, Huyser et al. (2011) found that the European American students’ parents opposed diversity based on the impact they believed it would have on the school. Not only parents resisted change, but European American teachers also appeared to be unprepared and unwilling to implement and make needed accommodations for racially and culturally different learners.

Teacher resistance has often resulted in conflicts with racially and culturally different school administrators. Evans (2007) discovered that many European American teachers who often punished and referred African American students for minor infractions entered into conflicts with administrators who were racially different. Administrators accused teachers of maintaining hostile behaviors toward African American students. Teachers reproached administrators for running away from their responsibilities to contact parents of students who misbehaved.

Another factor that has impeded change relates to power and the possibility of exercising authority either to carry out change or to prevent diversity adjustments from being enforced and implemented. This power is often held by people who are in the upper middle class, most likely European Americans. Evans (2007) argued that although the suburban schools he investigated had designed inclusive policies, significant transformation could not occur, even at shallow levels such as discipline. In one of the high schools Black History month was even struck from the calendar of school activities. Similarly, Holme et al. (2013) discovered that decision making and the distribution of resources rested in the hands of a power elite who could accept or refuse school district policies. These authors recounted the behavior of a group of European American elite parents who opposed their school district leaders’ decision to rezone school attendance boundaries to balance racial and socioeconomic disparities in schools. When some of the power elite’s children were included in zones that were to be mostly attended by various races and lower socioeconomic class children, influential parents exercised pressure to have their children attend schools of their socioeconomic class. Paradoxically, these most influential parents would vote against propositions to raise or evenly distribute funds for improved facilities and instructional equipment among all the schools (Holme et al., 2013; Caldas & Bankston III, 2001). Thus, this opposition to racially and socioeconomically disempowered people could only be ended through court rulings or through laws (Caldas & Bankston III, 2001; Holme et al., 2013).

To ensure that all children receive quality education, courts of justice and the federal government have often ruled and passed laws compelling schools to develop and apply plans for distributing resources and making adjustments to accommodate everyone, particularly children from the lower socioeconomic classes (Caldas & Bankston III, 2001; Holme et al., 2013). Schools and district leadership have to comply with these rulings and laws. However, the comprehension and application of these mandates have often posed problems.

Federal Mandates Compliance

There has been a dearth of literature treating the issue of compliance with federal mandates. When studies addressed educational law parameters, they were usually part of an examination that related to constraints imposed by these policy requirements. However, a few researchers (Terry, 2010; Turnbull & Anderson, 2011) and national evaluators have discussed the capacity of states and school districts to comply with Titles I and III of the No Child Left Behind Act. The studies related to these two mandates have shown mixed results in relation to their application in states and districts. Turnbull and Anderson (2011), in a study related to state capacity to implement Title I, found that states largely complied with the procedural requirements. However, there were some dysfunctions related to the distribution of qualified manpower. Furthermore, Turnbull and Anderson revealed that there was a lack of communication between states and districts. As a result, many low-performing schools' needs could not be met. In addition, states also prioritized their assistance to various low-performing schools to only support those that were severely underperforming. Finally, the authors discovered that states were unable to advise schools on scientifically proven methods and strategies that would help schools raise students' test scores.

While Turnbull and Anderson (2011) focused on states' capacity to implement Title I, showing the positive aspects and shortcomings in its implementation, a report from the U.S. Department of Education (2007) described the key provisions and implementation of that policy. The researchers found that 29% of states with data related to low socioeconomic status students were likely to meet the Title I policy goals by 2013-2014. The report also indicated that fourth-grade culturally different students in reading, mathematics, and science had improved their scores while results for middle and high school were mixed. Achievement disparities between high-needs students and middle and upper middle class students tended to also narrow.

Tanenbaum et al. (2012), in a national evaluation of Title III implementation at the state and school district level, found that most states and school districts had put in place procedures to identify, report, and track English learners' progress. In addition to the procedural aspects, the researchers realized that most school districts used one or a combination of English development programs, including English as a second language (ESL), content-area teaching through sheltered English immersion methods, and bilingual education programs. Of these programs, ESL was the most widely used in various ways encompassing push-in and pull-out. Whereas ESL remained the most popular instructional program, 87% of Title III school districts reported using content in English with some accommodations for English learners. While some states encouraged delivery of instruction in bilingual education, others restricted the use of native languages. Although these programs were recommended in school districts, there was no obvious proof to assess their effectiveness in relation to state and national tests. The researchers also revealed that states were using highly qualified teachers or provided teaching staff with professional development training that allowed them to support English learners' learning.

Although states were in compliance with Title III policy mandates, funds supporting English learners' instruction and support were declining.

Unlike national evaluations that focused on states' capacities to fulfill Titles I and III policy requirements, Terry (2010), in a qualitative case study related to two districts' capacities, found that a number of issues persisted. Superintendents appeared to have little knowledge of the policy mandates and would rely on subordinates to accomplish compliance-related duties. Even when these collaborators reported that a number of schools did not comply with legal requirements, the superintendent — depending on the nature of the relationship with a principal — would decide to ignore the report or support the school administrator in his/her behavior. While some principals were knowledgeable of the law's requirements, others did not even know what these policies addressed. In addition, some principals showed reluctance in their application. A number of administrators and teachers did not understand the relationship between legal requirements to raise students' academic performance and special needs students' participation in general education programs. In a similar vein, the author reported that most school building principals related the No Child Left Behind duties to school improvement. There was a widespread belief among both building principals and teachers that policy mandates were a waste of time and resources. As a result of that conviction, many teachers and administrators remained uncommitted to making instructional changes that would support raising students' academic attainment.

Although the literature appears to have dealt with many topics related to population shift in suburban areas, most of the researchers have focused on the traditionally known U.S. ethnic groups, mainly African Americans and Latinos. Undoubtedly, these groups are fast growing and often capture decision makers' attention. However, taking into account recent trends in population growth, there is an increasing influx of immigrants from various parts of the world, including Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia. Many of these newcomers arrive from war-torn countries and are often sponsored by churches and religious organizations. Because they are sponsored, many of them are relocated to the suburbs of central cities. The literature so far has not focused on specific educational programs and accommodations that suburban school districts propose to address this shift in their student demographics.

Method

Research Design

This study was a descriptive single-case study of Kentwood Public Schools (KPS) school district's endeavors to adapt to demographic changes in its schools. The case focused on two major aspects: (a) population changes not only in the school district, but also in comparable surrounding suburban districts, and (b) actions undertaken by KPS to adapt to this demographic pattern shift.

Case studies are designed to study in-depth phenomena in their natural settings (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1989). Yin (1989) defines a case study as an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources are used" (p. 23). Furthermore, he contends that case studies are appropriate when they illuminate a decision or set of decisions. Case studies can focus on institutions, processes, programs, neighborhoods, events, or

organizations. The present study met at least two criteria as defined by Yin: illuminating a decision and focusing on an institution.

Research Site

The City of Kentwood is a suburb located south of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The city's population is 49,694, which is subdivided as follows: European American or White - 31,628 (63.65%); African American or Black - 6,602 (13.30%); Latinos - 4,844 (9.75%); Asian American - 3,265 (6.57%); Biracial and multiracial - 1,963 (.04%); Native American or American Indian - 134 (3.95%); Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander - 15 (.03%); other and not identified - 1,243 (2.50%). Built on 20.95 square miles, the city is bordered to the west by Wyoming, to the north by Grand Rapids and Grand Rapids Township, to the east by Cascade Township, and to the south by Gaines Township. The median household income is estimated at \$50,710, with a per capita income of \$24,651 in 2011 (City of Kentwood, 2013a). Originally known as Paris Township in 1839, its charter was adopted in 1967. However, to prevent further land occupation by Wyoming and Grand Rapids, the city was ultimately named after Kent County.

The KPS District includes 17 schools: 10 elementary schools, one early childhood development center, three middle schools, one high school subdivided into two campuses (freshmen and 10th-12th grades), and one alternative high school. There are 8,842 students with 540 teachers. While there is much diversity in the student population ethnically, culturally, and linguistically, the teaching staff remains heavily dominated by European Americans, who constitute 95%.

Documentation

The documentation for this study was gathered from archives and the second researcher, who could provide school information as she is a member of the central office executive team. Information was also gathered by surveying various websites, including those of the U.S. Census Bureau, the KPS District, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the Michigan Department of Technology, Management & Budget. In addition to the websites and documents from the KPS District, data were obtained from the Kent Intermediate School District through telephone calls and e-mails.

Results

Research Question 1

The first major study question was *what demographic changes have occurred in the Kentwood Public Schools District during the last 25 years?*

In response to this question the researchers examined demographic data from the City of Kentwood, suburban school districts around Grand Rapids, and the KPS District. The researchers analyzed the state and city population shifts and compared them to trends in the City of Kentwood and in KPS and surrounding districts.

According to the Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget (2012) drastic demographic changes occurred in Michigan during the last three decades, as seen in

Figure 1. Domestic population deflated during periods of economic crisis, with a slowing trend in 2011-2012. The department found that in 1981-1982 the domestic population declined by more than 150,000. A similar phenomenon was observed in 2010-2011 when 42,000 people left the state. In 2011-2012, although the trend slowed, the number of people who left the state was still high — approximately 33,000. However, the number of new immigrants in the state in 2010-2011 increased by 16,000 and continued to increase in 2011-2012 by 17,000.

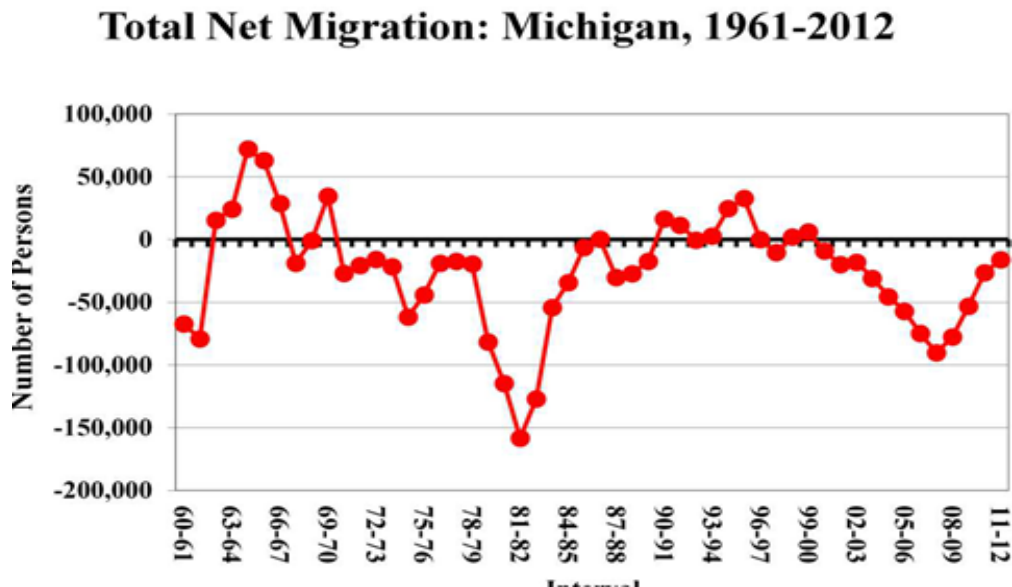


Figure 1. Data supplied by Michigan Department of Technology, Management & Budget (2012).

While these trends have occurred at the state level, the population in the City of Kentwood has been growing and was estimated to be 49,694 in 2011 — a 1% growth during the time the state of Michigan had negative growth of 0.1%. Of these 49,694 people, 63.65% were European Americans and 13.5% were foreign born (City of Kentwood, 2013b). This shift in demographic patterns from being European-American dominated to having more culturally and linguistically diverse students is also evident in the surrounding school districts.

As shown in Table 1, five of the eight school districts have a high percentage of English learners and a dominance of culturally and/or linguistically different students; the exceptions are Forest Hills Public, East Grand Rapids Public, and Caledonia Community schools. One of the leading districts to experience a dramatic shift in student demographics has been the KPS District.

Table 1

Diversity Comparison: Kentwood Public Schools (KPS) and Neighboring Districts' School Demographic Percentages

School District	School Year 2001-2002 ELs*	School Year 2011-2012 ELs*	School Year 2001-2002 CLDs**	School Year 2011-2012 CLDs**
Caledonia Community	0	0.07	3	8
East Grand Rapids Public	1	0.04	6	9
Forest Hills Public	2	0.01	6	15
Godfrey Lee Public	24	32.40	58	89
Godwin Heights Public	n/d	13.00	n/d	73
Grand Rapids Public	15	20.30	72	79
Kentwood Public	2	15.00	37	58
Wyoming Public	8	14.30	28	59

* English learners

** Culturally and/or linguistically different students

During the 36 years between 1975 and 2011, the KPS student population changed from 96% European Americans to 58% culturally and/or linguistically different learners (Table 2).

Table 2

Kentwood Public Schools (KPS) District: Student Demographics by Ethnicity

Year	Total	European America	African American	Latino	Native American	Asian Pacific Island	Multiracial	Total Minority	% CLD*	% Increase/decrease
1975	6397	6125	212	38	11	11	0	272	4.25	0.00
1985	5785	5199	392	57	12	125	0	586	10.13	5.88
1995	8134	6485	961	260	44	384	0	1649	10.27	10.14
2005	9432	5041	2783	731	57	631	189	4391	46.50	26.23
2011	8877	3727	2624	1080	49	875	522	5150	58.00	11.50

* Culturally and/or linguistically different students

As part of that trend, the English learner population increased from 2% in 2001-2002 to 15% in 2011-2012. An examination of the demographic shift for the KPS District also shows that, in general, each of the groups identified as culturally or linguistically different from European Americans has been steadily increasing. With the increase in this population, a shift in socioeconomic status has also occurred. For the academic year 2012-2013, 64% of students, on average, were eligible for free or reduced price meals. Thus, with the significant increase in the number of English learners and ethnically and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, the

school district was compelled to respond to the new student landscape. Federal provisions under Title I and Title III imposed additional requirements on the district.

Research Question 2

These considerations led the researchers to ask the second question: *how has the school district been responsive to these demographic shifts, either in response to federal and state laws/requirements or as policies were independently developed?*

With the growing number of English learners and students of color entering the district, diversity became a mainstay and part of the unique fabric of KPS. New challenges rose to which the district had to respond. KPS' responses were implemented in a number of ways — by designing new policies, training teachers and support staff, creating a newcomer center for English learners, tailoring support systems for culturally and linguistically different students through a community/school district partnership, and partnering with a local tertiary academic institution. The details for KPS' responses are presented here in the context of Titles I and Title III.

Title I - Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged - is an amendment to the 1965 law known as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. As amended, this act mandates that all schools receiving federal funding ensure that all students are provided with “. . . a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, para. 1). The law requires that schools implement academic educational programs and support systems for all students that aim at bridging the disparities among students, particularly between disadvantaged students and those who are from relatively privileged socioeconomic status.

Part A of Title III is titled Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). It aims to ensure that English learners and immigrant students who are non-native speakers of English achieve language proficiency and meet the same standards as their English-speaking peers in content areas. To achieve this, the federal government allocates funds to state and local education agencies. Schools and school districts receiving Title III funds are obligated not only to report annually on English learner progress, but also have to inform parents about ESL programs that they implement. Title III also compels school districts to maintain communication with parents and communities.

Kentwood Public Schools District has responded to these mandates by issuing a number of policies and by changing its practices. As the number of English learners and culturally and linguistically different students increased, the district created a multicultural advisory committee (MAC) comprised of students, staff, parents, and community members, and designed short- and long-range strategic diversity plans. The MAC was entrusted with the role of producing a document detailing diversity.

In terms of practices, the district has created academic programs targeted to meet state benchmarks, and has implemented academic and support programs. For example, in addition to the newcomer center and push-in and pull-out English development programs, the district has built a mentor program aimed at helping students to become academically and socially successful. The school district has also created support staff groups that provide intervention services for students exhibiting high-risk behaviors. To implement new and existing diversity

policies, the district has provided its personnel (faculty and staff) with multicultural or cultural sensitivity workshops, at the end of which these employees should demonstrate cultural competency behaviors in dealing with the culturally and linguistically different learners and coworkers. As a complement to these school-based endeavors, the district has also partnered with community agencies that provide in-school counseling services.

Along with these efforts, the school district has also recruited certified teachers in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) and paraprofessionals called ESL interventionists. When these interventionists did not have a teaching background in ESL, the district partnered with a local university TESOL program to provide courses in second-language teaching methodologies. To advance English proficiency among English learners, KPS implemented the use of English language learning software that focuses on language development, literacy instruction, and strategic first-language support. The foundation of this language learning software is based on five essential components of reading identified by the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Personal communication with the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services, December 28, 2012).

Discussion

The data in the results from this study showed a discrepancy between the city demographic composition and that of the schools. Although the city has a European American population estimated at 63.65%, only 42% of the students from that ethnic group attend KPS schools. This finding seems to indicate that there is an attrition of European American learners in the district. As mentioned previously, a number of researchers (Caldas & Bankston III, 2001; Terry, 2010; Huyser et al., 2011) have called this phenomenon White flight. However, one cannot ascertain whether this decline in European American students is because parents from that group want their children to avoid racially and socioeconomically different learners. Many factors may explain this decline, including the creation of many charter schools and the fact that some of the domestic population has been leaving the state while there has been an inflow of immigrants.

Another finding related to the discrepancy between the city demographic data and those of the school district in connection to socioeconomic status. According to the City of Kentwood website (<http://www.city-data.com/city/Kentwood-Michigan.html>), the yearly median household income is estimated to be \$50,710. But the school district's food service reports that 64% of the students have been eligible for free or reduced price meals. One plausible explanation of that apparent discrepancy can be found in the estimated per capita income of \$24,651 in 2011, thus positioning KPS as a Title I district.

Types of Interventions

In terms of compliance with No Child Left Behind Act requirements and making adjustments to demographic shifts, the findings of this study showed four types of interventions: (a) policy and practices, (b) professional development, (c) partnerships with community agencies and higher academic institutions, and (d) educational structures and instructional programs.

At the policy and practices level, the district has developed a mission statement that emphasizes a commitment to diversity and the development of academic excellence. This commitment was translated into a number of practices, including the creation of the MAC

advisory committee. The commitment to diversity was also translated into practice through multistage cultural training for the personnel. The City of Kentwood has been recording an influx of many immigrants from war-torn zones and from parts of the world whose cultures are not known by most of the district's school educational practitioners. Those factors may explain the rationale behind the development of a multicultural advisory committee. The formation of the MAC is also consistent with findings in Evans' (2007) case study of three high schools, where one of the schools constituted a faculty diversity committee.

Along with the development of policies and practices related to diversity, the district has also been active in providing its personnel with professional and academic training. The study results indicated that educational practitioners have received cultural sensitivity training. In addition, the KPS District has established mentoring groups to assist disadvantaged students. These findings align with Shodavaram et al's (2009) research conclusions that many teachers are unprepared to teach immigrant students of non-European ancestry, and hence hold erroneous perceptions of this category of students. Research has also consistently shown that educational practitioners need to be given knowledge and skills that allow them to be effective with culturally diverse learners. Providing culturally responsive training workshops may be the right action to undertake. However, the district has not yet diversified or sought to diversify its personnel, particularly the faculty.

In addition to culturally responsive training sessions, the district has partnered with a local academic institution and a professional support institution to provide knowledge and skills to paraprofessionals and a number of teachers. That training has essentially been oriented toward instructional assistants and teachers who implement ESL programs and content classes with English learners.

As a complement to the professional training, KPS has developed educational structures and ESL programs for English learners. The newcomer center provides sheltered content English to newly arrived students, which is complemented by the district's push-in and pull-out ESL programs. The district has also purchased computer software aimed at developing phonological and phonemic awareness together with vocabulary and grammar usages. In addition, the school district runs an after-school program based on Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes for students struggling in reading. The program is divided into two groups. These results were consistent with Tanenbaum et al's (2012) national evaluations of Title III and with Larson's (2003) observation that change in many suburban school districts consists of adding more on to what already existed (e.g., more computer equipment, more science kits, longer class periods).

Study Limitations

The focus of this study was to analyze the ways in which the Kentwood Public Schools District responded to demographic shifts and how that district complied with the policy mandates contained in Titles I and III. The study did not focus on how these mandates are applied at the school level. In addition, it was not the researchers' intention to explore teachers' and parents' perceptions of diversity and demographic changes. Further research is needed in these areas. Also, one of the researchers is part of the district's leadership team; thus, the presentation of the results and their analyses may have been positively skewed.

The school district trains teachers and other staff members. However, no data were gathered showing whether the knowledge and skills gained from these trainings are being

applied as they are supposed to be implemented. Also, more research is needed to evaluate the extent to which the language programs and software purchased for English learners' development are effective.

Recommendations

In light of these findings and their analyses, a number of recommendations can be offered to K-12 researchers, school district central office leaders, board of education members, building principals, teachers and staff, students' parents, and community members. In relation to the training of mainstream or disciplinary teachers (i.e., teachers who teach in heterogeneous classrooms but are not specialists in English learner issues), school districts that comply with federal mandates need to provide their teachers with training in sheltered English immersion teaching strategies. Sheltered English immersion models foster effective teaching not only for English learners, but also for any native speaker of English. Although KPS provides its English development paraprofessionals with such training, they are not teachers; they are only instructional assistants. There is a need to require that all content-area teachers take courses or attend workshops dealing with such courses. Involving teachers in attending professional development workshops or taking courses related to sheltered models cannot be done without strong district leadership intervention.

In a related vein, school district leadership may provide mainstream teachers and their TESOL practitioners with an array of approaches that have been shown to be effective for heterogeneous classrooms. Thus far in Kent County, and in many counties in West Michigan, teachers have been provided with sheltered immersion observation protocol (SIOP) training — a sheltered English immersion approach developed by Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2012) — almost to the exclusion of other approaches. It is essential to widen the scope of teaching approaches. The SIOP model is one approach among many. Widening the choices in teaching approaches allows teachers to select one or more teaching methods suitable to their teaching style and students' learning modalities.

Along these lines central office administrators need to: (a) implement curricular changes to meet diverse learner needs; (b) provide school personnel with diversity training that ultimately changes perceptions and behavior toward racially, culturally, and linguistically different people; (c) develop and implement programs that foster community involvement in school-related activities; (d) identify budget and financial sources to support diversity; (e) constantly elicit suggestions from school personnel and the community for improving the integration of multiculturalism in both curricular implementation and extracurricular activities; (f) fully implement existing multicultural education policies; and (g) balance teaching staff ethnicities to reflect the student population.

These initiatives and policies can only bear fruit if they are supported and translated into practice by building principals and teachers. For example, building principals must ensure a friendly, inclusive, and welcoming school environment; enforce district diversity policies; and lead and encourage diversity integration curricular initiatives. To complement this, teachers should integrate diversity topics and concepts into their daily teaching practices, and identify and use culturally responsive materials that are effective with diverse learners.

Conclusion

In general, challenges posed by demographic changes in suburban school districts (and specifically KPS) appear to have been met. However, adaptations have only been implemented to comply with federal and state mandates. For the particular case of KPS, it seems that although the student population is diverse, the teaching and administrative staff remains disproportionately

European American. There is a compelling need to make concerted efforts to ensure that minority groups are fully represented in the teaching and administrative ranks in order to reflect the new multi-ethnic student landscape. Reflecting diversity within the composition of the staff will further demonstrate the district's commitment to excellence and equity for all.

Efforts must also be made to attract and retain European American students if KPS and all suburban school districts want to take pride in the fact they are diverse and value diversity. Otherwise students' learning and social experiences will clearly suffer in a world that is increasingly global and diverse.

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