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# PK–12 District Administrator Perceptions about Career Readiness and Workforce Preparation Programs and Activities in Schools

Shawn Lee Dilly
*Walden University*

# Walden University

College of Education

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Shawn Dilly

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Review Committee
Dr. Celeste Fenton, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. John Flohr, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Ionut-Dorin Stanciu, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
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Abstract

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Shawn L. Dilly

MA, West Virginia University, 2004

BA, Fairmont State University, 1995

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Leadership, Policy, and Change in Education

Walden University

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## Abstract

The lack of student career preparedness has increased the number of youths facing negative personal, economic, and social implications and have led to increased calls for public education to find solutions. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore West Virginia district administrators' perceptions about career readiness and workforce programs. Underpinning the study's conceptual framework was educational leadership. The two research questions focused on district administrator perceptions about the value and importance and the barriers, limitations, and successes of career readiness and workforce programs. A qualitative survey and semistructured interview were employed to provide data for an iterative, cyclical analysis of participants' responses. Analysis revealed seven themes, and the most notable surrounded economic trend awareness and career and technical education (CTE) separate from academics. These primary themes along with a discernable difference in those administrators with CTE leadership experience revealed key insights into the perceptions of district administrators. The results can provide policymakers and other school leaders understanding of district administrators' perceptions about the value and challenges associated with preparing today's youth for the workforce. With greater comprehension of these attitudes and beliefs, public schools and states can develop training, policies, and responses to address productive career and workforce preparation for students to avoid a negative career trajectory and promote the positive social change of avoiding underemployment and unemployment.

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# Dedication

I would like to dedicate the work and culminating dissertation to my three children, Sommer, Dylan, and Levi. It is my hope that the perseverance and dedication to this endeavor over the past few years has set a positive example for them to understand the value of continually trying to improve one's self. As they continue to grow in their adult journeys, I remain inspired by them and humbled and blessed to be a part of their lives. May you each continue to be world changers.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The definitions of career readiness by various entities and organizations may vary in detail, but all the explanations mention the development and demonstration of certain competencies as a foundation to enter the world of work (Council of Chief State School Officers, n.d.; National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2019; United States Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2017; United States Department of Education, n.d. a). The National Association of Colleges and Employers (2019) defined career readiness as the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies which broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace. Individual states have varying degrees of successful solutions to address the need for more skilled students leaving their schools. Without these skills students are confronting the personal, social, and economic cost of underemployment and unemployment. In this generic qualitative study, I explored the perceptions and beliefs West Virginia PK–12 district administrators have about career readiness programs and activities.

In this study I contributed to the work of previous researchers who have identified factors that contribute to, or detract from, successful career readiness and workforce programs for students which are crucial preparations in the avoidance of the social implications of youth underemployment and unemployment. My goal was to further the understanding of the perceptions of school administrators in implementing career readiness and workforce programs in West Virginia. This chapter includes background

knowledge, the problem statement, and the purpose of the study. The chapter also includes the research questions, theoretical framework, and nature of the study.

## Background

The lack of career preparation for American youth has surfaced as a growing challenge within the schools and the economy (Belfield. et al., 2012; Chancer et al., 2019). One of the reasons for the United States productivity has been the ability of its education system to help students acquire academic and technical skills needed in the workplace. Career and workforce education have important social value in the 21st century for developing economic growth and preparing individuals to be competitive and contributing members of the economy. However, a growing body of literature highlights the need for public schools to focus greater emphasis on skills needed to be successful in the modern global society. Chancer et al. (2019) submitted American youth continue to experience high underemployment and unemployment even after the economy has largely recovered from the Great Recession (2007–2009). The U.S. Chamber of Commerce reported 50% of available positions are unfilled because qualified candidates are not available, and 40% of businesses are not able to increase production since they cannot fill open positions (Oldham, 2017). Moreover, countries with low levels of career and technical skills experience higher welfare expenditures, lower tax proceeds, an unexploited investment, and increasing social instability due to large populations being demoralized and unable to contribute to the workforce economy (Organization for Economic Co-operation & Development, 2015).

According to a recent Phi Delta Kappa poll (Ferguson, 2018) 82% of respondents were in favor of career readiness activities in schools, but federal, state, and local policy makers were not aligned with public opinion. The National Conference of State Legislators (2018) reported policymakers are beginning to actively engage in developing strategies and policies to workforce education needs. A variety of research exists on the integral role of the classroom teacher and counselor in providing and supporting career exploration and guidance activities in schools (Aliaga et al., 2014; Anctil et al., 2012; Chenven, 2018; Dodd & Hooley, 2018; Kartaş & Kaya, 2015; Seward & Gaesser, 2018); however, there is a need to extend the research on the beliefs and perceptions of administrators about career and workforce education. Kappler and Long (2017) believed school administrators are second only to teachers in the importance and influence on curriculum, teaching, motivation, and focus on goals. Support from administrators is an important foundation for career and workforce readiness and education programs (Cannon et al., 2013; Kappler & Long, 2017). While educator attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of career and workforce development programs are explored in some studies outside of the United States, there is a scarcity of literature focused on administrators within the United States. There is a lack of knowledge about what administrators in West Virginia feel, believe and perceive about the value of career readiness and workforce programs, and the barriers, limitations, and successes in implementing such programs. The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to explore West Virginia PK–12 district

administrators' beliefs and perceptions about career readiness programs and the value, barriers, limitations, and success of implementing workforce preparation activities.

## Problem Statement

The United States' educational system is expected to help students obtain the technical and academic skills required in the workplace. Consequently, career and workforce education has garnered increasing social value in the 21st century by creating economic growth and preparing individuals to be contributing and competitive members of the economy. However, the lack of career preparation for American youth is becoming a growing challenge within the schools and the economy (Belfield et al., 2012; Chancer et al., 2019). There is a call for public schools to focus more on the skills needed for students to be successful in the modern global society (Chancer et al., 2019). A body of literature exists on the essential role of the counselor and classroom teacher in offering guidance activities and career exploration in schools (Aliaga et al., 2014; Anctil et al., 2012; Chenven, 2018; Dodd & Hooley, 2018; Kartaş & Kaya, 2015; Seward & Gaesser, 2018). Although an important foundation for career and workforce readiness programs is support from administrators, very little research has been conducted on the perceptions and beliefs of administrators about career and workforce education. (Cannon et al., 2013; Kappler & Long, 2017).

The problem that I addressed in this study was a need to understand what PK–12 district administrators in West Virginia believe and perceive about the value of career readiness programs, and the barriers, limitations, and successes in implementing

workforce preparation activities. I used a generic qualitative study to extend understanding around decision making and school priorities established to avoid the social implications of youth underemployment and unemployment.

## Purpose of the study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore West Virginia PK–12 district administrators' beliefs and perceptions about career readiness and workforce preparation activities and programs. To achieve this purpose, I gathered two types of data: a qualitative survey developed from the Teachers' Attitudes toward Career Learning Index (TACLI) to collect administrators' responses and follow-up digitally recorded semistructured interviews with administrators to expand and clarify the survey responses.

## Research Questions

1. Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the district administrators' perceptions about the value and importance of West Virginia's PK–12 career readiness and workforce program(s)?
2. Research Question 2 (RQ2): What are the district administrators' perceptions about the barriers, limitations, and successes of West Virginia's PK–12 career readiness and workforce program(s)?

## Framework

I used Bolam's (1999) and Bush's (2006, 2007, 2010) research on educational leadership as the theoretical underpinning to examine the two research questions. While there is a substantial and growing body of literature to enhance the understanding of the

role teachers play in supporting the development of a student's career identity and transition into work and additional learning areas, my search for research on administrator impact on, or perceptions about, career and workforce development returns few results. Among the few studies focused on district leadership, Chingos et al. (2013) suggested district leadership is an important factor in student achievement but acknowledged the topic is well-positioned for further research. There is growing evidence educational leadership is an essential function for policymaking change and the fulfillment of objectives and strategies (Bolam, 1999; Bush, 2010; Cuthbert, 1984). Bush (2007) stated that leadership embodies the process of influence based on the values and beliefs articulated by leaders resulting in goals and objectives for an educational entity. I used the theory of educational leadership as the underpinning for this study, specifically the cultural model of educational leadership. The cultural model is used to examine the ideas, beliefs, norms, values, attitudes, symbols, rituals, traditions and ideologies of the leadership as central to the behavior of the organization (Bush, 2007) and will be further explored in Chapter 2.

A second component of the framework is the research supporting teachers' attitudes influencing their behavior in the classroom (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Brown, 2005; Keys & Bryan, 2001; Maier et al., 2013; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 2003; and Thompson, 1984). Understanding the important influence of teachers' attitudes on their behaviors within the classroom, Dodd and Hooley (2018) examined teachers attitudes toward career learning within their Teachers' Attitudes toward Career Learning Index

(TACLI). Dodd and Hooley suggested there is an increasing need to understand teacher attitudes toward career learning with the advancing numbers of programs requiring teachers to participate in career activities; moreover, a good instrument for measuring teachers' engagement in career learning needs to continue to be refined. No such instrument has been developed to increase understanding of administrator attitudes and perceptions about the value, challenges, or barriers of career and workforce education. In this study, I adapted the TACLI to reflect the focus on administrators. The TACLI developers grant permission for researchers to use or adapt the TACLI to fit the needs of the research. For the purposes of this generic qualitative study, built upon the concept of influence administrator thoughts can have on an organization, I used an adapted version of the TACLI instrument with follow-up interview data, to explore West Virginia secondary school administrators' feelings, beliefs, and perceptions about the value of career readiness and workforce programs, and the barriers, limitations, and successes in implementing such programs.

## Nature of the Study

I explored the perceptions held by West Virginia PK–12 district administrators about career readiness and workforce programs and clarified understanding of their thoughts about the value of career readiness and workforce programs, and the barriers, limitations, and successes in implementing such programs. I collected the West Virginia PK–12 district administrators (superintendents, directors, coordinators) responses through semistructured interviews and a qualitative survey that I developed from the Teachers'

Attitudes toward Career Learning Index (TACLI) instrument presented in Appendix D (Dodd & Hooley, 2018). I conducted semistructured interviews of district administrators to clarify and expound on survey responses. I digitally recorded the interviews.

I used the research questions to guide the inquiry, but the evolving nature of the research findings produced additional emergent themes. I used this methodology to collect rich expressions and statements of feeling and belief, and to reflect the results accordingly based on the individual participant's perceptions about career readiness and workforce programs in West Virginia secondary schools. I used the method to assimilate and analyze the data through inductive reasoning to determine common themes in the beliefs and feelings of West Virginia's secondary school administrators toward career and workforce programs. Merriam (1998) stated that a generic qualitative study is used to uncover the worldviews, perspectives, or process to understand the phenomenon. Percy et al. (2015) suggested ethnographies, case studies, grounded theory, or phenomenology would not be suitable for investigating people's attitudes opinions, or beliefs about a particular issue or experience. I selected a generic qualitative approach as other approaches have proven too time consuming or too restrictive to permit the unhindered emergence of themes and concepts related to this study.

I used an adapted version of the TACLI instrument with follow-up interview data to collect information from West Virginia PK–12 district administrators related to the research questions. Following the collection and analysis of data from the adapted TACLI survey, I conducted the audio-recordings of semistructured participant interviews

to clarify understanding of responses to the survey. I analyzed this information to gain insight into any factors or experiences administrators express about the value of, or barriers to, career readiness and workforce programs.

## Definition of Terms

*Career readiness*: Career readiness is the preparation activities to develop the skills to compete in the global knowledge-based economy (United States Department of Education, n.d. a). While Guidry (2012) presented career readiness lacks a generally held definition due to the multi-faceted nature of career preparation activities. Despite the lack of consensus, career readiness can include any career-focused activities in the school to aid in preparation for advancing down a career pathway, consisting of career learning activities not exclusive to career and technical education.

*District Administrators*: District administrators include those individuals who are involved with educational leadership, management, and administration. Bolam (1999) stated that educational leadership, management, and administration have not gained an agreed-upon definition in the field. Nevertheless, Bolam presented the definition of those individuals who carry out the executive functions of policy and management responsibilities. Bush (2006) suggested that educational management is the process of determining the goals of the organization. For this study, district administrators were those educational leaders who hold a position outside the school building level and support the leadership, management, and administration of the whole district. Titles of

these positions may include superintendent, deputy superintendent, assistant superintendent, associate superintendent, director, and coordinator.

*Workforce preparation programs*: Similar to career readiness, workforce preparation programs lack a commonly held definition. O'Lawrence (2017) suggested workforce programs permit students to acquire individual knowledge and capacities while garnering unique competences in a profession and learn about the available work specializations along with the requirement of those occupational pursuits.

*Youth Unemployment*: The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015b) defined those currently unavailable for work, who has actively looked for work in the past 4 weeks, and those who do not have a job. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019a, 2019b) established youth unemployment as those unemployed between the ages of 16 and 24.

*Youth Underemployment*: Barnichon and Yanos (2019) stated that unemployment is the traditional gauge of the labor market but is missing an important dimension of underemployment as a substantial fraction of workers in the United States are in jobs for which they are overqualified. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019c) defines underemployment in terms of workers in three broader labor underutilization measures: discouraged workers, marginally attached, and employed part-time. Discouraged workers are those who have looked for employment in the past 12 months, seeking and available for work, are not currently in the workforce, and cite they believe there are no jobs available for them. The marginally attached group of workers are

similar to discouraged workers, but their lack of employment search is based on any reason. Finally, those defined as persons employed part-time (less than 35 hours per week) for economic reasons and wished to work full time (sometimes called involuntary part-time workers).

## Assumptions

Since 2006, I have held positions in educational leadership at both the building-level and district-level in public schools in West Virginia. This work has occurred with six separate districts over the past 21 years including my teaching experience. This work, along with participating in several professional organizations in the state, has created many opportunities to labor with and interact with the state's district administrators. Consequently, this interaction involved exposure, support, training, and leadership produced a familiarity with me and my work and enabled improved access to participants. Participants shared freely and were not apprehensive about my judgment. I assumed that participants responded in a trustworthy manner to provide an accurate understanding of perceptions about the value of career readiness and workforce programs along with their perceptions about the barriers, limitations, and successes in West Virginia's PK–12 schools due to their position and limited consequences associated with this study.

## Scope and Delimitations

In this generic qualitative study, I explored West Virginia's PK–12 district administrators' beliefs and perceptions about career readiness programs and the value,

barriers, limitations, and success of implementing workforce preparation activities. Subsequently, the research only included perceptions from district-level administrators who agreed to participate in the study. I selected district-level administrators over building-level administrators due to the critical function district-level administrators play in deciding district priorities, which Bush (2006) cautioned could be heavily influenced by outside pressures. Although Bush (2006) raised concerns about outside pressures that may influence district-level administrators, I believe their crucial decision-making functions places them in a position to prioritize career readiness and workforce program initiatives in their districts. Their insights surrounding the value, barriers, limitations, and successes of career readiness and workforce programs enhanced the understanding of district-level decision making surrounding career readiness and workforce programs.

## Limitations

When considering potential weaknesses associated with the study, the most challenging would be my comprehension of the importance of career and technical education and career readiness. This understanding has evolved from 9 years as a career and technical education director for three districts in the state of West Virginia.
In my 5 years as a superintendent, I worked with local business and industry and participated in a regional economic development forum, local chamber of commerce, and a tri-state economic development organization. My work experiences and passion for the topic have focused this study around career readiness and may support some potential

biases. I believe that participants' responses were honored, and I was able to restrict my influence and biases on the collected data.

Beyond the potential influence of bias, generalizability may be limited to West Virginia public education. This limitation is based on the highly centralized hierarchical structure of West Virginia's public schools. This centralization places district administration with a significant level of influence on what is targeted by classroom teachers. Other public-school structures may not share the same level of authority and may not be able to generalize the findings of this study.

## Significance

The exploration of West Virginia's district administrators' beliefs and perceptions about career readiness programs and the value, barriers, limitations, and success of implementing workforce preparation activities extended the understanding of the importance of critical decision making and prioritization on student outcomes in public schools. This vital understanding about district level decision making will be a crucial component of developing responses to the social problem of underemployment and underemployment. Steinberg (2013) reported untrained, low-skilled youth who are unemployed or underemployed resulting in young people unable to cover student loan payments, forced to return home and live with parents, and delay retirement savings. Steinberg suggested youth unemployment results in the loss of consumer demand on businesses, reduced revenues for taxpayers, increased pressure on government-provided services, heightened crime, and added welfare payments. Virtanen et al. (2016) discussed

a connection between unemployment and poor mental health, which remains beyond the unemployment cycle; thus, increasing long-term health costs associated with difficulties entering the workforce. The significant challenge of addressing the shortage of an appropriately equipped workforce compels policymakers and school leaders to seek better comprehension of effective educational responses to ensure career-ready graduates. In this study, I explored West Virginia PK–12 district administrators' beliefs and perceptions about career readiness programs and the value, barriers, limitations, and success of implementing workforce preparation activities. The collected information can provide insight into district administrators' perceived value and challenges associated with preparing today's youth for the workforce. District administrators' attitudes and beliefs about career readiness and workforce preparation affect crucial decisions surrounding career education. With greater comprehension of these attitudes and beliefs, public schools and states can develop training, policies, and responses to address productive career and workforce preparation for students to avoid a negative career trajectory and promote the positive social change of avoiding underemployment and unemployment.

## Summary

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore West Virginia PK–12 district administrators' beliefs and perceptions about career readiness programs and the value, barriers, limitations, and success of implementing workforce preparation activities, and their relevance to the economic and social implications of underemployment and

unemployment. Although school administrators have influence and impact on career readiness and workforce programs in schools, there is a shortage of studies focused on the beliefs and perceptions of administrators about career and workforce education.

Chapter 2 includes a detailed review of the literature examining the concepts of career readiness and workforce education, discusses current career readiness programs, analyzes trends surrounding youth unemployment, investigate the economic, social, and personal cost of youth unemployment, and review the literature around the TACLI and educational leadership's influence on student outcomes. Chapter 3 includes a detailed discussion of the research design for this study and the rationale for the method.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## Introduction

American public education has continued to underproduce students with the necessary career preparation to support economic demands (Belfield et al., 2012; Chancer et al., 2019). The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore West Virginia PK–12 district administrators' beliefs and perceptions about career readiness programs and the value, barriers, limitations, and success of implementing these and workforce preparation activities. In this chapter, I examine career readiness and the need for workforce preparation programs to address the growing challenge of youth unemployment and the economic, social, and personal cost associated with young people being unsuccessful in transitioning to work. The U.S. educational system has permitted the acquisition of academic and technical skills to support the transition of youth into supporting economic needs. It is this foundational premise of public education to support societal and workforce needs to ensure the continuing preparation of today's youth to be competitive and contributing members of the economy. Career preparation for American youth has emerged as an increasing problem within the workforce and schools (Achieve, 2015; Belfield et al., 2012; Chancer et al., 2019; Soulé & Warrick, 2015; Vuković et al., 2015). This advancing challenge has a growing body of literature suggesting public schools need to focus more on career readiness/workforce programs necessary to be successful in today's knowledge economy (Achieve, 2015; Chancer et al., 2019; Soulé & Warrick, 2015; Vuković et al., 2015).

The increasing difficulty of youth finding employment and the economic, social, and personal cost of youth unemployment presents a significant challenge for policymakers and school leaders to address in the United States and abroad. Comprehending the need for schools to respond to this growing problem, I sought to understand the beliefs and perceptions of West Virginia's school district administration about the value, barriers, limitations, and successes of career readiness programs and workforce preparation activities.

## Literature Search Strategy

Establishing a literature base for this chapter, I utilized multiple academic databases, including ERIC, ProQuest, Education Research Complete, Academia, ResearchGate, and Google Scholar. I used key terms in searching databases surrounding essential topics of youth unemployment, educational leadership, and career preparation. The key terms revealed threads presented by articles' subject words and authors provided key words for further exploration. Initial broad searches on key terms delivered few current studies, but the available literature supplied me references to critical support for the review. These references led me to expand the searches on key terms and enabled more focused and critical data to be examined and added to the review. The search threads provided me useful data in some cases, while others offered interesting aspects related to the topic of inquiry but not meeting the needs of the study. As the literature review developed, my search narrowed to more specific areas of interest such as skill sets

needed in the future, current trends in the economy and others that permitted search parameters to isolate vital data.

I searched databases using a combination of the following terms when examining the conceptual framework: *administrator attitudes, career choice, career development, career development program, career education, career guidance, career planning, educational administration, leadership, teacher attitudes, transition to adulthood, and vocational guidance.* While researching key concepts including career readiness, youth unemployment, skills, and work climate, my searches focused around the following key terms: *barriers, career readiness, college readiness, education work relationship, employability, employment of youth, employment opportunities, employment patterns, employment potential, job skills, knowledge economy, labor market, labor supply, outcomes of education, postsecondary education, skill development, social capital, West Virginia, skill development, and youth unemployment.*

The organization of the literature review began with an examination of the literature surrounding district administrators influence on student outcomes. I employed multiple search strategies using key terms, reference lists from found articles, library support, and other methods produced only minimal literature about the perceptions of district administrators influence. Most of the information located surrounded the teachers' role in influencing student outcomes. Chingos et al. (2013) established district leadership as a significant factor in student achievement and suggested the need for further exploration. This connection to leadership prompted my search on educational

leadership and lead to Bush's (2007, 2010), Bolam's (1999), and Cuthbert's (1984) work. Their work presented crucial factors related to student outcomes but led to uncovering a significant factor related to teacher's attitudes influence on student outcomes. Beyond the influence of educational leadership and attitudes, the literature review includes the definition of career readiness and explores the problems generated by youth unemployment and value of career and workforce preparation programs. A final element of the literature review, I examine three perspectives associated with the economic, social, and personal costs related to being unemployed during initial entry into the workforce.

## Conceptual Framework

### Educational Leadership and Management

Growing adverse labor market conditions have prompted discussions about career readiness but remain in need of additional exploration within its increasing role in school reform discussions. School reform remains a topic at the forefront of public policy and public attention, but little existing research examines school districts' influence on student achievement **(**Chingos et al., 2013). Chingos et al. suggested more popular school reform efforts are focused on the district level. The authors suggested reform efforts have been intended to disrupt the public schools' monopoly on publicly funded K–12 education, increasingly relevant to the attention given to prominent school superintendents, and the influence of private philanthropy. Examples of misused meta-analysis and conflation of causation and correlation approaches **(**Chingos et al.) were found in research surrounding

the district-level impact on student learning. Chingos et al. advanced many research studies failed to control for socioeconomic demographics and other variations within districts.

Due to these shortcomings within the existing research, Chingos et al. (2013) established protocols to address the limitations presented in prior research and account for the variables. Fourth and fifth-grade math and reading scores in Florida and North Carolina student datasets collected between 2000–01 and 2009–10 school years were a focus of the study. The authors employed Bryk's and Raudenbush's (1988) hierarchical linear models and used variance decomposition techniques to address socio-economic influences and other district conditions. Within the findings, essential differences in student achievement emerged surrounding a district's impact on student outcomes. The authors acknowledged the importance of school districts but noted several caveats: the study could not account for similar practices across multiple districts, the research was limited only to math and reading for fourth and fifth-grade students, and the findings could not necessarily be extrapolated to other state's small districts. Influences on student achievement by school districts and the need for further exploration were indicated by the research.

The responsibilities of managing and leading operations and learning exist within a school district. Educational administrators are an essential part of the district's role in influencing student outcomes. Bolam (1999) believed educational administration research lacked a conceptual framework, and suggested the terms educational management,

administration, and leadership are unclear and have not been agreed upon in the field. However, Bolam stated that educational administration referred "to an executive function for carrying out agreed policy" (p. 194) and those leaders' management responsibilities. Bolam focused the conceptual map on the management of teaching and learning at the primary and secondary levels. Bolam's map was organized into three thematic headings: management of teaching and learning, individual characteristics and contextual pressures, and training and development for educational leadership. Bolam suggested one theme focused on educational leadership's linkage to effects on teaching and learning. Another theme proposed individual characteristics and contextual pressures are directed toward the influence of an individual's characteristics and contextual pressures on the school leader's performances and tasks. Bolam's third theme targeted how school leaders and managers are trained and developed to promote evidence-based practices.

Despite the lack of a unified approach to understanding educational leadership and management, Bush (2006) provided some critical insights surrounding school outcomes. Bush advised that the heart of educational management is the process for determining the aims of the organization. These school aims are often heavily influenced by pressures from the external environment. Bush explained many countries had national curriculums, leaving schools with interpreting external imperatives rather than defining aims on student needs and the basis of their assessment. This interpretation underlines an essential challenge of school leaders' abilities to "…modify government policy and

develop alternative approaches based on school-level values and vision" (Bush, 2006, p. 1).

More governments comprehend the need to keep pace with the global economy, they must invest in their people and develop a highly skilled workforce (Bush, 2007). This realization has prompted increasing interest in educational leadership as the widespread belief about the quality of leaders has a significant influence on student outcomes (Bush). Bush cautioned about distinguishing educational leadership versus educational management; management and leadership need to be given equal prominence in order for schools to achieve desired outcomes and operate effectively. Bush recognized the growing interest in educational leadership and management due to the relationship of effective schools and economic competitiveness but stated that there is limited clarity on what leadership behaviors produced the most favorable outcomes. Additionally, Bush shared the various theories on educational leadership and management reflected very different ways of interpreting and understanding behaviors and activities in schools and colleges.

Bush (2007) elected to classify 20 years of research on educational leadership and management into six major models: formal, collegial, political, subjective, ambiguity, and cultural (Table 1). Bush further stated that Leithwood et al.'s (1999) notions on managerial leadership presume the focus of leaders is on the functions, tasks, and behaviors to carry out the fulfillment of the work of the organization, and transformational leadership is focused on capacities and commitments of organizational

members with the assumption higher personal commitment results in extra effort and greater productivity. Bush expressed that the model is more comprehensive as it provides a normative approach to school leadership and concentrates on leaders seeking influence on school outcomes rather than the direction of those outcomes. Bush described Leithwood et al.'s (1999) participative leadership centers on group decision-making as the core focus as it is anticipated participants will advance school effectiveness, justified by democratic principles, and makes available leadership to any stakeholder. Bush established political and transactional leadership as a combined approach with political leadership focused on the most powerful protagonist overcoming a disagreement, whereas transactional relationships are based on an exchange for some valued resource. Bush recognized educational leaders require the cooperation of educators to secure the effective management of their schools but acknowledged a significant limitation of the approach is it does not engage staff beyond the benefits from the immediate transaction. Postmodern leadership accepts organizations have no ontological reality and are just the persons within them with very different views and leaders should respect and provide attention to the individual and diverse perspectives of stakeholders (Bush, 2007). Bush described moral leadership as a model focused on the beliefs, values, and ethics of leaders themselves. Bush presented instructional leadership was different than the other models as it emphasizes on the behavior of teachers and teaching and learning and stresses the direction and impact of influence rather than the process of influence itself. Bush described the other leadership models as partial, and stated that contingent

leadership accepts "…the diverse nature of school contexts and the advantages of adapting leadership styles to the particular situation" (p. 402). Moreover, Bush agreed with Leithwood et al.'s (1999) notions about school leaders influence will depend upon mastery of a large repertoire of leadership practices. Bush concludes with defining leadership as the process of influence based on well-defined beliefs and values, leading to a vision for the school, and these models are partial but provide unidimensional and distinctive perspectives on school leadership.

Table 1
*Typology of Management and Leadership Models*

| Management Model | Leadership Model |
|---|---|
| Formal | Managerial |
| Collegial | Transformational<br>Interpersonal |
| Political | Transactional |
| Subjective | Post-modern |
| Ambiguity | Contingency |
| Cultural | Moral<br>Instructional |

*Note.* Table 1 displays six management models on the left and parallels them with similar leadership models on the right. Adapted from "Educational leadership and management: theory, policy, and practice," by T. Bush, 2007, *South African Journal of Education 27*(3), 391–406. Adapted with permission.

Leithwood et al. (2019) discussed a small but compelling study that demonstrated district-level organizations influenced student learning. Leithwood et al. acknowledged the limitations of the research due to being measured on elements with little or no district control. Leithwood et al. described a much larger body of research on districts performing beyond expectations to improve student learning, often referred to as district effectiveness. The authors' found the majority of the studies were qualitative and mostly case study in nature and elected to focus on the quantitative portions of a larger mixed-methods approach. The framework consisted of nine characteristics of high performing districts with both indirect and direct effects on student English and math achievement scores. The nine characteristics included mission, vision, and goals for students; coherent instructional program; uses of evidence; professional development; professional leadership; the extent of district/district's alignment; elected leadership; organizational improvement processes and relationships.

Leithwood et al. (2019) found no direct effect on student achievement due to school leadership; however, a significant indirect impact on student learning due to school leadership was found. Leithwood et al. further looked at the total effects of both indirect and direct effects on student achievement and found four of the nine characteristics had impacted student outcomes (mission, vision, and goals; coherent instructional program; uses of evidence; and district alignment). The authors acknowledged the limitations of the study due to it being based on a unique Canadian district. Leithwood et al. used a cross-sectional design not allowing for a review of the

characteristics of districts' effectiveness over time. The nine selected characteristics did not encompass all school effectiveness characteristics in the literature. Finally, the evidence about student achievement scores was based on cut scores and not scale scores.

Notwithstanding the limitations, Leithwood et al. (2019) suggested the findings would be potentially generalizable to the United States as the nine characteristics were based on much of the research conducted in the United States. The authors discussed the effects of district characteristics on student achievement and corroborated seven of the nine characteristics efficacy with no clear dominating feature; thus, supporting the claims to have districts develop coordinated and comprehensive efforts to enhance student outcomes. Two practical implications emerged from Leithwood et al. 's discussion was for central office leaders to use the district characteristics as a framework for their district improvement initiatives, and district-provided professional development had little to no effect on student achievement. Also, within the findings, the authors found three conditions mediating district effects on student achievement: safe and orderly environments, teacher trust, and teacher efficacy. Additionally, the authors presented school leadership emerged as a strong contributor to student achievement but was not a potent mediator within the nine district characteristics. Whereas, district effects and school leadership effects seemed independent of one another and spoke to a remarkable degree of consistency surrounding what influences teacher's responses to school reforms, whether the sources are the school leader or the district (Leithwood et al.).

## The Influence of Attitudes Towards Career Learning

School reform plays an essential role in today's educational environment, and teachers are an integral part of the implementation of those reform efforts. Maier et al. (2013) shared Ball's and Cohen's (1996), Brown's (2005), Keys' and Bryan's (2001), Pajares' (1992), Richardson's (2003), and Thompson's (1984) notions on teachers' attitudes being seen as theoretically important as they have demonstrated guiding teacher's classroom behavior. It is the importance of teachers' attitudes and beliefs on student outcomes, which Dodd and Hooley (2018) discussed in their development of an instrument to measure career learning. Dodd and Hooley understood the critical role school plays in the career identities and development of young people. Children establish an emerging career or vocational identity through learning about the workplace through others' work experiences, developing a sense of self, and aligning one's self with the workplace (Porfeli & Lee, 2012). Research revealed a relationship between career thinking in young people and their postsecondary outcomes (Stringer et al., 2012). Moreover, purposeful interventions affect young people's career thinking (Hooley et al., 2011; Porfeli & Lee). This influence on career thinking elevates the role of career learning. Career learning is closely related to career and technical education, or sometimes referred to as vocational education, but is not confined to a single educational pathway. Career learning can include conventional approaches as one-to-one career counseling, providing access to employers and work experience, and teaching career lessons (Dodd & Hooley). Schoon and Polek (2011) suggested adolescence is a critical

juncture in the individual career development for their aspirations and hopes can have significant implications toward later life development. Robinson and Diale (2017) acknowledged the need for more research around primary students' aspirations within the evolution of the lifespan concept in career development, whereas career behavior occurs in stages starting in childhood and going throughout one's life.

Dodd and Hooley (2018) understood the essential role teachers play in career development but acknowledged the need for more research on teachers' attitudes toward career learning. Teacher attitudes were found to be an important factor related to behavior in relationship to a spectrum of co-curricular and curricular areas (Dodd & Hooley). For example, Oreck (2004) believed teachers' attitudes affect the engagement of students in arts education. Maier et al. (2013) discovered similar outcomes related to science education. Dodd and Hooley suggested much of the research surrounding career learning focused on the U.S. classroom experience and U.S. policy. Dodd and Hooley identified the work of Akos et al.'s (2011) U.S. middle school work. Akos et al.'s work developed a nine-item scale to measure teacher perspectives on a career-relevant curriculum. Two critical factors emerged from the instrument data: teachers' beliefs about schooling and if the curriculum should include preparation for the future of work, and teachers' perceived value of focusing career and work in their core classroom content (Dodd & Hooley). One of the research results was teachers saw value in the core curriculum emphasizing work and there were high levels of agreement about the curriculum preparing students for the future of work (Akos et al.; Dodd & Hooley).

Hooley et al. (2015) presented much of the debate on young people's employability and careers have focused mainly on employers and career guidance professionals and has often left teachers lost in the discussion. The authors described teachers at the heart of a long-term approach to enhancing career and employability learning. Hooley et al. suggested a consensus in the literature about the makeup of good quality career and employability learning: the mission and ethos included career learning delivered through the curriculum; the delivery consists of qualified specialists and the broader school staff; the curriculum and delivery involved useful resources, information, and technologies; and the delivery includes external stakeholders, such as employers and post-secondary providers.

Hooley et al. (2015) further defined a series of roles United Kingdom teachers should be supported in the tutorial, teaching, and leadership roles of career and employability learning (CEL). Tutorial roles included career informant and pastoral support. A career informant is a trusted adult who experienced and who made career decisions who can inform a young person's career building. Pastoral support included helping young people make links to career support and decisions within the guidance of the pastoral role. Teaching roles are divided between within-subject teachers and delivering CEL. The within-subject role had teachers making connections between CEL and the subject they teach along with the broader curriculum and building employability skills. Leadership roles included Leading CEL and senior leadership. Leading CEL had teachers in a middle leadership role who act as the school's career leaders, careers

coordinator, and head of careers. The senior leadership role had teachers providing senior leadership to career and associated areas. (Hooley et al., 2015). Dodd and Hooley (2018) described Hooley et al.'s (2015) conceptualization of teachers' roles within an educational charity of Teach First and the Teachers' Attitudes toward Career Learning Index developed as an evaluation tool for the Teach First professional development program. Dodd and Hooley presented the purpose of the intervention was to increase teachers' capacity to deliver and engage teachers in career learning. Teachers were tested before and after the intervention, and data collected was used to validate the instrument and better understand teachers' engagement and attitudes about career and employability learning (Dodd & Hooley).

Dodd's and Hooley's (2018) focus around teachers' attitudes toward career learning prompted an important question around district administrators attitudes and perceptions on career learning. Leithwood et al.'s (2019) research highlighted the importance of school leaders and district influence within their indirect effect on student achievement. Moreover, Leithwood et al. connected a safe and orderly environment, teacher trust, and collective teacher efficacy mediating district effectiveness to influence student achievement and speculated teachers' perceptions of the trustworthiness of central office staff affected teachers' responses to district initiatives. This relationship between teachers' perceptions highlights the critical role district administrators play in influencing potential outcomes for students with the direct and indirect influence on teachers through reform efforts and district initiatives.

## Literature Review Related to Methodologies

Included in this section is a thorough review of the examined literature that established the groundwork for this study. The literature review contains a mixture of qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and an analysis of the literature presented through books and technical reports. Akos et al. (2011) and Dodd and Hooley (2018) utilize quantitative approaches to investigate teacher perspectives on career education. Bryk and Raudenbush (1988); Chingos, Whitehurst, and Gallaher (2013); and Leithwood, et al. (2019) utilize a quantitative approach to examine influences on student achievement. Maier et al. (2013) used a quantitative approach to study preschool teachers' attitudes and beliefs toward teaching science. Stringer et al. (2012) employed a quantitative study to focus on changes in the dimensions of career preparation. Oreck (2004) employed a mixed method approach to explore teacher attitudes toward the arts, while Bolam (1999); Bush (2006, 2007, 2010); Leithwood et al. (1999); Porfeli and Lee (2012); Hooley et al. (2011); Hooley et al. (2015) provided summaries and insights of literature within books, articles, and technical briefs.

### Qualitative Methodologies from the Literature

Robinson and Diale (2017) researched the career aspirations of Grade 7 learners in a community school in South Africa. With the lifespan concept of career development, Robinson and Diale utilized a generic qualitative study to examine Grade 7 student aspirations. Robison and Diale discovered a scarcity of research on career aspirations on low socioeconomic primary school learners. Using a collage, sociogram, and group

interviews, Robinson and Diale found the following themes: the role of family in molding career aspirations, career aspirations seeking to realize hope and dreams, and count the cost of career aspirations. The study concluded with the recommendation by the authors to explore learners' career aspirations early in life to reveal career choices in an ever-changing world of work (Robinson & Diale). Career exposure and the influence on career aspirations influence on career behaviors during the critical juncture of adolescence and potential implications for later development was highlighted in the study (Schoon & Polek, 2011).

**Quantitative Methodologies from the Literature**

Akos et al. (2011) developed a measure to assess teacher perspectives on middle school career education efforts. Akos et al. presented a lack of research limited to the lack of empirically validated instruments to measure teacher attitudes. The lack of an empirically validated instrument has led to the limited research around career relevant curriculum being delivered by middle school core teachers (Akos et al.). Akos et al. determined survey results from 291 middle school teachers demonstrated in a confirmatory and exploratory factor analysis a two-factor structure: career integration and future orientation. Denoting caution, the authors provided an optimistic and novel account of middle school teachers' perspectives on career education and suggested the instrument was a valuable tool for monitoring, measuring, and understanding teacher perspectives of career education (Akos et al.).

Dodd and Hooley (2018) presented the important role teachers play in supporting young people in forming their career identities and to make a successful transition to work and further learning. Dodd and Hooley suggested little research had been done with the role of the teacher and specifically attempted to establish a measure of teacher attitudes toward careers work. Dodd and Hooley used a survey design process including construct and content validity components which recognized five underlying factors in teachers' engagement and attitudes in careers work: (1) career learning and support practices, (2) school career strategy attitudes, (3) subject career learning, (4) career support attitudes, and (5) school career strategy practices. Dodd and Hooley acknowledged the instrument failed to measure all the roles identified in their study, but two important constructs related to school career strategy attitudes and school career strategy practices were revealed. Overall, Dodd and Hooley declared the instrument useful in measuring teacher attitudes toward career learning, but recommended the instrument be further investigated and refined through confirmatory factor analysis.

Chingos et al. (2013) focused on the educational reform efforts being targeted at the district level with little existing research on how critical they are to student achievement. Chingos et al. applied a variance decomposition analysis based on hierarchical linear models on ten years of Florida and North Carolina fourth and fifth grade students' statewide data. Their findings indicated only a small portion (1 to 2%) of district influence impacted student achievement. However, Chingos et al. suggested the difference between low and high performing districts was large enough for practical and

policy significance due to 0.11 standard deviation in student achievement over nine weeks of schooling. However, these findings are limited due to Florida's very similar approaches to running schools, data only included student performance on state math and reading exams in fourth and fifth grade, and may not be extrapolated to states with smaller districts where superintendents can change district emphasis much easier (Chingos et al.). Although, not insignificant, a connection between student outcomes and district-level decision making surfaced in the findings.

Bryk and Raudenbush (1988) reviewed the two troublesome and persistent methodological problems in educational research associated with the nexus of children's learning is typically the object of the inquiry and learning usually occurs in an organizational setting of classrooms. Bryk and Raudenbush discussed the challenge being overcome using hierarchical linear models. The authors presented conceptual and technical difficulties have confounded past analysis of research based on school effect research using multi-level data. The authors asserted the three-level hierarchical model should constitute a basic architype for future quantitative research on student learning. Nevertheless, limited SES data cautioned Bryk and Raudenbush on the speculative outcomes generated within the study.

Leithwood et al. (2019) tested the effects of nine district characteristics on student achievement, and explored the conditions facilitating such characteristics and contributed to understanding about school-level leaders' role within district improvement efforts. Leithwood et al. suggested there is a small but compelling body of research

demonstrating a significant variation in student learning expounded by district-level organizations often referred to as school effectiveness. The authors indicated much of the research surrounding school effectiveness was qualitative and largely case studies. However, their current research takes the quantitative portion of the data collected as part of a larger mixed methods study to complete mediation analysis of the nine characteristics. The nine characteristics are summarized as mission, vision, and goals for students; coherent instructional program; uses of evidence; professional development; professional leadership; extent of district alignment; elected leadership; organizational improvement process; and relationships. Leithwood et al. presented the study supported the efficacy of seven of the nine characteristics.

Stringer et al. (2012) understood preparing for adult career included incorporating a career into one's identity during a youth's transition to adulthood. Moreover, connections between career preparation and postsecondary adjustment and differences in developmental patterns of career preparation dimensions (indecision, planning, and confidence) shortly after high school graduation was established in previous research. Stringer et al. examined the associations between career preparation dimensions and three aspects of adjustment (emotional stability, social adaptation, and self-actualization) for 454 youth from twelfth grade to 4 1/2 years after graduation. Employing a latent growth curve analysis, Stringer et al. presented career preparation predicts and is predicted by adjustment, and career confidence was a critical predictor of adjustment. The twelfth-grade career confidence and changes in time forecast alterations in adjustment 4 1/2 years

post-graduation. Findings also indicated growth in emotional stability was predictive to lower indecision and higher career confidence (Stringer et al.). Overall, findings emphasized the essential role career preparation dimensions are to advance postsecondary adjustment.

Teacher attitudes and beliefs are complex, multidimensional constructs guiding behavior, and because of their complexity, multiple dimensions of both attitudes and beliefs have been explored (Maier et al., 2013). Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about teaching are deemed significant due to their influence on classroom behavior, and because they represent a potential mechanism through which professional development and training can impact instructional practices (Maier et al.). Maier et al. applied a series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses for preschool teachers' attitudes and beliefs toward teaching science in the aim to develop a reliable and valid assessment instrument. Three distinct factors: teacher comfort, child benefit, and challenges were identified in the research. Maier et al. acknowledged the need for more valid and reliable instruments to provide a greater understanding of the influence of teacher beliefs and attitudes has on science instruction.

**Mixed Methods Methodologies from the Literature**

Oreck (2004) employed a mixed method approach to research teachers' attitudes toward the arts. Oreck suggested little was known about teachers' attitudes toward the arts and the applications of arts processes within the teaching practice. Oreck utilized data collected from 423 kindergarten through twelfth grade teachers. Three primary questions

were investigated in the study: (1) “What attitudes related to arts use in teaching can be identified and interpreted from teachers’ responses on the Teaching with the Arts Survey (TWAS)?” (2) “To what extent can variance in teacher’s self-reported frequency of use of the arts in their teaching be explained by demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, ethnicity, years of teaching experience, grade level taught), personal experience with the arts (i.e., past and current involvement in the arts, attendance at tarts-based professional development), and their scores on the attitude measures on the TWAS?” (3) “What do teachers consider be the primary issues related to the use of the arts in their teaching?” (Oreck, pp. 57–58). Principal component analysis was applied to provide validity evidence for the TWAS Survey and to detect interpretable elements explaining substantial variations in the responses (Oreck). Stepwise hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used in question two to discover the degree attitudes and demographic variables contributed to the variance levels in the self-reported classroom use of the arts (Oreck). Surrounding question three, Oreck used data from two open-ended short answer questions coded with an open-coded emergent classification system. Oreck found three critical difficulties for teachers using the arts: “to nurture and maintain their own creativity and artistic skills, to develop facilitation skills in the arts, and to find a balance between their artistic values and the pressures of their jobs” (p. 67). To conclude, Oreck stated, “the inner resources of teacher; their attitudes toward art, creativity, and innovation; their commitment to personal growth; and their educational and life values all need nurturing within the school and in professional development programs” (p. 67).

The Teachers' Attitudes toward Career Leaning Index offers a starting point to consider attitudes about career and employment learning in schools. Within this study, I will use the instrument with modifications to delve into the district administrator's perceptions about the value and importance of West Virginia's PK–12 career readiness programs and what are district administrator's perceptions about the barriers, limitations, and success of West Virginia's PK–12 career readiness and workforce program(s). Participant selection focused on district administrators due to their critical gatekeeper functions as district leaders. Within West Virginia's highly centralized school system, much of what is completed in schools is influenced by decision-makers outside the classroom. The West Virginia Legislature, West Virginia Board of Education, and West Virginia Department of Education establish laws, policies, and funding priorities which district administrators are tasked to implement at the local level. It is this influence on district outcomes and priorities leading to the interest in district administrators for the purposes of the study. Leithwood et al. (2019) discussed the indirect influence by district administrators on student achievement. Still, it is hoped to learn more about how district administrators' perceptions can influence career readiness and workforce preparation attainment among West Virginia's students.

## Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

### Career Readiness

In 1983, a report called A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform presented to the Nation, Secretary of Education, and United States Department of

Education the nation's public schools were not preparing students for the future workplace (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report was one of the first to point out the growing separation between schools and the workforce. Unfortunately, employers throughout the 1980s and 1990s continued to convey a disconnect between skillsets needed in the workplace and the emerging workforce (Guidry, 2012). This growing divide led to policy makers pushing for new national policy supporting the need for college and career-ready students. The U. S. Department of Education (n.d. a) began the use of the "career readiness" language to represent the growing concerns over students facing inconsistent standards across the country and with the goal of every student, regardless of their demographics, to develop the skills to compete in the global knowledge-based economy. The states have led the development of college and career readiness standards reinforced by the federal government's Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) added flexibility (United States Department of Education, n.d. b). The ESEA flexibility has come through the adoption of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and has replaced elements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (United States Department of Education, n.d. a). 45 states adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in order to comply with initial expectations of the adoption of the flexibility (United States Department of Education, n.d. a). However, many states altered their college and career standards due to many misunderstandings and politics surrounding the CCSS.

Mishkind and the College and Career Readiness & Success Center (CCRSC) (2014) provided an overview of state college and career definitions. Mishkind's and CCRSC's analysis determined there were two primary categories for definitions from the 36 states and the District of Columbia. 33 of the 37 definitions included a combined definition for college and career readiness, while four involved separate definitions for college and career readiness. 21 states presented concrete knowledge and dispositions for their states, including academic knowledge, critical thinking, problem-solving, social-emotional learning, collaboration, communication, grit, resilience, perseverance, citizenship, and community involvement in their definitions. (Mishkind & CCRSC). The authors concluded that college and career readiness is multifaceted, encompassed academic readiness, along with knowledge abilities, and dispositions which influence academic achievement.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (2019) defined career readiness as "career readiness is the attainment of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace" (¶. 3). NACE presented career-readiness competencies as critical thinking/problem solving, oral/written communications, teamwork/collaboration, digital technology, leadership, professionalism/work ethic, career management, and global/intercultural fluency. Despite the college focus contained within NACE's definition, a compelling argument can be made to include the same career-readiness competencies for graduating secondary students.

The Career Readiness Partner Council (n.d.) (CRPC) is an organization uniting workforce organizations and national education leaders to focus on what it entails to be career-ready. CRPC defined "a career-ready person effectively navigates pathways that connect education and employment to achieve a fulfilling, financially-secure and successful career" (p. 2). CRPC added career readiness is more than a job and requires adaptability and a commitment to life-long learning to include a mastery of critical knowledge, dispositions, and skills that modify over time as one progresses along a developmental career continuum. CRPC organized their definition into two primary categories: academic and technical knowledge and skills and employability skills and dispositions.

According to Guidry (2012), the term career readiness lacks a commonly held definition due to the multi-faceted nature of preparing individuals to be career-ready and the many stakeholders responsible for addressing adequate career preparation. Guidry presented the Association of Career and Technical Education's "What Is Career Ready?" reported three significant categories for career readiness: core academic skills, employability skills, and technical/job-specific skills. Guidry provided evidence many employer survey frameworks are based on a standard premise of foundational cognitive and behavioral skills are critical for career readiness. Career readiness and workforce preparation programs have continued to gain importance with the growing challenge of finding workers but remain ununified in a standard definition and expectations for young people.

Despite this lack of cohesive definition, many states are seeking their own definitions and preparation plans for addressing the growing challenge of missing skilled and trained labor force. West Virginia, the state associated with this study initially adopted Common Core State Standards in 2011 and later repealed the state's version of CCSS in December of 2015 and adopted West Virginia's College and Career Ready Standards (CCRS) (West Virginia Department of Education, n.d. a). West Virginia would, in turn, declare their standards with the following goals "…we must provide a comprehensive, high-quality learning system that empowers students to reach their full potential, promotes their development as productive and responsible citizens, and prepares them to meet workforce and economic demands" (West Virginia Department of Education, 2018a, p.1). West Virginia would fall into the category of states with the 33 others holding a combined definition of college and career readiness (Mishkind & CCRSC, 2014). The West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) and West Virginia Department of Education would adopt in 2018, a combined goal of creating an educational system which "encourages a pursuit of lifelong learning and skills; promotes a culture of responsibility; promotes a culture of responsibility; personal well-being and community engagement; and responds to workforce and economic demands" (West Virginia Department of Education, 2018b, p. 2). Frank Vitale, a West Virginia State Board Member, would state for the first time WVBE and the West Virginia Department of Education aligned a single strategic plan which prioritizes ensuring all students graduate college and career ready (West Virginia Department of Education, 2018b).

Even with the increased recognition of the workforce and career readiness in West Virginia, only one career readiness policy existed exclusively focused on workforce prior to 2020, simulated workplace. In 2020, the WV Legislature approved changes to state policy to include career exploration in middle schools (WVDE, 2020). It is unclear how this new policy (effective July 2020) will influence changes in middles schools across West Virginia. Even with this new addition, the CTE curriculum standards remain the primary guidance for career readiness and workforce preparation. These standards are reinforced with the policy simulated workplace. Simulated Workplace has been implemented to address mounting concerns from business and industry about the deficit of employability skills from students leaving West Virginia's schools (West Virginia Department of Education, n.d. b). The Simulated Workplace program attempts to create an authentic workplace culture within the CTE classrooms, establishes a student led and developed workplace protocols focused on professionalism, attendance, safety, workforce requirements, and employee drug testing (West Virginia Department of Education, n.d. b). Unfortunately, the Simulated Workplace Policy only reaches those students participating in career and technical education (CTE) programs. With this limited focus on CTE programs, just under 9% of West Virginia's students in 2018 benefited from this policy (West Virginia Department of Education, n.d. b, n.d. c, 2018c).

This limited response coincides with the notions of Kreamer et al. (2014) in states employing student performance indicators only focused on a subset of students. Kreamer et al. suggested states needed to place greater emphasis on career performance indicators

and experiences. West Virginia is one of thirteen states including CTE pathway completion as a factor of the statewide report card (Kreamer et al., 2014). West Virginia's accountability model or Balanced Scorecard includes college and/or career readiness credentials achieved by twelfth grade students called Student Success Indicator: Post-Secondary Achievement as one of eight measures within the scorecard (West Virginia Department of Education, n.d. d). The West Virginia Department of Education's (n.d. d) indicator embeds CTE completion rates along with Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), college-credit-bearing coursework (students receiving grades C or higher) to calculate the overall score. Kreamer et al. contend states are missing an opportunity to indicate to students, parents, communities, schools, and districts that careers matter by not including indicators reflecting career pathways and experiences. Consequently, the West Virginia Department of Education's Post-Secondary Achievement does not distinguish in its summary score a distinction between college or career acquisition. The score is a total number of students acquiring AP, IB, and CTE Completion divided by the total number of twelfth graders (West Virginia Department of Education, n.d. d). Thus, the calculation equates to CTE completion as being only a subset of one indicator of the total of eight factors.

**Career readiness programs**

The College and Career Readiness & Success Center (CCRSC) (2019) reviewed all 50 state's college and career readiness plans reporting definitions, metrics, pathways, and other attributes of each state's ESSA plan. West Virginia's response to support

college and career readiness included the adoption of the National Career Clusters Model and the requirement for each student to complete and individual student transition plan (ISTP) along with college preparation elements (CCRSC, 2019). The policy has since been amended and has replaced the ISTP with a similar approach to student career planning through a personalized education plan (PEP) (West Virginia Department of Education, 2018). The United States Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy (n.d.) shared all but eight states (Arkansas, California, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Wyoming) have instituted a state-wide expectation of individualized educational planning for college and career readiness. Nonetheless, West Virginia 's career readiness elements, coupled with Simulated Workplace, haven't adequately addressed the changing demands of the modern world of work, nor do they reach all public-school students. Of the 55 state districts, many are rural and face depleting resources, shrinking student populations, minimal diversity, and eroding business and industry opportunities; therefore, many rely exclusively on career and technical education (CTE) programs, including Simulated Workplace to support career readiness preparation.

When surveyed, only four districts responded with additional efforts beyond CTE to support student’s preparation for the workforce. One district provides career literacy at the middle school level, culminating in an academy model at the high school level focused on career pathways. Another district supports their eight high schools with coordinators to provide internships and apprenticeships opportunities. One district boasts

a coordinator of career connections whose responsibility to develop career days, get-a-life simulations, internships, business partnerships, and shadowing experiences. One final district has partnered with West Virginia Department of Education and Marshall University to complete an entrepreneurship pilot with their students.

Despite West Virginia having such a limited response, there are other states and districts across the nation, creating programs to address career readiness preparation. In 2007, Tennessee began an effort to make career readiness a top priority and adopted Tennessee Promise, a career clusters initiative, and bolstered their college and career and technical programs to ensure students would excel in jobs with their state (CCSSO, 2017). The Council of Chief State School Officers (2017) highlighted Warren County, Tennessee making strides in career readiness with work-based learning methods including in-demand skills embedded in their classrooms, allowing for exposure to such fields as engineering and mechatronics. In 2005, Metro Nashville Public Schools established career-based academies, enabling ninth-grade students' exposure to college and career pathways which focus on high-skilled, high-wage, high-demand jobs available in the region (Uppercue, 2019). Vicksburg Warren School District in Mississippi elected to develop college and career academies focused on four exit strategies: employment, enrolling in postsecondary education, enlisting in the military, and entrepreneurship. Jersey Shore School District in Pennsylvania has included exposure to some careers in elementary school and additional occupational examinations in middle school which culminates in high school students choosing a liberal arts pathway, including content with

job-specific skills (Seagraves, 2019). Troy City Schools in Alabama has incorporated a Ready-to-Work program at the high school to ensure students leave with needed soft skills (Holmes, 2019). Additionally, the high school has instituted the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council training to better meet the needs of the local community's and region's occupations (Holmes, 2019).

**Workforce preparation programs**

These mounting challenges of predicting needed workplace skills and uncertainty of increasingly precarious working conditions and employment prospects for young people compels school leaders and policymakers to seek out responses required to technological advancements. One potential approach is the role of workforce preparation programs. According to O'Lawrence (2017), "…that the United States. has worst-educated unskilled nonprofessional/hourly workforce among the major economic powers" (p. 68) due to lack of capitalizing on training and retraining. Moreover, O'Lawrence suggested to have educational policymakers and political leaders anticipate the changing workforce needs and better align employment opportunities for returning veterans, high school graduates, and college graduates. O'Lawrence promoted workforce development programs as they allow students to procure unique competencies within a profession while gaining knowledge of their capacities and aptitudes; comprehend the spectrum of available work specializations; and learn the rewards and requirements of occupational pursuits. Also, Chancer et al. (2019) declared to compete more successfully in the global arena, businesses, governments, education, and community leaders would

need to embrace innovation in education and workforce development across economic sectors.

Jacobs and Hawley (2009) asserted workforce development had several definitions within the literature. Harrison and Weiss (1998) advanced activities from counseling, crisis intervention, mentoring, placement, follow-up, and recruitment as defining workforce programs. The Urban Institute described workforce development to comprise a range of training and employment services, including targeted assistance for employers (Pindus et al., 2000). Giloth (2000) suggested the central focus of workforce development is on employment training tied to both industries driven education and training and employer targeted assistance. Grubb (1999) understood workforce development programs provided individuals with necessary employment content, including specific academic competencies and technical information. Gray and Herr (1998) defined workforce education as a pre-baccalaureate pedagogy offered by business and industry, community-based organizations, government, or educational institutions to address organizational human performance problems or to enhance individual labor market opportunities.

According to Jacobs and Hawley (2009), most literature calls for investment in postsecondary training or community colleges rather than secondary level training. Chancer et al. (2019) cautioned secondary career and technical education (CTE) programs about being aligned with workforce needs and credentialing, or they would not have value in the labor market. In addition, Chancer et al. (2019) stated state and federal

policies should require CTE programs to work with workforce development agencies, industry representatives, and business leaders to aid in pinpointing high-growth, high-demand, and high-skill occupations (Chancer et al., 2019). The documented challenges facing today's youth requires collaboration from business, industry, communities, government, and education to address these mounting challenges (Chancer et al., 2019; O'Lawrence, 2017; OECD, 2015). Communities, districts, and states are beginning to seek out but have not fully met the challenge of the growing skills gap (Olson, 2015), leaving many students unemployed or underemployed.

**Youth Unemployment**

As states continue to seek out approaches to respond to the demands for college and career readiness, it is essential to understand the connection between career readiness and youth unemployment. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2015) reported between 2007 and 2011 youth have suffered the most considerable income loss and experienced a widening gap among poverty risk between youth and the remainder of the population in an increasing number of nations. Callanan et al. (2017) presented the Great Recession of 2008's quick rebound of gross domestic product hid a real, severe, and harmful impact of the Great Recession's effect on youth. The influence of the Great Recession has remained a decade and beyond with its harmful impact on labor force participation rates (Bullard, 2014); surge of people trapped in involuntary part-time employment (Cajner et al., 2014); and underutilization of the workforce and underemployment of youth (Abel et al., 2014). Callanan et al. defined the

recession and post-recession years as the “lost period” for many millennials (people born between 1980–2000). Millennials have found many career-oriented jobs and opportunities have been limited and accepted more reduced earnings than previous generations (Callanan et al., 2017). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) cautioned time will not erase the deep-rooted problems faced by youth attempting to join the workforce; moreover, countries with aging populations with shrinking youth cohorts will become increasingly dependent on successful outcomes for youth to support future growth, sustainability, and wellbeing.

**Skills gap**

Olson (2015) stated the worker shortage within the global economy is known as the skills gap. The skills gap has resulted from multiple global trends including globalization, technological advancement, loss of employer loyalty, corporate cost saving initiatives, and modern-day skill requirements outpacing education (Olson, 2015). The World Economic Forum (2016) presented the world is in the beginning of the Fourth Industrial Revolution The author suggested great promise with the impending change but warned businesses, governments, and individuals must react to prevent a growing inequality, talent shortages, and mass unemployment by reskilling and upskilling today’s workers; insisting, we could not “…weather the current technological revolution by waiting for the next generation’s workforce to become better prepared” (p. 7). The implication was that not only can we not wait on workers to be prepared, but we must also capture all available workers to fulfill changing employment needs. The Global

Human Capital Report's researchers calculated 38% of the human capital was not being developed among the 130 participating countries, while North America exhibited a 26% gap in human capital development (World Economic Forum, 2017). "Managing this transition toward deeper investment in human potential within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is one of the most important political, societal, economic and moral challenges we are facing today" (World Economic Forum, 2017, p. v).

Soulé and Warrick (2015) promoted a widespread consensus about the U.S.'s education system failing to sufficiently prepare students for the critical 21st century knowledge and skill demands. Vuković et al. (2015) suggested business and industry identified the discrepancy between the real needs of the economy and the system of education as one of the most significant causes of youth unemployment. Youth unemployment is related to several economic, societal and personal cost to youth (Chancer et al., 2019; Institute for the Future, 2014; OECD, 2015; Virtanen et al., 2016). This realization of the connection between education/career readiness/workforce preparation and youth unemployment has begun to shift opinions about how schools should respond. A current Phi Delta Kappa poll revealed 82% of participants supported career readiness activities in schools, but acknowledged local, state, and federal policymakers were not in line with public opinion (Ferguson, 2018). Despite the growing support for career readiness activities, the current educational practice continues to see youth unemployment numbers not improving. However, the National Conference of State

Legislators (2018) suggested policymakers are starting to participate in policies and strategies to address education's response to workforce needs.

Chancer et al., (2019) presented youth unemployment has obtained considerable attention in Europe but remains unheeded in the United States in areas of policy intervention and study. Vuković et al. (2015) posed a significant social and economic problem is high unemployment especially in young people; moreover, youth unemployment is not exclusively a pressing issue in North America and Europe but also in developing countries throughout the world. Vuković et al. suggested young people's transition in the past decade has become progressively turbulent, increasingly complex, and taken longer. The OECD (2015) conveyed where the labor market and education co-exist as two separate worlds; young people have difficulty transitioning from one world to the other. Vuković et al. stated today's youth "…are three times less likely to find employment than adults" (p.175).

Hauge et al. (2016) posed the difficulty many states and industries are having in locating qualified workers and the growing mismatch between available skilled labor and the industries' needs. This mismatch has a direct impact on a states' economic competitiveness and has become a top priority for governors across the nation (Hauge et al.). Achieve (2015) suggested 40% of recent high school graduates were unable to fulfill the demands of the workplace or college classroom. The International Assessment of Adult Competencies reported 14% of new graduates have poor numeracy skills and 10% exhibit poor literacy skills and more than 40% of those leaving before completing

secondary education suffer from low numeracy and literacy skills (OECD, 2015). The OECD stated, "…too many young people leave education without having acquired the right skills and so have trouble finding work" (p. 15).

This large percentage of students struggling to meet modern educational and workplace expectations is compounded by Hauge et al.'s (2016) acknowledgment of the United States Census Bureau's prediction over 20% of the nation's population will be retiring or over the age of 65. This realization of a large percentage of the population no longer occupying or leaving the workforce shortly, heightens the increasing importance of students being able to be career ready. The global knowledge-based economy necessitates schools to change and suggest postsecondary training or education beyond graduation for all occupations (Achieve, 2015). "Today's economy demands that all young people develop high-level literacy, quantitative reasoning, problem-solving, communication and collaboration skills, all grounded in a rigorous, content-rich K-12 curriculum" (Achieve, p. 2).

The challenge of adequate career preparation extends beyond K-12 education and has college students questioning their preparation for careers. Information presented in a 2016 survey by McGraw Hill concluded 60% of college seniors surveyed feel their college experience did not prepare them for a career. Identified in the survey were areas college students felt higher education could have provided better career preparation. First, 67% requested more internships and professional experiences. Secondly, 59% requested more time to focus on career preparation. Thirdly, 47% of participants suggested better

access to career preparation tools. Finally, 34% of contributors desired more alumni networking opportunities. Another highlight of the survey was 71% of college students identified it was extremely important to plan for a rewarding career (McGraw Hill, 2016). The Gallup-Purdue Index 2016 report's authors found similar conclusions with 86% of entering college freshman stating getting a good job was a critical factor in enrolling into college (Gallup, 2016). Wolff and Booth (2017) emphasized the selection of college as a pathway for job acquisition is more critical now than in the past. This increased need for college has private and public funders, students, and families concerned about the return on investment of higher education (Wolff & Booth, 2017). This growing concern is showcased by a 2015 Gallup-Purdue Index report reporting only 50% of college alumni strongly agreed their university education was worth the cost (Gallup, 2015).

**Youth and employment data**

The mounting crisis known as the skills gap is leaving every industry, job, and employer with a critical talent supply shortage, which has the potential to put a strain on governments, cripple economic progress, and leave millions unemployed (Olson, 2015). Jobs for the Future (2015) presented 17% or 6 million young people (16–24) in the United States in 2015 are out of school or out of work. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015a) presented during 2015 over 5 million jobs remained open. The unfilled positions are strong indication of youth missing necessary and needed skills to access workforce opportunities. Further validating this inability to successfully transition into the workplace, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019a) reported 16 to

24-year-olds held a 9.1% unemployment rate, while the national average was 3.7% in 2019. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) established in 2018, West Virginia's unemployment rate for the state was 5.3%, while 16 to 19-year-olds faced and 18.8% rate of unemployment and 20 to 24-year-olds climbed to a 9.3% rate of unemployment (Table 2). McKinsey & Company claimed 40% of American employers could not locate employees with the necessary skills, even for entry-level jobs (Laboissiere & Mourshed, 2017). The United States Chamber of Commerce communicated 50% of jobs remained vacant due to the inability to find qualified candidates causing 40% of businesses to be unable to increase production (Oldham, 2017).

Table 2

*United States Bureau of Labor Statistics: 2018 Annual Averages of Employment among West Virginia Statuses*

West Virginia

(Numbers in thousands)

| Population Group | Civilian non-institutional population | Civilian Labor Force | | Employment | | Unemployment | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Number | Percent of Population | Number | Percent of Population | Number | Rate | Error Range of Rate | |
| Total | 1456 | 784 | 53.8 | 743 | 51.0 | 41 | 5.3 | 4.5 – | 6.1 |
| 16 to 24 years | 201 | 104 | 51.6 | 91 | 45.4 | 12 | 11.9 | 8.9 – | 14.9 |
| 25 to 54 years | 653 | 491 | 75.1 | 466 | 71.4 | 24 | 5.0 | 4.1 – | 5.9 |
| 55 years and over | 602 | 190 | 31.5 | 185 | 30.8 | 4 | 2.3 | 1.3 – | 3.3 |
| Men | 711 | 420 | 59.1 | 395 | 55.6 | 25 | 5.9 | 4.8 – | 7 |
| 16 to 24 years | 106 | 56 | 53.2 | 49 | 46.6 | 7 | 12.4 | 8.2 – | 16.6 |
| 25 to 54 years | 322 | 262 | 81.4 | 247 | 76.6 | 15 | 5.9 | 4.5 – | 7.3 |
| 55 years and over | 283 | 102 | 36.0 | 99 | 35.1 | 3 | 2.5 | 1.0 – | 4.0 |
| Women | 746 | 364 | 48.8 | 347 | 46.6 | 16 | 4.5 | 3.5 – | 5.5 |
| 16 to 24 years | 95 | 47 | 49.7 | 42 | 44.1 | 5 | 11.3 | 6.9 – | 15.7 |
| 25 to 54 years | 330 | 228 | 69.0 | 219 | 66.3 | 9 | 4.0 | 2.8 – | 5.2 |
| 55 years and over | 320 | 88 | 27.5 | 86 | 26.9 | 2 | 2.1 | 0.6 – | 3.6 |

*Note*. Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by sex, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and intermediate age in West Virginia. From "*Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by sex, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, marital status, and detailed age, 2018 annual averages,"* United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018. In the public domain

The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce posed that United States businesses could see a deficit of over twelve million skilled workers by 2025 if conventional hiring practices are continued to be pursued (Georgetown University, n.d.). McKinsey & Company predicted by the year 2020 there will be a shortage of 40 million college-educated workers, 45 million workers with secondary and vocational training, and roughly 95 million lacking workplace skills needed in advanced economies in the international workforce (Dobbs et al., 2012). Cornelius (2011) presented 70% of students leaving school lack practical (real-world) experience, while 56% of students lack any recognizable career experience, 58 % of students have deficits in professional conduct and work ethic, and 62% of students struggle to communicate in written or oral form. These critical shortcomings highlight the need for a stronger educational response and perpetuate the push for higher education attainment. However, even with postsecondary education, Wyman (2015) advanced 45% of recent college graduates lack basic employability skills and find themselves underemployed. These numbers present a real challenge for youth entering the workforce and a growing imperative for school leaders and policymakers to address the negative consequences surrounding youth unemployment and ensuring students are receiving the appropriate skills and knowledge to access robust career pathways.

**The impact of youth unemployment**

Chancer et al., (2019) presented the U.S.'s focus on unemployment monitors lost earnings and overlooks the negative implications of early-life unemployment recognized

by scholars as having a powerful multiplier effect on adverse adult-life outcomes and social problems for youth. The economic costs are not the only impact on today's unemployed youth. "Disengaged", "idle", "off-track", or "opportunity youth" face economic, social, and personal implications. The OECD (2015) stated social and emotional skills, cognitive skills, and work and job-specific skills were fundamental in an individual's socioeconomic advancement, welfare, and enable the achievement of diverse life goals. Belfield et al. (2012) suggested this group of youth (opportunity) are more likely to be involved in criminal activity, rely on government supports, and face worse health status than other employed youth. Millett and Kevelson (2018) shared the concerns of disconnected youth threatening the social cohesion and social development costing into the trillions of dollars, negatively affecting labor productivity and tax revenues, and increasing incarceration and social service rates.

**Economic, Social, and Personal Cost**

Belfield et al. (2012) advanced the need to address those American youths not engaged in education nor participating in the labor market or both society and taxpayers will feel the burden of this group. The burden of opportunity youth is multifaceted with those youth without the human capital or employability skills are at-risk for inferior personal, social, and economic outcomes (Belfield et al.). The authors estimated 6.7 million or 17% of 16 to 24-year-olds are not earning income or investing in their human capital. Largely, these opportunity youths are minority and male, and the authors categorized them into two categories chronic and under-attached. The authors defined

chronic categorization included those youths who have largely essentially abandoned school and work after the age of 16; while under-attached youths have some work experience and school beyond 16. Nonetheless, the authors presented education as a key mediator and low levels of educational attainment weaken economic welfare in adulthood. Unfortunately, only 1% of opportunity youth completed an associate degree by 28 in comparison to 36% of their peers (Belfield et al.).

Belfield et al. (2012) would calculate the social and taxpayer burden for each year a youth was identified as an opportunity youth. The estimate in 2011 would equate to a social burden of $37,450 and a taxpayer burden of $13,900. Each year beyond 25 years old an opportunity youth would inflict a social burden of $529,030 and a taxpayer burden of $170,740. These calculations only cover the immediate imposition up through 25 years of age, while opportunity youth greatest obligation occurs afterwards with three-quarters of the burden seen from ages 25 through 65. Consequently, a 20-year-old opportunity youth levies a full social burden of $704,020 and a full tax burden of $235,680 (in 2011 dollars). In total, the 6.7 million opportunity youth (16–24 years old) in the aggregate inflict a social burden of $4.75 trillion and a taxpayer burden of $1.56 trillion (calculated in 2011 dollars). In addition, each under-attached opportunity youth would necessitate a social burden $596,640 and a taxpayer burden of $215,580. With the 3.3 million under-attached opportunity youth, the social loss would be $1.96 trillion and fiscal loss of $707 billion (calculations expressed as a lump sum at the age of 20) (Belfield et al.). Cohen and Piquero (2009) established altering the course of an 18-year-old disconnected youth

violent and criminal activities to a healthy and productive path would save society between $2.6 and $5.3 million.

Chancer et al. (2019) described unemployed youth facing social and individual damages equivalent to the economic cost. In addition, the social implications associated with youth unemployment involve isolation or exclusion, alienation, feeling useless, and loss of hope for the future; consequently, these negative individual and social repercussions foster drug-taking, increased crime, mental health problems, violence, and conflicts (Chancer et al., 2019; Institute for the Future, 2014; OECD, 2015). Virtanen et al. (2016) reaffirmed the consequences of youth unemployment's connection to poor mental health and suggested the mental health concerns remain beyond the cycle of unemployment and lead to longstanding health cost. Millett and Kevelson (2018) cautioned about the critical years between adolescence and adulthood having long-lasting and far-reaching impacts and perpetuate the cycle of poverty by reducing opportunities for disconnected youth and their children. Additionally, "young workers who enter the workforce during periods of high unemployment may settle for positions that do not match their qualifications, which can result in lower earnings and reduced employment stability even 10–15 years later" (Millet & Kevelson, p. 5). Corak (2016) suggested disconnected youth are often caught into a cycle of risk factors leading to further risk factors resulting in ongoing disconnection and negative outcomes. Moreover, this disconnected youth cycle is related to the growing inequality in the United States, resulting with lower social mobility rates than Canada and many European countries

(Corak). According to Hanna (2015), record levels of youth unemployment have produced unequal opportunities to climb the social ladder and many young people confronting a difficult future. Furthermore, Hanna suggested socioeconomic mobility encounters several key obstacles including access to early childhood education, levels of adolescent peer support, funding and quality of secondary schools, skills development, and young adult job matching.

Alabdulkareem et al. (2018) postulated economic inequality is one of the largest obstacles facing society today. Social mobility has declined with stark shifts in children earning more than their parents as seen in previous generations. Kochhar et al. (2015) reported 90% of children born in 1940 earned more than their parents, but only 50% of children born in 1980 out earned their parents. Beyond parental wage comparisons, Autor and Dorn (2013) reported the literature documented a prominent rise in wage inequality beginning in the 1980s for advanced nations and the United States due to the primary role of skill-based technological changes. Kochhar et al. suggested the American middle class is shrinking and falling further behind financially. The median income for the middle-class fell 4% in 2014 compared to median incomes in 2000; moreover, their median wealth fell 28% from 2001 to 2013 due to the housing market crisis and Great Recession of 2007–09 (Kochhar et al., 2015).

Compounding the erosion of the middle class is the polarization of jobs. Autor (2010) asserted two primary issues have endured in the United States to create this polarization. The first, is the United States labor market has seen since the 1970s and

1980s significant increases in demand for skilled workers while educational attainment has not kept up with the demand. This misalignment between education and demand for workers has resulted in a sharp rise in the inequality of wages, especially for males. The second shift described by Autor is the structure of job opportunities within high-skill, high-wage occupations; middle-skilled white- and blue-collar jobs; and low-wage, low-skill occupations. High-skill, high-wage and low-skill, low-wage occupations have continued to expand, while middle-skill blue- and white-collar opportunities have declined (Autor, 2010). The decline in middle-skill occupations has been damaging to the labor force participation rates and wages of workers without a four-year degree; consequently, concentrating many into low-paying service occupations (Autor, 2010). McKinsey Global Institute (2019) shared similar predictions through 2030 with middle-wage jobs eroding and high- and low-wage occupations expanding.

Another societal implication for disconnected youth beyond negative economic outcomes, work polarization, and economic immobility is the personal risk of civic marginalization. Zaff et al., (2014) suggested disconnected youth are disappointingly underrepresented in civic life. The authors presented in the 2008 presidential election only 26% of youth with less than a high school diploma voted. This was the lowest rate of participation since 1972 and fell 14 percentage points below those youth with a high school diploma and nearly 45% below the participation rates of those youth with a college degree (Kirby & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2009). Moreover, Zaff et al. described empirical evidence suggested disconnected youth will be less likely to continue to

participate in civic activities when they do not feel their voices are heard and will lead to the perpetuation of gaps in civic participation across generations.

**Skills Needed in Today's Global Workplace**

As school leaders and policymakers work to address ongoing workforce shortages and combat the negative implications of youth unemployment, it is essential to pinpoint the skills and knowledge allowing young people to enter the workforce unimpeded. Unfortunately, the literature does not provide a consensus among researchers. Chuang and Carroll (2018) presented a gap and limited research on the influence of technology on future employment and on human resource development; moreover, the literature fails to have a relevant, systemic literature review discussing about the crucial role of human resource development professionals and the need to upgrade worker's competencies. While there may not be a consensus within the literature, there have been many suggestions about shifting workplace realities and the needed skills and knowledge essential for future employment. O'Lawrence (2007, 2017) asserted if the United States is to remain a superpower, the nation will need to thoroughly educate our citizens with skills, new knowledge, social responsibility, attitudes toward cultural awareness, and a commitment to social values. According to the World Economic Forum (2016), within five years over one-third of workplace skills considered important today will be unnecessary. Soulé and Warrick (2015) suggested the need for education to underscore the 4Cs: collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. The OECD (2015) presented cognitive, social emotional, job- and occupational- specific skills, and

creativity and critical thinking as the needed skills in the workforce. de Andrade Régio et al. (2016) described lifelong learning as an empowerment tool and the need for intercultural communication skills. de Andrade Régio et al. referenced Hursen's (2014) lifelong learning competencies of informational retrieval, digital decision making, self-management, learning to learn, initiative, and entrepreneurship as need for future workers.

The Association of Career and Technical Education (ACTE) (2010) defined career readiness as containing three major skills: academic, technical, and employability skills. ACTE specified foundational academic knowledge included math and English language with the ability to apply this knowledge in context. ACTE defined employability skills included problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration and teamwork, oral and written communication, technology use, creativity, adaptability, professionalism, ethics, and responsibility. ACTE explained technical skills involved those job-specific knowledge and skills permitting access into occupations needing more than entry level skills and knowledge. Achieve (2015) suggested students need quantitative reasoning, communication and collaboration skills, problem-solving, and high levels of literacy in today's economy. Similarly, Trilling and Fadel (2009) recommended students need critical thinking and problem solving, professionalism and work ethic, oral and written communication, teamwork and collaboration, working in diverse teams, leadership and project management, and applying technology. Wagner (2008) presented the need for students to master critical thinking and problem solving,

curiosity and imagination, collaboration across networks and leading by influence, effective oral and written communication, agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurship. Wagner (2012) later would acknowledge the seven survival skills were incomplete and students needed to become innovators. Wagner extended beyond the original seven survival skills with the willingness to experiment, tolerate failure, perseverance, take calculated risk, and the capacity for design thinking.

Dean and East (2019) espoused technical skills are not enough, soft skills are paramount to compete in the highly competitive global economy. Whereas the new work world includes diverse work groups who interact globally with different cultures, and the ability to use interpersonal communication skills or known as emotional intelligence is essential for successful work interactions. Chuang and Carroll (2018) submitted displaced workers can maintain and bolster their competitive edge by demonstrating strong human skills (e.g. creativity, sense-making skills, advanced problem-solving skills, advanced communication skills, and adaptive and novel thinking) and focus on tasks performed by only humans. The 2018 Deloitte Skills Gap and Future of Work in Manufacturing Study advanced five key skills: digital literacy and competency, technology and computer skills, critical thinking, robot and automation programing, digital literacy and competency, and a working knowledge of tech-enabled tools and techniques (Thomas et al., 2018). Marr (2019) prescribed 10 vital skills needed for the future of work: creativity, emotional intelligence, analytical (critical) thinking, active learning with a growth mindset, judgement and decision making, interpersonal communication skills, leadership

skills, diversity and cultural intelligence, technology skills, and embracing change. Torkington (2016) recommended two primary skills combining mathematical and interpersonal skills, allowing workers to find lucrative and rewarding opportunities. Zambas (2018) proffered fifteen vital skills to be employable in the future: complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, coordinating with others, emotional intelligence, judgement and decision-making, service orientation, negotiation, cognitive flexibility, adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurship, social intelligence, new media literacy, and virtual collaboration. Gray (2016) and the World Economic Forum (2016) presented complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, coordinating with others, emotional intelligence, judgement and decision making, service orientation, negotiation, and cognitive flexibility as the top ten skills needed by 2020. Battelle for Kids (2019) described the Partnership for 21st Century Learning Framework. The Framework included life and career skills; learning and innovation skills; information, media, and technology skills; and core subjects and 21st century themes (Table 3). The Framework suggested the educational support systems to achieve these goals should include: 21st century standards and assessments, 21st century curriculum and instruction, 21st century professional development, and 21st century learning environments.

The list of needed skills continues to be investigated and debated, but one certainty is the needed skills of the future will continue to evolve with shifting workplace demands. Recent World Economic Forum's predictions (Table 4) demonstrated the ever-

changing realities of the precarious workplace by submitting newly needed skills along with those skills predicted to be declining in demand by 2022.

Table 3

*21st Century Student Outcomes*

| Core Subjects | 21st Century Themes | Learning and Innovation Skills | Information, Media, and Technology Skills | Life and Career Skills |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English, Reading, or Language Arts<br>World Languages<br>Arts<br>Mathematics<br>Economics<br>Science<br>Geography<br>History<br>Government and Civics | Global Awareness<br>Financial, Economic, Business, and Entrepreneurial Literacy<br>Civic Literacy<br>Health Literacy<br>Environmental Literacy | Creativity and Innovation<br>Critical Thinking and Problem Solving<br>Communication and Collaboration | Information Literacy<br>Media Literacy<br>Information and Communications Technology Literacy | Flexibility and Adaptability<br>Initiative and Self Direction<br>Social and Cross-Cultural Skills<br>Productivity and Accountability<br>Leadership and Responsibility |

*Note.* The Partnership for 21st Century Skills Framework Learning Definitions. Adapted with permission from "*The Partnership for 21st Century Learning: Framework for 21st Century Learning Definitions*," 2019, pp. 3–8. Copyright 2019, Battelle for Kids. All Rights Reserved. www.bfk.org

Table 4

*World Economic Forum Workplace Skills Comparison*

| Today – 2018 | Trending – 2022 | Declining – 2022 |
|---|---|---|
| Analytical thinking and innovation | Analytical thinking and innovation | Manual dexterity, endurance and precision |
| Complex problem-solving | Active learning and learning strategies | Memory, verbal, auditory, and spatial abilities |
| Critical thinking and analysis | Creativity, originality and initiative | Management of financial, material resources |
| Active learning and learning strategies | Technology design and programming | Technology installation and maintenance |
| Creativity, originality and initiative | Critical thinking and analysis | Reading, writing, math and active listening |
| Attention to detail, trustworthiness | Complex problem-solving | Management of personnel |
| Emotional intelligence | Leadership and social influence | Quality control and safety awareness |
| Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation | Emotional intelligence | Coordination and time management |
| Leadership and social influence | Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation | Visual, auditory and speech abilities |
| Coordination and time management | Systems analysis and evaluation | Technology use, monitoring and control |

*Note*. An occupational skills demand comparison between 2018 and 2022 among the top ten identified needed skills. Adapted from "*Future of Jobs Survey 2018*" by World Economic Forum, 2018, p. 12. Copyright 2018 by the World Economic Forum.

**The Shifting Work Climate**

Beyond the Great Recession's influence, today's youth are entering a different work environment than those in the past. The past few decades has shifted the industrial economy based on manufacturing to a service economy founded on creativity, knowledge, information, and innovation reshaping the nature of work and the workplace (Soulé & Warrick, 2015). The World Economic Forum (2016) suggested as many as 65% of children entering elementary school today will end up in jobs which do not yet exist. Chancer et al. (2019) posed the growth and polarized precarious employment systems have been influenced by technological change, globalization of production, rise of the service sector, political deregulation of markets, and reducing the enforcement of standards. There is general agreement the occupational world is changing faster than ever before; work security is disappearing by the erosion of firm and stable work structures; the modern work environment no longer provides the decades old sense of security; negotiating life-long agreements with one employer has nearly disappeared; life-long agreements are being replaced with the new normal of short and sometimes medium-term work assignments; and expectations of life-long learning and becoming employable to navigate repeated transitions in the workplace are becoming the new standard (Maree, 2017). Bakhshi et al. (2017) indicated globalization, technological changes, demographic changes, urbanization, environmental stability, political uncertainty, and increasing inequality as trends affecting the modern economy through 2030. The World Economic Forum's (2016) Future of Jobs Report's authors defined demographic and socio-

economic and technological changes as drivers influencing the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Within the report, demographic and socio-economic drivers included changing work environments and flexible working arrangements; rise of the middle class in emerging markets; climate change, natural resource constraints, and the transition to a greener economy; rising geopolitical volatility; new consumer concerns about ethical and privacy issues; longevity and ageing societies; young demographics in emerging markets; women's rising aspiration and economic power; and rapid urbanization. The report also included descriptions of technological drivers of change as mobile internet and cloud technology; advances in computing power and Big Data; new energy supplies and technologies; the internet of things; crowdsourcing, the sharing economy and peer-to-peer platforms; advanced robotics and autonomous transport; artificial intelligence and machine learning; advanced manufacturing and 3D printing; and advanced materials biotechnology and genomics.

The transition to a service economy has altered the educational preparation needs of the modern workplace. In 1973, only 28% of occupations required postsecondary education and training; however, in 2010 the percentage of jobs requiring postsecondary education rose to 59% and is predicted to reach levels as high as 65% by 2020 (Carnevale et al., 2013). Beyond the increasing educational attainment demanded in the modern workplace, Autor (2010) highlighted modifications in the United States labor market affecting employment rates, labor market opportunities, and earnings due to essential forces slowing four-year degree attainment rates; alterations in racial and gender

workforce composition; transformations in technology; offshoring of jobs and international trade; and differences in United States labor market institutions (e.g. minimum wage legislation and labor unions influencing wages).

Deloitte Development's (2018) report on Impact 2018 posed seven key disrupters reshaping work: artificial Intelligence, cognitive computing, and robotics; technology is everywhere; a tsunami of data; jobs vulnerable to automation; diversity and generational change; explosion of contingent work; and change in the nature of careers. Deloitte's Readiness Report suggested only 25% of business leaders have the right talent to be successful in this new era, and only 14% are highly confident they can exploit the changes; while 86% of business leaders think they are doing what they can to develop the right workforce (Deloitte Insights, 2019).

The World Economic Forum's (2018) postulated the opportunity for proactive management of the accelerated workforce transformations required business, government, and workers to plan and implement a new vision of the global labor market. The World Economic Forum identified drivers of change in business growth from 2018–2022 to include technological advances in high-speed mobile internet, widespread adoption of data analytics, use of artificial intelligence, and increasing utilization of cloud technology. Within employers interviewed, the World Economic Forum presented the following predictions between 2018–2022:

- Depending on the business or industry sector, 23 to 37% plan to invest in robotization through 2022.

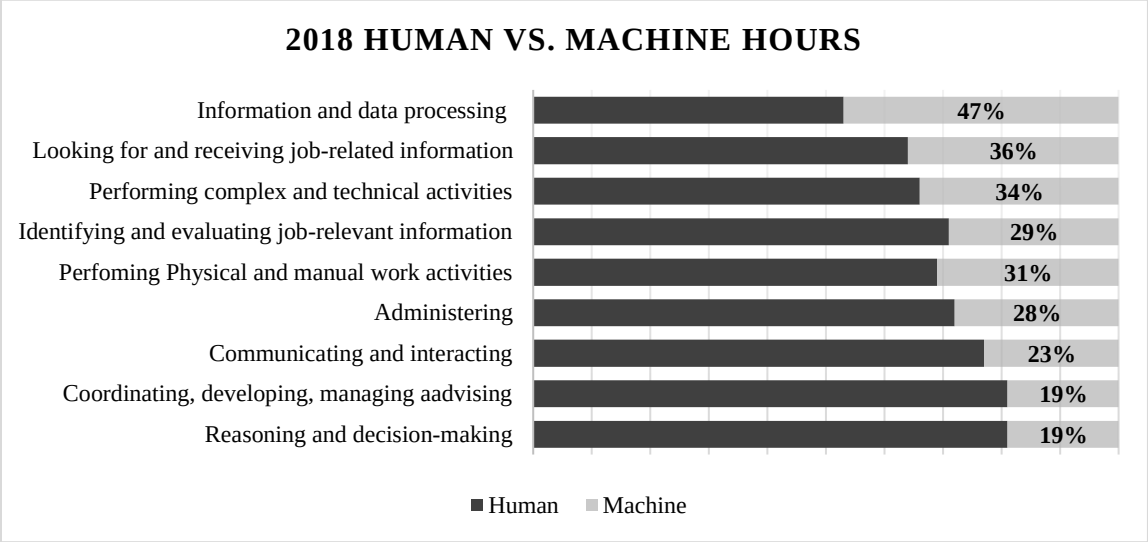
- 59% of employers will have significantly modified their production and distribution and will have moved their geographical base of operations.
- Almost 50% of employers expect to see a reduction in full-time workers, while 38% felt they would expand their workforce through new productivity-enhancing roles.
- In 2018, 71% of the twelve industries in the report are completed by humans versus 29% accomplished by machines; however, by 2022, machines are expected to complete 42% of the work, whereas humans will fall to 58% of the remaining labor.
- By 2022, across industries emerging professions is expected to increase employment from 16 to 27%; nevertheless, the shift estimates 75 million jobs may be displaced during the transition between humans, robot labor, and algorithms resulting in 133 million new jobs adapted for this new environment.
- Emerging from these new demand roles will be increased need for software and application developers, ecommerce and social media specialist, data analysts and scientist, and those roles based and enhanced by technology use.

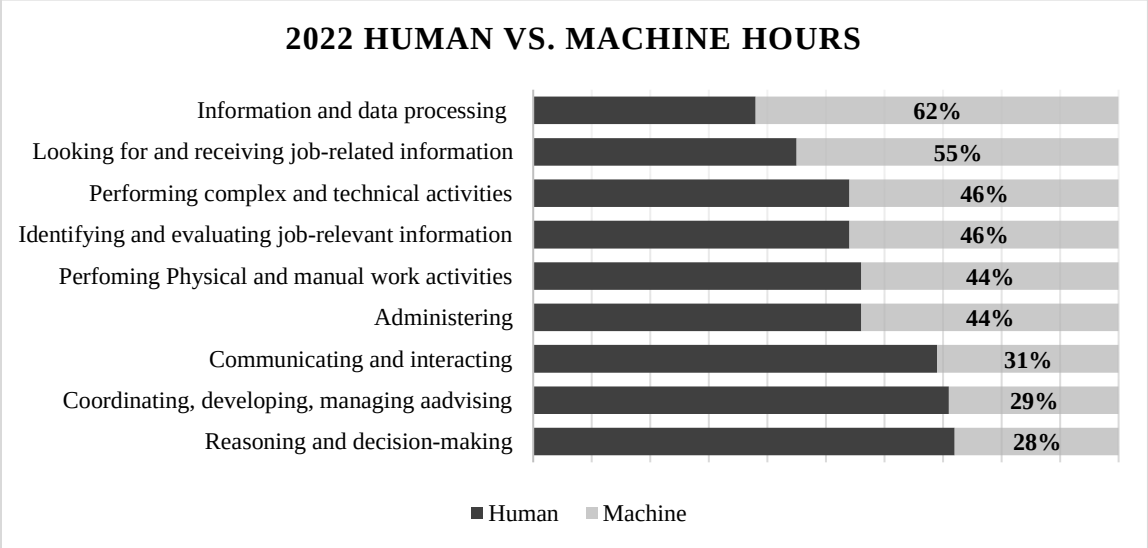
The shifts predicted in the World Economic Forum's (2018) report summarize a growing skills instability. The report indicates the skills instability is expected to reach 42% leaving only 58% of the jobs with their core skills remaining the same through 2022. The World Economic Forum presented by 2022, at least 54% of workers will require new training and upskilling. Figure 1 displays the World Economic Forum's predicted shift in

hours of work completed by machines versus humans. The transition of work due to robotization and technology limits traditional attainable work opportunities many youth and lower skilled workers could approach for career progression. Unfortunately, not all employees will be given the same opportunity to advance in their career. According to the World Economic Forum report, 41% of employers are prepared to target high-performing workers leaving those most in need of reskilling and upskilling without the needed training. Chancer et al. (2019) suggested young people continue to face exclusion from the labor market, education, and training opportunities; thus, creating the inability to obtain jobs which can generate a foothold toward obtaining progressively better jobs and promoting a stronger career narrative.

**Figure 1**

Ratio of Human versus Machine Hours Between 2018 and 2022




Note. Ratio of human-machine projected working hours comparison between 2018 and 2022. Adapted from "*Future of Jobs Survey 2018*" by the World Economic Forum, 2018, p. 11. Copyright 2018 by the World Economic Forum. Adapted with permission.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017) presented several themes of technological changes affecting the nature of work. First, business models based on web-based matching algorithms and continued use and creation of computer-based information technologies will continue to expand. Secondly, the decline of unionization has increased the prevalence of mobile workforce and contingent work. Thirdly, employment institutions may need to change to support employee access to social safety nets due to the advancing nontraditional workplace (being tied to one employer over a career). Fourthly, a growing geographical division of labor due to the ability of IT for co-location, eliminating nonessential face-to-face interactions. Fifthly, educational systems will need incorporate among traditional pushes for postsecondary education, strategies for bolstering social and uniquely human skills along with flexibility to face changing circumstances. Finally, the exact nature of change is based on the interplay of organizations, institutions, skills, culture, and policies and there is no guarantee how disruptive the influence of innovation will be on the status quo (NASEM, 2017).

McKinsey Global Institute's (2018) Skill Shift: Automation and the Future of the Workforce's authors presented automation and artificial intelligence will change the needed skills in the workforce. The authors proclaimed among the United States and 14 western European countries, between 2016 and 2030 the billions of hours spent on physical and manual labor would decrease by 14 billion hours, basic cognitive work would decrease by 15 billion hours, higher cognitive skilled work would increase by 8

billion hours, social and emotional skilled work would increase by 24 billion hours, and technological hours would increase by 55 billion hours. McKinsey Global Institute's (2019) report on the Future of Work in America's authors provided several predictions about automation's influence on the future of work. The largest prediction involves significant displacements of workers. This displacement is buttressed by the estimated 60% of economic growth clustered in 25 cities in the United States. In addition to the concentration of job opportunities, the report's authors suggested the next wave of automation will displace workers in transportation and logistics, customer service roles, food service, and office support positions; consequently, the outcomes of these shifting work climates will affect various demographics more robustly with forced displacements (McKinsey Global Institute). The authors predicted 11.5 million workers over the age of 50, 14.7 million young workers (ages 18–34), 11.9 million Hispanics and African Americans may be impacted by automation. Those individuals earning a high school diploma or less may find themselves four times more likely to be displaced as low skilled jobs are replaced (McKinsey Global Institute).

Frank et al. (2019) discussed the rapid advances of artificial intelligence (AI), and the potential AI has to disrupt labor markets by transforming almost all occupations. Frank et al. suggested advancing automation is occurring during a period of growing fears of technological unemployment and rising economic inequality generating a call for policy efforts toward addressing the reshaping of employment. AI's impact on the future of work is unclear, and Frank et al. posed several barriers for researchers to fully

comprehend AI's full impact: missing high-quality data surrounding the nature of work, empirical models of critical microlevel processes, and an insufficient comprehension of cognitive technologies influence on institutional mechanics and broader economic dynamics. The authors advocated overcoming these hurdles with enhancements in longitudinal and spatial resolution of data, and refinement of workplace skill data. These developments would facilitate multidisciplinary research to quantitatively examine and predict evolution in conjunction with technological progress (Frank et al., 2019).

The current labor market challenges faced by many young people in the United States included finding jobs which meet their needs, values, and expectations even with college degrees (Chancer et al., 2019). Chancer et al. suggested the jobs available to younger workers lead to workers being overqualified or underemployed, do not result in careers, and often produce low wages. The Chancer et al emphasized these outcomes reflect the growing youth experience of a broader rise in precarious and polarized work in European countries and the United States. Consequently, the vulnerability of young workers in such adverse labor market conditions and the reduction of career opportunities and employment has only grown more uncertain since the Great Recession (Chancer et al., 2019).

## Summary and Conclusions

Despite not having an agreed upon definition for career readiness (Guidry, 2012), a growing body of literature supports the need for schools to include career readiness and workforce preparation programs and activities. The lack of preparation has advanced

mounting concerns around the impact on youth facing economic, personal, and social cost associated with youth unemployment and underemployment (Callanan et al., 2017; Chancer et al., 2019; Institute for the Future, 2014; Olson, 2015; OECD, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2017; Virtanen et al., 2016). Beyond the personal cost is the economic and societal cost described by Belfield et al. (2012) is the polarization of jobs (Autor, 2010) and the challenge of economic inequality (Alabdulkareem et al., 2018). These difficulties are compounded by changing work expectations and the shifting work climate. Predictions by Deloitte Development (2018), the World Economic Forum (2018), the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (2017), McKinsey Global Institute's (2018), and others paint evolving workplace expectations and mounting concerns over finding workers with the needed skills. This mounting challenge has policymakers and others looking to public schools through reform efforts **(**Chingos et al., 2013) to overcome these many challenges facing today's youth. School leaders, such as district administrators, play an essential role in defining priorities and focuses for the district (Bush, 2006). The role of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs on student outcomes continues to grow (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Brown, 2005; Dodd & Hooley, 2018; Keys & Bryan, 2001; Maier et al., 2013; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 2003; and Thompson, 1984). It is this critical relationship between changing societal needs and district school leaders' beliefs and perceptions around career readiness this study explored. The findings from this generic qualitative study will add to the growing

understanding of how district administrators' beliefs and perceptions influence decisions around career readiness and workforce preparation activities.

# Chapter 3: Research Method

Within this study, I desired to achieve a deep understanding of district administrators' attitudes about career preparedness and its significance in preparing youth for the workforce. Included in Chapter 3 is a description of the research design, the rationale for the design approach, explanation of the role of the researcher, and the methodology. Contained in the methodology section, I described additional details about the participant selection, instrumentation, recruitment of participants, data collection, and data analysis plan. The final sections of Chapter 3 included discussions about trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

## Research Design and Rationale

Within Chapter 2, I included descriptions about the precarious and challenging environment today's youth are entering beyond high school and the necessity of appropriate career and workforce preparation to enable a successful transition into their postsecondary experiences. The knowledge about the demand for career and workforce preparation focused me towards designing this generic qualitative study on the critical perceptions of West Virginia's public-school district administrators. Participants' responses were acquired, analyzed, and conveyed findings to demonstrate the gap in understanding surrounding these perceptions identified in the research questions in Chapter 1:

- RQ1: What are district administrators' perceptions about the value and importance of West Virginia's PK–12 career readiness and workforce program(s)?
- RQ2: What are district administrators' perceptions about the barriers, limitations, and successes of West Virginia's PK–12 career readiness and workforce program(s)?

The generic qualitative design of this study allowed me to follow-up with interviews with selected participants to clarify participants' survey responses and offer more nuanced insight into their thoughts and feelings about career readiness and workforce programs.

**Research Tradition**

The generic qualitative approach was appropriate for this study, as it enabled the researcher the use of a survey for initial data collection and follow-up interviews to explore administrator perceptions in-depth. The questions asked during the interviews did not match the research or survey questions, but empowered a more profound discovery of participants' mindsets, viewpoints, and thoughts about career education. Accordingly, the administrative participants offered rich, generous, and honest insights, particularly about their own views, decisions, and experiences. Caelli et al. (2003) defined a "generic qualitative research as that which is not guided by an explicit or established set of philosophic assumptions in the form of one of the known qualitative methodologies" (p. 4). Kahlke (2014) suggested generic qualitative research refuses to align itself with

established methodologies. The lack of alignment and philosophic assumptions allowed me the greatest potential to explore the research questions. This approach presented a significant opportunity for me to discover meaning and understanding surrounding a relatively unexplored phenomenon of district administrator perceptions without the limitations and restrictions of other methodologies. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) put forward generic research as an approach to comprehend and illuminate the meaning of people's experiences. It is this understanding of district administrators' perceptions surrounding career and workforce programs I sought to clarify in my research. A generic qualitative approach permitted me the ability to acquire necessary data to describe district administrators' perceptions surrounding career readiness and workforce programs and inform us on the levels of individual district response during increasingly challenging times for today's youth entering the world of work.

**Rationale for the Chosen Tradition**

Case study, systems theory, and ethnography were other approaches I examined as options to explore the research questions. However, the case study limited the larger perspective of the state. A singular or small number of districts would limit an important broader perspective of being able to explore a larger sampling of state perspectives and may ultimately, constrain findings surrounding the research. The systems theory approach I found as an interesting lens to explore the perceptions, but due too little to no research on the topic within the state. I believed the system theory's focus on the public-school system's boundaries and interrelationships would limit an overall understanding of

the phenomenon. I may have developed some interesting findings with this lens; however, the purpose of the study planned for a more open exploration and emergence of themes. Finally, I determined that an ethnography would not explain the broader state perspective without an extreme amount of time committed to the research questions. I concluded the generic qualitative approach was the more open and adaptive approach for the study. Kahlke (2014) stated that the limitations of approaches are outweighed by the need for innovation and adaptation in methodologies to fit the researcher, the discipline, and the questions being examined. The overall understudied aspects and limitations surrounding district administrator perceptions relies on the use of a flexible approach to permit themes and ideas to surface unimpeded. Patton (2015) stated that generic qualitative studies have qualitative characteristics but seek to comprehend the perceptions of the individuals involved with the phenomenon. Caelli et al. (2003) stated that generic qualitative research as not being established on a set of philosophic assumptions. The openness of the generic qualitative approach to explore the research questions made it desirable for this study.

## Role of the Researcher

Within this generic qualitative study, I was the primary interpreter for the gathering and analysis of data. Patton (2015) stated that the appropriateness of the methods of a study are dependent upon the researcher's background, skills, interpersonal competence, training, capacity for empathy, cross-cultural sensitivity, how they engage in fieldwork and analysis, and intended audience for the study. Reflecting upon these

considerations, it was apparent in-depth interviewing was essential in addressing the purpose of the study. Rubin and Rubin (2012) presented six strengths to in-depth interviewing. First, the detailed experiences, opinions, motives, and the ways others see the world advance perspectives other than the researchers. Secondly, interviewing aids in reconstructing events researchers may have never undergone. Thirdly, in-depth interviewing aids in revealing ongoing social processes. Fourthly, repeated interviews across time and retrospective interviews capture change experienced by the participants. Fifthly, in-depth interviewing permits an examination of counterintuitive, complex, or contradictory matters. Finally, in-depth interviewing is the best tool for exploring morally ambiguous choices or sensitive and personal issues of participants.

My role was limited to the interviewer and facilitator of conversation and data collection. My relationship with participants is collegial and had no influence on participants. Their familiarity with me through prior working relationships or members of the same organization permitted sharing information more freely, but I am aware some bias may exist in my research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) presented the need to disclose an investigator's bias dispositions about their intended research, in order to convey more authenticity about the analyzed and interpreted data.

In order to achieve full disclosure, I will share my work around advocacy for career readiness, employability skills, and life skills. This work has led to state and national presentations, a national podcast interview, radio interviews, grants, school programs, partnerships, and talks on these topics. I spent 9 years as a career and technical

education director for multiple school systems, participating in multiple economic development groups, and a local chamber of commerce has altered my understanding of the economic imperative of public schools adequately preparing students for the world of work. My extensive research on the topic and active engagement with local, state, and national leaders in business and industry have significantly changed my view about the importance and value of career readiness. As a researcher sharing a similar district position as the participants, it was essential to minimize leading or biased questions surrounding my advocacy for the topic of career readiness. At the beginning of each interview, I emphasized to participants that the goal of the interview was to gain the benefit of their first-hand experience, knowledge, recollections, thoughts, and judgments regarding career readiness and workforce programs.

## Methodology

Guest et al. (2013) stated that in a qualitative research project, a number of approaches can be utilized, but some methods and approaches are more advantageous for certain types of qualitative inquiry. Creswell (2013) suggested that the approach of the qualitative inquiry will shape the procedures and design of the study. As Merriam (1998) suggested, a generic qualitative approach allowed for the discovery of district administrators' perceptions around career readiness and workforce programs. I elected to utilize a generic qualitative study due to its flexibility, which permitted the emergence of themes and concepts without limitations of a specific context or lens. My analysis of collected responses from the qualitative survey delivered a general overview of

participants' perceptions. Subsequent follow-up recorded semistructured interviews expanded exploration of survey results. Included in the following sections are descriptions with further detail about the methodology of this study.

**Participant Selection**

Yale University (2020) discussed priorities of participation selection, beginning with describing the attributes needed to achieve the purpose of the research. Moreover, Yale University (2020) established inclusion criteria as those essential characteristics needed to achieve the purpose of the research; whereas exclusion criteria are those prospective disqualifying characteristics of subjects not able to contribute to the purpose. The inclusion criteria for this study included public school district administrators in West Virginia holding a position of superintendent, assistant/deputy superintendent, director, or coordinator. Necessary criteria included work responsibilities and demographic information comprising of gender, age, and ethnicity were collected to examine any possible patterns among characteristics. The primary attributes of those work responsibilities comprised decision-making responsibilities surrounding curricular and human resource decisions affecting the pre-kindergarten through twelfth-grade instructional objectives. Exclusion criteria included administrators working outside the state, district administrators who do not make curricular or human resource decisions, building level administrators, teachers, and classified/service personnel.

Patton (2015) presented the usefulness of qualitative inquiry that included information-rich cases to illuminate the investigated research questions. Moreover, Patton

suggested multiple purposeful sampling strategies, including the most relevant for this study, group characteristic sampling. Patton suggested two strategies aligning with the selection criteria of the sampling, key informants and random. Both strategies correlate with the sampling as selected populations hold essential information about curricular decisions, district priorities, and staff utilization and were selected voluntarily, making the participants a random sample.

Targeted participants involved district administrators for two primary reasons. The first is accessibility through a state-wide organization, the West Virginia Association of School Administrators (WVASA) is an organization made up of central office administrators covering the entire state. It is the primary organization for a mixture of superintendents, directors, and coordinators. Although other organizations exist, this organization meets monthly with larger events in January and June. The other organizations do not meet with the same level of frequency. Around 20 to 40 members attend the monthly meetings, and over 100 attend the winter and summer conferences. Secondly, district administrators play a crucial gatekeeper role in establishing district priorities, desired student outcomes, and funding and resource concentrations within their individual districts. These two primary factors led to the selection of district administrators as primary participants to gain more insight into the value of career readiness and workforce programs and comprehend the barriers, limitations, and successes of these programs within their districts.

Another important consideration is establishing sample size to achieve data saturation. Sample size and data saturation are affected by the style of inquiry or theoretical underpinning of the research along with the heterogeneity of the participants and the scope and breadth of the research questions (Baker et al., 2012). Guest et al. (2006) recommended the participant sample size be resolved by theoretical saturation. Guest's et al. search for empirical consensus on qualitative sample size were absent a consensus on guidance for numerical sample size. The authors stated that for most enterprises among homogenous participants, 12 interviews should suffice to reach saturation. The U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) estimates the population of West Virginia in July of 2019 as 1,792,147 with 93.5% of the population being White. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2012a) reported in 2011–12 school year 98% of West Virginia's teachers were White. The report also indicated 96.4% of principals were White (NCES, 2012b). Moreover, the report indicated 70.9% of West Virginia principals were 45 years or older and 59.5% of the principals are female and 40.5% are male (NCES, 2012c). These demographics indicate the homogenous nature of West Virginia's educational workforce and school leadership. Although the report does not designate district administrators, the expected school administrative population embodied the teacher and principal population's makeup. Comprehending the homogenous nature of the school population including the district leadership, I sought 15 survey results and 12 administrators to complete the interview. With the 93.5% population being White along with 96.4% of principals being White, it was anticipated that most, if not all of the 15

participants, would be White. Considering the typical educational and career path of administrators, I also expected that most participants would be over 45 years of age. It was anticipated that nearly half will be female in correspondence to NCES's reporting. Due to the rural nature of West Virginia's districts and small number of large districts, it was probable the majority of participants will be from small to medium districts. Similarly, most districts have an excess levy increasing the number of participants from those districts. I expected to increase the number of participants holding a superintendent or deputy/assistant superintendent role due my familiarity with participants. Finally, the years in a position was projected to fall between zero and 10 years for most participants due to the experience demands for entry into the positions to limit many of these positions to individuals later in their educational career. Table 5 provided an anticipated participant demographics based on NCES and population data.

Table 5

*Anticipated Participant Demographics*

| Participant | Position | Years in Position | County Designation | Excess Levy | Make Decisions Related to Career Readiness | Age | Sex | Race |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Assistant/Deputy Superintendent | 0–5 years | Large | Yes | Yes | 41–50 | Woman | White |
| 2 | Assistant/Deputy Superintendent | 0–5 years | Small | No | Yes | 51–60 | Woman | White |
| 3 | Assistant/Deputy Superintendent | 6–10 years | Small | No | Yes | 51–60 | Man | White |
| 4 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Woman | White |
| 5 | Superintendent | Over 10 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | Over 60 | Man | White |
| 6 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Small | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Man | White |
| 7 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | Over 60 | Woman | White |
| 8 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Small | No | Yes | 41–50 | Man | White |
| 9 | Superintendent | 6–10 years | Small | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Man | White |
| 10 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | Over 60 | Man | White |
| 11 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Woman | White |
| 12 | Director | 0–5 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Woman | White |
| 13 | Director | 6–10 years | Medium | No | Yes | Over 60 | Man | White |
| 14 | Director | 0–5 years | Small | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Woman | White |
| 15 | Director | Over 10 years | Large | Yes | Yes | 41–50 | Man | White |

## Instrumentation

Data collection was achieved through two methods a qualitative survey and semistructured interviews. Appendix B showcases the survey protocol and Appendix C exhibits the semistructured interview protocol. The survey and interview questions were inspired by the Teachers Attitudes Towards Learning Index (TACLI; Appendix D; Dodd & Hooley, 2018). Although the TACLI was developed as a quantitative instrument, the questions focused on important concepts related to the phenomenon being researched. It was determined to utilize the questions from the TACLI and formulate them into open-

ended questions to support the qualitative nature of this study. For example, the TACLI instrument included this question, “the senior leaders in my school encourage me to integrate career and employability learning into my subject area.” This TACLI-based question inspired the following open-ended inquiry, in your opinion, how important do you believe it is for teachers to discuss how and what they teach is related to the world of work? The TACLI served as inspiration and direction to the development of the survey and interview questions.

The TACLI was developed as an evaluation tool for the Teach First professional development program in England making the original instrument not appropriate for an educational system which has yet to adopt a full career learning/readiness curriculum. Nonetheless, the questions lend themselves to important factors related to career readiness perceptions. It is for this reason the questions were adapted into an open-ended format to better examine district administrator perceptions. Dodd’s and Hooley’s (2018) comprehension of teacher’s roles in career development along with the importance of their attitudes toward behavior related to curricular and co-curricular areas evolved into understanding more about district administrators’ perceptions. It is this influence on behavior that the modification of these questions leads to greater understanding on the influence on career readiness and workforce activities. The addition of the semistructured interviews permitted learning about the phenomenon during scheduled times and enabled the interview to stay focused and be productive (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The initial conceptualization of the TACLI was based on a 2015 publication focused on potential roles teachers may occupy when involved with career learning in England (Dodd & Hooley, 2018). Hooley's, Watts', and Andrews' (2015) article along with synthesized literature on teacher's roles with the delivery of career learning. Dodd & Hooley's TACLI developed through gathering evidence from Austria, Finland, Hong Kong, Korea, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Norway, Switzerland, the Republic of Ireland, the United States, and Wales. A 40-Item instrument was developed from theoretical constructs gleaned from the literature review. After the initial content validity stage, the instrument was directed toward eight researchers review who altered it to include a total of 42 items. Construct validity used a sample of 526 Teach First affiliated teachers' responses were employed in the analysis. Participants had taught for 10 years on average and approximately 65% were female, and ranged in age from 21 to 65. From the content-validity process 21 items were dropped from the instrument with three items being added for a total of 24. The 24-item version of the instrument covered 12 concepts on operationalized both behavioral and attitudinal questions. The instrument went through three iterations before finalization. The result was a 19-item instrument presented in Appendix D (Dodd & Hooley, 2018).

Dodd and Hooley (2018) admitted that not all the roles identified were measured by the instrument. Nonetheless, two crucial constructs highlighted were school career strategy practices and school career strategy attitudes. Dodd and Hooley did find the instrument useful in measuring teacher attitudes, but recommend the instrument be

refined through confirmatory factory analysis. Consequently, the usefulness of the instrument's measure of teachers' attitudes prompted its use in this research around district administrator perceptions around career readiness and workforce preparation. Although the instrument had a different target population, it proved to be a vital element in the design of this research study.

**Recruitment of Participants**

Upon receipt of Walden University's approval of my proposal, permission was sought through the Executive Director of the West Virginia Association of School Administrators to distribute the survey to association members (Appendix A). The explanation of the study and consent to complete the online survey and interview included as an initial element of the online survey Upon completion of the online survey, and initial analysis of the survey data, invitations for members to participate in semistructured interviews was based on the participant's convenience. An explanation of the study and consent forms was emailed to association members agreeing to participate in the study (Appendix B, Appendix C).

**Data Collection**

Exploring West Virginia PK–12 public school district administrators' perceptions began with a qualitative survey (Appendix B) to provide a larger sample of the state's district administrators. Percy et al. suggested generic qualitative studies use a larger sample than other qualitative approaches to be more widely representative and information-rich. I used semistructured interviews (Appendix C) to investigate further

themes and concepts emerging from the survey. Surveys were completed through Microsoft Forms and enabled a direct digital copy of participant responses for me to examine for themes and concepts. The semistructured interviews were transcribed by me using a technology-based transcription feature. Transcriptions were forwarded to participants for their review and final approval to improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of the research (Saldaña, 2015). Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure confidentiality.

**Survey**

Jansen (2010) discussed that in an open-question interview survey, each response will be unique, and it is this uniqueness of the participants' responses that will enrich the findings of this study. Jansen further advocated for all members of the population to be encompassed to guarantee detailed and full coverage. The targeting of participants in WVASA enables access to a large percentage of West Virginia's PK–12 district administrators and would enable broad coverage of the state's educational leaders. The open-ended survey promoted randomization and targeted key informants as crucial sampling strategies suggested by Patton (2015). The collection of demographic information enabled emerging themes and concepts to be compared to the district level position; years participant has been in the role; the district size; if the district has an excess levy; and their influence on district-wide decision making. These comparisons highlighted similarities and differences in perceptions among demographic categories. Located in Appendix B, the survey protocol lists the five demographic questions and

seven open-ended questions used to explore district administrators' perceptions. The eighth and final question offered participants an opportunity to participate in additional conversations around the topic and to volunteer for the semistructured interviews.

**Interviews**

Given (2008) described semistructured interviews as a qualitative data gathering approach utilizing a series of predetermined but open-ended questions to provide more control than unstructured interviews. The semistructured interview protocol in Appendix C demonstrates Given's concepts with researchers developing a written guide for the researcher to follow. The topics of the guide are based on the research questions and exploratory conceptual model of the phenomenon. This guidance corresponds to Rubin's and Rubin's (2012) concepts on interviews requiring a healthy plan and arrangements while enabling plenty of data from the same questions due to the participants' many perspectives. Participants were offered three ways to participate in the interviews: telephonic, teleconference, or in-person interviews. These three approaches enabled greater participation as they provided greater flexibility for participants and their schedules.

**Data Analysis Plan**

With the selection of a generic qualitative approach, many options and considerations to establish an analysis plan remained. Therefore, it was necessary to consider the primary purpose of the study to assist in moving forward with the analysis plan. Guest et al. (2013) stated there is no right or wrong way to administer a qualitative

inquiry. Furthermore, Creswell (2013) presented the approach will shape the research design and procedures. Selecting a generic qualitative approach allowed me a lack of philosophic assumptions based on the known qualitative methodologies (Caelli et al., 2003). Merriam (1998) presented, “they simply seek to discover and understand the phenomenon, a process, or the perspective and worldviews of the people involved” (as cited in Caelli et al., 2003, p. 11). Patton (2015) defined a generic qualitative inquiry as “…a very practical side to qualitative methods that simply involves skillfully asking open-ended questions of people and observing matters of interest in real-world settings to solve problems, improve programs, or develop policies” (p. 154). This inquiry approach offered me the flexibility and the use of inductive reasoning for analysis.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested seven steps in the analysis of responsive interviews. Step one requires researchers to transcribe and summarize each interview. Step two defines, finds, and marks events, examples, names, places, dates, relevant themes, or concepts. Step three asks researchers to sort similarly coded excerpts and combine them into a single data file. Step four delves into coded excerpts, where selected data is placed into subgroups and summarized. Step five involves weighing different versions of the collected data into different interviewees' integration to create a complete picture. Step six asks researchers to combine themes and concepts to generate one’s theory of explanation surrounding the phenomena. Finally, Step seven entails generalizing results beyond the case, and individuals studied. My analysis of the interviews with district administrators followed the steps designated by Rubin and Rubin.

## Plan for Chosen Approach

Using the planned approach, I focused on analyzing data from a qualitative survey and semistructured interviews. Upon receipt of the responses to the qualitative survey, I examined the results for developing themes and concepts through a cyclical analysis. Transcriptions were then coded based on themes and concepts that emerged during the initial qualitative survey analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) introduced the process as inductive and comparative; thus, leading to additional iterations to reveal any additional themes and concepts not unveiled during the initial qualitative survey. Following this notion, my subsequent iterations provided greater insight into themes and concepts surfacing as information-rich data to inform the study results.

## Development of the Codes and Categories

Saldaña (2016) described coding as a heuristic process that discovers and explores words or short phrases which symbolically ascribes a salient, essence-caring, summative, or evocative attributes to visual or language-based data. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advised coding to be a constant comparative method for the gathered data. Saldaña presented coding is cyclical, and the first cycle is considered open coding, the second involves reorganizing and recategorizing data from the first cycle. I explored survey responses and interview transcripts through this cyclical process, and subsequent cycles of coding were used to refine and diminish the number of codes allowing for a concentrated consensus of themes and concepts to emerge from the data.

## Trustworthiness

Within the study, I explored perceptions of West Virginia's PK–12 district administrators about the value of career readiness and workforce activities and programs along with the barriers, limitations, and successes associated with these activities and programs. The need for this research is expanded upon in the literature review, and I focused the study on a gap of research surrounding district administrator perceptions. The issues of ethical considerations and data saturation I observed within Patton's (2015) recommendations for generic qualitative inquiry. Creswell (2013) discussed researchers need to look at themselves, the participants, and the readers in order to answer if the account of the study was accurate. Moreover, qualitative inquiry requires the researcher to anticipate and plan around ethical issues. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) presented trustworthiness exist when philosophical expectations and researcher perspectives align to support the paradigm. Shento (2004) discussed Guba's (1981) constructs for establishing trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These constructs, although not the exclusive measure for establishing validity and reliability, have been accepted by many (Shento, 2004). The following sections address Guba's constructs within this scope of this study.

### Credibility

Within Guba's (1981) constructs, Shento (2004) highlighted the need to determine congruence with reality. Shento presented Lincoln's and Guba's (1985) assertions on ensuring credibility being essential to establishing trustworthiness.

According to Shento, credibility can be established within four approaches: the adoption of well-established research methods, the development of an early familiarity with the culture of the organization, random sampling, and triangulation. Within the study I established its first approach toward credibility with familiarity. As a nine-year plus member of the West Virginia Association of Administrators (WVASA) and serving on their executive board along with many state-level committees involving members permitted an openness and minimized the need for preemptive consultation and visits to gain access to participants. Secondly, the utilization of volunteers promoted the randomization of the purposeful sampling of participants. Thirdly, within the study I utilized semistructured interviews and a qualitative survey to aid in the triangulation of data and promote Guba's (1981) and Brewer's and Hunter's (1989) notions on using different methods to compensate for limitations, while exploiting respective benefits of each method (Shento). In addition, Patton's (2015) discussion on analyst triangulation was incorporated with my Committee Chair providing a critic of the data as an impartial opinion to eliminate unintentional bias. All three approaches aided in establishing the credibility of this research.

**Transferability**

Shento (2004) presented transferability lies in demonstrating the results of the research can be applied to a broader audience. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) specified transferability were accessible by a researcher providing a full description of the data through meticulous analysis and interpretation. My descriptions of participant

perceptions about career readiness and workforce activities and programs as accurately as possible enhanced transferability. The collected data was written in such a way to allow the reader to determine transferability and permit additional examinations by researchers to be able to transfer conclusions to another context (Patton, 2015).

**Dependability**

According to Shento (2004), to address dependability, the research process must be reported in detail to enable future researchers to repeat the work. Moreover, Shento advanced for readers to develop a thorough understanding of the methods and their effectiveness, they should include sections addressing the research design and its implementation, the operational detail of data gathering, and the reflective appraisal of the project. Within this research, I included all three components advanced by Shento to promote dependability along with Creswell's (2013) notions on the second pair of eyes promoting dependability and confirmability. The second pair of eyes was the Committee Chair's review of these sections.

**Confirmability**

Shento (2004) shared Miles' and Huberman's (1994) notions on the essential condition for confirmability is the extent the researcher admits their own dispositions. Shento (2004) submitted the need for acknowledging the beliefs underpinning methods adopted and decisions made, along with explanations of reasons for favoring one approach over another to promote this essential condition.
Shento advanced the need for a detailed methodological description permitting the reader

to determine if the emerging constructs and data may be accepted. Shento referred to this detailed approach as an audit trail. Within this research study, I utilized an audit trail to enable readers to examine methodological descriptions and decision making to understand the data collection and analysis protocols to strengthen confirmability.

**Ethical Procedures**

Patton (2015) cautioned researchers about the many ethical considerations surrounding qualitative interviews and recommended twelve steps in developing one's research. The first is to explain the purpose of the inquiry and methods, and this explanation was completed within the permissions document. The second is reciprocity, and for this study, volunteers were utilized to avoid reciprocity. Third, the only promises offered surround data security and procedural components approved by Walden University's Institution Review Board (IRB). Following Walden University's IRB procedures assisted in identifying and illuminating any potential risk to participants. The risk was low as the line of questioning is not highly personal, nor did it promote a strong emotional response. Patton's fifth issue surrounds confidentiality. IRB protocols surrounding data security, disclosures, and explanations were followed to ensure participants clearly understood the implications and their role in the study. These protocols also addressed the sixth issue of getting informed consent. Permissions were sought from all participants as approved by the IRB. Issue seven surrounds data ownership and access. Ownership followed the IRB protocol, and participants were given access to their transcripts to ensure accuracy before the conclusion of the study.

Participants received a summary of results if requested. Issue eight involved the wellbeing of the researcher while conducting the fieldwork. The topic of interviews did not elicit a heavy emotional toll, as the subject matter is related to student outcomes and career preparation and not more sensitive subjects. Issue nine encompasses ethical advice. No ethical dilemma occurred during the study, but members of the committee would have been asked for guidance along with the IRB if a situation would have occurred. Patton's tenth issue includes data collection boundaries. The subject-matter, the line of questioning, and their familiarity with me as a colleague minimized any challenges in the successful completion of data collection. Issue eleven entangles the intersection of ethical and methodological choices. Strict adherence to the IRB protocols and committee guidance enabled avoidance of these choices for this study. Finally, Patton's twelfth issue discussed ethical versus legal issues and a researcher's ethical code who they will follow. This issue was addressed by carefully adhering to the IRB's protocol and following the legal and ethical standards of West Virginia's public employee standards as established in West Virginia Code. These standards include being a mandated reporter. However, due to the topic and questioning, no legal concerns arose.

## Summary

Within this chapter, I provided an explanation of the phenomenon of interest and explanations of the methodology process for this generic qualitative study. The chapter began with an explanation of the purpose of the study and a general overview. The discussion of the purpose is followed by a dialog about the rationale behind the study and

the research questions guiding the methodology selection. The selection of a generic qualitative study established the methodological underpinning guiding my selection of participants, instrumentation, recruitment of participants, data collection, and a data analysis plan. Beyond the methodological decisions, additional discussions focused on ensuring trustworthiness encompassed how I defined the means for establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, the chapter concluded with my discussion on the twelve common ethical issues presented by Patton (2015).

# Chapter 4: Results

## Introduction

The findings of this generic qualitative study on the perceptions held by West Virginia PK–12 public school district administrators about the value of career readiness and workforce programs, and the barriers, limitations, and successes in implementing these programs, are presented in this chapter. The research questions were:

RQ1: What are the district administrators' perceptions about the value and importance of West Virginia's PK–12 career readiness and workforce program(s)?

RQ2: What are the district administrators' perceptions about the barriers, limitations, and successes of West Virginia's PK–12 career readiness and workforce program(s)?

I used a qualitative survey to collect data from participants, followed by semistructured interviews to expand and clarify the West Virginia PK–12 district administrators' responses. Within Chapter 4, I described the setting for the study, demographics of the participants, data collection approach, data analysis procedures, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and summary.

## Setting

The centralized nature of West Virginia schools’ places district administrators in a critical role of prioritizing district aims, resources, and support for curricula and programming. I selected district administrators for this study due to this pivotal role. Their perceptions and beliefs about career readiness and workforce preparation are

essential in understanding their decision making around priorities and goals for their districts. The WVASA is an organization comprised of district administrators and offers many members who make these crucial decisions on behalf of their districts. Originally, I planned the setting for the study to take place during a WVASA conference and subsequent monthly meetings to collect additional data if needed. Conference participation is usually over 100 members, while monthly meetings vary between 20 and 40 attendees. Members are all district administrators and meet most of the selection criteria and are easily accessible at the end of each meeting or session. The conference seemed to be a viable opportunity for access to participants without the interruptions of a participant's office.

However, the intended setting for the study was impacted heavily by the COVID-19 pandemic. Procedures and approaches had to be modified to accommodate the many challenges that the pandemic presented to the schools and individuals' personal lives. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, my plan was to recruit 15 district administrators through a combination of emails and face-to-face contact. All in-person activities were canceled due to safety protocols related to COVID-19. To overcome the barrier of no in-person contact required relying solely on email invitations to solicit volunteers to participate in the survey. The initial mass email distribution of the survey was sent to the 130 plus members, but I only received three responses. The lack of response required extra steps to achieve the targeted number of participants. The inadequate initial response, I believe, was a result of the pandemic, and the timing of the email sent just

before the December holidays. Twenty-two additional direct individual emails to superintendents asking for their response and sharing with their central office staff resulted in more participation.

The individual email invitations generated an additional 13 responses totaling 16 survey responses. I asked eight administrators that completed the survey to participate in a semistructured interview because of their initial willingness to support the research and be interviewed. Moreover, these eight individuals met the inclusion criteria with five of the participants being superintendents, two being directors, and one assistant superintendent (Table 6). Semistructured interviews planned to occur during monthly in-person meetings had to be modified due to pandemic restrictions and occurred through teleconferences. Completed interviews involved participation during the workday with five occurring in the afternoon and three in the morning. Only one participant joined from their home. This approach proved beneficial in the transcription process as Microsoft Teams has a transcription feature built into their video conferencing platform. Teleconferencing did not appear to impact participants' responses, nor did it appear to be a barrier to conducting the interview other than some bandwidth issues interrupting responses during one interview. Participants had been utilizing teleconferencing tools for several months and may have contributed to the ease of use for the technology. Microsoft Teams is the primary tool used through the West Virginia Department of Education and most of the State's education system.

The lack of an in-person approach and ongoing challenges of the pandemic negatively impacted participation. I assumed that a teleconference would be more convenient but finding district administrators away from their districts and also with unencumbered time permits greater access. This unencumbered time along with a colleague asking directly has increased the willingness by members to participate in various activities including another member's past research. All participants in the interview were supportive of the research but acknowledged the ongoing challenges of time related to supporting their districts through the pandemic. This time factor most likely hindered participation rates in the research. Some responses made references to after COVID-19 but did not appear to alter perceptions about the research topic.

## Demographics

The survey participants included 11 superintendents, three assistant/deputy superintendents, and two directors who responded to the survey (Table 5). Eleven of the respondents have been in their position less than five years, four participants have been in their role between 6 and 10 years, and the remaining participant has been in their position over 10 years. The respondents represented five each from a small and large district, and six participants represented a medium district as designated by the WVDE. The WVDE (2019) designated districts into four population density categories as a component of their state aid formula.

- Sparse: Less than five students per square mile
- Low: five to less than 10 students per square mile

- Medium:10 to less than 20 students per square mile
- High: 20 or more students per square mile

For the purposes of the study's demographics, I combined low and sparse to be classified as small. Fourteen of the 16 respondents indicated that their citizens supported an excess levy. An excess levy is a tax on personal and real property upon which district voters elect to support every five years to provide additional funds for local schools above the basic state aid formula (WVDE, 2018d). Participants shared that four were 41–50 years old, eight participants were between 51–60 years old, and four were over 60 years of age. Ten of the participants are male, with the remaining six identifying as female. All 16 participants designated their ethnicity as White. Nearly all participants represent different districts throughout West Virginia, with only two participants representing the same district. This random sampling generated by the solicitation of volunteers resulted in 15 of 55 districts having a participant involved in the study.

The group's demographics indicate a largely homogenous population with only slight differences in age, size of the district, and excess levy support. The participant demographics resembled the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2012a, 2012b, 2012c) Schools and Staffing Survey information related to ethnicity and age for staff and principals. With all the participants 41 or older, a parallel to the 70.9% of principals being 45 or older. Even though age information was not located on district-level positions, the experience required to qualify for many district-level jobs would promote more significant percentages to mirror or advance the principal demographics.

The NCES reported 98% of teachers and 96.4% of principals were White (2012a, 2012b), while 100% of participants in the survey were White. NCES's (2012c) report further indicated 59.5% of the West Virginia principals are female and 40.5% are male. The gender make-up is the one area appearing to be the opposite of the NCES report, with 62.5% of the participants being male, with the remaining 37.5% identifying as female.

Eight participants completed the interview within the study (Table 6). Only one of the participants was an assistant/deputy superintendent, five were superintendents, and two were directors. Six of the eight administrators were under 5 years in their current position, one was in their position between 6 and 10 years, and the final participant had over 10 years in their current role. Two of the eight worked in small districts, five represented medium districts, and only one large district was represented. All but one participant worked in districts with an excess levy. Five participants were between 51–60 years old, two are over 60 years of age, and only one participant was between 41–50. Equally represented was gender, as 50% were male and female. All participants identified as White. Seven of eight districts were represented by the group as two participants work in the same school system.

Table 6

*Survey Participant Demographics*

| Participant | Position | Years in Position | County Designation | Excess Levy | Make Decisions Related to Career Readiness | Age | Sex | Race |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Assistant/Deputy Superintendent | 6–10 years | Large | Yes | Yes | 41–50 | Woman | White |
| 2 | Assistant/Deputy Superintendent | 0–5 years | Small | No | Yes | 51–60 | Woman | White |
| 3 | Superintendent | 6–10 years | Small | No | Yes | Over 60 | Man | White |
| 4 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Woman | White |
| 5 | Superintendent | Over 10 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Man | White |
| 6 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Small | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Man | White |
| 7 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | Over 60 | Woman | White |
| 8 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Small | No | Yes | 41–50 | Man | White |
| 9 | Superintendent | 6–10 years | Small | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Man | White |
| 10 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Large | Yes | Yes | Over 60 | Man | White |
| 11 | Assistant/Deputy Superintendent | 0–5 years | Large | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Man | White |
| 12 | Director | 0–5 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Woman | White |
| 13 | Superintendent | 6–10 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | Over 60 | Man | White |
| 14 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Large | Yes | Yes | 41–50 | Woman | White |
| 15 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Large | Yes | Yes | 41–50 | Man | White |
| 16 | Director | 0–5 Years | Medium | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Man | White |

Table 7

*Semistructured Interview Participant Demographics*

| Participant | Position | Years in Position | County Designation | Excess Levy | Make Decisions Related to Career Readiness | Age | Sex | Race |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | Assistant/Deputy Superintendent | 0–5 years | Small | No | Yes | 51–60 | Woman | White |
| 5 | Superintendent | Over 10 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Man | White |
| 6 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Small | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Man | White |
| 7 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | Over 60 | Woman | White |
| 12 | Director | 0–5 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Woman | White |
| 13 | Superintendent | 6–10 years | Medium | Yes | Yes | Over 60 | Man | White |
| 14 | Superintendent | 0–5 years | Large | Yes | Yes | 41–50 | Woman | White |
| 16 | Director | 0–5 Years | Medium | Yes | Yes | 51–60 | Man | White |

## Data Collection

Data collection included recruitment, consent, and protocols described in Chapter 3. The only addition was the need for additional emails to be sent to district administrators within the state for final recruitment. Two listserv solicitations to members of the administrative organization resulted in three surveys being completed. The initial request occurred on December 17, 2020. The proximity to the holiday break negatively impacted initial participation along with the ongoing challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. With only three responses, I asked that a reminder be shared on January 10, 2021 and only received minimal additional participation. I began emailing personal invitations to superintendents, assistant superintendents, and directors on

January 15, 2021. I consulted the IRB about the addition of the emails, and the IRB reported that it was within the parameters of the approved study by the individual invitations including the IRB-approved invitation and using the publicly available contact information. Twenty-two email invitations went out, resulting in the final 16 survey participants and eight interviews (Table 5, Table 6). Eight interviews were less than desired, but based on the lack of responses after multiple invitations, I believed that additional district administrators may not be willing to participate. Nevertheless, the similarity in responses from the participants within the collected data would meet the research's purpose. Surveys were completed between December 17, 2020, and January 15, 2021, and interviews were conducted between January 13 and January 28, 2021. The average time for the majority of participants to complete the survey was 18 minutes. However, there were three individuals for whom the survey completion took over 2 hours. It was anticipated that participants completed other work tasks during the survey's completion due to the survey's time stamps occurring during the workday. The semistructured interviews lasted under 30 minutes on average.

**Data Collection & Departures with Resolutions**

Much of the data collection followed the descriptions in Chapter 3; however, it is essential to note some departures and resolutions for these modifications occurred to improve the data collection and analysis's efficiency and accuracy. Participants completed the surveys on Microsoft Forms, with the final data being downloaded into an Excel file. Initial plans discussed potentially hand-coding collected data. A work

colleague introduced a more affordable option that made it easier to disaggregate and analyze data. This discovery resulted in the Excel file being uploaded in MAXQDA 2020 for analysis. MAXQDA 2020 improved efficiency by enhancing the organization and retrieval of essential themes and concepts over originally planned hand-coding. I recorded interviews using Microsoft Teams, and a backup on a phone app called Voice Recorder. Originally, I planned to utilize Microsoft Teams to auto-generate transcripts of the interviews for analysis. However, after reviewing their accuracy in comparison with another tool, it proved to be less accurate. The audio recording through Microsoft Word's transcription feature proved to require less editing and greater accuracy of the participants' responses. Therefore, the interviews were auto-generated in Microsoft Word and edited. I submitted the final edits to participants for their approval of the accuracy, along with a link to the video recording. I then uploaded the interview transcripts into MAXQDA 2020 for analysis.

## Data Analysis

Patton (2015) presented qualitative analysis as a matter of judgment when determining what items belong (e.g., category, pattern, grouping, theme). Patton further suggested judgments can be ambiguous but presented 12 tips for ensuring a solid foundation for qualitative analysis. In tip 1, Patton recommended beginning analysis during fieldwork. I began analysis immediately after receiving the three initial surveys and included my highlights and flagged responses from the completed interview notes. The initial three surveys provided me the opportunity to discover the majority of themes

and concepts. These codes were used in the first round of analysis and I expanded them as additional rounds of analysis of the survey responses. I supported Patton's tip two involving inventory and organization of the data and tip four protecting the data and making qualitative analysis software decisions by the utilization of MAXQDA 2020. The software permitted me to upload and organize the data in one location. However, I uploaded a more traditional backup of data within subfolders to my cloud storage service to ensure no data was lost. Tip three, Patton requested to fill in the data gaps, while tip five suggested expressing appreciation. Any data gaps or unclear information, I addressed through follow-up emails and phone calls. I shared appreciation at the beginning and conclusion of emails, phone calls, and teleconferences. Tip nine, Patton advocated for scheduling intense, dedicated time for analysis. With my employer's support, I established each Friday to include a two-hour block dedicated to the completion of this research. This dedicated time along with weekend mornings, enabled me the intense analysis time necessary to complete this research. Tip ten, Patton advised to clarify and determine initial analysis strategies. By my selection of a generic qualitative approach, I was able to leave the inductive process open and less defined than other theoretical traditions. Nonetheless, I used iterations of codes and themes through the analysis closely following Rubin's and Rubin's (2012) seven steps in analyzing responsive interviews. In tip eleven, Patton suggested to be reflective and reflexive and Tip twelve Patton recommended to start and keep an analysis journal. These tips, I completed through the intense analysis times as described above and my notes were kept in MAXQDA versus

an actual journal. Patton's tip seven reviewed exemplars for inspiration and this guidance remained the one tip not completely fulfilled in the defined approach during this research. Instead of exemplars, the literature review shared in Chapter 2 and supporting articles served the purpose as exemplars. These twelve tips accomplished within the study provided me a strong foundation for the overall analysis of the collected data.

I established most of the codes and themes on the 16 surveys. I went through a minimum of three reviews on the survey results, with some responses receiving as many as five reviews to ensure all the answers were clearly understood. Each participant received a pseudonym, as referenced in Tables 5 and 6. I transcribed interviews and sent copies of the transcriptions and the videos to participants for their review and approval as prescribed by Saldaña (2015) to improve the research's validity, credibility, and accuracy. After the participants' approval, I analyzed the eight interviews with a similar analytical approach as the survey results and utilized the codes and themes established in earlier iterations.

**Coding Method**

The inductive and comparative strategies endorsed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), I used to analyze data revealed multiple codes, categories, and themes. The initial coding cycle of the survey resulted in 20 initial concepts. In subsequent iterations my list of concepts was narrowed to 12. I consolidated several items into similar threads following Saldaña's (2016) recommendations of sorting and shifting coded materials into categories, the relationship between variables, patterns, and themes. Participants' responses provided

greater insight into their feelings about career readiness and workforce programs, and I discovered a few new themes and subthemes producing a total of 18. The additional clarity and depth shared in the interviews generated a total of 670 coded segments during my analysis (Table 7).

MAXQDA 2020, a qualitative data analysis software to organize and manage the collected data, enabled me quick access to coded segments and the ability to reflect on various emerging themes and patterns. I completed a minimum of three coding cycles on all data along with multiple lexical searches to reveal the primary themes. Multiple reflections and my sorting of the data resulted into coding themes and subthemes being categorized around the research questions. The first category was value and importance of career readiness (RQ1) where two primary themes emerged from participant responses: career awareness and school districts felt they could do better with career readiness and workforce preparation (Table 8). Initially career awareness was not a theme of value, but as more reflection was completed, the connections to career awareness revealed itself along with activities associated with career exposure, career activities, career immersion, and counseling. The second category was barriers and limitations (RQ2) and participant responses revealed five themes: funding, COVID pandemic, CTE separate from academics, economic trend awareness, and changing perspectives (Table 9). The third category focused on successes (RQ2) and participant responses highlighted four themes: career and technical education, collaborations/partnerships, and middle and elementary school programs (Table 10). Beyond these themes and subthemes, I flagged

comments that spoke specifically to the research questions and were significant and if they had a partial or strong relationship with the research questions. This highlighting was completed for my rapid retrieval of crucial statements and revelations by participants.

**Discrepant Cases**

The Pandemic limitations prevented traditional paths to accessing participants, consequently forcing the study to rely on teleconferencing with participants and reducing the overall participation rate. The inability to control the environment in the location of the interview prompted some challenges. The first was related to streaming delays causing communication and responses to be partially obscured and which forced me to rely on follow-up questions to gain clarity. Disruptions, such as phone calls, people coming into participant's offices, and others in the background affected three of the interviews. Nevertheless, it is not believed that the discrepancies affected the findings of this study.

Table 8

*Frequency Count of the Codes and Themes and Subthemes*

| Key Codes for Surveys and Interviews | Coded Segments | Interviews | Coded Segments | Survey | Coded Segments | Total No. Segments Per Participant |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Awareness Activities | 18 | | | S1 | 21 | 21 |
| Barriers | 127 | | | S2 | 9 | 9 |
| Career & Technical Education | 66 | | | S3 | 10 | 10 |
| Counseling | 13 | | | S4 | 10 | 10 |
| Collaboration/Partnerships | 33 | P5 Transcript | 53 | S5 | 10 | 63 |
| Elementary School | 6 | P6 Transcript | 78 | S6 | 13 | 91 |
| Exposure | 28 | P7 Transcript | 57 | S7 | 10 | 67 |
| Funding | 66 | | | S8 | 10 | 10 |
| Immersion | 14 | | | S9 | 8 | 8 |
| Middle School | 19 | | | S10 | 9 | 9 |
| Needed Skills | 20 | P11 Transcript | 62 | S11 | 11 | 73 |
| Successes | 171 | | | S12 | 14 | 14 |
| Value | 206 | P12 Transcript | 89 | S13 | 10 | 99 |
| Need to do better | 39 | P13 Transcript | 62 | S14 | 21 | 83 |
| CTE Workforce Separate from Academic | 18 | P14 Transcript | 41 | S15 | 13 | 54 |
| Economic Trend Awareness | 9 | P16 Transcript | 41 | S16 | 8 | 49 |
| Changing Perspectives | 7 | | | | | |
| COVID pandemic | 19 | | | | | |
| | | Total | 483 | Total | 187 | 670 |

Table 9

*Research Question 1 Thematic Review: Value & Importance*

| Category | | Themes | | Career Awareness Subthemes | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Value & Importance | | Career Awareness | Do Better | Career Exposure | Career Activities | Career Immersion | Counseling |
| Participant | Coded Segments | Coded Segments | | Coded Segments | | | |
| P5 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| P6 | 10 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| P7 | 19 | 8 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| P11 | 23 | 4 | 8 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| P12 | 30 | 7 | 14 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| P13 | 15 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| P14 | 14 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| P16 | 13 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| S1 | 9 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| S2 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| S3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S4 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| S5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S6 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| S7 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S8 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| S9 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| S10 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| S11 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S12 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| S13 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| S14 | 13 | 7 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| S15 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| S16 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 206 | 73 | 39 | 28 | 18 | 14 | 13 |

Table 10

*Research Question 2 Thematic Review: Barriers and Limitations*

| Category | | Themes | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Barriers & Limitations | | Funding | COVID/ Pandemic | CTE Separate from Academic | Economic Trend Awareness | Changing Perspectives |
| Participant | Coded Segments | Coded Segments | | | | |
| P5 | 16 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| P6 | 28 | 18 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| P7 | 17 | 14 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| P11 | 15 | 7 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| P12 | 13 | 6 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| P13 | 8 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| P14 | 10 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| P16 | 10 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| S1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| S2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| S4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S8 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S11 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| S13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| S16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 127 | 66 | 19 | 18 | 9 | 7 |

Table 11

*Research Question 2 Thematic Review: Successes*

| Category | | Themes | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Successes | | Career & Technical Education | Collaboration/ Partnerships | Middle & Elementary School |
| Participant | Coded Segments | Coded Segments | | |
| P5 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| P6 | 24 | 14 | 4 | 0 |
| P7 | 15 | 6 | 1 | 5 |
| P11 | 17 | 5 | 7 | 1 |
| P12 | 24 | 13 | 4 | 3 |
| P13 | 24 | 11 | 4 | 2 |
| P14 | 12 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| P16 | 11 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| S1 | 8 | 2 | 5 | 1 |
| S2 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| S3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| S4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S6 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| S7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S8 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| S9 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| S10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S11 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| S12 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| S13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S14 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S14 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| S15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S16 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 171 | 66 | 33 | 24 |

## Evidence of Trustworthiness

### Credibility

As described in Chapter 3, Shento (2004) suggested four approaches to establishing credibility. The first is using well-established research methods. Chapter 3 clearly defines the data collection and analysis approach. Data collection was ensured accuracy by collecting survey responses directly entered by the participants, and the interview transcripts were emailed along with a recording of the interview to participants. Each participant was asked to approve the accuracy of the transcript before analysis. Shento, also expressed the need to become familiar with the culture. This familiarity was defined in Chapter 3 as I have participated in the administrative organization as a member for over nine years and interacted and worked with many of the participants in the past. It is important to note that no study participants have a direct connection to my current work role. This familiarity eased access but was also random as participants volunteered from an invitation. This randomization of the purposeful sampling addressed Shento's fourth recommendation for developing credibility. Shento's final recommendation was triangulation. Employing a survey along with semistructured interviews to compensate for limitations and exploiting the benefits of each method (Guba's (1981); Brewer's and Hunter's (1989); in Shento (2004) provided triangulation of the collected data. All four approaches define evidence toward establishing the credibility of this study.

**Transferability**

An extensive description of the procedures was provided to address transferability; thus, demonstrating Shento's (2004) notions on transferability relying on defining how results can be applied to a broader audience. Moreover, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasized the need for a researcher to provide a complete description of the data through meticulous analysis and interpretation. Efforts to provide descriptions and procedures with clarity and accuracy have been completed. They should enable other researchers to transfer conclusions to other contexts (Patton, 2015) associated with district administrators' perceptions surrounding career readiness and workforce preparation.

**Dependability**

Shento (2004) presented that dependability was established by the research process being reported in detail to permit future researchers to repeat the work. This study contains detailed descriptions of the process, data triangulation, and member-checking. Included with these strategies, guidance from my dissertation committee chair and methodologist enhanced my first qualitative research study's dependability. Supporting Creswell's (2013) notions on the second pair of eyes promoting dependability and conformability, my committee chair and methodologist reviewed and approved this research before publication.

### Confirmability

The essential condition for confirmability is a researcher admitting their dispositions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Shento, 2004). Furthermore, Shento (2004) advanced the need to define beliefs on selecting methods and decisions with explanations to enable the reader to determine if the data and constructs may be accepted in what was called an audit trail. This study includes written explanations of decisions, procedures, and dispositions to enable a reader to determine dependability.

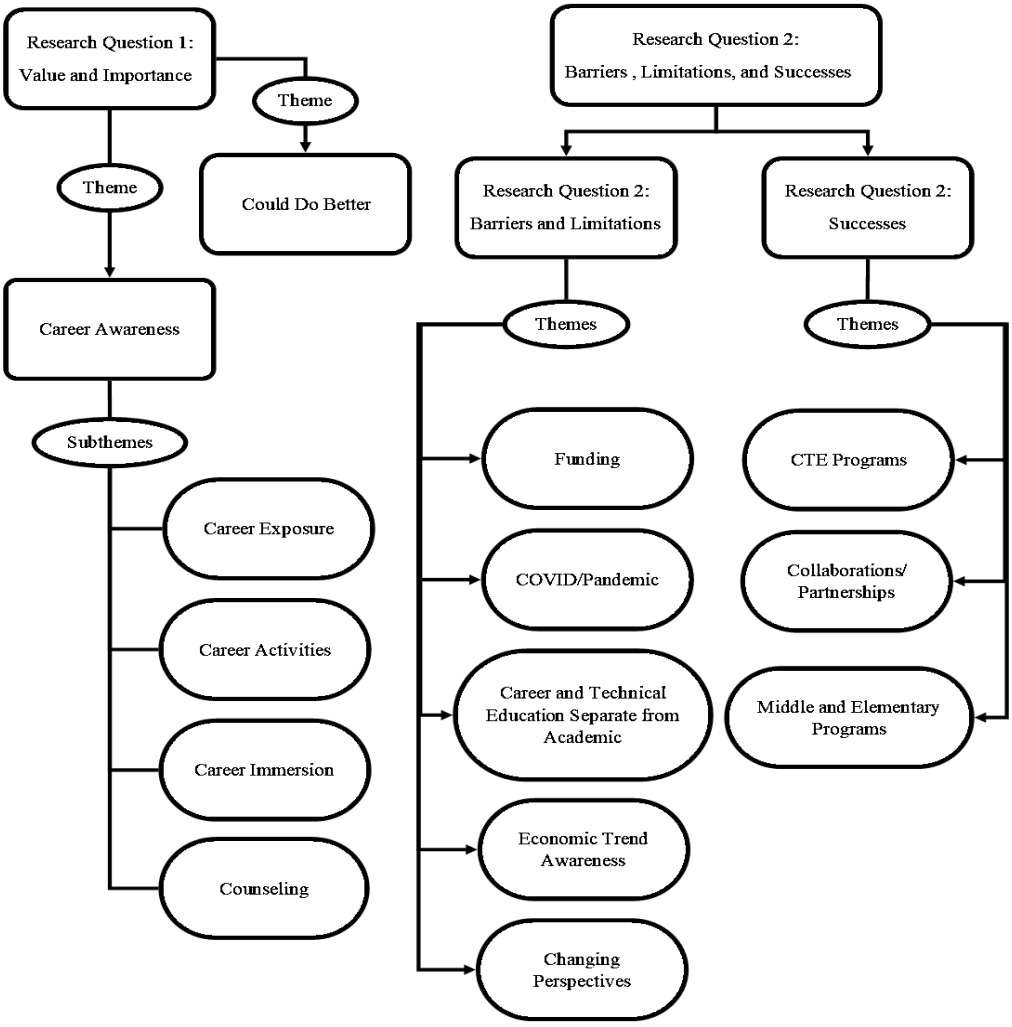
## Results

I focused the cyclical coding analysis on the research questions within three primary categories to organize the results: value and importance; barriers and limitations; and successes (Figure 2). These categories emerged as anchoring concepts for the themes to be organized around. This organizing pattern led me to some important revelations about district administrator perceptions. Research Question One (RQ1) examined perceptions around the value and importance of career readiness and workforce programs. My analysis established two primary themes of career awareness, and districts could do better. Career awareness was the most prevalent theme and comprised of four additional subthemes: career exposure, career activities, career immersion, and counseling. Research Question Two (RQ2) explored district administrator perceptions about barriers and limitations, and successes. RQ2 was divided into two categories to support organization around barriers and limitations and the second, successes. Funding, COVID pandemic, career and technical education separate from academics, economic

trend awareness, and changing perspectives surfaced as themes around barriers and limitations. Career and technical education (CTE), collaborations/partnerships, middle school and elementary programs arose as successes.

**Figure 2**

Thematic Figure Tree: Themes and Subthemes




Note. Figure 2. Thematic Figure Tree includes the prominent themes and subthemes associated with the two research questions generated from the analysis of participants' responses.

## Value and Importance

All 16 participants acknowledged the importance of career readiness and workforce programs through various comments and responses to questions. Comments such as career readiness… "the most important job we have" (S11). Referencing career readiness, "this is vitally important" (S13). "It is extremely important! Students need to see and understand that what they are learning will help them in their everyday lives. There must be a reason for students to want to learn. Connecting it to their lives and interests makes learning more meaningful and long lasting" (S14). Asked about the importance and value of career readiness Participant 7 replied, "I support it 100%, it's very important." The value and importance of career readiness and workforce preparation emerged through many comments and descriptions in all 16 surveys and 8 interviews. Two of the primary themes surfacing were career awareness and districts believing they can do better.

### *Career Awareness*

Concepts related to career awareness arose as the most common theme in perceptions about career readiness and workforce preparation. The career awareness theme was developed from four predominant subthemes: career exposure, career activities, career immersion, and counseling. Career exposure involved classes or curriculum that enabled students to be exposed to careers and the skills and aptitudes necessary to participate in that occupation. Seven of the interviews shared opportunities for students at various programmatic levels to be exposed to career-based education

(Table 8). Five of the eight interviews and seven surveys introduced career activities as another subtheme. Career activities included elements, such as field trips to business and industry, business and industry leaders visiting the classroom/school, and career fairs/programs. Five of the eight interviews and four of the surveys introduced career immersion activities. These activities involve opportunities for students to work directly in the career program and would incorporate work-study programs and internships. The final predominant subtheme incorporates counseling activities. Two interviews and seven surveys presented career counseling activities involving their school counselors. School counselors participated in various career activities to enable students to better comprehend the elements surrounding selecting a career path and needed preparations for that path.

These awareness elements were conveyed in participant comments about their perceptions of the value and importance of career readiness. For example, “But I think career tech is probably, you know, one of the best overall areas to increase that engagement of students” (P5). Participant 5 suggested that career preparation was one of the strongest ways to engage students in school making it vital for many students’ success. Survey 14 presented, “We offer three years of a career exploration class for students to learn about and research different careers that interest them. It continues through high school with the scheduling of classes that follow the career pathways offered in grades 9-12.” Participant 14 offered a significant prioritization of student time with exploratory classes and pathway designation highlighting the value their district

places on career preparation. Participant 11 suggested the need for greater efforts in communicating the value of career readiness. “I think that the communication out about those programs is exceptional, but I also don't think that sometimes our target audience is reading anything, so we've got to find a different way to communicate the value” (P11). Participant 12 shared the equal emphasis their district places on all pathways including career pathways.

> I do not believe that one pathway is emphasized more than others. We promote our technical pathways through the middle schools and high schools, we offer job shadowing and internships, as well as career major classes for all 10th grade students. Career readiness is discussed throughout all academic and technical classes as well as through the career major class that is a required course for all 10th grade students (S12).

These career awareness activities and perceptions showcased that the 15 districts represented by participants demonstrated the value and importance of career readiness and workforce preparation activities. Their support for various events, curriculum, career objectives, and immersion offerings for their students through funding, resources, partnerships, collaborations, scheduling, communications, social media, and celebrations stressed the value and importance of career readiness and workforce preparation.

***Districts Can Do Better***

The second theme to develop from my analysis was district leaders discussing the need to do better in providing students opportunities for career readiness and workforce

preparation (Table 8). Seven of the eight interviews along with four of the surveys made mention of doing better. Participant 12 shared, "… there's I think a lot of room for improvement to combine CTE and regular academics." Participant 7 suggested, "…we need to do a better job in preparing our kids for life… we could do a better job with education of the career pathways." Beyond preparations for life and pathways, Participant 13 discussed the need for a better understanding of changing global market conditions.

> …when you look at a global situation that is constantly in motion, we've got to be responsive to that, so I think we've got some really good programs, but I think we still have to really grow in how we continue to tweak and respond to a changing global environment" (P13).

Another area involved more integrations of other subjects presented by Participant 12.

> This is an area that we could be stronger in. I think there are a lot more things that teachers at all levels could be doing to make the two connected… I would so love to see our math and our English is and some of our core subjects taught in with our technical classes and I think when you start intertwining them to that depth. Then you definitely are on the right path (P12).

Participant 11 discussed another challenge and the need to do better

> …but I don't think that we do a good job of preparing kids for what um, a real job is like along with real responsibilities of paying your mortgage and all your other expenses. So, I think that's part of preparing kids for a career is that they have to

> understand what this job means to their future and their present and how it impacts their checkbook too (P11).

10 of the 16 participants established some form of needing to do better with career readiness and workforce preparation activities. The forms of doing better varied from communication, understanding the global economic conditions, to subject-matter integrations, starting earlier in a students' career, and adding more programs. Nonetheless, this desire to do better in these areas underscores the value and importance district administrators have about career readiness.

## Barriers and Limitations

Research Question 2 (RQ2) was divided into two major concepts: barriers and limitations, and successes. This division of the research question enabled greater organization of the themes. The eight interviewees received specific questions related to barriers and limitations; also, six surveys mentioned some form of barrier or limitation. The results in Table 9 display the five primary themes that become known through the analysis: funding, COVID pandemic, CTE separate from academic, economic trend awareness, and changing perspectives. Other barriers and limitations were mentioned by participants but not enough to suggest a common theme.

### *Funding*

Funding proved to be the most significant barrier/limitation that district administrators discussed. Many participants suggested that a barrier to doing better was the lack of funding. This outcome implied no difference in districts supported with an

excess levy and those with no levy. Moreover, when asked what was preventing them from adding their ideas to better support career readiness, all eight participants discussed funding as their primary barrier. Participant 14 stated, “Money, money, money, money, money, money, money that's what prohibits us.” Participant 6 offered similar sentiments with, “Well, I think the biggest barrier for us is funding.” Participant 12 expressed, “It's very, it's very disheartening to me that there are so many times that I don't have the money to do what I need to do in CTE.” There was also mention of the need to add more funding to Perkins. The Carl D. Perkins Act is a federal funding stream that supports career and technical education.

Another participant focused their funding concerns around enrollment. West Virginia utilizes student enrollment as a mechanism to establish funding calculations through a state aid formula. Therefore, student counts directly impact funding for supporting schools and their programming. A final notable mention was the challenge of finding high-quality career and technical teachers. Many of these teachers come directly from business and industry and take significant pay cuts to work for the school system. Some local districts have made some efforts to address the disparity, but the public education funding formulas do not support deviating from the state-wide pay scale. This pay issue, in turn, has developed shortages of qualified CTE teachers (P6, P14).

### *COVID Pandemic*

Another theme emerging from the interviews was labeled as COVID pandemic (Table 9). This theme developed from how restrictions related to the pandemic has

limited or stopped many activities that had been regular practices in several of the districts supporting career readiness and workforce preparation. The isolation protocols limited access to business and industry leaders and ended most students from participating in immersion activities.

> …but they have their own connections within their community that they use now this year, not so much because of the pandemic, we haven't been able to forge or use our community resources nearly as much as we have in the past years, but each of our schools they have connections in their communities that they make with the workforce (P13).

Participant 6 connected the pandemic and funding through the loss of enrollment. Participant 6 disclosed, “If you don't have the numbers, so that's probably our biggest barrier is that uh, you know, declining enrollment and with this pandemic and people doing home school and different things it has made it very, very hard.” Participant 7 discussed the need to shut down their most successful program. Their program worked with a local resort and enabled students to complete internships in multiple fields. The temporary ending of this program along with the loss of other activities with community partners has been a problematic outcome of the pandemic, according to Participant 7. Participant 13 communicated similar challenges associated with traditional activities being interrupted but acknowledged one positive outcome “…during this pandemic especially, we've provided meat to many of the grocery stores in our areas.” This meat delivery was achieved through the collaboration of the school’s agriculture program and

local farmers to address initial shortages of meat products." All the participants alluded to ongoing challenges associated with running schools during this time. The pandemic has prompted many changes to how schools operate and has impacted the ability to support career readiness and workforce preparation in traditional ways.

### *CTE Separate from Academic*

Another barrier or limitation associated with participants' views on career readiness and workforce preparation is the division between career preparation and college preparation. All eight interviews and the 16 surveys alluded to the primary method as largely or exclusively on CTE programs for career education. Seven of the eight interviews discussed middle or elementary school awareness programs. Some of these programs focused students toward a CTE path or a college-bound path. Participant 14 offered, "I just think that there are great opportunities, wide opportunities and exposure for our students so that they can make those choices to go into career immediately or into college." Similarly, Participant 3 suggested, "I think we do a good job of preparing both college-bound through our various AP and dual credit courses and students going directly into the workforce through our CTE program."

These comments suggest an either "or" but no consideration of "both" CTE and college together. This barrier/limitation was shared in many of the interviews and may indicate a limitation of knowledge surrounding CTE oriented postsecondary pathways in two- and four-year institutions. However, Participant 13 provided this broader view.

> Career readiness is all encompassing, I think. It's making sure that our students are ready for post high school existence. So, whether that means college because they're obviously preparing for their career in college, whether it means military, whether it means going straight into the workforce. Um, I think it's making sure that they are ready to make those decisions, whichever direction they choose to be headed (P13).

Some participants suggested the need to address the barrier between CTE and academics.

> I think we could be stronger that at all levels. I think there's a place in elementary school for working with regular teachers working with CTE teachers and combining things. I think there's a definite that we should be doing at the middle school level. So honestly, there's I think a lot of room for improvement to combine CTE and regular academics. To mesh them together into our schools…I think we have lots of room for improvement there (P12).

Despite some of these acknowledgements, most participants discussed career readiness as a function of CTE with limited to no crossover descriptions to other academic coursework.

***Economic Trend Awareness***

The next barrier or limitation presented by participants was related to their awareness of economic trends. Five of the eight interviews shared explanations and comments related to local, national, or global understandings influencing their local programming (Table 9). Participant 11 recognized the need to associate their efforts with

local economic trends with the comment, “I think one of the barriers that's getting a little bit better is that what we're offering our kids doesn't match our community.” The recognition of aligning career readiness and workforce preparation activities with local economic needs was an important revelation to ensuring students had the right skills and knowledge in preparation for the world of work. Participant 13 shared similar views, “…you want to develop programs that kids can leave our buildings and be prepared for workforce and get jobs you don't want to develop programs that just sound like really neat programs, but there's nowhere for our kids to go.” By the same token, Participant 11 suggested the importance of alignment with economic conditions.

Other participants presented an awareness by their discussions surrounding the future.

> …you know to identify and address what they're looking for and what they're needing for future employment and or future students. Most importantly, future employment. Because even college students are going to work someday so, that's the key. Listen to your business and industry leaders (P16).

Along the same future oriented response, Participant 5 shared the growing challenge of automation on the economic landscape.

> I think a lot of our jobs could be farmed out to robots or some type of automation, but there are certain things in career tech that we're going to be tried and they're going to be stable I think, and I think that's really important for us to think about in terms of students being employable in the future (P5).

These comments discuss a crucial awareness and present a critical barrier/limitation toward designing and implementing career readiness and workforce preparation programs and activities aligned with local, national, and global economic trends. Not all district administrators discussed the need for or importance of economic awareness and its influence on planning and implementing career education. Those administrators that conveyed more understanding utilized that knowledge for planning and bringing overall awareness to their stakeholders.

### *Changing Perspectives*

Another thematic area involved the need to change perspectives surrounding career education. Four of the eight participants shared information that highlighted a notable barrier/limitation. Participant 16 discussed the negative associations with career readiness and workforce preparation located in schools, "…if you attend in particular our technical center, you know that you're sometimes perceived as lesser as a status quo among students." This notion of negative perceptions was also mentioned by two others and another participant discussed the need to change parent perspectives about CTE programs and their value to students.

Interview participants were asked if they felt their understanding of career readiness and workforce preparation was the same or different from their district-level leadership teams. The responses indicated most participants felt they were similar. However, not all participants felt they had a similar comprehension. Participant 11 presented a barrier/limitation of leadership in the district, "We have a really, I think a

pretty strong pool of younger administrators who have a different understanding of what career readiness means, and they're doing some really good things out in schools. So as far as senior leadership. No, I think we've got a ways to go." Participant 11 discussed the differences in district level perceptions and their impact on building level administrator support for career education. This division illuminates another barrier/limitation of alignment of perceptions within a district's leadership team to ensure support and resources for career-related programming.

Participant 12 provided another perspective surrounding their own perceptions about career readiness and workforce preparation.

> I think until you really deal with career and technical you don't understand it. Therefore, you don't have the passion for it. So, I think, like I thought I knew career and technical as an administrator in a building. I thought I understood it, and I will tell you I didn't (P12).

This crucial revelation highlights the change in perceptions when this administrator became directly involved with CTE programs. Their understanding changed about the importance and value of these programs. Two other administrators shared similar changes in perceptions after being connected directly with CTE leadership.

**Successes**

Within Research Question 2, I explored another key concept of successes associated with career readiness and workforce preparation. 13 of the 16 surveys presented some form of success, despite only being asked directly during the interviews

(Table 10). Nonetheless, these successes emerged as three primary themes: career and technical education, collaboration/partnerships, and middle and elementary programs. Other successes also appeared but were not common threads through the surveys and interviews. Successes such as students achieving industry credentials, leadership earned in student organizations, state and national competitions (P16); social media, newspaper, and board recognition (P5); and fostering, mentoring, guiding from assistant principals and older students (P6) arose during the interviews.

### *Career and Technical Education*

When participants were asked about their successes associated with career readiness and workforce preparation, all participants made references back to their CTE programs. Examples such as, "We have a very strong technical center with excellent programs that are prioritized as highly as the academic pathways" (Survey 12). Another example, "I think we do a good job of preparing both college-bound through our various AP and dual credit courses and students going directly into the workforce through our CTE program" (Survey 3). Survey 6 added, "We have 16 various CTE programs that allow students to choose career paths."

Career readiness and workforce preparation questions in the interview lead participants extensively to descriptions of their district's CTE programs. CTE surfaced in several participant's responses to showcase the value and importance, but also to demonstrate the many successes in supporting career education. Participant 13 stated, "The value, I mean the value here is, it's just huge in our CTE programs. You know, we

we're giving children skills to prepare them really for life in general for whatever their career." Participant 16 offered another example, "I think our district places a high value on career readiness, …where we participate in high schools that work, which is a framework that centers around those career readiness skills, we have a career and technical center."

Several participants discussed CTE as a critical pathway for students especially if they are planning to go directly to the workforce.

> I think career readiness and the focal on the career and technical, that's important …we have a very midrange college going rate with about 50%. So, for us CTE is critical because we have almost half of our high school students that want to, you know, pursue a career ready position (P6).

While Participant 7 suggested, "I think personally. We have the focus has been on college. And we need career readiness, which could include college but just working. It could also be career tech." These statements capture many of the perceptions of the interview participants. They understand CTE's role in supporting career readiness and workforce preparation activities within the participants' districts.

***Collaboration/Partnerships***

A second success showcased by participants is the many collaborations/partnerships that schools have with local business, industry, and community leaders to support career readiness and workforce preparation programs.

Seven of the eight interview participants and four of the surveys shared valuable collaborations/partnerships.

> …our district has increased programs of study in CTE, built collaborations with local business and industry, added opportunities for dual credit and AP courses, and worked diligently to remove the stigma of CTE-focused courses. …but we persist in creating job-shadowing opportunities, working with local Chambers of Commerce, and building relationships with students that reflect upon post-secondary planning…They bring in guest-speakers. We work with our local United Way for a Hired or Fired event. The Chamber of Commerce organizes a career exploration day for our students (S1).

Survey 16 included, "the district works closely with the surrounding post-secondary institutions to develop articulation agreements." Other participants shared similar successes in their collaborations/partnerships with the local community, business, and industry. Career immersion activities that included internships and job shadowing were also mentioned in several of the responses. The partnerships/collaborations were touted as the primary successes by most of the participants. They spoke to how beneficial these programs were for students to obtain greater career readiness and workforce preparation.

***Middle School and Elementary Programs***

Many of the successes discussed involved CTE programming at the high school level. However, seven of the eight participants and four of the survey responses included

references to efforts in middle school to support career readiness and workforce preparation.

> We have our career tech come to the middle schools and talk about each of their areas of expertise, and show them what happens in the classes, what they can do after they graduate from high school with those certifications and classes…We offer several programs in our high school. We begin the focus in our middle schools. I'm giving them a taste of what's available in the high school level and we have a really good working relationship with our local workforce (P14).

Survey 12 responses included, "We promote our technical pathways through the middle schools and high schools, we offer job shadowing and internships, as well as career major classes for all 10th grade students."

While many participants discussed middle school efforts, five of our participants expanded those efforts to elementary school. Participant 5, Participant 7, Participant 12, Participant 13, and Participant 14 presented some efforts to engage elementary students in career education. Participant 14 shared, "…we put a focus in our middle school so that the kids know what career options or vocational programs that are available in our high school level." "Careers are discussed beginning in elementary schools through read-aloud books, field trips, and special visitor days in addition to cross-curricular activities in reading and social studies" (P14). Participant 7 discussed the involvement of a career coach and their role in all programmatic levels.

> It was part-time, only 15 hours, and it was only at the high school which we decided, we need to expand it. Elementary and middle and it was just showing all the careers pathways and it was a big focus on career tech at our high school and at Tri-County (P7).

Tri-County was referring to one of seven multi-county technical centers. These regional centers allow for concentrated CTE programming and support for two to four districts at one location. Nevertheless, five of the participants discussed elementary programming as some of their successes in supporting career readiness and workforce preparation.

## Conceptual Framework Perspectives

The survey and interview questions allowed participants opportunities to share perceptions associated with the theoretical underpinnings involving educational leadership and management and the influence of attitudes on career learning. Chapter 5 will include a deeper dive into my interpretation of the findings. This section is intended to assist the reader in connecting conceptual framework elements to specific participant responses and provide evidence of a connection to these components. Participant responses presented some common threads among the conceptual framework. These threads are discussed below within Bolam's (1999) and Bush's (2006, 2007) educational leadership and management and influence on career learning attitudes.

### *Educational Leadership and Management*

**Bolam**. Exploring Bolam's (1999) conceptual map offered me a perspective of three key areas to evaluate participants' responses. The first theme surrounded the

management of teaching and learning. Question 8 of the interview focused on support for teachers incorporating career readiness activities and programs (Appendix C). Participant responses focused on resources, professional development, and support.

> …with our teachers we always encourage them and support them when they want to, whether it's a conference within their area of expertise, we encourage that we've also, not only encourage it, we fund it. …I think they would say wholeheartedly support their involvement in their own professional development in their professional enrichment (P5).

Participant 14 shared additional support for teachers through "Field trips to different businesses and careers…We have in the middle schools we've implemented a career readiness course that all eighth-graders receive, as well." These examples reinforce a priority for curricular goals and focus on teaching and learning goals within the districts. Participant 11 discussed funding support for teachers' ideas.

> …I think from a teacher level, if they have creative, innovative ideas that will expose kids to career readiness and opportunities that the principals are very much open to those…I think a lot of times those ideas that come from the teacher from the ground up or some of the best ones (P11).

All participants prioritized career readiness through professional development, funding, or support for career awareness activities. However, most of those efforts were isolated to CTE programs and career awareness activities not associated with all instructional areas.

Bolam's (1999) second thematic area involved individual characteristics and contextual pressures of school leaders. The influence on school leaders' tasks is affected by state policies and local board directives. Outside the required course offerings associated with CTE curricula, only a recent policy change requires career exploration at middle school in West Virginia (WVDE, 2020). School districts have broad authority to address career readiness and workforce preparation beyond those minimum mandates. This ability is influenced heavily by local conditions and the leader's awareness of economic trends, ability to change stakeholders' perspectives, and their value and importance of career readiness.

Bolam's (1999) final area encompassed training and development for educational leadership. Training for career readiness and workforce preparation is not a part of the core aim of educational leaders. The question is then, how do school leaders increase the value and importance of career education? The participants shared essential factors associated with shifts in their development as leaders. Two main threads arose from the interviews. The first was with either an individual student or a personal experience with their child's struggles and successes related to career awareness. The second entailed CTE leadership as a work responsibility. Participant 12 disclosed an important revelation associated with the second thread.

> I think until you really deal with career and technical you don't understand it. Therefore, you don't have the passion for it…But I have a passion for it because

> what I've learned is it's amazing. Like it is exhilarating and what I watch those kids do (P12).

Participant 12 was not alone in their development as district leaders discussed their shift in perceptions being altered by their time as a leader over CTE programs (P5, P13).

**Bush**. Bush (2006) discussed the role of school leaders in determining the organization's aims and the ability of leaders to modify policy and develop alternative approaches for school-level visions and values. All participants stated they valued career readiness and workforce preparation. The value was demonstrated through support for curricula, staffing, resources, activities, partnerships/collaborations, and other school-based efforts. Bush (2007) further discussed various leadership models and discussed the advantages of adaptive leadership styles based on the need. This study preliminarily examined district leaders' influence on teachers by asking participants how teachers discuss career readiness, how they connect to what they teach to the world of work, and what support teachers found for implementing career readiness into their classrooms. Most participants offered support for professional development but did not provide many specifics of how this directly supported career education.

### *Attitudes Towards Career Learning*

The second conceptual framework involved attitudes and their influence on behavior. More notably, Maier et al. (2013) presented Ball’s and Cohen’s (1996), Brown’s (2005), Keys’ and Bryan’s (2001), Pajares’ (1992), Richardson’s (2003), and Thompson’s (1984) notions on teachers' classroom behavior being found to be influenced

by their attitudes. Dodd and Hooley (2018) recognized the critical role schools play in developing young people's career identity and how teachers' attitudes and beliefs could influence career learning. Building on this concept, district administrators' perceptions were explored utilizing the survey and interviews. Perceptions revealed several common themes. The three most relevant were districts needing to do better, a leader's economic trend awareness, and a leader's ability to change perspectives about career readiness and workforce preparation (Table 8, Table 9). Although other themes and subthemes surfaced, these three themes were the most germane toward influencing attitudes on career learning. All but one interview participant and four survey responses discussed their need to improve some aspects of their career readiness and workforce preparation. Secondly, a leader's economic trend awareness revealed a connection to decision making and establishing the value and importance of career readiness through support and resources. Finally, the theme about a leader's ability to change perspectives speaks to influencing attitudes of fellow administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders about career readiness and corresponds to Bush's (2007) notions on adaptive leadership. These threads reinforce the importance of attitudes about career learning and symbolize a possible connection between district administrators' support for career learning and possible prioritization of funding and resources to programs, curricula, and activities.

## Summary

After analyzing all the data, the participants provided responses that enabled themes, subthemes, and threads to emerge to speak to the research questions. Research

Question 1 examined the value and importance of career readiness and workforce preparations. All participants spoke to the value and importance of career readiness, and it developed through their primary notions on career awareness and doing better. For this study, career awareness encompassed those activities and instruction that permitted students direct awareness of careers. These career awareness elements were classified into career exposure, career activities, career immersion, and counseling. Eleven of the participants discussed the need to do better with programming and their response to career education. This desire to do better demonstrates their value and importance of career readiness and workforce programs.

Research Question 2 was divided into two categories of barriers and limitations, and the second successes. This separation permitted a more accessible approach to organizing themes, subthemes, and threads. Five primary themes emerged from participant responses: funding, COVID pandemic, CTE separate from academic, economic trend awareness, and changing perspectives. These themes highlighted two primary themes that were aspects that were outside of their ability to change: funding and the pandemic. Administrators can prioritize funding, but West Virginia's funding formulas have little flexibility to prioritize outside of their defined parameters within the state aid formula. The pandemic has affected schools in many ways, and no one has been able to control the impact. The three remaining themes connect by being elements associated with the district administrator's specific dispositions and beliefs (CTE separate from academic, economic trend awareness, and changing perspectives). Nearly all

discussed CTE as their primary pathway for career readiness and discussed the pathways from academic/college as an "or," and no one discussed this as a "both." Nonetheless, district administrators' knowledge of economic trends did appear to influence their attitudes and beliefs about career readiness and workforce preparation. District administrators also discussed the need to alter perceptions about career readiness with other administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Consequently, these perceptions crossover into Bolam's (1999) and Bush's (2006, 2007) notions on educational leadership and management and speak specific beliefs about attitudes.

The second category of Research Question 2 was focused on successes. Participants presented multiple successes, which appeared as career and technical education (CTE), collaboration/partnerships, and middle and elementary programs. The CTE was the primary perception that district administrators referenced as a success and an approach to support career readiness and workforce preparation. The district's CTE work built several collaborations/partnerships with local business, industry, and community leaders to offer career awareness activities and events. The final surfaced theme focused on career learning in elementary and middle school. Other successes included industry credentialing, student organization leadership, state national competitions, and communications (social media, newspaper, radio).

A final component of this exploration involved the demographics of the participants. It was anticipated that despite the homogenous nature of the participants they would reveal some rich insights about their perceptions about career readiness and

workforce programs. The participants did reveal several important revelations, but the analysis did not discern any differences in responses affected by their position, years in position, size of district, excess levy, age, gender, or ethnicity.

# Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

## Introduction

Within this generic qualitative study, I explored West Virginia PK–12 district administrators' beliefs and perceptions on the value, barriers, limitations, and success of employing career readiness and workforce programs and preparation activities. Data collected from a qualitative survey and semistructured interviews allowed me to establish themes, subthemes, and threads from the analysis. I compared these results through the conceptual framework of Bolam's (1999) and Bush's (2006, 2007) educational leadership and management and Dodd's and Hooley's (2018) work on teachers' attitudes on career learning. Participants shared their value and importance for career readiness through career awareness themes (career exposure, career activities, career immersion, and counseling) and the need to do better in this work. Examining barriers and limitations developed themes focused on funding, COVID pandemic, CTE separate from academic work, economic trend awareness, and the ability to change stakeholder perspectives. Investigating participant's perceptions and beliefs about successes, CTE programs, collaborations/partnerships, and middle and elementary school programs arose as the most common themes. In Chapter 5, I reflect on the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and conclusion.

## Interpretation of the Findings

Belfield et al. (2012) and Chancer et al. (2019) stated that American public education has continued not to generate students with the vital career training to support

economic demands, making career preparation a growing challenge for the American workforce and schools (Achieve, 2015; Belfield et al., 2012; Chancer et al., 2019; Soulé & Warrick, 2015; Vuković et al., 2015). A growing body of literature advances the need for American public schools to focus more on career readiness and workforce programs to achieve success in today's knowledge economy (Achieve, 2015; Chancer et al., 2019; Soulé & Warrick, 2015; Vuković et al., 2015). These mounting difficulties are finding their place in school reform discussions but remain in need of greater exploration. Chingos et al. (2013) suggested school reform is at the forefront of public attention and policy, and more popular reform efforts are focused at the district level. Despite this increasing district focus, Chingos et al. suggested that little existing research examines school district's ability to affect student achievement.

Leithwood et al. (2019) connected district influence that school leaders have on student achievement, and the vital role district administrators have with teachers' direct and indirect effect through district initiatives and reform efforts. Leithwood et al. (2019) advanced four characteristics of school districts that influenced student outcomes. These four characteristics are mission, vision, and goals; coherent instructional program; uses of evidence; and district alignment. All four of these characteristics are directly affected by district administrators and correspond to the indirect influence on student outcomes. As Bush (2006) noted, the heart of educational management is the determination of educational aims. Participants shared the value and importance of career education through their support for career awareness efforts. Even though many participants felt

they were doing well, they shared the need to expand programming, curriculum, activities, and other opportunities to gain greater awareness of career readiness and workforce preparation. These themes are an important connection to several key concepts associated with educational leadership and management. Chingos et al. (2013) discussed how school reform has increased on the district level. The capability to determine a district's focus is a crucial component of a district administrator's ability to influence student outcomes. Bolam (1999) presented a conceptual map that focused on three areas: management of teaching and learning, individual characteristics and contextual pressures, and training and development for educational leadership. These three areas relate to a district administrator's ability to prioritize career readiness and workforce preparation. Their influence on instructional priorities, funding, personnel, and other resources places them in a critical role in shaping teaching and learning. A district administrator's training and preparation and their characteristics and abilities to navigate contextual pressures influence students' prioritized outcomes. Bush (2006) discussed the importance of educational leaders' abilities to modify government policy and build alternative approaches. With West Virginia Policy 2510 (WVDE, 2020), state guidance exists in policy for career education, but most participants shared examples of their ability to go above and beyond the direction. Those district leaders prioritizing greater emphasis on career education found ways through partnerships/collaborations, middle and elementary curricula, and other ways to establish career readiness as an aim. The interviews also

revealed why they could not fulfill their entire vision and the barriers and limitations they face as a district leader.

Dodd's and Hooley's (2018) work with teacher's attitudes toward career learning led to discovering the absence of understanding around district administrators' perceptions and attitudes and their influence on career readiness and workforce preparation. The literature continues to grow surrounding the impact of beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes on student outcomes (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Brown, 2005; Dodd & Hooley, 2018; Keys & Bryan, 2001; Maier et al., 2013; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 2003; and Thompson, 1984). Teacher's attitudes are seen as theoretically significant as they steer classroom behavior (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Brown, 2005; Keys & Bryan, 2001; Maier et al., 2013; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 2003; and Thompson, 1984). With the understanding and importance of teachers' attitudes, it raises the important question of district administrators' attitudes and their influence on reform priorities and decisions that impact teachers and students.

Highlighted in the findings were district administrators' perceptions about CTE being separate from academics. This theme proved to be an area in need of more research but highlighted a significant result. Career readiness as a whole was almost exclusively associated with the CTE programming held in each district. Participants described some elementary and middle school efforts, but many of these were various career awareness elements focused on pathway considerations and CTE program determination. This limitation of concentrating mainly on CTE programming minimizes the wide-ranging

need for described skills within participants' definitions of career readiness. Taking an even broader set of defined skills, such as Wagner's (2008) curiosity and imagination, collaboration across networks and leading by influence, critical thinking and problem solving, initiative and entrepreneurship, effective oral and written communication, and agility and adaptability could be argued to be necessary across all curricula. District administrator attitudes and beliefs around needed skills appear to connect to how they discuss these aspects of career education and may influence stakeholders' attitudes about their value and importance. Another area the participants discussed was life skills such as financial literacy and navigating adulthood. The literature review provided the many personal, economic, and societal costs of not having these skills (Chancer et al., 2019; Institute for the Future, 2014; Olson, OECD, 2015; Virtanen et al., 2016) and suggested the harms of youth unemployment and underemployment have because of insufficient preparations (Callanan et al., 2017; Chancer et al., 2019; Institute for the Future, 2014; Olson, 2015; OECD, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2017; Virtanen et al., 2016).

The analysis also revealed that many participants promoted an academic pathway (college-bound) or a direct-to-work pathway (CTE-focused) and often referenced these choices as "or." There is a need for more research in this area; however, the concerns surrounding the "or" limits students' opportunities and do not align with many of the economic trends suggesting that it should more often include career education and postsecondary acquisition. Autor (2010) discussed the increasing polarization of jobs, while Alabdulkareem et al. (2018) presented the growing economic inequality in the

United States. Today's youth are facing financial insecurity, changing work expectations, and a shifting work climate. Deloitte Development (2018), National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017), McKinsey Global Institute's (2018), the World Economic Forum (2018), and others proffered the evolving workplace expectations and finding the necessary workers to fulfill economic demands.

Vuković et al. (2015) presented the past decade as increasingly turbulent and progressively complex, and illustrated that it took longer for young people to transition to the workplace. Vuković et al. proclaimed that adults were three times more likely to find employment than today's youth. It is unclear what impact the current economic downturn related to the COVID-19 pandemic will have on students. Still, the uncertainty of the pandemic highlights the vital necessity of today's youth exiting schools with the appropriate skills and knowledge. To achieve this outcome for students, the findings suggest district administrator perceptions will need to evolve to minimize the inclusion of the "or" and work to establish career readiness as an integral part of the curriculum not focused exclusively on CTE and non-college-bound students. The OECD (2015) shared a similar assertion with a caution about the labor market and education co-existing as two separate worlds. Where this occurs, young people have greater difficulty transitioning from one world to the other. The OECD's caution speaks to the need for district administrators to develop greater awareness of economic trends and foster a more significant focus on career readiness and workforce preparation to assist in navigating between these two worlds.

Based on the analysis, some participants had greater economic awareness and disclosed CTE leadership in their background responded with more examples of conversations with stakeholders and sharing a common vision about the value and importance of career readiness. This awareness and experience allowed them to share evidence and information that cultivated a cohesive vision among decision-makers, including their boards of education, central office leaders, and building leaders about the value and importance of career readiness and workforce preparation. This finding speaks to Leithwood et al.'s (2019) school effectiveness research on student outcomes by their connection to district administrator's impact on teacher responses to school reforms. Those participants having a shared district vision of career readiness and workforce preparation reported minimizing barriers and promoted more resources and priorities toward teachers and programs involving career awareness efforts. Their experience as CTE leaders and greater awareness of economic trends have influenced their attitudes and behaviors toward career readiness and workforce preparation. More research will need to be conducted to confirm this assertion, but preliminary evidence suggests a connection.

Participant responses revealed three primary themes among the many threads associated with successes: CTE programs, collaborations/partnerships, and middle and elementary school awareness efforts. CTE emerged as the dominant area considered a success by participants. The various program offerings and approaches and individual success stories were at the core of most responses. Participants touted the many collaboration/partnerships that supported career readiness and workforce preparation. As

discussed before, this was a means to create greater career education opportunities due to funding limitations but highlighted the district administrator perceptions about the importance of these efforts. Participants believed these career activities, career immersion, career exposure, and other activities provided a more vital awareness of career pathways and overall readiness for selecting a path beyond school. These perceptions converge on Porfeli's and Lee's (2012) discussion of career or vocational identity development through learning about other's work experience, aligning with the workplace, and one's sense of self. These collaborations/partnerships also speak to Bolam's (1999) and Bush's (2006, 2007) thoughts on responding to contextual and external pressures. The collaboration/partnership speaks to district administrators' abilities to mold these pressures into meaningful career learning opportunities for students.

## Limitations of the Study

The initial limitation surrounded the broader understanding of the value and importance of career readiness and my advocacy work for changes associated with this research topic. It was imperative to limit my bias, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 3. In Chapter 3, I disclosed my biases and dispositions under the researcher’s role as suggested by Merriam & Tisdell (2016). This explanation, along with analyst triangulation (Patton, 2015) and following Shento's (2004) four approaches for credibility as described in Chapter 3, should limit any inherent biases.

The second area of limitation is generalizability. The sample size was 16 surveys and eight semistructured interviews. Although having 15 of the 55 districts or 33% of the state's districts represented, the limited sample size may hinder the findings' generalizability to other school districts. The homogenous participant pool also may prove to limit the overall generalizability. Districts and district administrators with greater diversity and population may not draw the same conclusions as this study's rural and exclusively White population. The final area that may limit the generalizability would be associated with West Virginia schools' hierarchical structure. West Virginia is highly centralized, whereas the West Virginia Legislature and West Virginia Department of Education establish the laws and policies surrounding school goals and operations. In turn, this creates a fairly uniform system across the state's districts. Districts with greater authority, flexibility, and funding may not share the value and importance, barriers, limitations, or successes found in this study.

A final limitation surrounds the semistructured interview instrument. Several areas emerged within the findings, but the scope of the instrument hindered more in-depth revelations surrounding these areas. CTE separate from academics or the "or versus both" could be addressed with the addition of a few questions. Additional questions could further examine the influence of CTE leadership experiences and economic awareness on participants. The final edit is the upfront clarity surrounding terms. Career readiness and workforce preparation were being combined as a single concept by most participants. The

researcher should add specific efforts to the study to support greater clarity around these two concepts.

## Recommendations

This research may have limitations surrounding its small number of participants, centralized nature of schools, and homogenous demographics. Nonetheless, it adds to the understanding of district administrators' perceptions and beliefs. The scope of the study and the emerging themes suggest five crucial areas needing additional research: CTE separate from academics ("or" versus "both"), essential skills in career education being incorporated across the curriculum, the influence of CTE leadership, the influence of greater economic trend awareness, and conversations about career learning with teachers. The first area involved participants often describing a college-bound or CTE-bound approach to serving students. Limited responses discussed a combined or both CTE and postsecondary together. Within the instrument and research, I did not focus on this particular question but highlights a crucial area for additional research around district administrator perceptions and beliefs. The second recommendation included participant responses around skills and dispositions needed to succeed in the world of work. Participants presented critical thinking, soft skills, problem-solving skills, financial literacy, and others. However, these instructional goals were not presented in the context beyond CTE or specific career awareness efforts. No connection was offered between these provided skills and dispositions and their integration into other academic coursework. This result may speak the perceptions surrounding college-bound or CTE-

bound. This area was not explored directly by me in the study but presents another area for additional exploration. Another intriguing finding was the discernable differences in those district leaders with current or prior CTE leadership experience. This experience showcased a broader understanding of the value and importance of career readiness and workforce preparation. The differences in perceptions between CTE experienced versus non-experienced district leaders would be another area of suggested research. This research could focus on Leithwood et al.'s (2019) four characteristics (mission, vision, and goals; coherent instructional program; uses of evidence; and district alignment) that indirectly affect student outcomes.

The fourth area was the district administrator's awareness of economic trends. This awareness appeared to influence their understanding of the value and importance of career readiness and workforce preparation. Consequently, additional research around the influence of economic trend awareness could further expand our understanding of district administrator beliefs and career learning attitudes. The final area not fully engaged in this study but emerged as another area deserving further investigation was district administrators' discussions and interactions with teachers about career readiness and workforce preparation. With teacher's attitudes impacting student outcomes (Dodd & Hooley, 2018), district administrator interactions may be an important area of influence on career learning.

These five primary areas I determined from the analysis within this study of district administrators' perceptions and beliefs. They highlighted the need for changes to the study if it should be repeated. The interview instrument should be evolved to include additional questions surrounding the topics listed above to gain greater clarity about these five suggestions. An additional effort should be made to remove some of the redundancy of the questions. The redundancy occurred while interviewing participants, and the subsequent questions would sometimes approach the same concept that they just responded to in their previous answer. Essentially, making the question unnecessary. Another aspect was the general consolidation of career readiness and workforce preparation into just one category of participants' career readiness. Although it is not believed to affect this study's outcome, it is recommended to define these terms more clearly with participants in the future.

## Implications

Young people face an increasingly precarious entrance into the world of work. This difficult entry into workplace has prompted and increase in the demand for changes in schools. District administrators sit poised as critical gatekeepers in developing and implementing responses to this growing challenge. Without an appropriate response to changing workplace demands, young people may continue to feel the personal, economic, and social implications of underemployment and unemployment. Young people remain challenged to find a foothold in normal economic conditions (Chancer et al., 2019). The Pandemic’s many implications have not left us with normal economic conditions and

increase the imperative for schools to find a more robust response to support youth entering employment. Suppose schools are unable to find a strong response. In that case, today's youth may face similar or even worse conditions of the Great Recession, such as low participation rates in the labor force (Bullard, 2014), trapped involuntary part-time employment (Cajner et al., 2014), underemployment, and underutilization of the available workforce (Abel et al., 2014), and reduced earnings (Callanan et al., 2017).

Understanding district administrators' perceptions and beliefs about career readiness and workforce preparation enables improved navigation of their support for career learning. Bolam's (1999), Bush's (2006, 2007), and Leithwood et al.'s (2019) highlighted the critical role that school administrators could have on student outcomes. This crucial function is paramount during adolescence as this a critical juncture in career development with students' hopes and aspirations having considerable consequences toward later life development (Schoon & Polek, 2011). Stringer et al. (2012) further confirmed the prominence of this time with young people within their research and discussed the relationship between career thinking and young people's postsecondary outcomes. Hooley et al. (2011) and Porfeli and Lee (2012) promulgated young people's career thinking could be influenced by purposeful interventions. These interventions appear to be increasingly important in achieving positive outcomes for students and are a direct function of district administrators' duties and responsibilities.

Dodd's and Hooley's (2018) comprehended the critical role teachers play in career development and understood that their attitudes were a significant factor in their

behavior associated with co-curricular and curricular areas. This essential role of attitudes addresses the primary implications of this research. District administrator perceptions influence vital decisions that affect district aims, resources, and curricular decisions. This research found a preliminary connection between district administrator's perceptions, which was affected by career and technical education leadership experience and economic trend awareness. These two factors appeared to shift their perceptions and broaden their understanding of career readiness and workforce preparation. This principal understanding provides an opportunity to shift the perceptions and attitudes of district administrators to emphasize career learning to avoid the negative social implications of youth underemployment and unemployment.

## Conclusion

Within this generic qualitative study, I explored West Virginia PK–12 district administrator perceptions about career readiness and workforce preparation. The analysis reviewed three categories: value and importance, barriers and limitations, and success associated with career readiness and workforce preparation. Category one revealed two primary themes of career awareness (career exposure, career activities, career immersion, and counseling) and the perceptions that districts needed to do better. Category two focused on barriers and limitations and divulged funding, COVID pandemic, career and technical education (CTE) separate from academics, economic trend awareness, and the ability to change stakeholder perspectives as primary themes perceived by district administrators. The third category focused on district administrator perceptions about

successes surrounding career learning. The primary success shared focused on CTE programs. Collaborations/partnerships and middle and elementary career awareness efforts also proved important successes shared by district administrators.

Five suggestions for further research developed as a result of the study that may provide greater clarity to the findings associated with this critical topic. These five research areas include district administrator perceptions revealing CTE as separate from academics and postsecondary pathways; desired essential skills in career education with no discussion of their integration into other areas of the curricula (i.e., problem-solving, critical thinking, soft skills, and financial literacy); the influence of CTE leadership on perceptions about career learning, the effect of greater economic trend awareness on perceptions about career readiness and workforce preparation; and conversations about career learning with teachers.

This study's findings enabled me to add to the knowledge about district administrator perceptions and beliefs about career readiness and workforce programs. Although suitable for additional research, district administrator beliefs and perceptions appear to influence their career education decisions. Significant findings such as CTE leadership experience and greater economic trend awareness appeared to generate greater understanding surrounding the value and importance of career education. This increased comprehension shaped their decision-making and provided essential talking points with stakeholders. The essential role that district administrators play in developing and supporting district aims, curricula, personnel, and resources place them in a crucial

position to respond to the escalating challenge of youth unemployment and underemployment. District administrators can contribute to the positive social good by having the adeptness to influence stakeholders in developing career education responses that will permit students to avoid the personal, economic, and social costs associated with unemployment and underemployment.

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Appendix A: Permission for Survey Distribution

Dear Mrs. Collins,

As you may recall, I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am nearing the conclusion of my journey for my PhD, and I am seeking permission to conduct research among the West Virginia Association of School Administrators members.

My research surrounds West Virginia PK–12 district administrators' perceptions of career readiness and workforce activities and programs in their districts. Along with perceptions surrounding barriers, limitations, and successes of implementing these activities and programs. My research will be completed in two components. The first, will include a qualitative survey open to all members. Second, would be asking for a least 12 volunteers to participate in semistructured interviews.

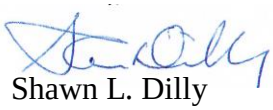
The primary focus of the study is to reach those members that are either coordinators, directors, assistant/deputy superintendents, or superintendents who make curricular, student outcome, and resource (budgets, human capital, etc.) decisions. As an active member, I am aware many of the other members meet this criterion.

The survey itself will be electronic and take no more than 15 minutes to complete by members. My hope would be to take advantage of the membership listserv to distribute the survey. The interviews will be established at the convenience of volunteers.

I truly appreciate your consideration of this request. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at 304-XXX-XXXX or email me at sXXXXXXXXX@waldenu.edu.

I have included a copy of the email invitation for your benefit.

Thank you,



Shawn L. Dilly

Enclosure

Appendix B: Survey Protocol

Each organization member will receive the email invitation (Appendix B) which will include the consent form including the description of the study. The survey will consist of the following on Microsoft Forms.

# Career Readiness and Workforce Preparation Qualitative Survey

By selecting the link, you have agreed to participate in the study conducted by Shawn Dilly.

I wish to thank you for your time and your assistance in exploring this critical topic. Please complete the questions below. If you have selected the link by error, then please exit the survey at this time.

Section 1 will include eight questions surrounding demographic information.
Section 2 will include eight open-ended questions

* Required

## Demographic Information

1. What position do you hold for your school district? *

- ○ Superintendent
- ○ Assistant/Deputy Superintendent
- ○ Director
- ○ Coordinator
- ○ Other

2. How long have you been in your current position at the district level? *

- ◯ 0-5 years
- ◯ 6-10 years
- ◯ Over 10 years

3. West Virginia classifies districts into three categories: small, medium, or large. Which of these matches the district where you are employed? *

- ◯ Small
- ◯ Medium
- ◯ Large

4. Does your district have an excess levy beyond the basic state aid formula? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

5. In your current position, do you make decisions that influence student outcomes, curricular decisions, resource allocations, and/or employee placement? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

6. What age bracket best represents you? *

- ◯ Under 30
- ◯ 31-40
- ◯ 41-50
- ◯ 51-60
- ◯ Over 60

7. What is your gender? *

- ◯ Woman
- ◯ Man
- ◯ Non-binary
- ◯ Prefer not to say

8. What is your ethnicity? *

- ◯ White
- ◯ Black / African American
- ◯ HIspanic / LatinX
- ◯ Asian
- ◯ Pacific Islander
- ◯ Other

## Open-ended Questions regarding Career Readiness and Workforce Preparation

9. As a district administrator would you explain what you believe is the importance of schools in your district preparing students for work and further learning beyond graduation? *

10. If you were to provide a definition for career readiness, what would it be? *

11. What value does the district place on career readiness activities and programs in your district? *

12. In your opinion, how does your district prioritize postsecondary pathways? *

13. In your opinion, is one pathway emphasized more than others? Yes/No (Please see the follow-up question below)
    If No - If one pathway is emphasized more than others, why do you believe that is?
    If Yes - If all pathways are equally represented, would you share some of the methods that your
    district employs to promote all pathways? *

14. In what ways do your teachers discuss career readiness in your school district? *

15. In your opinion, how important do you believe it is for teachers to discuss how and what they teach is related to the world of work? *

16. To what extent would you be willing to participate in an individual interview to discuss these topics further? *

- ◯ I would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview.
- ◯ I would like this survey to conclude my participation.

17. If you have agreed to participate in the follow-up interview, what is the best way to establish contact with you to arrange a time to complete an interview?

**Concluding Email (Sent to all participating members)**

I wish to thank you for participating with the survey. Your contribution will assist my research and building greater understanding around district administrator perceptions about career readiness. I will make a summary of the results for anyone who wishes to receive a copy. Again, thank you for your time and willingness to support this endeavor.

Respectfully,

Shawn Dilly

**Email Notice of Non-Selection**

I wish to thank you for your interest in supporting my research surrounding district administrator perceptions on career readiness and workforce programs in West Virginia's schools. Despite your willingness to support this effort, either I have met the number of participants needed to complete this work or you may not have met the inclusion criteria needed specifically for this study. Again, I thank you for your willingness to support this research and encourage you to reach out with any questions You can contact me at sXXXXXXXXX@waldenu.edu, or 304-XXX-XXXX.

Respectfully,

Shawn Dilly

# Appendix C: Semistructured Interview Protocol

Participants will have consented to participate as a component of the survey protocol. Upon receipt of participants willing to be interviewed, a time will be scheduled to hold the interview via teleconference (Microsoft Teams) in compliance with pandemic restrictions.

**Opening**

Hello, my name is Shawn Dilly, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. Before we begin, I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to support this research study. If you will recall, the consent form indicated the interviews will be recorded. I will be recording on Microsoft Teams and taking notes during the interview. It is crucial you understand your identity will be always be kept confidential.

This study seeks to understand the perceptions of West Virginia's administrators about career readiness and workforce activities and programs. Therefore, I will be asking you a number of open-ended questions to comprehend your perceptions about these topics.

Let us begin with a little bit of information about you and your district and the position which you hold. I realize this information was previously collected; however, collecting this information again, will assist me in aligning any themes or concepts that may be associated with one or more possible demographic characteristics emerging in the research.

**Demographic Information**

1. What position do you hold for your district?
    a. Superintendent
    b. Assistant/Deputy Superintendent
    c. Director
    d. Coordinator
    e. Other – Please indicate_____
2. How long have you been in your current position at the district level?
    a. 0 to 5 years
    b. 6 to 10 year
    c. Over 10 years
3. West Virginia classifies districts into three categories: small, medium, or large. Which of these matches the district where you are employed?
    a. Small
    b. Medium
    c. Large
4. Does your district have an excess levy beyond the basic state aid formula?
    a. Yes
    b. No
5. In your current position, do you make decisions that influence student outcomes, curricular decisions, resource allocations, and/or employee placement?
    a. Yes

   b. No
6. What age bracket best represents you?
   a. Under 30
   b. 31– 40
   c. 41–50
   d. 51–60
   e. Over 60
7. What is your gender?
   c. Female
   d. Male
8. What is your ethnicity?
   a. White
   b. Black/African American
   c. Hispanic/LatinX
   d. Asian
   e. Pacific Islander
   f. Other

Now that I have some of the basic demographic information, let us begin with a little more in-depth questions surrounding your perceptions.

**Interview Questions**

1. How would you define career readiness?
2. What are your perceptions about the value and importance of career readiness and workforce programs in your district?
3. Would you describe your perceptions of barriers, limitations, and success in career readiness and workforce programs in your district?
4. In your opinion, how does your district showcase the described value for career readiness activities and programs that you provided?
   a. In your opinion, do you believe that these programs and activities you have described adequately meet your definition of career readiness? Why or Why not?
   b. In your opinion, do you believe the described programs and activities go far enough to prepare students for the modern global economy? Why or Why not?
      1. If not, what has been some of the barriers or limitations of you going further to prepare students?
   c. If you could add more programs to support career readiness, what would they be?
      1. How do you believe these programs would benefit students?
      2. What is preventing you from adding these ideas in your district?
5. Do you believe others on your district leadership team share same definition of career readiness?

a. (If not) How do you feel having different definitions affects decisions about career readiness activities and programs?

b. (If not) How do you feel having different definitions affects decisions about workforce preparation activities and programs?

c. (If so) Has a similar definition helped in emphasizing career readiness activities and programs in your district?

d. (If so) Has a similar definition helped in emphasizing workforce preparation activities and programs in your district?

6. Do you believe career readiness activities and programs are important?
    a. (If yes) What has led you to this conclusion?
        1. If you believe that career readiness activities are important, in what ways do you engage in conversations with members of your district about changing demands in the workplace?
    b. (If no) Would explain why you do not feel that the activities and programs are not important?

7. Do you believe workforce preparation activities and programs are important?
    a. (If yes) What has led you to this conclusion?
        1. If you believe that workforce preparation activities are important, in what ways do you engage in conversations with members of your district about changing demands in the workplace?
        2. (If no) Would explain why you do not feel that the activities and programs are not important?

8. Would you please describe ways for teachers in your district find support to incorporate career readiness activities and programs?

9. We have discussed a number of the activities and programs that your district has been doing, would you share some of the successes that you accomplished surrounding career readiness and workforce preparation?

10. These questions are all I have prepared for the interview; do you have anything else you would like to add about the topic that we discussed today before I conclude the interview?

**Conclusion**

It is a significant priority to ensure that the information is recorded truthfully and conveys accurately your statements today. In order to achieve this priority, I may need to follow up with you to seek additional information surrounding your comments or ensure that I precisely recorded your statements. Please let me know if you have a preference in contact method. I am happy to make a phone call, teleconference, or email to facilitate the follow up conversation.

Thank you, for sharing your knowledge and expertise about this topic. I appreciate you taking this time and assisting me with the study. Upon completion of the transcript from this interview, I will

provide you a copy to ensure accuracy, and at the conclusion of the study, I will be happy to provide you a copy of the summary of the results for your review.

If you have any questions or concerns about what we have discussed today you can contact me at sXXXXXXXXX@waldenu.edu, or 304-XXX-XXXX.

**Concluding Email (Sent to all interviewees)**

I wish to thank you for your time and participation in the interview. Your contribution will assist my research and building greater understanding around district administrator perceptions about career readiness.

I will follow up shortly with a copy of our transcript for your review to determine if it accurately matches the interview dialog. Upon satisfaction with the accuracy of the transcript that you please email me your approval of its content.

I will send a summary of the results to you upon its completion. Again, thank you for your time and willingness to support this endeavor.

Respectfully,

Shawn Dilly

**Email Notice of Non-Selection**

I wish to thank you for your interest in supporting my research surrounding district administrator perceptions on career readiness and workforce programs in West Virginia's schools. Despite your willingness to support this effort, either I have met the number of participants needed to complete this work or you may not have met the inclusion criteria needed specifically for this study. Again, I thank you for your willingness to support this research and encourage you to reach out with any questions You can contact me at sXXXXXXXXX@waldenu.edu, or 304-XXX-XXXX.

Respectfully,

Shawn Dilly

Appendix D: Teachers Attitudes Towards Career Learning Index Item Instrument

| Questions | 1 (strongly disagree) 5 (strongly agree) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I have talked with my students about careers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I have directed students for more support with their careers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I have facilitated career conversations with the relevant people (i.e. other staff, parents, employers). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I have helped students consider how their learning might impact on their future career. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I have enabled students to reflect on work-related learning. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I have helped students think about career routes available in my subject area. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. It is important for schools to have a strategy relating to career and employability learning. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. It is important that schools regularly engage with employers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. It is important that schools prepare young people for work and further learning. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. It is important that schools regularly engage with post-16 learning providers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. It is important that schools regularly engage with post-18 learning providers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. It is important that students develop employability skills as part of learning my subject | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. It is important that students develop employability skills as part of learning my subject | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. It is important that I help students think about career routes available in my subject area | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. It is important that I talk to my students about careers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. It is important that I know where to direct students for more support with their careers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. It is important that I facilitate career conversations with the relevant people (i.e. other staff, parents, employers). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. The senior leaders at my school are involved in career and employability learning. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. The senior leaders in my school encourage me to integrate career and employability learning into my subject area. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

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