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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION DEFENSE

of

Nicole Hughes

for the degree of
Doctor of Education

Interprofessional Leadership and Cultural Foundations
College of Education, Health and Human Services

**COMPETENCIES OF A COLLECTIVE SCHOOL LEADER:
A TEACH PLUS CASE STUDY**

Friday, May 19, 2023

10:00 a.m.

Microsoft Teams

Kent State University

Nicole Hughes

Master of Education, School Leadership
Teachers College, Columbia University, 2010

Master of the Science of Teaching, Social Studies Education
Pace University, 2007

Bachelor of Arts, History
Yale University, 2005

Nicole Hughes serves as the National Director of School Leadership Development at Teach Plus, a non-profit organization. Before joining Teach Plus, Nicole was the Campus Principal of Buchtel Community Learning Center, supporting the turnaround efforts and implementing College Career Academies of Akron. Nicole earned the Ohio Association of Black School Educators' Leadership Excellence award in Akron.

Previously, Nicole worked as the Headmistress of Pine Forge Academy, serving as the CEO of the historically Black boarding school. Pine Forge Academy is one of only three remaining historically Black boarding schools and has a rich cultural history and an extensive network of thriving alums and advocates. Nicole still wears her honorary PFA sweater proudly.

Before joining the PFA community, Nicole founded a charter high school in Trenton, New Jersey, where 100% of the graduating classes earned acceptance to two and four-year colleges. She often credits her experiences as a high school History teacher in Brooklyn, New York, as the basis of her leadership success. Nicole was a New York City Teaching Fellow at Frederick Douglass Academy VII in Brooklyn, New York. While at FDA VII, she learned the power culture and community has to galvanize an effective school strategy. Nicole earned two congressional citations for excellence in teaching while working in Brooklyn, New York.

While Nicole is an avid reader, her favorite subject of discussion is her family. She is married to Casey. Together they have three children and an Akron-based Christian ministry.

Abstract

Competencies of a Collective School Leader: A Teach Plus Case Study

This study explores current and former teacher-leaders' understanding of collective school leadership and their subsequent determination of the competencies a collective school leader should possess. Throughout contemporary research, collective leadership is defined as the concerted efforts of a group of people who come together toward a common goal. Collective School Leaders are school administrators who effectively harness the collective power of stakeholders, especially teachers, to build and sustain multifaceted leadership that drives student outcomes.

As the National Director of School Leadership, I convened a Teach Plus working group (current and former teacher leaders) to share their perceptions of collective school leadership and co-create collective school leadership competencies. The following research questions guided this study: 1) What adaptive and technical skills does the Teach Plus working group believe school leaders need to cultivate and sustain teacher leadership? 2) How does the Teach Plus working group understand the concept of collective school leadership? This study employed a qualitative, action-based approach to collect data throughout all working group sessions. Interviews were also conducted to explore participants' perspectives on collective leadership and the competencies selected by the working group. Sixteen educators in various roles participated in this study, representing all of the major regional areas of the national organization.

This study attempted to reverse the traditional framing of leadership as “top-down” by implementing a “bottom-up” approach to identifying the competencies of collective school leaders. Participants selected five competencies: personal awareness, collaborative vision-setting, distributed leadership, systems innovation, and equity advocacy. Participants in this Teach Plus case study advocate that school leaders who exhibit the five competencies of collective school leadership are poised to promote and expand teacher leadership.