SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS’ USE OF THE NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM
TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS LIVING IN POVERTY

BY

ALICIA M. GEDDIS

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Christopher Span, Chair
Professor Carolyn Shields, Director of Research, Wayne State University
Professor Violet Harris
Clinical Assistant Professor Linda Sloat
ABSTRACT

According to a 2007 U.S. Census report, 43% of children in America younger than six are classified as low income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). The USDA (2008a, 2009a) indicated 17.1% of school-aged children are classified as overweight; an additional 15% are at risk of becoming overweight; and approximately 17.2 million children are living in food-insecure households. Nationwide, poverty, obesity, and food insecurity are harsh realities for school-aged children. The state of Illinois is not exempt from these problems.

With poverty, obesity, and food insecurity challenging the daily lives of children, schools should be empowered to meet some of these challenges. The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to investigate how elementary school district administrators in south suburban Chicago school districts implement the National School Lunch Program and examine how they maximize the nutrition provided to children who live with poverty. This research sought to describe the lived experiences of the administrators who are given charge over the National School Lunch Program and develop meaning from these experiences.

Consistent with research, this study found that school administrators who work in high poverty schools tend to prefer such settings, and conveyed a sense of purpose in their work. This study found that while they minimized their efforts, these school administrators were shining examples of transformative leaders who were taking steps to address the issues of food insecurity and obesity for children.

Researchers estimate that it costs about one to three times as much to educate students from disadvantaged communities compared to more advantaged communities (Wall, 2006). It appears that the same is true for feeding children in disadvantaged communities. This study
revealed that the overall food service expenses for these high poverty districts greatly exceeded the expenditures made in districts serving Illinois’ most affluent districts.

The School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study III (USDA, 2007) indicated that over two-thirds of the public school lunches did not meet the USDA requirements for total fat or saturated fats. As the meals analyzed in this study consistently failed to meet the calorie and other nutrient benchmarks, it is evident that we must educate and provide solutions for those most responsible for the school menu.

As the administrators in this study expressed their hopes and desires to serve their students more nutritious meals, I believe these transformative leaders have stumbled upon a solution that can address issues of obesity, food insecurity, and some of the economic conditions for the communities in which they serve.
DEDICATION

In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy path Proverbs 3:6

I truly thank the Creator for His vision, favor, guidance, and love. Because of Him, I am. Thank you for allowing me to serve You.

To my mother—as a little girl, you stood in the cotton fields of Arkansas and looked up at a plane. You became determined to discover where they were going and you made it all the way to New York. You believed that education was the ticket to a better life, so you worked hard and pushed me to achieve. When most of the people we knew believed it was an accomplishment to make it through the 12th grade, you told me I could stop only after I finished the 24th grade. I didn’t really understand it then, but I did know that college was not an option, it was a requirement. Yes, I have now come to learn that the 24th grade is called a doctoral degree. Thank you for your vision. If every little girl could have a piece of who you are, I know that the world would be a better place.

To Brandon and Giovanni, through you God truly broadened my purpose and showed me a love that has surpassed my understanding. Thank for your patience, love, and forgiveness. I am grateful for the opportunity to be your mother. The 24th grade is waiting for you. To Isiah, I pray that you will one day show the world the greatness in you. I hope each of you will remember the words of Marianne Williamson: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world.”
To my former superintendent, James Cunneen, who pushed me to start this program, my Board President Darlene Gray Everette, and my entire District 149 family, thank you for your support, love, and commitment. I can only hope that my service will stand as a token of how much I love and appreciate you.

To my teachers: Mrs. Mozelle Stevens, my 5th grade teacher. You spanked my butt, and dared me to show the world who I really was at that time. Thank you for giving me a bigger picture of myself. Mrs. Mulvani, you used my competitive spirit and pushed me to be a better student. Senorita Selano you showed me that learning can and should be fun. Dr. Shields, we had a very rough start, but it pushed me to be better. You would not accept mediocrity or excuses. You required that all of us in the Oakbrook Cohort “man up “and here we are today. Thank you for the journey and the exposure! Dr. Aretha Faye Marbley, my mentor and my aunt, thank you for ensuring that I was better prepared to meet the challenges of “academia.” Your gift for transforming rhetoric into practical terms is a phenomenon in its own right. With all of your educational accolades, you have set the bar very high for our entire family. Thanks for being you! To my dissertation committee, thank you for your patience, encouragement and guidance. To all of these great educators, I thank you and love you. Please know that your work was not in vain.

To all of my friends and family (especially Beth and the women of Post Ave.) most people are blessed to have one great friend, I am so fortunate that God has blessed me with each of you! Finally to my church family at the Greater House of Prayer Church: Thank you for the words of encouragement, your prayers, and for pushing me up from the back pew!

I am so blessed that I have ALL of you in my life. It truly takes a village to raise a child. This is our accomplishment!!! In the words of my friend, Mike Rob “When the dream in your
heart, is bigger than the environment you are in- enlarge your territory! Live your purpose! Be blessed!”
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

Among school-aged children, 17.1% are classified as overweight with an additional 15% at risk of becoming overweight (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2008a). With obesity having an effect on the health of Americans—including diabetes and hypertension—it is a serious problem which should be prevented early in life. According to the 2010 report by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, “diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States and accounts for 11% of all US healthcare costs” (2011, p. 15). Researchers have also indicated that 20% of cancer in women and 15% of cancer in men is attributable to obesity, and children who are obese are more than twice as likely to die before age 55, than those whose body mass index (BMI) is within a healthy range.

The research of Marin and Ferris (2007) used BMI as a measure of obesity and found based on this measure, that food insecurity is a risk factor for obesity. Further, the Food Research and Action Center stated:

While all segments of the population are affected, low income and food insecure people are especially vulnerable to obesity due to the additional risk factors associated with poverty, including limited resources, limited access to healthy and affordable foods, and limited opportunities for physical activity. (2010a, p. 1)

Yet there is no consistent evidence that proves that there is a relationship between food insecurity and obesity. Nonetheless, these are two serious nutrition challenges facing school-aged children from families with lower incomes.
In general, the American diet is plagued with large portion sizes, more calories, too few fruits and vegetables, whole grains, too much fat, sugar, and too many sodas. Researchers have indicated that convenience and availability promotes the consumption of fast foods and present barriers to fruit and vegetable consumption (Lucan, Barg, & Long, 2010).

This American reality is also a reality in schools. Today, the diets of school aged children are “characterized by low intakes of vegetables and fruit, very low intakes of whole grains, and high intakes of sodium, saturated fats, solid fats, alcoholic beverages, and added sugars (SoFAAS)” (USDA, 2008a, p. 1). To compound this problem, the USDA (2008a) stated that “on average, school-aged children obtain 39% of their total daily energy intake from SoFAAS—a level well above the discretionary calorie allowances included in the MyPyramid food intake patterns” (p. xi). It would seem that providing students with opportunities to consume fruits and vegetables at school is critical and educators can lead this charge. In fact, it may be possible for school administrators to use the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to do this.

**Food Insecurity**

In addition to the alarming obesity challenges for school-aged children, there are some equally alarming statistics for children facing food insecurity. Food- insecurity is defined as “a condition where the food intake of one or more household members is reduced and their eating patterns are disrupted at times during the year because of a lack of money and other resources for food” (USDA, 2009a, p. 2).

According to the USDA (2010), there were 50.2 million people including 17.2 million children who lived in food- insecure households in America. In Illinois, the reality of food insecurity is also evident. The Hunger in America (2010) study indicated that 45.6% of clients
serviced by charitable feeding agencies in Illinois were households with children under 18. This is a great concern for schools because according to Duniform and Kowaleski-Jones (2003), food insecurity is associated with behavioral and health outcomes for children.

**The Role of Schools**

It is the position of the American Dietetic Association, Society for Nutrition Education, and the American School Food Service Association (2003) that schools can play a critical role in reversing trends in childhood obesity and food insecurity. Because America’s children spend more than six hours a day and approximately 186 days per year in school, it would make sense to use schools to help address some of these concerns. This makes it imperative that those responsible for implementing the NSLP maximize the nutritional opportunities for children living with poverty.

For example, Illinois schools—like schools in other states—have access to several child nutrition programs including the NSLP, the School Breakfast Program, NSLP-After-School Care Program, Special Milk Program, Illinois Free Lunch and Breakfast Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, and the Food Distribution Program (Illinois State Board of Education, 2009). However, the reality is with all of these programs available as resources, school-aged children in the United States still suffer from food insecurity and obesity.

**Research Problem**

According to the 2007 U.S. Census report, 46% of children in America younger than six are classified as low income (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2010). The USDA (2008a, 2009a) indicated 17.1% of school aged children are classified as overweight, an additional 15% are at risk of becoming overweight, and approximately 17.2 million children are
living in food-insecure households. Nationwide, poverty, obesity, and food insecurity are harsh realities for school aged children.

The state of Illinois is not exempt from these problems. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2010), 40% of children in Illinois live in low-income homes. In 2010, Food Research and Action Center (2011) determined that in families with low incomes, 29.9% of Illinois’ children aged 2 to 5 and 34.9% of children aged 10 to 17 are overweight or obese. In 2010, there were 1.4 million Illinois residents who received emergency food from the Feeding Illinois food banks and 42% of those served were children under 18 years old (Feeding Illinois, 2010).

With poverty, obesity, and food insecurity challenging the daily lives of children, schools should be empowered to meet some of these challenges. It is the position of the American Dietetic Association, Society for Nutrition Education, and the American School Food Service Association (2003) that schools can play a critical role in reversing trends in childhood obesity and food insecurity. The USDA stated that “The NSLP and SBP can play a prominent role in obesity prevention—particularly for low-income students who receive free and reduced-priced meals—as these meals can constitute a substantial portion of a student’s daily intake” (USDA, 2007, p. 10). The Food and Nutrition Service (USDA, 2005) indicated that the NSLP is one of four major food assistance programs that can make a difference in the lives of families with lower incomes. Because of this, it is imperative that those responsible for implementing the NSLP maximize the nutritional opportunities for children living in poverty.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to investigate how elementary school district administrators in south suburban Chicago school districts implemented the NSLP and to
determine whether the nutrition provided to children who live with poverty was maximized. According to Moustakas, “the first challenge of the researcher, in preparing to conduct a phenomenological investigation, is to arrive at a topic and question that have both social meaning and personal significance” (1994, p. 104). Because of my own involvement with daily administrative duties for the NSLP, my curiosity about the inner workings of the program in other districts was heightened. As a public school administrator and researcher, I am always looking for ways to improve the program for my students. This research sought to describe the lived experiences of the administrators who were given charge over the NSLP and to develop meaning from these experiences.

**Research Questions**

Five major questions guided this research:

1. How do school/district leaders describe their role related to the NSLP?
   a. Are they concerned about the nutrition content of the meals?
   b. Are they concerned about the material realities of their student as they relate to poverty and obesity?
2. Do particular knowledge, experiences, and/ or influences lead them to think about the potential of the NSLP as a vehicle for transformation or social justice?
3. How do school leaders attempt to encourage greater participation in nutritional eating?
4. Do the meals offered in elementary high poverty school districts meet the NSLP guidelines?
5. What are the revenues and expenses for the food service program in these high poverty, elementary school districts?
a. How do they compare to school districts in Illinois’ most affluent neighborhoods?

I believed these questions would enable me to explore the phenomenon of implementing the NSLP in Chicago’s south suburban school districts in a way that would address the needs of students who may be faced with the challenges of food insecurity and or obesity.

**Background of the National School Lunch Program**

The NSLP was created as a result of the National School Lunch Act. This financial initiative was created to promote the nutritional health of America’s children. In 1966 Congress determined the ultimate purpose of the NSLP was to provide nourishment to the neediest public school children in America. According to Gunderson (2009), the program later expanded its scope to include all schools that voluntarily complied with its regulations. In addition to reimbursements, schools receive various commodities, which can range from meats, frozen or canned vegetables and fruits, to legumes and grains from surplus agricultural stocks. These items are then used to prepare school meals (USDA, 2009a).

During the USDA’s 2009 fiscal year, more than 31.3 million school children ate their lunch from this program (USDA, 2011a). As a part of the NSLP, households are eligible for free meals and milk, as well as reduced price meals for their children based on federal income poverty eligibility guidelines. School food authorities (SFAs) are defined as “the governing body which is responsible for the administration of one or more schools and which has the legal authority to operate the school meals programs in those schools” (USDA, 2008b, p. 2). SFAs are given cash reimbursements for each free or reduced price meal served. With the large number of school children served, the NSLP has grown to become a $9.8 billion program operating in over 90% of American public schools (USDA, 2011a).
NSLP Demographics for Participants

According to the 2007 School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study III (SNDA-III) conducted by the USDA, NSLP participants were more likely than non-participants to be Hispanic or African American males in grades 1 through 6, who were living with one adult. During the 2004-2005 school year, the Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project’s participant families were more likely than non-participants to suffer from food insecurity and they were more likely to be Hispanic or African American (USDA, 2007). In Illinois, clients of charitable feeding agencies were more likely to be African American males. The characteristics of these participants were very similar to those students participating in the NSLP. With such similarities between those who faced with the threat of food insecurity and those participating in the NSLP, it seemed reasonable to expect that the NSLP could be used to address the needs of those faced with the challenges of food insecurity.

Guidelines

The USDA has nutritional guidelines that inform the NSLP. These guidelines include the prohibition of certain foods, a mandate for the use of recipe worksheets to formulate menus, regulations for food purchasing, and serving sizes. They also require special child nutrition labels. Unfortunately, in 2007, many NSLP meals served were not consistent with the standards for fat and saturated fat. In addition, NSLP participants had significantly higher daily intakes of calories (United States Department of Agriculture, 2007) than required (USDA, 2007).

To address this concern, Section 204 of Public Law 108-265 required local education agencies, as a part of the 2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, to establish a local school wellness policy by the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year. At minimum, these policies were required to address goals for nutrition education, establish nutritional guidelines for
all foods available on each school campus, establish a plan for measuring implementation and involve the entire learning community in the process (Public Law 108-265, 2004).

**NSLP Implementation**

The actual implementation of the NSLP happens on the local level. In Illinois schools, administrators help determine whether a district will have healthy and nutritious food options as a part of their program. Although many choose to contract their food service program to a third party vendor, the ultimate responsibility for the school food program resides with the school district’s administration. Since administrators ultimately implement the program, they must assume some responsibility for meeting the additional needs of children in poverty, those who suffer from food insecurity, and those impacted by obesity.

Encouraging students to participate in the NSLP and offering healthy food options are just some of the ways administrators can meet this need. Unfortunately, the easiest way for school districts to increase participation is to serve foods that students prefer and the research suggests students prefer foods and snacks that are not characterized as healthy (Snelling, Korba, & Burkey, 2007). This may explain why some school lunch menus are plagued with pizza, nachos, and chicken nuggets—food with high intakes of sodium, saturated fats, solid fats, and added sugars.

An unanticipated and unforeseen obstacle to the ultimate purpose of NSLP-promoting the nutritional health and providing nourishment to the neediest American public school children becomes evident when districts rely upon their food service program for operating revenue. The need for revenue can make it difficult to place as a priority the need to maximize students’ exposure to nutritious food options.
Methodological Overview

This qualitative study was designed from a phenomenological theoretical orientation. Phenomenology was first developed by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl. Husserl (1969) believed that “phenomenology is the ‘science of science’ since it alone investigates that which all other sciences simply take for granted (or ignore): the very essence of their own objects” (p. 23).

This theoretical perspective of phenomenology was chosen primarily because I wanted to understand how school administrators can fulfill the initial mandate of the NSLP, which is to provide nourishment to the neediest American public school children, and as a result help fight obesity and food insecurity in school-aged children.

Specifically, from a phenomenological perspective, I was interested in the culture in schools that seems to have created the phenomenon of feeling so trapped that administrators may provide unhealthy food choices to children who are living in poverty. Further, I was interested in (a) how school administrators keep the integrity of the NSLP, (b) increase participation in NSLP, and (c) simultaneously entice students to purchase and eat the healthy food.

Thus, a qualitative approach allowed me to not only explore the culture of food nutrition in schools, but to also explore the essence of the relationship those who implement the NSLP have with the program. Moustakas (1994) stated that “in phenomenological research, the question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. The researcher’s excitement and curiosity inspire the research” (p. 104). Moustakas’ statement accurately described my curiosity about the NSLP and its potential positive effects on combating obesity and food insecurity in school-aged children. This approach also afforded me the opportunity to
share my personal experience as well as my passion for working with school-age children through the NSLP.

**Perspective of the Researcher**

I am currently a 12-year central office school administrator in a Chicago south suburban elementary school district. My responsibilities include managing the school district’s finances, benefits, transportation, facilities, technology, food service programs, and specifically the implementation of the National School Lunch Program. The school district’s food service program is supported by a food service management company and the food service manager has worked with me for 11 years.

Our district has eliminated fried foods, and provided additional fruits and vegetables to each of our middle school students at no cost to them. We are fortunate to have two full service kitchens and three additional satellite kitchens in our schools. The Board of Education in my school district has been very supportive of my intense desire to use our NSLP to address the realities of food insecurity and obesity for our children. They have given me the opportunity to expand my knowledge of the program’s intricacies and granted me the latitude to provide the best possible program for our students. Unlike many administrators, I have a great deal of flexibility.

Qualitative research stresses the importance of making clear the personal perceptions of the researcher and his or her possible biases should be taken into consideration throughout the course of this study (Creswell, 2009). According to Moustakas (1994), this research should begin with an unbiased receptive presence, and Creswell (2009) suggested this may not be perfectly achieved. In agreement with Creswell, I purposely embraced Duarte’s (2000) definition of co-intentionality. Given my in-depth and daily workings with the NSLP, I believe
the need for pure consciousness and essence of intentionality in Husserl’s (1969) interpretation of phenomenology, was unattainable for me. Using both Husserl (1969) and Freire’s (1997) discourses, Duarte (2000) suggested that conscientizacion, the collective consciousness that emerges as a result of the dialogue, better described that which actually results.

**Definition of Terms**

This study encompasses several federal and state programs with acronyms and terms that are common to the school community and to those who work with children living in poverty. The following list is offered to establish clarity on the terms used within the proposal (Creswell, 2009).

1. *Body mass index* (BMI) is a reliable indicator of fatness calculated from a person's weight and height (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011).

2. *At risk for overweight* is a phrase describing BMI for age at or above the sex specific 85th percentile but less than the 95th percentile” (Ogden, Carroll, Curtin, McDowell, & Flegal, 2010).

3. *Overweight* is the term describing a BMI for age at or above the sex-specific 95th percentile (Ogden, Carroll, Curtin, McDowell, & Flegal, 2006).

4. *Obesity* is the term used for adults with a BMI of 30.0 or higher (USDA, 2008a).

5. *Food insecurity* is a condition where the food intake of one or more household members is reduced and their eating patterns are disrupted at times during the year because of a lack of money and other resources for food (USDA, 2009a).

6. *Local educational agency* or the *public board of education* are terms used when the USDA discusses application, certification, and verification activities.

7. *SoFAAS* stands for sodium, solid fats, alcoholic beverages, and added sugars
8. *FMNV* (foods of minimal nutritional value) includes “soda water, water ices, chewing gum, and certain candies (hard candy, jellies and gums, marshmallow candies, fondant, licorice, spun candy, and candy coated popcorn)” (Illinois State Board of Education, 2009, p. 4).

9. *SNDA* (School Nutrition Dietary Assessment study) provided “information on the school meal programs, the school environments that affect the food programs, the nutrient content of school meals and the contributions of school meals to children’s diets” (USDA, 2007, p. 1).

10. *SMI* (School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children) began in 1993 and is a collective of reforms originally aimed at the nutritional content of school meals and extended to operational issues.

11. *Competitive food* is the term used to describe “any food or beverage sold during the meal period other than the reimbursable meal including a la carte items” (Illinois State Board of Education, 2009, p. 12).

12. *Phenomenological research method* describes a research method that “aims for rich, fresh, complex descriptions of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (Finlay, 2009, p 6).

**Study Limitations and Delimitations**

There are characteristics of this qualitative inquiry that will limit the scope of the study and others that will limit the application or interpretation of the results. In this section, I discuss the limitations and delimitations of my study.
**Limitations**

This study is limited by the demographical composition of the students, schools, and the school administrators reported in the proposed research. The researcher had limited control of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status of the students in each school district and the sample may not be representative of all participants in the NSLP. Therefore, generalizations from the findings needed to be made with caution. Also, due to the nature of the school calendar, there were times during the school year when collecting data was not optimal.

All selected districts in Chicago’s southwest suburban area that have 80% or more of their students qualifying for free and reduced lunch were invited to participate. Districts that ultimately chose to participate in the study were chosen selectively and not randomly; thus the study is not reflective of a randomly selected population.

This study examined menus for several school districts. Unfortunately, I did not have the specific recipes and ingredients from menu items. Therefore, general recipes were used and analyzed for nutritional content. In addition, I did not analyze the menus of the comparison affluent districts. Their menus were used to determine the type of meal service program offered; they were not used to determine if these comparison districts menus met the nutritional guidelines.

Another limitation emerged as eligible school administrators agreed to participate in the study. Of the districts eligible to participate, it was discovered that the majority used the same vended service provider.

Lastly, this study did not include the perspective of students who attend the selected school districts. Their lived experience with poverty, obesity, food insecurity, and the NSLP could generate a more complete picture of how the NSLP is experienced in the sample schools.
Delimitations

This study was limited by geography and time. These two areas were beyond the researcher’s control. For example, due to time constraints and resources, she did not travel beyond the south suburbs of Chicago to conduct the study. This inherently limited the boundaries of this qualitative inquiry.

Another delimitation of this study that limited its scope included the focus on administrators only in elementary school districts. This study focused on the lived experiences and perspectives of this population.

There is an abundance of research that examined outcomes of the NSLP in terms of the nutritional value for school aged children. There is also research on obesity and food insecurity and its prevalence in school aged children. However, there was no consistent research that linked obesity in school aged children, food insecurity, and participation in food and nutrition assistance programs together (USDA, 2007). This qualitative study did not make an attempt to bridge this gap. This study sought to describe the lived experience of Chicago’s south suburban school district administrators, and the practices or beliefs in schools districts that may have created a phenomenon of feeling so trapped that they may provide unhealthy food choices to children who are living in poverty.

Significance of the Study

The NSLP has received a great attention with the advent of the 2004 HealthierUS School Challenge. This initiative combined with First Lady Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move! campaign has propelled the NSLP to unprecedented prominence. This research was an attempt to uncover strategies that elementary school administrators in selected southern suburbs of Chicago used
with the NSLP to (a) provide health and nutritious food for school age children, and (b) to aid in combating obesity and food insecurity.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to investigate how selected administrators in Chicago’s south suburban elementary school districts implemented the NSLP and examine how they maximized the nutrition provided to children who live with poverty. According to the USDA (2004), participation in the NSLP is a function of poverty. Because of this, I felt it necessary to begin this review of the literature with a definition of poverty and a section that I hope would inspire administrators.

As a means to understand how they can use the NSLP to positively impact the lives of children, I believed it was important to continue this literature review with an examination of the historical need to feed children living in poverty. This material provides critical insight into the conditions that helped to create the NSLP. This section continues with a detailed overview of the policies and practices required to implement the NSLP in schools.

Using transformative leadership theoretical lens, I examine research on food insecurity, and obesity. I continue with research that looks at how these realities may be interrelated. Because I am a school administrator with the responsibility of implementing the NSLP, my familiarity with the subject compelled me to include research on school administrators and the issues of school funding. In the last section of this review of the literature, I present research on transformative leadership in schools.

Thus, the literature selected was impacted by and is inseparable from socio-historical, economic, and political factors, as well as environmental oppressors related to children living in poverty, the school systems that educate them, and those responsible for addressing student educational and nutritional needs at school.
Poverty

The National Center for Children in Poverty defined the 2008 federal poverty level as a household income of $21,200 for a family of four, $17,600 for a family of three, and $14,000 for a family of two (Hall, 2008). This same research also suggested that families need at least twice these amounts to meet their basic needs. The National Center for Children in Poverty indicated income levels for families classified as low income as $42,400 for a family of four, $35,200 for a family of three, and $28,000 for a family of two.

Since 2000 the number of students living in poverty has continued to increase (Hall, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). In 2007, 43% of children younger than 6 years of age were classified as low income. Today single parents are not the only parents facing tough economic times; two parent families are also struggling. They represent 46% of the homes of children in living in poverty (Hall, 2008). There are many assumptions and stereotypes that suggest most of our impoverished children’s parents are uneducated and that poverty is a function of urban living. The reality is nationally, only 25% of the low income families have parents with less than a high school education and there are 9.7 million impoverished children living in urban areas, 5.2 million in rural areas and 9.8 million in suburban areas (Hall, 2008). These facts are quite contrary to the things many have come to believe about our children (Hall, 2008).

There have been many studies on the effects of childhood poverty including the research conducted by the Center for American Progress. Their research suggests that childhood poverty cost Americans $500 billion dollars per year (Holzer, 2007). Holzer (2007) also indicated that future income earnings, crime, and health conditions are directly affected by childhood poverty. Russell, Harris, and Gockel (2008) suggest, “Poverty is the common thread uniting families
identified by child protection services as being at high risk for neglect and abuse” (p. 83). These statistics reflect the horrible realities many of our children face on a daily basis.

Our children come to school with the burdens of poverty and they are not able to dismiss these realities when they enter the school door. As administrators, we must be sensitive enough to recognize our call to action. We must remember that, “The struggle over public schools cannot be separated from the social problems currently facing this society” (Giroux, 2002, p. 142).

**The Moral Need to Respond to Poverty**

Shields and Furman (2005) suggests that we should respect the worth and dignity of our students, teach them how to participate in open inquiry, and how to critique their situations. While charging us all to act deliberately on behalf of our children, Shields and Furman (2005) stated “social justice is a deliberate intervention that challenges fundamental inequities that arise in large part due to the inappropriate use of power by one group over another” (p. 123). If, as administrators, we are to become an effective force in our students’ lives, it becomes our responsibility to begin to act purposely and deliberately on behalf of our children.

It is my belief that our schools administrators must engage in the process of critical awareness, reflection, analysis, and action (Shields, 2009). We must become more sensitive to the challenges our students face and prepare them with the tools to become successful. To ignore the challenges and their realities would make us guilty of “marginalizing and engaging in practices that pathologize the lived experiences of our students” (Shields & Furman, 2005, p. 123).
The Historical Need to Feed Children Living in Poverty

The need to address the needs of school children living in poverty can be traced back to 1790, when American-born Count Rumford began a combined program of teaching and feeding poor children in Germany through his Poor People’s Institute. In 1900, Holland became the first country to have official legislation that spoke to the need to feed school children, and Paris followed their example in 1903 by establishing The Society for People’s Kitchens in public schools. Shortly thereafter, England joined the effort by passing legislation as early as 1905. (Gunderson, 2009a)

In America, the call to feed the children from lower income homes has a long history. For 220 of America’s 234 years of existence, feeding children has been a part of the educational process. In 1853, the Children’s Aid Society of New York and the Women’s School Alliance of Wisconsin provided lunches to students from economically challenged communities, but it was the writings of Hunter in 1904 and Spargo in 1906, that propelled their efforts to receive national attention. Hunter’s book Poverty boldly challenged the principles of compulsory attendance and urged the government to become more involved. He stated:

It is utter folly, from the point of view of learning, to have a compulsory school law which compels children, in that weak physical and mental state which results from poverty, to drag themselves to school and to sit at their desks day in and day out, for several years, learning little or nothing. If it is a matter of principle in democratic American that every child shall be given a certain amount of instruction, let us render it possible for them to receive it, as monarchial countries have done, by making full and adequate provision for the physical needs of the children who come from the homes of poverty. (1904, p. 217)
In *The Bitter Cry of the Children*, Spargo stated the following:

The past fifty or sixty years have been attended with a wonderful development of the science of education…We have created a vast network of means, there is no lack of equipment, but we have largely neglected the human and most important factor, the child. The futility of expecting efficient education when the teacher is handicapped by poor and inadequate means is generally recognized, but not so as yet the futility of expecting it when the teacher has poor material to work upon in the form of chronically underfed children, too weak in mind and body to do the work required of them. (1906, p. 59)

Together these writers outlined the realities of children for whom poverty and empty stomachs provided serious barriers to success in school. The message was clear; a partnership was needed between cities and schools, and there was demand to increase efforts toward feeding the children who suffered from the effects of poverty.

In 1908, the superintendent of New York Schools appealed to the board of education to give the schools the means to feed students. Los Angeles also increased its food service to students living in poverty. In other cities, parent teacher associations, school administrators, and boards of education began to implement food service programs as the concern over hunger and children grew. However, it was the Chicago Board of Education in 1921 that was cited as having the “most intensive school lunch system in America” (Gunderson, 2009a, p 10). Chicago’s Board of Education was absorbing the full responsibility of a program in all of their high schools and 60 elementary schools.

**The Federal Government Commits to Feeding Children in School**

With the help of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, the federal government began to support local and state efforts as early as 1932. Unfortunately for schools, this financial
support was sporadic and had diverse year-to-year appropriations. Because of the depression in 1936, the federal government began using agricultural food surpluses to provide support to schools through its commodities program. When World War II began placing great demands on these surpluses, school lunch programs received substantially lower amounts of commodities. Without this continued federal support, there were one million less children receiving food service through schools (Gunderson, 2009a). Soon the federal government realized just how many schools were depending on this assistance and decided to recommit to this program. Today, the commodities program continues with much of its original form, function, and purpose (Gunderson, 2009a).

In 1946, the 70th Congress made federal support of feeding children living in poverty permanent with the National School Lunch Act. Section 2 of the Act stated:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress, as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities and other food, by assisting the States, through grants in aid and other means, in providing an adequate supply of food and other facilities for the establishment, maintenance, operation and expansion of nonprofit school lunch programs. (Congress, 1946, p. 2-2)

With this legislation, 7.1 million children were served by the end of the first year of the NSLP (USDA, 2009b). The original legislation supporting the program has undergone several amendments but the federal support remains.

In 2004, Public Law 108-265—otherwise known as the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004—began to serve as the revised guidance under which schools currently operate. Today, both the commodities program and the NSLP are sponsored by the
USDA, administered federally by the Food & Nutrition Services (FNS), administered on a state level by state agencies and locally through agreements by SFAs. During the 2004-2005 school year, the commodities program and the NSLP provided a combined $7 billion in support to schools (USDA, 2007).

The NSLP Today

In 2009, the NSLP operated in more than 101,000 public and non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions and provided reimbursements for meals that served 31 million children daily (USDA, 2009). According to the USDA, the program operates in the following manner:

The Federal government establishes overall program rules, as expressed in legislation and regulations. The States convey these requirements to their SFAs, serve as conduits for meal reimbursements, provide technical assistance, and monitor local schools and districts for compliance with established regulations. The individual SFAs have responsibility for determining student eligibility for free and reduced priced meals and for offering meals that meet nutrient standards to all children who participate. (USDA, 2007, p. 3)

Through the NSLP, schools can provide free lunches to children from families whose incomes are at or below 130% of the poverty level, and reduced price lunches of no more than $0.40 to those whose family income is between 130% and 185% of the poverty level. According to the USDA, for the period July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012, “130 percent of the poverty level was $29,055 for a family of four; 185 percent is $41,348” (USDA, 2009b, p. 1).

Today, both the commodities program and the NSLP are sponsored by the USDA, administered federally by the FNS, administered on a state level by state agencies, and locally...
through agreements by SFAs. In the state of Illinois, the Illinois State Board of Education is the administering agency. The Illinois State Board of Education created the Nutrition Programs Division as the administering division assigned to work with “schools, community organizations, child care centers, day care homes, and other sponsoring organizations to provide adequate nutritious meals, snacks, and/or milk for children” (Illinois State Board of Education, 2011, p. 3).

**School Food Authorities-Focusing on Illinois**

For the school administrator, requirements for participating in the NSLP extend far beyond providing a nutritious meal. According to the USDA, “The individual SFAs have the responsibility of determining student eligibility to receive free and reduced priced meals and for offering meals that meet nutrient standards to all children who participate in the program” (USDA, 2007, p. 3). Additional federal mandates enforced by the Illinois State Board of Education include the following requirements for administrators:

1. Operate a non-profit food service program
2. Meet nutritional requirements: Meals must meet the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* which include require that the lunch meal provide children with no more that 30% of calories from fat and less than 10% of the calories come from saturated fat.
3. Meet service requirements: The meal must be priced as a unit and served between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.
4. Meet menu planning requirements: Schools must use one of the four menu planning approaches (nutrient standard menu planning, assisted standard menu planning, traditional food-based menu planning, enhanced food-based meal planning). These are discussed in greater detail in the section outlining the makings of a reimbursable meal.
5. Meet meal pricing requirements
6. Prevent overt identification of, or discrimination against eligible students.

7. Provide service for all students without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

Additional administrative requirements for include:

1. Public announcements-to advise the public that the program is available. (The Illinois State Board of Education does this on behalf of all its SFAs)

2. Letters to households-SFAs must send letters to all their students’ households to let them know that the program is available

3. Maintain eligibility documents-Each student participating at the free or reduced price level must have documentation on file (This documentation includes a completed Household Eligibility Application, Direct Certification Report, or Direct Certification listing)

4. Eligibility documentation must be reviewed within 10 days of receipt and a determination must be made. Eligibility begins as of that date and continues for the rest of the school year unless the verification process determines that eligibility levels should change
   - Households must be notified within 10 days of receipt of the application eligibility determination
   - Schools carryover eligibility from the previous school year for 30 days into the new school year

5. Verification of eligibility-Verification is the confirmation of eligibility to receive free and reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. By November 15 each year, each local educational agency (LEA) must have selected a sample of applications approved for free or reduced-price meal benefits as of October 1,
and have verified those applications for meal benefit eligibility. By December 15 each year, the LEA must electronically submit the summary of verification results.

6. **Meal counting and claiming**—In order to receive reimbursements, SFAs must maintain documentation that demonstrate accurate counting, and recording.

For administrators, the requirements of the NSLP extend far beyond the development of the school meal. While these necessary rules and regulations are designed to translate into healthier lunches that meet federal requirements, and provide low cost or free, nutritionally balanced lunches to children during school, we must remember that this program, represents only one portion of the school administrator’s responsibilities.

**The Makings of a Reimbursable Meal**

Prior to 1995, the traditional NSLP meal had four components that consisted of milk, a meat or meat alternative, a grain produce or bread, and two servings of two different fruits or vegetables. Serving sizes were based on age and the goal was to meet 33% of the recommended daily allowance for energy (calories) and nutrients. One part of the new legislation came in the form of the School Meal Initiative for Healthy Children regulations that created nutrient standards that were consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines*. This final legislation provided flexibility with the menus options, which resulted in the five menu planning options that schools use today. They are:

1. **Traditional food based menu planning system**—Four component, five items with minimum serving sizes based on age and grade.

2. **Enhanced food based menu planning system**—Similar to the traditional system but requires more servings of grains and larger serving sizes of fruits and vegetables.
3. Nutrient standard menu planning-Allows schools to create their own menus based on a computerized nutrient analysis system but requires milk, an entrée, and at least one side dish.

4. Assisted nutrient standard menu planning-Schools can contract with outside sources to provide a nutrient standard based menu.

5. Other reasonable approaches- Schools can apply with their state to provide menus based on other reasonable approaches.

According to the USDA (2010), because of the growing epidemic of overweight and obese children, the seventh edition of the guidelines focused on reducing calories and increasing activity. Those guidelines included (a) one-third of the RDA of calories protein, vitamin A, vitamin c, calcium, and iron; (b) less than 30% of calories from total fat; and (c) less that 10% of total calories from saturated fat. The SFAs decide which meals are actually offered, but through these various menu planning options school lunches are expected to meet the guidelines.

**Reimbursements to Schools for Meals Provided**

All children enrolled in the school must be allowed to purchase a meal. Schools are reimbursed by their respective state agencies for meals provided through the NSLP. The National School Lunch Act provides two different payment levels for lunches served under the NSLP. These reimbursement levels differ based on the percentage of free and reduced priced meals served during the second preceding school year. For the state of Illinois, these levels are calculated by the Illinois State Board of Education and they notify SFAs how they will be reimbursed for the upcoming school year. Table 1 outlines the rates applicable during the 2011-2012 school year, when less than 60% of the lunches served as free or at a reduced price meals.
### Table 1

**2011-2012 Illinois State Board of Education NSLP Reimbursement Rates: Less than 60%**

**Payment Level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Lunch</th>
<th>SFA Reimbursement Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid Full Priced Lunches</td>
<td>SFAs receive $0.26 for each meal served</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced Price Lunches</td>
<td>SFAs receive $2.37 for each meal served</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Lunches</td>
<td>SFAs receive $2.77 for each meal served</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 outlines the applicable reimbursement levels when 60% or more of the lunches served during the second preceding school year were served free or at a reduced price:

### Table 2

**2011-2012 Illinois State Board of Education NSLP Reimbursement Rates: 60% or More**

**Payment Level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Lunch</th>
<th>SFA Reimbursement Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid Full Priced Lunches</td>
<td>SFAs receive $0.28 for each meal served</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced Price Lunches</td>
<td>SFAs receive $2.39 for each meal served</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Lunches</td>
<td>SFAs receive $2.79 for each meal served</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Monitoring Meals Served Through the NSLP

The USDA monitors the dietary quality of school meals provided through the NSLP. According to the USDA, this is “because the school meals system operates at a very decentralized level, with most meal production decisions made in individual school districts and often in individual schools” (USDA, 2007, p. 5). In an effort to examine the results of the monitoring efforts, and to examine how school meals affect students’ diets, the Food & Nutrition Service division of the USDA sponsored several studies. These studies are outlined below.

School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study I

The first study, the National Evaluation of the School Nutrition Programs I (NESP-I) was conducted in the 1980’s but it was the 1990’s School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study I (SNDA-I) that proved to have the most substantial impact on the NSLP. This study found that school lunch provided one-third of the recommended daily amount for most vitamins and minerals. It also determined that, “school lunches contained higher than recommended levels of saturated fat and sodium” (USDA, 2007, p. 6). With this information, the USDA determined that additional legislation was needed to help address this concern.

School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study II

The SNDA-II, conducted in 2001, determined that “schools had made some improvement in meeting nutritional goals, but that policy objectives had not been fully met“(USDA, 2007, p. 7). School meals still had greater than recommended percentages of calories from fat. These findings were confirmed by a 2003 study conducted by Gleason and Suitor (2003), Miller (2009) and the SNDA-III (2007). All of these studies have shown that schools are not offering meals that meet the nutritional guidelines outlined in the NSLP requirements.
School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study III

The SNDA-III (2007) was conducted over the 2004-2005 school year with a representative sample of all public SFAs that offered the NSLP. It was completed in 2007 during the midst of growing public concern about increased incidences of obesity in school aged children. According to the USDA, this study provided “national data on what schoolchildren eat on school days, and on the role of USDA-sponsored school meals and competitive foods sold in school” (USDA, 2007, p. 11). The results of the study yielded the following: (a) over 85% of schools lunches met the USDA requirement for protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron, (b) over two-thirds of the public school lunches did not meet the USDA requirements for total fat or saturated fats, (c) there were no schools that offered lunches that met the sodium benchmark, (d) almost all schools met the benchmark for fiber and cholesterol, (e) 6% to 7% of the schools offered lunches that met all of the SMI standards, and (f) competitive foods were widely available. With these results, it is evident that there is a need for school administrators to improve their NSLP to create more nutritional outcomes for their students who are more at risk of being affected by obesity and food insecurity.

Food Insecurity and School Aged Children in Illinois

In 2009, there were 50.2 million people, including 17.2 million children, who lived in food-insecure households in America (USDA, 2010). This means that “at times during the year these households were uncertain of having, or unable to acquire enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they had insufficient money or other resources for food” (USDA, 2009b, p. 2). Similarly, in 2010, 11.1% of Illinois’ households faced the challenges of food insecurity (Mathematica Policy Research Inc., 2010).
According to Feeding America, “a key cause of food insecurity is the lack of sufficient resources to cover the cost of food in addition to meeting other basic needs” (2011, p. 4). They also indicate that the need to understand the household characteristics for food insecurity is important for developing and planning nutritional programs nationwide. To meet this need, the USDA conducts an annual study to understand the experiences and behaviors that indicate food insecurity throughout the US. They suggest that the leading indicators and behaviors associated with food insecurity include, “the inability to afford balanced meals, cutting the size of meals because of too little money for food, or being hungry because of too little money for food” (USDA, 2011b).

Although nutritional programs exist, Feeding America (2011) found that there were “millions of food insecure children in American in households with incomes above the eligibility threshold for food assistance programs” (Feeding America, 2011, p.7). They also noted that areas in the US with higher unemployment rates, have higher rates of food insecurity, and the effects of poverty and unemployment have a greater effect on food insecurity amongst children. In other words, although reasons for food insecurity vary, the association with food insecurity and poverty is indisputable.

According to Feeding Illinois, an organization whose mission is to provide food for hungry people in Illinois, “Because hunger is a symptom of poverty, the demand for emergency and government nutrition programs has exploded” (Feeding Illinois, 2010, p. 1). They indicated that in 2010 there were 1.4 million Illinois residents who received emergency food from the Feeding Illinois food banks, and 42% of those served were children under 18 years old (Feeding Illinois, 2010).
Food insecurity effects how our children perform in schools. According to Murphy, Wehler, Pagano, Little, Klienman, and Jellinek (1998), intermittent experiences of food insufficiency and hunger are associated with poor behavioral and academic functioning in children who live in households with lower incomes. This was also evident in Duniform and Kowaleski-Jones’ (2003) research indicated that:

Food insecurity is associated with behavioral and health outcomes among children but not with cognitive outcomes . . . and food insecurity may instead represent a level of stress in a household that is translated most reliably into children’s behavioral adjustment. (p. 88)

Food-insecurity is a concern facing too many families and children throughout America, and its effects can be felt in our schools.

**Obesity in School Aged Children**

In 2008, 17.1% school aged children were classified as overweight with an additional 15% at risk of becoming overweight (United States Department of Agriculture, 2008a). In Illinois, these numbers are even higher for children living with poverty. In families with low incomes, 29.9% of children ages 2-5, and 34.9% of children ages 10-17 are overweight or obese (Food Research and Action Center, 2011).

For the purposes of this research I used BMI, as it was the index more frequently used to discuss the issue of obesity. According to the Food Research and Action Center (2010a), BMI “provides a reliable indicator of body fatness for most people, and it is used to screen for weight categories that may lead to health problems” (p. xxx).
In order to better understand the difference between overweight and obese, the Food Research and Action Center (2010a) has outlined the following classifications for children and adolescents:

- Healthy weight-BMI greater than or equal to 5th percentile to less than the 85th percentile
- Overweight-BMI greater than or equal to 85th percentile to less than the 95th percentile
- Obese-BMI greater than or equal to 95th percentile

Using these classifications and the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey data, Ogden, Carroll, Curtin, Lamb, and Flegal (2010) indicated that among children and adolescents ages 2 to 19, 11.9% were at or above the 97th percentile and classified as obese. These figures become even more disturbing when used in context of the research conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. According to them, children who are obese are more than twice as likely to die before age 55, than children whose BMI is in a healthy range (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2011). With these staggering statistics for children, there is a definite role that schools and school administrators can play to help our children. In fact, there is a role in turning around this epidemic of childhood obesity that we are obligated to play.

**Obesity and Food Nutrition Assistance Programs**

There is growing concern about federal food and nutrition assistance programs and obesity. The Economic Research Service division of the USDA indicated there are some critics who contend, “the Food Stamp Program (FSP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, all designed to reduce poor nutrition, may, ironically, encourage participants to overeat and gain weight” (Economic Research Service, 2007, p. iii). I believe this criticism may
be misguided by the reality that “many low income individuals are both overweight and participants in one or more nutrition assistance programs” (USDA, 2004, p. 7).

According to the research conducted by the Economic Research Service (2007), “our results cast doubt on the hypothesis that food and nutrition service programs are major contributors to obesity” (p. 27). The USDA’s research suggested that it is more likely that poverty is related to obesity, and program participation is related to poverty (USDA, 2004). This conclusion was supported by the research of Li and Hooker (2010). They suggested that the type of school a child attends (i.e. public or private school) is positively correlated to obesity, and it is not difficult to assume that students living in poverty are not largely represented in affluent private schools.

**Examining the National School Lunch Program Relationship to Obesity**

There are scholars who believe that school food programs are contributors to obesity in school-aged children. Millimet, Tchernis, and Husain (2008) suggested that the NSLP contributed to the problem of obesity in primary school children. Schanzenbach (2009) suggested that school lunches increase students’ weight and the chance that they will be classified as overweight when compared to students who bring their lunches. However, students who live in poverty are far less likely to bring lunches to school than their more advantaged peers.

The research conducted by the USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service Division (2005) indicated that there was no consistent research that could show a consistent relationship between participation in the NSLP and obesity. In reality, the harsh truth is that obesity is most probably a product of poverty and not a result of participation in a school food program.
NSLP and the Fight Against Obesity

According to O'Toole, Anderson, Miller, and Guthrie (2007), the American Dietetic Association, the Society for Nutrition Education and the American School Food Service Association, schools have a unique opportunity to encourage healthy eating and control the exposure and availability of certain foods (Briggs et al., 2003). The research that examined the role NSLP can play in this fight against obesity can be categorized into two major themes: Schools play a critical role in the fight against obesity, and competitive foods are a barrier to providing a healthy NSLP.

Schools Play a Critical Role

Because children spend a great deal of time attending and consume more than one-third of their caloric intake in school, they can provide “a systematic means to improving the health of America’s youth” (Briggs et al., 2003, p. 58). However, in order to change the way children eat, a great deal of education and retraining will be required and schools can lead the way. According to Lytle et al. (1997), children need education about food and nutrition. Students need to understand what it means to maintain a healthy weight and how to choose a diet low in fat, unsaturated fat, and cholesterol. This education also needed to help students understand serving sizes and interpreting food labels. Schools have the perfect opportunity to provide the comprehensive education that is needed. The USDA (2004) indicated that they could “use their built-in access to people at risk to provide the necessary tool to have a healthy lifestyle through eating nutritious food and being active” (p. 14).

Even if schools educate the children, they must change the way they administer the NSLP because the school environment is shaped by the food choices offered as a part of the NSLP and not the actual NSLP itself. This concept was supported by Miller (2009) and the SNDA-III
(USDA, 2007) which has shown that schools are not offering meals that meet the nutritional guidelines outlined in the NSLP requirements. The SNDA-III found that schools continue to prepare lunches that exceed the current standard for total fat and saturated fat and too many menu items are commercially prepared.

**Competitive Foods Play a Major Role**

The other major theme in the research suggests competitive foods played a major role in contributing to obesity in school aged children. Competitive foods are foods and beverages available as alternatives to the NSLP and compete with the program. These foods are sold as a la carte items, placed in vending machines, snack bars, school stores and are sold as a part of special events like fundraisers and sport events. The USDA has indicated that “these foods tend to be high in calories, fat and added sugars, and low in essential nutrients” (2004, p. 1). Many schools are selling items that are high in fat, salt, and sugar because they sell in high volumes, and this translates into revenue. Unfortunately, according to O'Toole et al. (2007) and Grainger, Senauer, and Runge (2007), too many of these foods compete with the NSLP, and contradict the goals of the USDA and the role that schools and school administrators are obligated to assume in turning around this epidemic of childhood obesity. As administrators, we should use our schools to help address childhood obesity, and as those responsible for implementing the NSLP, we should maximize the nutritional opportunities for children living in poverty.

Dantley (2003) made the argument that our administrative teams could serve as moral agents. He also indicated that we must give voice to the children who do not have much input in their overall school experience. Transformative leadership, with its focus on justice, democracy, and personal responsibility, could serve lens through which we—as school administrators—view
our role. Speaking from the foundation of my African American spirituality, I believe it our purpose and personal responsibility to ensure the best interests of students are served.

**The Relationship between Food Insecurity and Obesity**

Hunger and obesity can and do coexist (Food Research and Action Center, 2010d). The need to purchase foods that create the feeling of fullness for longer periods of time may result in purchasing foods that are high in calories or energy dense. In their research, the Food Research and Action Center (2010b) stated that “low-income and food insecure people are especially vulnerable [to obesity] due to the additional risk factors associated with poverty, including limited resources, limited access to healthy and affordable foods, and limited opportunities for physical activity” (p. 1).

Later, the Food Research and Action Center (2011) developed a more detailed report that examined the relationship between hunger and being overweight or obese. They found that the key factors facilitating the relationship were then extended to include: cycles of food deprivation to protect children from hunger and overeating when food does become available, high levels of stress due to the financial and emotional pressures, greater exposure to a disproportionate amount of marketing for obesity promoting products and limited access to quality health care (Food Research and Action Center, 2010b).

The pervasive question throughout the research surrounding hunger and obesity continues to examine whether or not there is a positive relationship or association between the two. It is safe to say that the research around this question has been inconsistent. According to Basiotis and Lino (2003), Townsend, Peerson, Bradley, Achterberg, and Murphy (2001), and Olson (1999), there is a positive relationship between food insecurity and overweight status in women.
The research of Lahteenkorca and Lahelma (2001) indicated that both thinness and obesity were associated with food insecurity, but only thinness was associated with hunger.

Conversely, the research of Rose and Bodor (2006) determined that once the NHANES data were controlled for race, ethnicity, and gender, there was no relationship between food insecurity and obesity. This seems to be consistent with Food Research and Action Center’s (2010c) statement that disparities in obesity rates exist based on race-ethnicity, gender, age, geographic region, and socioeconomic status. It is also consistent with the research of Gundersen (2009b). The research of Vieweg, Johnston, Lanier, Fernandez, and Pandurangi (2007) took this one step further and suggested that low SES was the important factor in childhood and adolescent obesity.

While the research may differ, according to Food Research and Action Center (2010c), rates of obesity and food insecurity are both at disturbingly high rates, indicating the one consistent fact is that “low income and food insecure people are especially vulnerable to obesity due to the additional risk factors associated with poverty, including limited resources, limited access to healthy and affordable foods, and limited opportunities for physical activity” (p. 1).

**School Administrators**

There has been a great deal of research examining teachers and their impact on students and student learning. Recently, attention has been directed toward school administrators and their impact on students and the learning environment. For the purposes of this literature review, the leadership focus is on those who possess the title of administrator, or those who are identified as the formal leaders outlined in the Leithwood and Riehl (2003) study.

In a report to the American Education Research Association entitled “What do we already know about successful school leadership?” Leithwood and Riehl (2003) developed five
research based conclusions: (a) leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effects of quality curriculum and teaching; (b) currently, administrators and teachers provide most of the leadership in schools, but other potential sources of leadership exist; (c) a core set of practices form the basics of successful leadership and is valuable in almost all educational contexts; (d) successful school leaders respond productively to challenges and opportunities created by today's accountability-oriented policy context; and (e) successful leaders respond productively to the opportunities and challenges of educating diverse groups of students.

With a more challenging and complex school environment, today’s school leaders are faced with a complicated challenge. Specifically, Leithwood and Riehl stated:

Educational leaders must guide their schools through the challenges posed by an increasingly complex environment. Curriculum standards, achievement benchmarks, programmatic requirements and other policy directives from many sources generate complicated and unpredictable requirements for schools. Principals must respond to increasing diversity in student characteristics, including cultural background and immigration status, income disparities, physical and mental disabilities and variation in learning capacities. They must manage new collaborations with other social agencies that serve children. Rapid developments in technologies for teaching and communication require adjustments in the internal workings of schools. These are just a few of the conditions that make schooling more challenging and leadership more essential. (2003, p. 2)

With all of these challenges, educational leaders and/or school administrators continue to be instrumental to the success of our children and our schools. According to Clark, Martorell, and Rockoff (2009), this leadership role becomes more crucial for those in high poverty schools;
White and Bowers (2011) posited the demands on these administrators are even greater. Unfortunately, with these greater demands, administrators have indicated that issues about legal matters and litigation take up the precious time that should be given to their students.

Superintendents and principals in a 2011 study indicated that leadership was the first and most essential step to improving the most troubled schools (Farkas, Johnson, Foleno, & Foley, 2001). Administrators can have positive effects on student absences (Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff, 2009), parent perceptions (Rice, 2010), and creating the culture of the school (Brewer, 1993). Brewer (1993) also indicated that effective school leaders were a necessity for highly effective schools. Therefore, if leadership and its effects on learning are second only to curriculum and good teaching, empowering school administrators could translate into real student success.

This is especially true for administrators in high poverty districts (Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff, 2009). In these districts, successful leaders respond productively to the opportunities and challenges of educating diverse groups of students. Diversity can take different forms, including diversity in student characteristics, cultural background, income, immigration status, physical and mental disabilities, and variations in learning abilities. To address these opportunities and challenges, successful school administrators recognize the importance of creating allies in and out of the school setting. Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) argued:

When administrators and school personnel make it their practice to persistently and personally communicate with families (e.g., through home visits, phone calls, and community meetings), they see these practices translate into student and family success and satisfaction in school. Leaders, who make facilitating connections between teachers
and families a constant and deliberate practice, enhance the collaborative resources necessary for improving student learning. (As cited in Scribner Paredes, Crow, Lopez, & Khaulia, 2011, p. 395)

According to White and Bowers (2011), more experienced principals produce higher student achievement gains and those who are able to have stability in their placement with their school placement are more effective. Researchers seem to suggest that if we could allow administrators the opportunity to grow with their schools, and we work to retain highly effective administrators, we could begin to see some of the changes needed in our schools.

**Illinois School Administrators**

With Chicago Public Schools the largest district in Illinois, they have served as a catalyst for the abundance of research on Illinois public schools. Similar to their nationwide counterparts, Illinois administrators are asked to juggle multiple roles including instructional leader, organizational manager, and internal and external relations expert, while managing day-to-day administrative and operational tasks. In Illinois public schools, more women and minorities are beginning to fill the demanding role of school administrator (White & Agarwal, 2011). This reality however, seems to be found more abundantly in Chicago Public Schools (White & Agarwal, 2011; Sullivan-Brown & White, 2010).

The role of administrators is professionally and personally demanding. According to Stoelinga, Hart, and Schalliol (2008), Chicago public school administrators work on average about 60 hours per week, and the job often requires great family and personal compromises (Farkas, Johnson, Foleno, & Foley, 2001; White, Brown, & Hunt, 2011). Yet, statistics indicate that Illinois public school administrators are overwhelmingly satisfied with their jobs and those
who work in high poverty and high minority schools tend to prefer such settings (White, Brown, Hunt, & Klostermann, 2011).

Schools can play a critical role in reversing the trends in childhood obesity and food insecurity (Briggs, Safaii, & Beall, 2003). It is imperative that those responsible for implementing the NSLP maximize the nutritional opportunities for children living in poverty. If leadership and its effects on learning are second only to curriculum and good teaching, and America’s children spend more than six hours a day and approximately 186 days per year in school, it would make sense to think that we could empower the school administrator to be successful and use schools to reverse the trends in childhood obesity and food insecurity.

**School Funding**

Funding America’s schools has been an issue that has evolved since *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education*. The focus often revolves around the funding differences between rich and poor districts caused by variations in property wealth. Verstegen and Driscoll (2008) stated that “to align resources with curriculum and performance standards, funding systems need to be reinvented for an information age and global economy. Current school finance systems are obsolete and antiquated; they have failed to achieve equity or to incorporate adequacy” (p. 332).

A study by Verstegen and Driscoll (2008) illustrated the disparities in resources that became evident across all types of school districts. The researcher’s findings specifically showed that there was a strong relationship between the quality of a child’s education and the amount of the local wealth in their school’s community. Researchers estimated that it costs about one to three times as much to educate students from disadvantaged communities as for more advantaged communities (Wall, 2006). Baker (2005) examined the relative costs of adequacy and determined that it can cost 35% to 100% more to educate children from
disadvantaged communities. Unfortunately, the disadvantaged students who need more money have less. Wall (2006) recommended that states consider making adjustments to their funding formulas so they more accurately provide for the costs of educating disadvantaged students.

**Illinois School Funding**

For the 892 school districts in Illinois, per pupil spending ranges from $5,000 to $18,000. According to the Chicago Urban League (2009), academic success is a function of the wealth of its community. On August 20, 2008, the Chicago Urban League and the Quad County Urban League filed a complaint against the Illinois State Board of Education. They cited disparities in funding between low and high property wealth districts. Specifically, they argued that the “State’s funding system has denied African American, Hispanic and other minority children a high quality education” (Epperson, 2009, p. 15). The Chicago Urban League suit (2009) highlighted several concerns regarding Illinois school funding. They indicated that the state of Illinois ranked 49 out of 50 in state contributions to school funding, ranked 49 out of 50 for their large per-pupil funding disparity between the lowest to highest poverty districts, and had lower property wealth areas paying much higher property tax rates than areas with higher property tax wealth.

On April 15, 2009, the Cook County Circuit Court decided that the Urban League had a valid claim and had met their burden to show that minority students have suffered injury from the discriminatory implementation of the Illinois school funding system (Chicago Urban League, 2009). The case continues to rise within the court system.

School funding in Illinois is a function of three factors: a district’s local wealth (property taxes), state revenue, and federal revenue. With a strong relationship between the quality of a child’s education and the amount of the local wealth in their school’s community, in fiscal year
2008 property taxes represented 56.5% of all local sources of revenue for Illinois’ public schools (Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, 2008). If we adopt Baker’s (2005) research then we understand that it can cost 35% to 100% more to educate children from disadvantaged communities. Unfortunately, the disadvantaged students who live in communities with less local wealth and need more money have less. This is setting a disturbing tone for funding efforts in Illinois.

**Illinois State Aid**

In 1997, the legislators established the Illinois Education Funding Advisory Board (EFAB) to make recommendations for establishing a rate that would represent the minimum amount of basic education funding to be made available to schools for each student. This amount for basic education funding is the referred to as the foundation level. In 2006, EFAB recommended that the state of Illinois needed $6,405 per student as the foundation level. They also recommended that if the proper allocation for students with disabilities and ELL students were to be included, then the foundation amount required increased to $7,473 per student.

Unfortunately, the level allocated by the state was far less. This left “at least 79% of pupils in Illinois with less funding than needed for an adequate education “(Verstegen & Driscoll, 2008, p. 345). The researchers posed this question for others to consider: “Does inadequate education funding for almost 79% of Illinois school children constitute a constitutional claim and judicially manageable standard” (Verstegen & Driscoll, 2008, p. 351)?

Once the foundation level is set for a school year, the Illinois State Board of Education separates school districts into the following three funding categories based on their wealth: (a) flat grant districts are districts with the greatest amount of local property wealth, (b) alternative formula districts have the second greatest amount of local property wealth, and (c) foundation
formula districts have the lowest amount of local property wealth (they can cover less than 93% of the foundation amount for that year). In Illinois, 77% of the students attending K-12 schools attend foundation formula districts. The remaining districts have so much local wealth they can cover the amount necessary for basic funding. In fact, these districts can cover 175% of the current Foundation Level (Epperson, 2009). Unfortunately, the students attending flat grant and alternative formula schools also perform better academically than the students attending the foundation formula schools (Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, 2008).

**Transformative Leadership**

The lens through which the researcher conducted this research was the call for transformative leadership. According to Weiner (2003), transformative leadership is an exercise of power and authority that begins with questions of justice, democracy, and the dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility (p. 89.). Specifically, I subscribe to the definition of transformative leadership as outlined by Shields (2010). According to Shields (2010), this type of leadership “starts with a recognition of some material realities of the broader social and political sphere recognizing that the inequities and struggles experienced in the wider society affect one’s ability to perform and succeed within an organizational context” (2010, p. 568). In 2001, Burber applied a similar concept of transformative leadership to schools. He stated:

For the genuine educator does not merely consider individual functions of a pupil as intending to teach him only to know or be capable of certain definite things; but his concern is always the person as a whole, both in the actuality in which he lives before you now and in his possibilities, what he can become. (Burber, 2001, p. 101)
Transformative leadership in schools seeks to transform the lived experiences of all students. With this leadership, administrators use their power and position to address the inequalities in their students’ lives. According to Shields, this leadership requires moral courage and leaders who “take risks for the good, not only of the whole community but often for those whose voices tend not to be heard and whose perspectives may not always be valued by mainstream society” (2008, p. xx).

Greenfield (1993) argued that morality is inherent in leadership and celebrated in transformative leadership. To this point, Dantley (2003) offered four reasons why administrators must be deliberately moral:

First, the school itself is a moral institution. School serves a moral socialization function in our society. Second, the status of children as minors means they have little to or no voice in determining the quality, quantity, and content of their school experiences. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the school administrator to facilitate a learning environment where the best interests of all children are served. Third, the principal himself is a moral agent. Greenfield characterizes the morality of the school administrator as being distinctly moral. . . . Fourth, because school leaders must focus upon the well-being of all those in their learning community, their moral behavior is evidenced in their sensitivity to those who are the “other,” those who are not a part of the dominant culture. (p. 5)

With this, I add transformative school leaders can use the NSLP to fight against the reality of food insecurity and childhood obesity in school aged children. Food insecurity and childhood obesity are conditions faced by those who are not a part of the dominant culture. To
address these conditions, transformative school leaders can use the NSLP to fight against the limited exposures to healthy food options and address food insecurity.

Summary

America’s children spend more than six hours a day and approximately 186 days per year in school, and for students who receive free and reduced-priced meals, we must understand that these meals can constitute a substantial portion of a student’s daily intake (USDA, 2007). Transformative school leaders can use the NSLP to fight against the reality food insecurity and childhood obesity in school-aged children.

According to Shields (2010), transformative leadership “starts with a recognition of some material realities of the broader social and political sphere recognizing that the inequities and struggles experienced in the wider society affect one’s ability to perform and succeed within an organizational context” (p. 568). Research has consistently shown that “low income and food insecure people are especially vulnerable to obesity due to the additional risk factors associated with poverty, including limited resources, limited access to healthy and affordable foods, and limited opportunities for physical activity” (Food Research and Action Center, 2010b, p. 1). Because hunger and obesity can and do coexist in America, schools can play a critical role in reversing the trends in childhood obesity and food insecurity. There is a moral responsibility that is inherent and celebrated in transformative leadership. This type of leadership is necessary in our schools because our children come to us with the burdens of poverty, which they are not able to dismiss when they enter the school door.

According to Carlin (1992) and Clark et al.(2009), the school administrator’s role is more profoundly felt in high poverty schools, it is critical these administrative positions are filled with leaders who are adequately prepared to meet the needs of children living with food insecurity
and obesity. The USDA has nutritional guidelines that inform the NSLP for administrators. These guidelines include the prohibition of certain foods, mandate the use of recipe worksheets to formulate menus, regulate the purchasing of foods, direct serving sizes and require special child nutrition labels. Unfortunately, NSLP meals served to children have not met the standards for fat and saturated fat and NSLP participants had significantly higher daily intakes of calories (USDA, 2007).

The actual implementation of the NSLP happens on the local level. School leaders help determine whether a district will have healthy and nutritious food options as a part of their program. Therefore, we must assume some responsibility for meeting the additional needs of their children who live in poverty. We must do a better job of meeting nutritional guidelines that translate into higher nutritional outcomes for school-aged children. If transformative leaders seek to transform the lived experiences of all students and use their power and position to address the inequalities in their students’ lives, then there is much that needs to be improved in our work with the NSLP.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I review the research problem and questions that guided this study and present a brief overview of the methodological approach utilized. This is followed by an explanation of the phenomenological approach used to drive the inquiry. The strategies of inquiry employed for this study and data collection procedures are provided, along with the rationale for site selection, participants, and document selection. Then the data analysis procedures employed are discussed, including the process for narrative analysis and the process used to code the data. In the last section, the ethical considerations and steps taken to establish trustworthiness are outlined.

Problem and Purpose Overview

In 2009, there were 50.2 million people including 17.2 million children who lived in food-insecure households in America (USDA, 2009). According to Murphy et al. (1998), intermittent experiences of food insufficiency and hunger are associated with poor behavioral and academic functioning in children who live in households with lower incomes. Concurrently, obesity in America has reached alarming rates and the causes are very complex. In Illinois, 29.9% of children from families with low incomes aged 2 to 5 and 34.9% of children aged 10 to 17 are overweight or obese (Food Research and Action Center, 2011).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate how elementary school district administrators in south suburban Chicago school districts implemented the NSLP and examine if they maximized the nutrition provided to children who may be living with the challenges of food insecurity and/or childhood obesity.
Research Questions

This research is an attempt to uncover strategies that administrators of NSLPs in school districts in the southern suburbs of Chicago used to (a) provide health and nutritious food for school age children at low cost, specifically to the neediest public school children; and (b) to aid in combating obesity and food insecurity. Therefore, there are five major questions that drove this research:

1. How do school/district leaders describe their role related to the NSLP?
   a. Are they concerned about the nutrition content of the meals?
   b. Are they concerned about the material realities of their student as they relate to poverty and obesity?

2. Do particular knowledge, experiences and/or influences lead them to think about the potential of the NSLP as a vehicle for transformation or social justice?

3. How do school leaders attempt to encourage greater participation in nutritional eating?

4. Do the meals offered in elementary high poverty school districts meet the NSLP guidelines?

5. What are the revenues and expenses for the food service program in these high poverty, elementary school districts?
   a. How do they compare to school districts in Illinois’ most affluent neighborhoods?

This research sought to describe the lived experiences of the administrators who were given charge over the NSLP and to develop meanings from these experiences. It was my goal to determine if there were any commonalities in these experiences that could be used to develop practices that may translate into better service for these children.
Methodological Approach

Qualitative research is an in-depth research method used to explore variables in their natural setting without having any idea about what those variables might be. It examines how different people make sense of their experiences, and interprets relationships. (Kvale, 1996) According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative researchers are concerned with rich descriptive understandings of the perspectives, processes, and meanings given to the phenomena by the participants.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) indicated that “qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study; personal experience, introspection, life story, interview; artifacts; cultural texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives” (p. 3). The qualitative researcher builds the picture as they work to collect and examine the parts.

This study examined the personal experiences of selected south suburban Chicago school administrators to understand how they experience the NSLP, so I used qualitative procedures as my inquiry method. This qualitative approach allowed me to explore the culture of food nutrition in schools, and the essence and relationships school administrators have with the NSLP.

Inquiry Approach

There are many different inquiry approaches used to conduct qualitative research. Finlay stated that “phenomenology is a research method that aims for fresh, complex descriptions of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (2009, p. 6). According to Vagle, “phenomenological researchers look to those who have experienced the phenomenon of interest through the use of standard qualitative data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, and writings to describe/interpret the phenomenon” (2009, p. 588). For the purpose of this research, a
phenomenological approach was used to uncover meanings of the administrators’ realities as they experienced the NSLP.

Specifically, from a phenomenological perspective, I was interested in the culture, practices and beliefs in schools districts that may have created a phenomenon of feeling so trapped that they may provide unhealthy food choices to children who are living in poverty.

In order to examine these interests, I relied upon Giorgi’s (1997) approach to access the human experience. Giorgi’s (1997) approach outlined a specific interpretation to the five steps that included: (a) reading the data to gain an overall sense of what had been shared by the subjects; (b) dividing the data into units of discipline relevant meaning units that are still true to the subject’s everyday language; (c) organizing and presenting the meaning units which have been developed in the language used by those within the specific discipline; and (d) summarizing, describing, and expressing how the phenomenon becomes evident using phenomenologically grounded terms. These steps helped to provide complex descriptions of the culture, practices, and beliefs in schools districts that may have created a phenomenon of school districts feeling so trapped that they may provide unhealthy food choices to children who are living in poverty.

**Site, Participant, and Document Selection**

The Illinois School Board of Education has divided the responsibility of serving Illinois school districts into regional offices. These regional offices perform regulatory functions directed by the Illinois school code. This includes coordinating and delivering state and local services that fall into the categories of service and assurance to the public.

Due to the recent dissolution of the regional office in Cook County, Chicago and the suburban school districts are not serviced by regional offices, but rather by intermediate service
centers (ISC). In south Cook County, ISC4 services the 66 south suburban school districts of which six are special education cooperatives, 47 are elementary school districts and 13 are high school districts. These districts are commonly known as Chicago’s south suburban school districts.

In order to determine which of these 47 elementary districts qualified for the study, all of their district report cards were examined. Section 10-17a of the Illinois School Code indicates that the school report card is a document that each regular public school and school district produces (Illinois State Board of Education, 2010). This document provides information about school districts including demographic information, student performance data, district financial resources, the use and sources of resources, truancy rates, mobility rates, teacher salaries, indicators of parent involvement, and information regarding the number of students eligible for free and reduced priced lunches. Illinois school districts are required to post these report cards on their websites.

According the district report cards, there were 13 of the 47 elementary school districts with at least 80% of their student population eligible to receive free and reduced lunches. Each of these 13 districts’ superintendents received a recruitment letter (see Appendix C). The letter explained the project, invited them to participate in a 60-minute face to face interview, and advised them they would receive a copy of the recommendations reported in this study that could be used to improve their program. The recruitment letter included a self-addressed stamped card, which gave them the opportunity to indicate that they wanted to participate or wanted to identify another person to participate in the study (see Appendix C). The card also gave them the opportunity to request a follow up phone call to address any questions, comments, or concerns,
or refuse to participate in the study. Of the 13 eligible administrators, seven chose to participate in this study.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Fieldwork is “the way most qualitative researchers collect data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 82). It is during this process that researchers go into the subject’s territory for the purpose of spending time, developing relationships, and learning about the subject. For the purpose of this study, the researcher became a fieldworker with the goal of conducting quality fieldwork using interviews, and document reviews as my data collection methods. Data were not collected anonymously as initial contact was made via mail and email, and subsequent contact was made by telephone. Descriptions of these of how these methods were utilized and applied in this study are outlined below.

**Interviews**

In order to determine how school district leaders describe their role related to the NSLP, interviews were used as a dominant strategy for data collection in this study. According to Kvale (1996), “the qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge . . . an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interests” (p. 6).

The purpose of the interviews in this research study was as Kvale suggested obtaining, “descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (p. 6). Three of the five research questions were addressed during the interview: (a) how do school district leaders describe their roles related the NSLP; (b) is there any particular knowledge, experiences, or influences that would lead then to think about the potential of the NLP as a vehicle for transformation or social justice; and (c) how do school leaders attempt to provide greater exposure to nutritious meal options in the NSLP.
With the respondents’ permission, interviews were recorded on non-voice activated digital voice recorders. These recorded interviews were transcribed using using pseudonyms by a transcription service. The actual names of respondents with their pseudonyms were separated and stored in a locked location. These pseudonyms were used in all presentations or publications related to the study. The transcriptions were verified by comparing the transcribed text to the recordings to ensure they accurately reflect what occurred. After the verification process was complete and the research approved, the digitally recordings were destroyed.

Since qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the settings where they naturally occur, the data collection for this study occurred in each participant’s school district or in a location chosen by them (e.g., the office, meeting room, or school cafeteria). It was the goal of this researcher to establish relationships that enabled the participants to feel comfortable so they were able to speak openly about their opinions and experiences. This was done to maximize the potential of capturing a more true essence of the participant’s lived experience.

**Document Collection**

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), “subject-produced data are employed as part of studies where the major thrust is participant observation or interviewing, although at times they are used exclusively” (p. 133). For the purposes of this study, the document collection method was used, and as a part of the data collection process several documents were collected for review. Using the Illinois State Board of Education and the respective school districts’ websites, district report cards, lunch menus, and annual financial reports, the necessary documents were collected for this study.

The school report cards were analyzed to determine eligibility for participation and to gather demographic data. The lunch menus were needed in order to address Research Question
4: Do the meals offered in elementary high poverty school districts meet the NSLP guidelines? For those districts participating in the study, the October 2011 menus were analyzed by Aviand’s Food Service using the TrakNow Nutritional Analysis Program.

   In this study, Research Question 5 asked: What are the revenues and expenses for the food service program in these high poverty, elementary school districts? How do they compare to school districts in Illinois’ most affluent neighborhoods? To answer this question, each of the responding district’s 2011 annual financial reports was examined. The annual financial reports provided detailed audited information about each district. These reports outlined the amount of federal revenue received for the NSLP and the total amounts of money spent in food service.

   To determine which areas qualified to be labeled the seven most affluent Chicago suburbs, the website of the Illinois Department of Revenue was accessed. The Illinois Department of Revenue prepares individual income tax stratification reports and in the preliminary 2010 Illinois Individual Income Tax by Zip Codes report (Illinois Department of Revenue, 2012), they identified those zip codes in Illinois with the highest adjusted gross income. Once the most affluent, seven suburban areas were identified the websites of their local elementary school districts were accessed. From their respective websites, I collected the 2011 annual financial reports and examined the reported amounts of NSLP revenue and food service expenditures.

   **Data Analysis Procedure**

   Data analysis was defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) as “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings” (p. 159). This study applied Giorgi’s (1997) interpretation of the phenomenological method the data analysis process by using his five steps:
1. Collection of verbal data: Using descriptions and/ or interviews, the researcher presents open ended questions to enable the subject to express the truth of their experience.

2. The reading of the data: The data in this step are read not for the purpose of developing themes, but rather in order to gain an overall sense of what has been shared by the subjects.

3. Divisions of the data into parts: The data are divided into units of meanings by those who have some familiarity with the discipline. The goal is to establish a series of discipline relevant meaning units that are still true to the subject’s everyday language. It is important to note that these meaning units may develop as a direct result of the researcher’s active involvement with the process and or their familiarity with the discipline.

4. Organization and presentation of data in the disciplinary language: The meaning units which have been developed are re-described in the language used by those within the specific discipline.

5. Summary, description, expression of the phenomenon: The description of the concrete lived experiences, or the phenomenon using phenomenologically grounded terms (p.9).

I have attempted to describe how the phenomenon became evident as a result of the several interrelated meaning units. These meaning units emerged naturally with the questions asked.
Analysis of Interviews

Once the fieldwork was completed, interviews were transcribed and analyzed for keywords and emerging themes using Tesch’s (1990) eight step process for analyzing data. With a transformative leadership and social justice lens the data were coded using Creswell’s (2009) in vivo terms. The goal of the analysis was, as Giorgi (1997) suggested, establishing a series of discipline relevant meaning units that were still true to the subject’s everyday language.

Analysis of Menus

Since the USDA’s (2007) SNDA-III study indicated that over two-thirds of the public school lunches did not meet the USDA requirements for total fat or saturated fats and no schools met the sodium benchmark, menus of those districts participating in the study were analyzed. In order to determine how the participants’ menu items compared to the NSLP guidelines, their October, 2011 lunch menus were selected and analyzed using the TrakNow Nutritional Analysis Program.

Analysis of Annual Financial Reports

With school funding in Illinois operating as a function of a district’s local wealth, state revenue, and federal revenue, and per pupil spending ranged from $5,000 to $18,000, academic success in Illinois is seen as a function of wealth of its community (Chicago Urban League, 2009). If it truly costs more to educate disadvantaged students, certainly one could assume that it would cost more to feed hungry children. In order to examine the revenues and expenses for the food service program in these high poverty elementary school districts and determine how they compared to school districts in Illinois’ most affluent neighborhoods, the annual financial report of each participating district was analyzed. These annual financial reports provided the data needed to determine how much districts received in federal reimbursements for the NSLP and
the amount of operating expenditures used for food services. This same analysis was done for those districts identified as Illinois’ most affluent suburban school districts.

**Ethical Considerations**

Based upon Bogdan and Biklen’s (2007) guidelines for ethical considerations, I was committed to implementing an ethical approach for conducting this qualitative research study. The initial contact was made by an introductory letter that was sent via mail and e-mail to all 47 elementary school district superintendents served by the ISC4. This letter clearly outlined the purpose of the research, and gave an indication of time requirements.

To minimize any concerns of coercion to participate, no one employed in the researcher’s school district was invited to participate in the study. To ensure that participants were aware of my intent to conduct research, participants provided a written consent letter. With the participant’s permission, the interviews were recorded on audio tapes. To protect the identity of the participants and the confidentiality of the data, these tapes were transcribed using pseudonyms. These pseudonyms will continue to be used in this and subsequent publications related to this study.

There were no physical risks to participants. However, if any participant expressed or demonstrated any anxiety in exposing any deficits that may exist in their NSLP, he or she was reminded that pseudonyms would be used and the data would be coded to provide them with anonymity in the findings.

**Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Transferability**

As an attempt to establish trustworthiness, I provided multiple accounts of the data. My application of triangulation was based upon Denzin and Lincoln’s (2007) approach to the concept. They stated that “a triangulated account depends not only on an opportunistic
combination of methods and sources, but also on a principled array of methodological strategies that reflect the indigenous principles of order and action.” With this, interviews and the review of three different document sources were the multiple strategies of inquiry utilized in this study.

To establish credibility, Eisner (1991) stated: “We seek a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions” (p. 110). The multiple types of data used, should provide confirming evidence to support the interpretations.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), uses of rich thick descriptions of the data are necessary to ensure that the findings are transferable between the researcher and the participants. In an effort to achieve transferability, I provided detailed accounts and several quotes from the participants’ statements. By sharing the actual answers given during the interviews, thick descriptions of the data were established. All of these strategies were employed as an attempt to provide a more detailed picture of the subjects’ lived realities.

**Summary**

One of the major strategies of inquiry for this study included interviewing. To support this strategy, I also used the Illinois State Board of Education website and the respective school districts’ websites to collect district report cards, lunch menus, and annual financial reports. Once all of the interviews, documents, and menus were analyzed, I divided the data with the goal of establishing a series of discipline relevant meaning units that were true the everyday language of administrators. In the next chapter findings from the data analysis using a transformative leadership lens are presented. These findings are organized around the units of analysis.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Throughout our nation poverty, obesity, and food insecurity are harsh realities for too many school-aged children. The USDA (2008) indicated that 17.1% of school-aged children were classified as overweight, an additional 15% are at risk of becoming overweight, and approximately 17.2 million children are living in food-insecure households. In addition, the U.S. Census report (2007) indicated that 43% of children younger than 6 in America are classified as low income. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how selected administrators in Chicago’s south suburban elementary school districts implemented the NSLP and maximized the nutrition provided to children who may live with poverty. This research sought to describe the lived experiences of the administrators who are given charge over the NSLP and develop meaning from these experiences. The findings of the study presented in this chapter are organized in two sections: (a) review of the data demographics, and (b) findings in the data. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings.

Demographics of the Population

In Chicago’s south suburbs, there are 66 school districts serviced by the Intermediate Service Center 4 (ISC4). The 66 districts are comprised of six special education cooperatives, 47 elementary school districts, and 13 high school districts. According to their respective district report cards, 80% of the student population are eligible for free and reduced lunch in 13 of the 47 elementary districts. After being contacted as described in the previous chapter, administrators from 7 of these 13 districts volunteered to participate in this study. Table 3 summarizes the participants’ position, gender, and ethnicities.
Table 3

Demographics of Participating Administrators

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<th>Respondent No.</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
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<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>Business Manager</td>
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<td>R6</td>
<td>Business Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>R7</td>
<td>Business Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings

Using a phenomenological perspective and a social justice lens, I was interested in the culture, practices, and beliefs that may have created a phenomenon of schools districts feeling so trapped they might actually provide unhealthy food choices to children who were living in poverty. Several themes emerged as respondents shared their lived experiences. These themes are presented based upon the units of analysis.
Responsibility for the NSLP

When asked how administrators viewed their role in the implementation of the NSLP, two themes emerged. These themes indicated the administrators (a) felt ownership or direct responsibility for the success of program, or (b) felt they were simply responsible for the administration of the program. The majority of the seven respondents indicated they viewed themselves as being directly responsible for the success and implementation of the program. Descriptors such as the teacher, the point person, the person in charge, and personally interested, were often used to describe their role in the implementation of the program. Respondent 4 indicated, “I am the implementer . . . trying to provide every student in our district a meal that is as nutritious as possible.” Respondent 1, a superintendent, indicated that it was her responsibility to teach and expand the horizons of her students by providing additional exposure to healthy food options.

Respondent 5, who is also a superintendent, knew that the majority of the day-to-day decisions were made by the business office, but saw participation in this study as an opportunity to increase his awareness and become more involved. He stated,

Very little hands on work with the program is done by the superintendent. Essentially, it goes through the business office. Our business office deals with our whole lunch program, and it works with our vendor and they provide the menus and they provide the services.

Respondent 3, a first year business manager, believed she was too new in the position to think that she was doing more than simply “making sure that they eat.” She would later come to realize that she was implementing strategies to help transform the realities of her students. Similarly, this was also true of Respondent 2. Initially, she did not see that her contribution
expanded beyond approving the menus and adhering to the standards. Later, she revealed that she was challenging the system to provide healthier options for her students while trying to address obesity with exercise.

**Strategies to Serve the Children**

When asked what strategies the administrators used to provide greater exposure to nutritious meal options and address food insecurity, four major themes or categories emerged naturally. I organized their responses using words I felt best described the response. The categories were: (a) A-administrative, (b) G-governmental tools, (c) E-educational strategies, and (d) T-strategies that could be classified as transformative leadership based strategies. Table 4 summarizes the responses given.
### Table 4

*Strategies Used to Provide Greater Exposure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Can’t afford to give an extra lunch so make sure they are full before they leave school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Limit the times certain foods are served - cereal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Voiced her concerns regarding options w/food service management company (FSMC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Sit down with the FSMC and cherry pick options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Provide nutritional information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Provide nutritional information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Provide nutritional instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Fresh fruit and veggie (FFV) grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>CEO option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Menus not planned with food insecurity in mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>The standards address obesity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>FFV Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>CEO option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>FFV Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>FFV Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Go beyond the guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>I micromanage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>After school p/e for students and community with trainers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Aerobics and exercise equipment available to all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Compare what's served in more affluent districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R5</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Working with the Cook County Dept of Health to develop strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R5</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Has a health program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>I created a food service committee, review the menus to make sure they meet the guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Give extra food during ISAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R7</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Try to be sensitive to the people in our community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1 illustrates the frequency of the four types of responses. There were 25 strategies mentioned by the participants, the majority could be classified as transformative leadership strategies.

![Figure 1. Types of strategy responses.](image)

Strategies that embraced transformative leadership can be illustrated by Respondent 6. When asked specifically about the prevalence of food insecurity and strategies to address it, Respondent 6 indicated:

Considering the fact that we have somewhere around a 96% free and reduced rate in our school, we don’t have a lot of working parents. They have supplemental income through welfare programs and things like that. So there’s a great possibility that we may have a rate higher than most schools because we have 96% of our parents who qualify for free and reduced lunch. So therefore, we always have extra food available to serve them.
With that in mind, okay, we may have maybe a 2 or 3% rate of kids who are not getting the proper nutritional values when they get home in the evenings, or they may not get a breakfast in the morning before they come to school. That is something we have to address in our schools—we have a breakfast program. But even more so than that, we try to do something extra during times like ISAT—so the kids have the proper nutrition to take the test or they have a meal before they start test taking and they’re not doing it on an empty stomach.

According to Shields (2010) transformative leadership recognizes “that the inequities and struggles experienced in the wider society affect one’s ability to perform and succeed within an organizational context” (p. 568). This administrator attempted to implement a strategy that could address the struggles of his students. He also recognized the possible effect these struggles could have on student performance in school. This is a transformative leadership strategy.

**Concerns with Current NSLP**

With seven respondents participating in this study, only three chose to share concerns about the actual implementation of their NSLP. The concerns had nothing to do with the NSLP’s guidelines or policies, but focused on the quality, packing, and presentation of the food served in their schools. The food was described as soggy, bland, and generic by two different respondents. The third respondent wanted to change the offerings, and suggested that the products should be name brands rather than the generic type of products that were offered to the students. It was stated,

So everything is pretty much pre-frozen and brought in and it’s warmed up on site. So you’re not really getting the Cadillac of lunches like you would from a scratch kitchen where you’re cooking everything. Ours is pretty much just a warming station to get it
warmed up for the kids. But I’ve actually had a meal or two, to kind of sample it. It’s a little bit bland, a little bit generic. But it’s holding true to the nutritional requirements of the National School Lunch program. You know what I mean? (Respondent 4)

One respondent clearly expressed that she did not like the menu items, the presentation, or the smell of the food. With this, she intended to advertise her food service contract with the hope of receiving competitive bids and better food options for the next school year. The other two respondents indicated they did not like the presentation or the packaging of the food.

Respondent 1 has decided to make substantial changes:

So one of the choices, like the pizza, instead of being a square and jammed into this little container that you peel back and now the pizza crust is soggy because the moisture is built up inside—now the pizza is going to be served on a plate, and it’s going to be a wedge of pizza. It’s going to be like something you might get if you went out with your family to pizza hut, or at home. It’s cut in a wedge. The presentation matters to kids.

Concerns with Obesity and Food Insecurity

All of the administrators interviewed indicated they were aware of growing obesity rates for at least some part of their student population. They could only speculate as to the reasons and causes for this trend. This included exposure to poor quality foods offered at home, the lack of quality local grocery stores, and the lack of opportunity for physical activity. When asked how they were addressing this issue, most of the respondents minimized their efforts. It was almost as if they did not believe any of their efforts specifically addressed obesity. However, as I continued to ask questions about obesity, their conversation revealed that each respondent was in fact implementing deliberate strategies to address obesity.
Respondent 6 qualified his efforts and described them as just providing a nutritious meal. He indicated: “There are a lot of kids overeating. I don’t know how to correct that. The only thing I can say is that we try to serve a nutritious meal at school that kind of serves as a balanced diet for them.” Two questions later, he outlined his process for developing the menus. This discussion revealed that he had a very deliberate strategy aimed at addressing obesity in his schools. He stated:

It’s not a one person decision to create the menu. It’s not the food service director. It’s not the business office. It’s a committee. And we look at everything including commodities—Asking, “Are we ordering the right kind of commodities? Are we giving them the right nutritional value?” So we then look at everything and we revise our menus. When they come to the food service committee, you know, we revise them to make sure that they have the right foods on there to provide better nutritional value for the kids. Okay, we look at everything from the fresh fruits and vegetable program that we have. Okay, we serve the kids vegetables and fruits and stuff throughout the day, whether it’s carrots and a snack, or whether it’s just a fruit cup. So, we buy from various vendors to provide the freshest fruits and vegetable snacks throughout the day to make sure that they have a balanced meal and are eating the right foods. (Respondent 6)

There were slightly different results when I asked respondents about food insecurity. Although they were not quite clear about the actual meaning of food insecurity, after I defined it they were able to speak of the deliberate actions they were taking to address it. Allowing them to elaborate on the subject revealed that they were in fact taking specific steps to address food insecurity. Respondent 4 believed that almost of 60% of his students in the upper grades did not know from where their next meal was coming. He stated:
With that being said, a lot of our kids, they really don’t eat at home. I can tell you that right now- some do, some don’t. You can kind of tell who does and who doesn’t. We’ve implemented the [CEO] option for the entire district. We’ve qualified every single school, where every kid has a free lunch and a free breakfast, every morning and every afternoon. We’re trying to get an afterschool program going, but that’s going to have to wait until our teacher contract comes up to try and get some academics going on after school to qualify for that section of it. But I’m a firm believer you can’t really pay attention when you’re hungry. And if you can’t pay attention while you’re hungry, you can’t really fully learn. And if you can’t fully learn how do you expect to do well on the ISAT tests, you know what I mean? Food goes a long way… You need to eat before anything can really get done. (Respondent 4)

I wondered how the administrators became aware of the prevalence of food insecurity in their schools. They indicated that they were made aware through a number of sources. This included receiving messages from teachers and students, assumptions made based on the districts’ free and reduced lunch percentages, and conversations with the students themselves. Respondent 7 indicated, “It may be due to the fact that we are a low income population, [our parents] can’t afford to feed their families the way they would like to.” She thought that approximately 70% of her student population may be affected. Respondent 4 indicated:

I’ve worked in Township X where there’s as you call it high food insecurity level as well. I’ve seen kids. I’ve seen kids’ eyes, you know, personally. You know what I mean? So, you see them, and the food disappears instantly if they haven’t eaten. You know- especially on a Monday. You’d expect that the parents are going to be able to feed them and so on and so forth, but they come to school hungry. They go to lunch hungry, you
know what I mean? And a lot of them will ask for, you know, is there anything else left over? Is there anything else?

This respondent administrator did not minimize his efforts to address food insecurity. He actually celebrated the steps he had taken to address the needs of his students in this area:

And I view just being able to help provide a meal, just a simple meal, you know- let it be breakfast or lunch for a child, as doing something fantastic. Then, if I can have the means to help out in any way possible, and they (NSLP) will carry the cost for feeding our kids, trust me I’m going to get them to try to cover as much as they possibly can.

Growing up and not knowing where your next meal is coming from is not exactly conducive to a thriving society. You know what I mean? You’ve got other things on your mind…And I don’t think, especially in a country that is so developed like ours, where we have a surplus of food, our kids here shouldn’t have to go hungry. Does that make sense to you? (Respondent 4)

**Transformative Leadership Responses**

When respondents were given the opportunity to voice the challenges they faced and outline how they were addressing them, I could clearly see examples of transformative leadership and social justice based interventions. Although they sometimes minimized their efforts, these administrators spoke in terms of purposeful action to make improvements in the lives of their students. They also communicated a desire to use their power and position to transform the lived experiences of all students.

Respondent 1, a Caucasian superintendent who grew up in a more affluent northern suburb, provided just one example of transformative leadership. Outside of her dislike of the look of the cafeterias, the packaging, and presentation of the food, she most disliked the way
children in her less affluent schools were forced to walk in lines and the way they were
socialized during the meal period. She said:

The first thing that I did after we got better playgrounds—I said, “See those lines?” I said to our building and grounds director, “go seal coat the playground, because it’s all blacktop and it actually runs into the parking lot. I actually think it’s a dangerous situation.” But that’s a different story. And there were lines. There was one line for every classroom with a number in front of it. So every classroom the kids knew where they were supposed to stand, which line to pick. And then there was actually 18 inches measured out with a hash mark on every one of them with a number in it that kids had to stand in. And even their backpack had to be between the hash marks. If that’s not a prison mentality, I don’t know what is. So he said, “We spent a lot of money to paint those lines.” And I said, “Well that was stupid, because I’m going to paint over them.” So we painted over them . . . But now the kids when they arrive at school, they just come in. And they come in and they go to the cafeteria and they sit down and they eat. Then they get up and go to their classrooms—not this mentality, this herd mentality of being in lines and walking in step and all this stuff . . . But just in terms of how kids are treated.

Yeah, there are schools where kids line up and come in and not that it’s that horrific, but I’d never seen it where it was so regimented where even the backpack, you know, your backpack couldn’t be over the little hash mark. They had this defined territory, you know, that was theirs and that’s how to maintain distances and stuff between them. I don’t get that at all. So I painted over it . . . I think I’m a club of one, though. I don’t think there are many people who do this . . . I’m a passionate person, but it gets on
people’s nerves. They say, “Why do you do that?” I say, “Because it matters. It matters to the kids.”

The respondent indicated that the mere sight of the regimented need for kids to stand in line reminded her of the writings of Kozol. I shared her concern as it also made me wonder if some schools are preparing our students to function in society or are they preparing them for prison?

Dantley (2003), Greenfield (1993), and Shields (2008) suggested that school administrators must be deliberately moral and act with moral courage. Respondent 1’s deliberate intervention to stop this type of prison preparation challenged the system and dared to change the quality and content of the school experience for her children. This is a perfect example of transformative leadership in action.

Respondent 2 indicated that proper administration of the NSLP should be enough to meet the nutritional needs of her students during lunch. However, she did believe there was a need to address obesity for her entire learning community in other ways. She stated,

The other important part that we looked at is trying to provide more exercise. Well, just trying to make sure that we incorporate it. We have a program . . . and its offered to students and the community. We do it after school, and we also do some weekends, where it helps the community just focus more on getting more physical activity. . . . They have some trainers come in and they have aerobics training. It is after school. Now there are some components of it that also tries to help give a better quality physical education program through curriculum and academics, but most of the time the program is focused on after school. Parents in the community can actually observe and get information too-so that they can help their students see the importance of better physical
exercise. You know, for better movement and (understanding) how that (has an) effect on the body. So it’s, as you would go to any physical facility that adults go to. There are a couple of machines there . . . they help with movement—like a Stairmaster, elliptical machines and things like that. But the majority of it focuses on aerobics, Zumba, and those type things. And they actually do measurements for body weight and body mass and things like that.

Her schools are located in a community where there are no health clubs or gyms. In addition, unlike many other local municipalities in the south suburbs, their municipal offices do not provide access to exercise equipment or exercise classes. To fill this gap, they attempt to address the needs of her whole community. With the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) citing limited access to healthy and affordable foods, and limited opportunities for physical activity as contributing factors to the vulnerability of low income and food insecure people to obesity, she provides an excellent example of an administrator using their power and position to address the inequalities in their students’ lives.

Respondent 3 focused on using exposure and education to transform the experiences of her students:

Like one of the things that I’ve done, because at the time my son was going to another south suburban school, I noticed the different content that’s within their menu. And I noticed they had a variety of -I noticed that at the school where my son was going, they had a lot of different—they had like chicken wraps. They had the option of having salads. And then I looked at our menu and we had beef and bean burritos and cheesy grits. And I just one day I brought the menu in. I’m just like; well this is what they’re serving here. Why are they serving us something different? So we started paying more
attention to what the kids ate, and we started voicing our opinion more in regards to like, no we don’t want this, we want this to be served. As opposed to serving flaming hots, we want more fruits and more vegetables involved in the children’s menu. . . . we’ve incorporated educational materials just throughout the day- throughout the regular school day, with the implementation of the fresh fruits and vegetable program. Now they’re learning and they are tasting different foods that they may not get at home. They are tasting them. Like they’re eating more carrots and cauliflower and stuff like that.

One of the major themes in the obesity research suggests competitive foods played a major role in contributing to obesity in school-aged children. These foods are sold as a la carte items, placed in vending machines, snack bars, school stores, and are sold as a part of special events like fundraisers and sport events. Flaming Hots would serve as an example of foods that compete with nutritious lunches and that could contribute to childhood obesity. The USDA stated these foods “tend to be high in calories, fat and added sugars, and low in essential nutrients” (USDA, 2004, p. 1). Many schools were selling these items because they sell in high volumes, and this translates into revenue. Given that Respondent 3 serves in a school district with over 99% of her students were classified as low income and her district had the lowest operating budget, the need for additional revenue was evident. However, this district and this administrator have recognized their moral obligation to put their students’ health above the need to generate additional revenue. As Greenfield (1993) suggested, there is a moral responsibility that is inherent and celebrated in transformative leadership. This participant’s actions were an example of being deliberately moral, and she was serving as a model of a transformative leader.

Respondent 4 firmly believed that the responsibility of maximizing the possibilities of the program was up to him:
Well, I think I am the implementer. I guess, trying to get down to the grass roots of it, I’m looking at pretty much trying to provide every student here in our district as nutritious of a meal as possible, all while still trying to get the maximum reimbursement back from officials.

By applying for the Community Eligibility Option (CEO), this respondent provides his parents with an alternative to household eligibility applications for free and reduced price meals. With this option, his entire student population is eligible for free breakfast and lunch, and the district has agreed to provide this option for four years.

Shields’ (2008) research indicated that transformative leadership was evident when leaders “take risks for the good, not only for the whole community but often for those whose voices tend not to be heard and whose perspectives may not always be valued by mainstream society” (p. xx). Respondent 4 acknowledged that there were some uncertainties remain with participation in the CEO option, such as the effect on E-Rate eligibility, and the effect on a districts’ poverty data. However, since the he was able to offer, every student in each school, a free lunch and a free breakfast, he decided that the CEO option was a risk worth taking.

With these actions, the respondents provided me with examples of transformative leadership in action. These school leaders used the NSLP to fight against the limited exposures to healthy food options, and address food insecurity. They also worked to address obesity by providing access to opportunities for physical activity.

Influences on Perspectives and Practices

Our past experiences and current reality often play a role in shaping the choices we make today. There are many personal influences that shape the way we think of a particular issue or cause us take on a particular challenge. This has proven to be true for the participants. The
influences that cause them to think of the NSLP, obesity, and food insecurity, ranged from early career choices, having the opportunity to teach in other countries, to having personal challenges with obesity.

Before choosing education as a career, Respondent 1 wanted study at Le Cordon Blue in Paris and train to become a chef. She indicated that “food is important—food and appropriate beverages are very important to me. I collect restaurant experiences.” This passion and love for food was most probably a strong influence on her son. He was studying to become a chef. She was also influenced by the opportunity to work with schools in another country. She indicated that “they did not put me in the more affluent schools. I was in a school where some of the kids probably would have qualified for free and reduced lunch here. [In that country] if they didn’t have money, they didn’t eat. The children there often went without any food.” With these experiences, when Respondent 1 was asked to become an administrator, she had only two demands: the ability to take her secretary, and the ability to design the lunch program.

The other participants also shared experiences that were influential to them. Respondent 5 also served as an administrator in another country. There the children were given much healthier food options as a part school lunch. This experience helped to shape his desire to provide opportunities for his students to have healthy food for lunch. Respondent 2 had a family history of obesity related illnesses including diabetes, heart attacks, and high blood pressure. Finally, Respondent 7’s step-child was battling the challenges of being an obese young adult. Hence, each respondent had some experience that supported his or her focus on nutrition and health. This resulted in a focus on the need to address obesity.
Unlimited Resources and Time

I asked the respondents to hypothesize how they would work with their NSLP if they had unlimited resources and time. The dreams of these administrators could be best described as moderate rather than lofty. In fact, the responses could be categorized into two major themes. Of the seven respondents, five had the same desire— to have a full service kitchen in at least one of their schools. The other two respondents wanted the government to modify or enhance some of their practices.

For those respondents wanting a kitchen, most believed that it would enable them to cook, and provide meals that students could enjoy. Respondent 4 stated:

I would personally—unlimited resources and unlimited time? I would take the NSLP-and I know this is kind of their dream too; I would actually make a full kitchen and maybe a couple of satellite kitchens within an actual district. I’d see if we can’t prepare our own food to our kind of standards. I’d kind of have that “home cooked meal kind of advantage” versus “here’s something that’s processed or warmed up” for you. I would also, by doing that, I mean, I think you’d be able to hire—because we have a high unemployment rate around here, as well. I mean, kind of try to get some local people actually helping out with actual programs and put some dollars back into the community instead of with a food service provider. I guess you could say—keep that money a little bit more local. Put some jobs out there for our people and break out the best quality food that we can given the price. That would be my dream. Now, I would try to do it after school, too, and be able to get dinner. I would do a full breakfast and lunch, for sure. And depending on the teachers’ contract, if I could do an afterschool part as well, that would be great. I mean, three square meals a day, all home cooked, all made fresh, you
know, the same day. I think that would be great for the kids. That would be a fantastic thing.

Respondent 7 also believed having a kitchen could really help her children. She stated: I would make every school a full service cooking kitchen. (We could actually function with our three larger schools. We have five schools, three are large, and two are small. So we could possibly service the two smaller from one of the three bigger schools.) I would have a salad bar. I would just have different stations. I’d have a potato bar . . . I’d even have some junky foods just because of those guilty pleasures, but I wouldn’t make that the main meal. It would be high quality food. Right now we’re doing the prepackaged, warm them up kind of meals, because we don’t have a full service kitchen. . . . We’d be able to pick our meals. Make them fresher. Give the children more variety. Give them more fresh options. And I think when you eat a good meal—you are just more focused.

With five of the seven respondents having the same wish—a full service kitchen to allow them to cook and provide meals students could enjoy—I could only describe the responses as moderate and reasonable. As a fellow administrator serving students from poorer communities, this made me consider two questions: Have we really learned to keep our dreams small rather than to dream big? Are the solutions to our problems reasonable yet unattainable? Why, in fact, do we not dream about eliminating childhood poverty, obesity, and hunger?

**Menu Analysis Results**

To help ensure that school meals are consistent with USDA *Dietary Guidelines*, the USDA provides nutrient standards that are applicable to school meals through the School Meal Initiative (SMI). These guidelines are represented in Table 5.
Table 5

*The Dietary Guidelines: Minimum Nutrient and Calorie Levels for School Lunches*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preschool</th>
<th>K-3</th>
<th>Grades 4-12</th>
<th>Grades 7-12</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Energy Allowances</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Calories)</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Fat</strong></td>
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<td>Not to exceed</td>
<td>Not to exceed</td>
<td>Not to exceed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30% of calories</td>
<td>30% of calories</td>
<td>30% of calories</td>
<td>30% of calories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saturated Fat</strong></td>
<td>To be less than</td>
<td>To be less than</td>
<td>To be less than</td>
<td>To be less than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10% of calories</td>
<td>10% of calories</td>
<td>10% of calories</td>
<td>10% of calories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vitamin A (RE)</strong></td>
<td>150</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>285</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vitamin C (mg)</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Calcium</strong></td>
<td>267</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iron (mg)</strong></td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this study I used the TrakNow Nutritional Analysis Program to determine how the October 2011 menus of the participating districts compared to the SMI guidelines. All of the districts in this study met the guidelines for vitamin C. Unfortunately, the results also indicated these school lunches often failed to meet the guidelines by exceeding the requirements for total fats, saturated fats, and failing to provide enough vitamin A (RE), and vitamin A (IU). Disturbingly, menus for Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 failed to meet the calorie benchmark each week. Menus for Respondents 6 and 7 failed to meet the calorie benchmark four of five weeks,
and three of five weeks respectively. This means that the participating districts often failed to provide the required minimum of one-third of their students’ daily energy allowance. For children living with food insecurity, this could be disastrous. Major findings from the analysis are highlighted in Table 6. Individual menu analysis results can be found in the Appendix.

Table 6

*October 2011 Nutritional Results for Participating Districts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>R1</th>
<th>R2</th>
<th>R3</th>
<th>R4</th>
<th>R5</th>
<th>R6</th>
<th>R7</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calories (Kcal)</td>
<td>Too low 5</td>
<td>Too low 5</td>
<td>Too low 5</td>
<td>Too low 5</td>
<td>Too low 5</td>
<td>Too low 4</td>
<td>Too low 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
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<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total fat (%)</td>
<td>Too high 1</td>
<td>Too high 1</td>
<td>Too high 1</td>
<td>Too high 1</td>
<td>Too high 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>week</td>
<td>week</td>
<td>week</td>
<td>week</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat. Fat (%)</td>
<td>Too high 1</td>
<td>Too high 2</td>
<td>Too high 3</td>
<td>Too high 2</td>
<td>Too high 1</td>
<td>Too high 2</td>
<td>Too high 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin A (RE)</td>
<td>Too low 3</td>
<td>Too low 3</td>
<td>Too low 3</td>
<td>Too low 3</td>
<td>Too low 3</td>
<td>Too low 2</td>
<td>Too low 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin A (IU)</td>
<td>Too low 3</td>
<td>Too low 1</td>
<td>Too low 1</td>
<td>Too low 1</td>
<td>Too low 3</td>
<td>Too low 1</td>
<td>Too low 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
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<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin C (mg)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcium (mg)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron (mg)</td>
<td>Too low 5</td>
<td>Too low 5</td>
<td>Too low 5</td>
<td>Too low 5</td>
<td>Too low 5</td>
<td>Too low 4</td>
<td>Too low 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
<td>of 5 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Expenditures and Revenues for the NSLP

Table 7 highlights the types of meals services offered by the districts. One district is self-operated and controls all aspects of the food service program. Respondents 1 and 4 provided prepackaged meals through a contracted meal service vendor. Because their vendor controls the preparation, distribution of the food, and the management of the program, their contract is defined by the Illinois State Board of Education as a food service management contract. The other four respondents receive the same prepackaged meals from the vendor but use district employees to manage the food service program and distribute the food to students. This classifies their program as a vended food service program. All of the districts in the affluent neighborhoods prepare meals in kitchens located in the schools, and use a food service management company to manage the program.

The food service program is a portion of the overall costs of educating children. With Wall’s (2006) research estimating that it costs about one to three times as much to educate students from disadvantaged communities, and school lunch serving as a component of the educational process, I wanted to review the NSLP revenues and food service expenses for the participating districts. Using the 2011 Annual Financial Report (AFR) for each district, Table 7 also outlines the NSLP revenue and food service expenditure findings for the participating districts and those districts located in neighborhoods identified by the Illinois Department of Revenue (2012) as Illinois’ most affluent zip codes.

This study found that the participating districts and their combination of vended meal services, food service management contracts and self-operated programs spent two to three times more to feed their students than the affluent districts. With some financial assistance to cover the
installation expenses, maybe the cost of installing at least one kitchen in the participating districts could be more feasible than anyone has realized.

Table 7

*Revenues, Expenditures, and Type of Meal Service*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent Number</th>
<th>NLSP Revenue 2011</th>
<th>Food Service Expenses 2011</th>
<th>District’s Free and Reduced Lunch %</th>
<th>Type of Meal Service</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Food Service Annual Cost Per Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>$364,970</td>
<td>$625,746</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>Vended Meal</td>
<td>1,166</td>
<td>$536.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>$174,499</td>
<td>$256,101</td>
<td>99.4%</td>
<td>Vended/FSMC</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>$705.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>$522,025</td>
<td>$791,523</td>
<td>84.9%</td>
<td>Vended/FSMC</td>
<td>1,635</td>
<td>$484.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4</td>
<td>$424,790</td>
<td>$591,396</td>
<td>90.5%</td>
<td>Vended Meal</td>
<td>1,081</td>
<td>$547.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R5</td>
<td>$1,212,163</td>
<td>$1,807,439</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>Vended/FSMC</td>
<td>3,612</td>
<td>$500.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>$755,117</td>
<td>$1,796,717</td>
<td>97.6%</td>
<td>Self-Operated</td>
<td>2,392</td>
<td>$741.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R7</td>
<td>$631,162</td>
<td>$1,015,843</td>
<td>93.6%</td>
<td>Vended Meal</td>
<td>1,833</td>
<td>$554.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinsdale</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$269,408</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>FSMC-Quest</td>
<td>4,040</td>
<td>$66.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrington</td>
<td>$530,362</td>
<td>$2,385,763</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>FSMC- Sodexo</td>
<td>9,006</td>
<td>$264.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winnetka</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$313,015</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>FSMC-Arbor</td>
<td>1,926</td>
<td>$162.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Forest</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$693,707</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>FSMC-Quest</td>
<td>2,119</td>
<td>$327.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northbrook</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$222,018</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>FSMC-Arbor</td>
<td>1,171</td>
<td>$189.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highland Park</td>
<td>$190,412</td>
<td>$506,030</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>FSMC-Arbor*/PTO</td>
<td>4,429</td>
<td>$114.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Zurich</td>
<td>$266,033</td>
<td>$1,723,112</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>FSMC-Southwest Food Excellence</td>
<td>6,124</td>
<td>$281.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that the higher the percentage of free and reduced price lunch students, the higher the cost of the food provided. One must ask why such a difference should exist, given
that all participating schools and districts were located in the same geographic area in which costs should be relatively similar.
Summary and Conclusion

Nationwide, poverty, obesity, and food insecurity are some of the harsh realities for too many school aged children. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how selected elementary school district administrators in south suburban Chicago school districts implement the NSLP and maximize the nutrition provided to children who live with poverty. This study found that of the 66 districts served by the ISC4, 47 are elementary districts, and 13 of those districts have at least 80% of their student population eligible for free and reduced lunch. Seven of these districts participated in this study.

There were many personal influences that helped shape the way these administrators thought about feeding children. These influences included early career choices, opportunities to teach in other countries, and personal challenges with obesity. The majority of participating administrators viewed themselves as being directly responsible for the success and implementation of their NSLP, and used strategies that centered around four major themes: (a) administrative strategies, (b) governmental tools, (c) educating strategies, and (d) strategies that should be classified as transformative leadership. Of the seven districts, six used the same food service management company to assist them with this charge. The remaining district was self-operated. Three of the respondents shared the concerns they had with their current program. These concerns centered on issues of food quality, packing, and presentation. All of the respondents indicated that given the opportunity to have a different type of program, they would do so.

When respondents were asked if they believed any of their students were facing challenges with obesity and food insecurity, all of the administrators indicated that growing obesity rates were a reality for some part of their student population. These same administrators
could only speculate as to the reasons and causes for this trend. When administrators spoke of interventions used to address the needs of these children, they spoke in terms of purposeful action to improve the lives of their children. They exemplified the concepts surrounding transformational leadership. Unfortunately for their students, the interventions were not translating into meals that met the majority of the SMI guidelines for school meals. An analysis of the menus found that the majority of the meals served by the participating districts often failed to meet the NSLP requirements for calories, saturated fat, vitamin A (RE), vitamin A (IU), and iron.

This study also found that it costs two to three times as much to feed students in the participating poorer communities. The overall food service expenses for these high poverty districts greatly exceeded the food service expenditures made in districts in Illinois’ most affluent neighborhoods. This may be responsible for the modest responses given by the participants when presented with the idea of having unlimited time and resources to change their NSLP. When given this opportunity to think of having and doing anything, only two themes emerged: (a) the desire to have at least one full service kitchen, and (b) having the government modify or enhance some of their practices as they relate to the NSLP. These responses forced me to wonder: As administrators serving students who live in poverty, are our dreams based so deeply in our needs, that we have forgotten how to have desires that extend beyond them?
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how selected elementary school district administrators in Chicago’s south suburban school districts implement the NSLP and examine how they maximize the nutrition provided to children living with poverty. This research sought to describe the lived experiences of the administrators who are given charge over the NSLP and develop meaning from those experiences. There were five major questions that guided this research:

1. How do school/district leaders describe their role related to the NSLP?
   a. Are they concerned about the nutrition content of the meals?
   b. Are they concerned about the material realities of their student as they relate to poverty and obesity?

2. Do particular knowledge, experiences and/ or influences lead them to think about the potential of the NSLP as a vehicle for transformation or social justice?

3. How do school leaders attempt to encourage greater participation in nutritional eating?

4. Do the meals offered in elementary high poverty school districts meet the NSLP guidelines?

5. What are the revenues and expenses for the food service program in these high poverty, elementary school districts?
   a. How do they compare to school districts in Illinois’ most affluent neighborhoods?

Examining the research questions specifically, the study revealed insightful information as it relates to school administration, school funding, transformative leadership and the NSLP.
The questions enabled me to explore the phenomenon of implementing the NSLP in Chicago’s south suburban school districts to address the needs of students who may be faced with the challenges of food insecurity and/or obesity.

This study was met with an unanticipated limitation that emerged as a result of the type of service required by the participants and the limited number of vendors available to provide service to participants. What emerged as a result suggested that the experience with the NSLP for the most respondents did not vary greatly. Due to their inability to prepare their own meals, participants were trapped into serving prepackaged, precooked meals. Themes that emerged from this study were consistent with some of the findings from the literature and research on food insecurity, obesity, school administrators, school funding, transformative leadership, and the moral need to respond emerged as a result of the findings.

**Discussion of Findings**

In this study, I found that all administrators interviewed were deeply concerned about the nutrition content of the meals and the material realities of their students. In fact, each administrator described his or her role in implementation of the program with a sense of responsibility and ownership. Most respondents even described a personal experience or family situation that had enhanced his or her awareness. At the same time, they did not appear to realize that their demands for changes to their NSLP did not translate into healthy food options for their students.

One finding that emerged was a key component to the success of the NSLP for Illinois school districts was having the ability and the will to exercise fully the district’s right to have final menu approval. Respondents believed the menu changes requested translated into choices for their students. While the majority indicated that they exercised this right and often requested
changes to the proposed menus, all of the menus for the six districts using the same vended meal provider were almost identical.

When asked what strategies the administrators used to provide greater exposure to nutritious meal options and address food insecurity, four major themes or categories emerged naturally: (a) A-administrative, (b) G- governmental tools, (c) E-educational strategies, and (d) T-strategies that could be classified as transformative leadership based strategies. Because respondents were providing extra food, making aerobic exercise available in communities with no access to health clubs, and working with the Cook County Department of Health, transformative leadership strategies were the most prevalent.

I also found when respondents were given the opportunity to hypothesize how they would work with their NSLP if they had unlimited resources and time, the dreams of these administrators could be best described as moderate and reasonable. In fact, the responses could be categorized into two major themes: the desire to have a full service kitchen in at least one of their schools, and to have the government to modify or enhance some of their practices.

An analysis of the menus found that the majority of the meals served by the participating districts often met the NSLP requirements for calories, saturated fat, vitamin A (RE), vitamin A (IU), and iron. This study also found that it costs two to three times as much to feed students in the participating poorer communities. The overall food service expenses for these high poverty districts greatly exceeded the food service expenditures in districts in Illinois’ most affluent neighborhoods.

The findings from this study make it evident that there continues to be a great need for training, support, and resources that would enable school administrators to improve their NSLP. This is particularly true if we are to create more nutritional outcomes for students who are more
at risk of being affected by obesity and food insecurity. My discussion of the findings will continue in the sections that follow. I will use this opportunity to highlight how these findings compare to the research discussed in chapter two.

**Administrators**

In Illinois public schools, more women and minorities are assuming these leadership roles (White & Agarwal, 2011). Of the seven participants, there were three African American females, one Caucasian female, one African American male, and two Caucasian males. This was a diverse group of leaders, serving diverse populations, and each indicated they were facing a variety of complications and challenges.

White, Brown, Hunt, and Klostermann (2011) suggested that the Illinois public school administrators working in high poverty schools tended to prefer such settings. This is supported by many of the participants in this study who communicated that they preferred to work in their schools because they felt a sense of purpose. Respondent 4 indicated, “I put myself in a position where I can do the greatest amount of good here, this is where you belong. . . . I’m doing something fantastic.” This opinion was supported by the statements of Respondent 6:

I hope this research and this data that you’re collecting will serve that purpose of helping us to feed those children in need the correct way. That’s what it’s all about. In these school districts we’re here to serve our kids. A lot of time people lose focus while we’re here. Our number one priority is to serve these kids in these communities. They are the future leaders of our society. So why not prepare them well? Why not feed them well? Why not give them the quality education that they deserve? And that’s what it’s all about.
I do not believe it is too much of a stretch to think that these feelings of purpose and the passion with which they were communicate, can be interpreted as a preference for working in their school districts where a large number of students are living with poverty.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) indicated that successful leaders respond productively to the opportunities and challenges of educating diverse groups of students. Even with all of the challenges, these educational leaders/school administrators demonstrated how they are instrumental in helping their children create a better life for themselves. Respondent 1 indicated:

Certainly I have personnel who manage it on a day to day basis, paperwork and things like that. But I think that the most important role that I play is in terms of philosophy of the program and what we’re trying to accomplish. It’s not just about feeding kids, but it’s also teaching them about nutrition and helping to build good lifestyle, a good lifestyle for them as they move forward.

This is an example of the leadership, philosophies, attitudes and actions outlined in the Leithwood and Riehl (2003) research. Because these administrators serve in high poverty districts, they are as Clark et al. (2009) indicated as necessary.

School Funding

The study completed by Verstegen and Driscoll (2008) illustrated the disparities in resources and specifically showed that there was a strong relationship between the quality of a child’s education and the amount of the local wealth in their school’s community. Wall (2006) also estimated that it costs about one to three times as much to educate students from disadvantaged communities than advantaged communities. It appears that this is also true for feeding children in disadvantaged communities.
This study revealed that the overall annual food service expenditures for the high poverty districts greatly exceeded those made in the most affluent districts in Illinois. This study revealed that there was a $264.91 annual food service cost per student for the largest affluent district, compared to the $500.40 annual food service cost per student for the largest low income district in this study. This is almost twice as much and supports Wall’s (2006) research. Maybe if the participating districts had assistance with the initial costs of installation, then installing at least one kitchen could be more feasible than we realize.

Because I serve as a Chief Financial Officer for a school district, I believe it would be a disservice to the profession if I failed to bring attention to the obvious disparities in the costs of implementing the federally funded programs when compared to the non-federally funded programs. There appears to be an inordinate increase in the per pupil cost of feeding poorer children—those who are in particular need of better nutrition and more nourishing meals. While it was not a part of this study, these data call for more investigation into the costs charged to these districts.

Transformative Leadership

According to Weiner (2003), transformative leadership is “an exercise of power and authority that begins with questions of justice, democracy, and the dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility” (p. 89). To this discourse, Shields (2008) added that transformative leadership requires moral courage. Through this study, I had the privilege of highlighting the deliberately moral actions of seven transformative leaders. These leaders felt ownership and responsibility for the success of their students and their NSLP.

According to Shields (2010), “transformative leaders recognize the material realities of the broader social and political sphere recognizing that the inequities and struggles experienced
in the wider society affect one’s ability to perform and succeed within and organizational
context” (p. 568). Respondent 4 recognized the economic challenges too many in his district’s
community were facing and spoke of how he dreamed doing something to transform both the
lives of his students and their parents. He stated:

I would make a full kitchen and have that “home cooked meal kind of advantage,”
versus “here’s something that’s processed or warmed up” for you and (I’d) be
able to hire- because we have a high unemployment rate around here. . . . Try to
get some local people and put some dollars back into the community instead of
(spending the money) with a food service provider. (Respondent 4)

When asked what strategies the administrators used to provide greater exposure to
nutritious meal options and address issues of obesity and food insecurity, I classified 40% of the
strategies employed as transformative leadership strategies. This was demonstrated by the
strategies these administrators used to intervene in the lives of children who may be living with
food insecurity and obesity. This included making after-school nutrition education, aerobics, and
exercise equipment available to the entire community. In these poor communities with very
limited access to exercise equipment and classes, they were working with the Cook County
Department of Health to bring programming to the students and parents, and giving extra food.
The actions and strategies of these school administrators are very consistent with the definitions
of transformative leadership as defined by Weiner (2003) and Shields (2010).

The National School Lunch Program in Action

The Food and Nutrition Service indicated that the NSLP is one of four major food
assistance programs that can make a difference in the lives of families who have lower incomes
(2005). The SNDA-III provided national data on school meals provided through the NSLP. The
research indicated that over two-thirds of the public school lunches did not meet the USDA requirements for total fat or saturated fats. This was also true for the majority of the participating districts. The results of the USDA’s study indicated that the majority of school lunches met the requirement for protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron. Unfortunately, all of the districts in this study consistently failed to meet the guidelines for vitamin A, and all but one failed to meet the iron benchmark five of five weeks. The remaining district failed to meet the iron benchmark four of five weeks.

The most troubling finding in this study was based on the calorie benchmark. The recommended daily amount of food energy (calories) for meals consumed as a part of the NSLP should constitute one-third of the recommended energy allowance (USDA, 2007). All districts in this study failed to meet the calorie benchmark five of the five weeks except one, and that district failed to meet the benchmark four of the five weeks. This means that the participating districts were failing to provide the required one-third of their students’ daily energy allowance. For children facing the challenges of food insecurity, failing to provide enough energy (calories) can be devastating.

With 1.4 million Illinois residents receiving emergency food from the Feeding Illinois food banks and 42% of those served were children under 18 years old (Feeding Illinois, 2010), food insecurity is a reality for too many of our school aged children in Illinois. As school administrators, we cannot fail to give our students the amount of energy (calories) they need. Each meal must provide them with the energy they need, as it may be the last meal they have until they return to school. According to Murphy et al. (1998), intermittent experiences of food insufficiency and hunger are associated with poor behavioral and academic functioning in children. Duniform and Kowaleski-Jones’ (2003) research indicated that food insecurity was
associated with behavioral and health outcomes. As administrators serving children living with poverty, we cannot afford to miss the NSLP’s nutrient benchmarks. Too many of our children may depend upon these meals for survival.

If transformative leaders seek to transform the lived experiences of all students and use their power and position to address the inequalities in their students’ lives, these findings reveal that there continues to be a great need for school administrators to improve their NSLP and create more nutritional outcomes for their students who are at risk of being affected by obesity and food insecurity.

**Recommendations**

The NSLP has received a great attention with the help of the 2004 HealthierUS School Challenge, and First Lady Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move!* campaign. This research was an attempt to uncover strategies that elementary school administrators in selected southern suburbs of Chicago, use with the NSLP to (a) provide healthy and nutritious food for school age children, and (b) to aid in combating obesity and food insecurity. The administrators in this study were faced with limited financial resources. Yet when compared to some of Illinois’ wealthiest districts, they were forced to spend nearly twice as much as to feed their students. Because these and other administrators in poorer districts serve students who may be faced with challenges of food insecurity or obesity, from this study the following recommendations can be made:

- Educate those responsible for preparing menus
- Fully exercise the right to have final menu approval
- Insist that vendors follow the menus as outlined in the bid specifications and provided as a part of the bid package
• Acknowledge the educational importance of good nutrition and consider funding schools that serve more impoverished children at higher levels.

Schools play a critical role in the fight against obesity, and while some districts want to provide better meals to their students, the Stang, Story, Kalina, and Synder (1997) research suggested that they have failed to properly train the staff most responsible for the task. In order to address this issue, districts will have to educate those who actually develop menus, prepare meals and serve students. According Stang et al. (1997), these staff members need education on preparing modified menus, using commodities and implementing the dietary guidelines in school meals and ways to make meals more appealing to students. Providing district administrators and the food service staff with tools and strategies to effectively address the needs of students living with poverty is critical because the challenges currently facing our children are staggering.

Another key component to the success of the NSLP for districts that are not self-operated is the need to exercise fully the district’s right to have final menu approval. One of the most unexpected findings that emerged from this study centered on control over menu items. While the majority of the respondents indicated that they exercised the right of final menu approval—and often requested changes to the proposed menus—for the six districts using the same vended meal provider their menus were almost identical. Does this mean that the contractor ignored the administrators’ requests or could it mean that given the many duties and responsibilities administrators failed to fully exercise the right to have final menu approval?

Finally, Illinois administrators must remember that the first month’s menu items are established by them as a part of the bid proposal. According to the regulations, this menu must be used by the FSMC or vendor as a guideline for all subsequent menus. Administrators must use this opportunity to communicate standards and expectations for their meal service program.
In addition to the recommendations given, administrators may consider adding any of the following strategies to enhance their food service program:

- Participate in the National School Breakfast Program that operates very similarly to the NSLP. These breakfasts must meet federal requirements and offered as free or reduced price breakfasts to eligible children. In return, the districts can receive cash subsidies from the USDA for each meal they serve. They also receive support from the USDA’s nutrition team and their local state agency to start the program.

- For those Illinois districts with 40% of their identified students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, consider applying for the CEO option. With this option, a districts’ entire student population becomes eligible for free breakfast and lunch for a period of four years. The application can be found at http://www.isbe.net/nutrition/htmls/nslp-hhfka-ceo.htm.

- Offer more substantial meals on Monday and Friday because this would allow the children who may have little to no food during the weekend to have meals that can help them achieve the feeling of satiety longer.

- Apply for the Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Program that program enables districts to offer fruits and vegetables to their students that are in addition to the options provided as a part of the NSLP. In Illinois the applications can be accessed from http://www.isbe.net/nutrition/htmls/ffv_program.htm#usda.

- Use the nutrient analysis protocols provided by the USDA as these protocols were developed for schools to conduct nutrient analysis which help ensure that nutrient guidelines were met. This free tool is accessible from http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/resources/nutrientanalysis.html
• Apply for Illinois State Board of Education’s 21st Century grant to include an afternoon snack and dinner program. A copy of my district’s grant can be found at www.schooldistrict149.org

• Consider partnering with neighboring districts that have full service kitchens to provide students with fresh, hot meals and eliminate the prepackaged meals.

• Take advantage of the new meal nutrition standards that will take effect July 1, 2012 as an opportunity to rebid the food service program. The new standards can be found at http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Legislation/dietaryspecs.pdf

• Consider participating in the Summer Food Service Program or the Summer Seamless Options because these programs provide nutritious meals when school is not in session and are funded by the USDA through Illinois State Board of Education. The applications can be found at http://www.isbe.net/nutrition/htmls/summer.htm

The NSLP is receiving a great deal of attention and resources to support its success and encourage innovation. Implementing the given recommendations and any combination of the strategies outlined, could translate into better nutritional outcomes for students who may be living with obesity and or food insecurity.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on the schools and administrators in elementary school districts in Chicago’s south suburbs that are serviced by the ISC4. Other researchers across the nation could use this study as a catalyst for research with districts in different regions of Illinois and districts in other states that serve students living in poverty and determine if similar results emerge.

Given the limitations that emerged as a result of the limited number of service provider options available to service districts without kitchens, researchers could study the sample of the
population that are self-operated or those who use different food service management companies. This would provide researchers with a larger variety of menus for nutritional analysis and comparisons.

In this study, the menus from the seven affluent comparison districts were not analyzed for nutritional content; additional research could examine if these districts’ menu items meet the nutritional guidelines. These findings could be used to determine if the more affluent school districts meet the guidelines more often that poorer school districts.

Finally, this research could be enhanced by actually gathering facts as they relate to the nutritional needs of students and their lived experiences. Interviewing students to understand how they use the NSLP to address their issues of food insecurity and obesity would empower administrators to really position their program to serve them. This may add a fresh perspective for administrators or, if nothing else, it would provide us with a serious dose of reality. I realize that interviewing students adds a significantly more complex level of requirements, but I believe it is a road worth travelling.

**Conclusion**

Making the assumption that as school administrators serving students who may live in poverty, I believe we are placed in our students’ lives to exemplify transformative leadership. Burber (2001) has provided me with the words to describe how I believe this concept of transformative leadership should be applied to schools:

For the genuine educator does not merely consider individual functions of a pupil as intending to teach him only to know or be capable of certain definite things; but his concern is always the person as a whole, both in the actuality in which he lives before you now and in his possibilities, what he can become. (p. 101)
Using Burber (2001) as my foundation, I believe that we must use our power and position to address the inequalities in our students’ lives. In poorer communities, our children have certain realities that are often misunderstood by mainstream society. To borrow a popular African American spiritual term, I must say that as administrators we are called to stand in the gap.

The need to have high quality nutritious food is pervasive in our community because too many of our students are living with food insecurity and/or obesity. With the NSLP, we have a tool that can help us in this charge, but we must do our part. This means that the administration of the NSLP cannot be turned over to food service management companies or food service vendors. The findings in this study support this fact. The participants in this study believed their request for menu changes translated into healthier choices for their students. Since I was not present and cannot describe the requests, I cannot say the changes were not made. However, I do believe it was highly unlikely that each administrator asked for the same changes, resulting in menus that were almost identical. I believe the administrators were paying only lip service and the vendors produced the meals as they had intended. As administrators, we must remember that we do not have to settle for whatever these companies choose to give us. The vendors are paid to serve and meet the needs of our students, but we must take the time to require that our vendors service our students properly.

Most of us are moved by our experiences. This study showed that personal histories and personal experiences drew the attention of the participants to care about how they fed the children in their schools. One respondent wanted to be a chef and collected restaurant experiences. Another had a family member who was living with the challenges of being obese. The same is true for me. Having grown up in some of New York’s poorer suburban schools and
then moved to more affluent neighborhoods, my attention toward the financial disparities which create differences in educational experiences is heightened. The fact that it costs twice as much to provide food service in poor districts should be troubling for every educator and politician. We should question the conditions and policies that enable corporations to serve poor students food that fails to meet the nutritional guidelines at a cost that far exceeds those of more affluent districts.

When asked to dream big, the participants in this study simply wanted a kitchen as a means to provide higher quality food to their students. They saw the kitchen as a means to being able to offer employment to community members. With a little financial assistance to help poor districts build these kitchens, districts would be able to cut their food service costs in half and reallocate these funds into other educational services that could serve their children. This is a win-win situation.

If they extended their thinking, with these kitchens, schools could offer breakfast and lunch programs, making the move to also provide dinner a reality. Paired with an afterschool program, students could receive three square meals at school. Parents could also purchase these meals and alleviate the need to rush home to prepare dinner, which could make time available to actually spend engaging with their children. This could be an excellent strategy to address food insecurity which most certainly exists somewhere in our communities. If, according to Mathematica Policy Research Inc. (2010), 11.1% of Illinois’ households are faced with the challenges of food insecurity, why not use the schools to address this concern. With funding similar to those given to food pantries, schools, which are readily accessible to parents and students, could provide meals to those in the school community who are living with food insecurity. This entire vision creates a demand for employees, addresses the issue of providing
more nutritious meals to students, and addresses food insecurity. This enables our schools to better serve the entire community.

There is yet one area that needs to be addressed. From this study, I believe it is evident that those responsible for developing menus need help. This need is supported by the findings that resulted from the only self-operated district in this study. This district was in control of the entire food service program, including menu development and food production. Unfortunately, this district failed to meet the same nutritional guidelines almost as frequently as the districts with food service management contracts and vended programs. Yes, there is a plethora of information available from the USDA, but it is not translating to better menus in our schools. Despite my ongoing strong commitment to provide healthy food options to poorer students, it is only as a result of writing this dissertation to complete my degree, have I come to know even know about these resources. Administrators are pulled in so many different directions, so requiring them to spend the amount of time needed to understand this information becomes unreasonable. I suggest that the USDA provide us with a database of menu options from which to choose.

The participants in this study were asked to create a vision of their NSLP if they had unlimited resources and time. Most of the respondents said they simply wanted a kitchen. This made me wonder if, as administrators serving students from poorer communities, we have really learned to keep our dreams too small. In actuality, the vision may not be small because these kitchens have great transforming potential and if we paired this vision with providing sample menus, we could better meet the needs of our children. Yet we need to think bigger. We need to dream about eradicating hunger and poverty, educating all children to their capabilities, and hence transforming the lives of our children, parents and the entire learning community. When
thought of in this manner, the school nutrition program is a reasonable first step to solve the challenges we face. I hope this study inspires all of us to get started.
Epilogue

As I ask other administrators to more fully assume the charge of fully utilizing the authority given to us by the Illinois School Board of Education and the USDA, I have to let them know that it is possible to succeed at this task. My dissertation committee has also helped me recognize the importance of sharing more of my journey with the National School Lunch Program as a part of this dissertation.

My research indicated that were several factors that influenced how the administrators thought about the NSLP. In the summary I mentioned that I grew up in some of New York’s poorer suburban schools and then I moved to more affluent neighborhoods. This served to draw my attention toward the financial disparities which are associated with differences in educational experiences for children. However, I failed to add that it was my mother’s battle with her weight and her desire for me to have a different reality that served as the catalyst for my concerns about nutritious foods. My mother told me as a child that low fat yogurt was really gourmet ice cream, she never gave me sugar filled cereals, she always served me 100% juice, and stressed the importance of eating raw vegetables and “real food”. My mother also told me that the neighborhood in which you live could dictate the food available to you. It is that lesson that moves me to provide a different reality for the children I serve.

In my role at Dolton School District 149 I have held several positions, but it was not until I became the Business Manager that I began working with the NSLP on a regular basis that I recognized the impact a lunch program could have. Now, as the Deputy Superintendent and Chief Financial Officer, I oversee several educational functions and work with several programs. However, everyone in DSD 149 knows that the NSLP holds a special place in my heart, and I will always work to play an instrumental role in the implementation of the program.
When I began the journey I was fortunate enough to attend a very thorough training provided by Denise LeFever at the ISBE. In this training I learned a great deal about the administration requirements of School Food Authorities and the requirements of administrators who ultimately assume responsibility for the program. I left Springfield armed with information and the realization of just how we were falling short of the programs’ intended goals.

My Board of Education, under the leadership of Mrs. Darlene Gray Everett, gave me the latitude to make the necessary changes. This was, and continues to be, a Board of Education that is committed to feeding every child a full lunch, every day, regardless of their ability to pay. I say that so that their commitment to truly serving the needs of children can be more clear. With the support of this group of leaders, I was able to eliminate all fried foods, high sodium, high sugar, and high saturated fat snacks regardless of the effect on the fiscal bottom line, long before it became a federal program requirement. As I worked to become more knowledgeable about nutrition and food in general, the demands I placed on my food service management company may have served as the reason I went through a few food service managers. Finally, the company recruited a manager who they believed could “handle” my demands. Mike Roache was working with the Detroit Public Schools, but actually lived in our community. We had a very rough start, and finally he admitted that his company was not used to having such a “hands on” administrator. They were more familiar with districts that hired them and simply allowed them to have full control over the program. He quickly realized that I wasn’t that type of administrator and he understood that I was passionate about how we fed my children. Here was proof that being hands-on could make a difference.

With our new found understanding, Mr. Roache and I began working toward improving our program. We made substantial progress and our lunch program became the talk amongst
the surrounding school districts. We were actually visited by the high school Superintendent, who wanted to know what we were doing in DSD149. Many of our students went on to attend her high schools and she couldn’t help but take note of the complaints and comparisons made by my former students. We continued to make changes which included fresh, not canned, or frozen fruits and vegetables, baked chicken, less pizza and less tacos.

I knew that I was beginning to dip into my FSMC’s bottom line, and this was evident as the company began harrassing Mike Roache and my regional managers about this very fact. Knowing that I had final menu approval and that my bid specifications were written such that all subsequent menus had to offer a certain type of meals, I continued to demand that they meet my menu requests. Before that school year ended the Vice President in charge of our area resigned, and the Regional Manager was reassigned to a different region. Mike Roache eventually resigned and DSD149 was given a new District Manager.

The 2008-2009 school year was a turbulent year for food service in DSD149. With my new manager in position, I received more parental, student, and administrator complaints than I had received in my entire career at DSD149. Menu items were changed daily without my approval or knowledge. I received complaints about cold food, poor tasting food, strange colored meats, tacos and pizza served daily, and children who were allowed to put taco meat on flammaing hots. In addition, I receive the lowest score ever on my kitchen health inspections and my Federal School Meals Initiative Review was a disaster. I was livid!

I held a very heated meeting with the District Manager and the Regional Manager. Disgusted with the excuses received and lack of concern displayed. I took my concerns to the President of this very large company. With supporting documents attached, I sent a very detailed letter to him and requested a meeting. I was eventually contacted by a member of his executive
cabinet, but I felt successful in sending the message that I was serious. We made it through the
remainder of the school year with this company, but I was determined to show them that I would
not settle or lower my standards. At the conclusion of the school year, I placed the contract on
the bid list to solicit quotes from other companies. With the help of my district’s attorney, we
were able to write the specifications such that my current FSMC would be forced to disclose the
problems they were having with our district and other districts similar to DSD149.

Knowing that my former contractor was one of the largest companies in the business, I
knew that I would have to be aggressive in the pursuit of a company to compete with them. I
researched to find other companies in neighboring states that provided similar services and I
found Aviand’s Food & Service Management in Wisconsin. They had no real presence in K-12
schools in Illinois, but I forwarded my bid specifications to them. To keep a long story short, I
will say that they are now our FSMC and we are making great strides in food service. Since they
have come on board with us, we have been able to expand our meal program to offer breakfast,
lunch, snack and dinner to our middle school students. We plan to expand our program so that
we are able to provide these same services to all of our students. Again, I was taught that having
a clear goal, persistence, and a hands-on approach could result in change.

Our community is now fortunate enough to have a full service supermarket. Pete’s Fresh
Market, came in to our community and continues to provide fresh fruit, vegetables, and meats at
low prices. They provide the members of our community with the Whole Foods experience,
minus the organic food exposure, at reasonable prices. So our agenda is now geared to address
the issue of food insecurity for our entire learning community. We are scheduled to begin
reaching out to the Department of Human Services during the next school year to develop
partnerships that will enable our schools to better serve the entire community.
REFERENCES

(2004). *Section 204 of Public Law 108-265*.


APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

University Of Illinois
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

April 1, 2011

Alicia Greddis
Education Policy, Organization and Leadership Department
337 College of Education
MC-708

Dear Alicia,

On behalf of the College of Education Human Subjects Committee, I have reviewed and approved your research project entitled "National School Lunch: An Examination of the program's implementation in Chicago's south suburban elementary school districts that serve a large number of students who live in poverty." This project meets the exemption criteria for federal regulation 46.101(b)1 for research involving the use of normal education topics in an educational setting where the identity of the participant is protected. It also meets the exemption criteria for federal regulation 46.101(b)2 for research involving the use of normal interviews where the identity of the participant is protected.

No changes may be made to your procedure without prior Committee review and approval. You are also required to promptly notify the Committee of any problems that arise during the course of the research. Your approved project number is 4716 and exempt projects are typically approved for three years with annual status reports requested. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Best regards,

Amee S. Robertson
Coordinator, College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee
Co: Dr. Richard Hunter
Approval for Research Involving Human Subjects for:

☐ Early Research  ☐ Master's  ☐ Prelim  ☐ Final Defense

Name of student: Ainea Geddis  Department: EDOL

Student has obtained approval for research involving human subjects for the project entitled:

School Administrators' use of the National School Lunch Program to Address the needs of Students Living in Poverty

Anne S. Robertson  06/07/12
College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee  Date

Student has discussed the project with the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee and it was determined that human subjects approval was not required to complete the research for the project entitled:

College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee  Date

Select ONE of the following options:

☐ has passed Early Research examination, including human subjects approval
☐ has passed Master's examination, including human subjects approval
☐ has passed Prelim, may proceed with data collection for doctoral dissertation
☐ has passed Final examination with new title as approved in Human Subjects Approval
☐ must reapply for Human Subjects Research Approval

Signature of Advisor/Research Director  Date

Note: Human Subjects Review should be completed in advance of the preliminary examination. The Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee should sign on the first or second line. The third box should be completed and signed by the advisor or research director. It's preliminary examination is not required (or in the case in some departments for early research requirement and master's check). Human Subjects review and approval must take place before any data collection begins. This form should be attached to Early Research, Master's or Doctoral signature forms and kept on file in Graduate Program Office.
APPENDIX B

SAMPLE ILLINOIS SCHOOL REPORT CARD EXAMPLE

State and federal laws require public school districts to release report cards to the public each year.

Starting in 2006, charter school information is included in district statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racial/Ethnic Background and Other Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTRUCTIONAL SETTING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental Contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homeroom/Staff Ratios</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Class Size</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Number of Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Devoted to Teaching Core Subjects (Hours per Day)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
</tr>
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<td>Grade 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ILLESOIS DISTRICT REPORT CARD

Dolton SD 149
Calumet City, ILLINOIS
February 07, 2011

Superintendent’s Name
District Name
Street Address
City, State Zip

Re: Recruitment Letter

Dear Name,

As a student at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, I am conducting research on the National School Lunch Program. Specifically, I am examining the program’s implementation in school districts in Chicago’s south suburbs. The purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to investigate how elementary school administrators in south suburban Chicago school districts implement the NSLP and examine if they maximize the nutrition provided to children in high poverty districts. This research seeks to describe the lived experience of the administrator and develop meanings of the essences of these experiences.

Through interviews with school administrators who are assigned to oversee the program, I seek to understand strategies, practices, and policies that administrators employ to provide nutritious outcomes for their students who are more at risk of being affected by obesity and food insecurity. This research is being conducted by me, Alicia M. Geddis, a school administrator, as I work to complete my dissertation in Education Policy Organization and Leadership.

Your district was selected based on the number of students eligible for free and reduced lunch as listed on your school report card which is located on the district’s website. At this time, I would like to invite you to consider participating in this study. Enclosed, is a response card. If you are willing to have your district participate, I am asking for permission to contact the person in your district who is most responsible for implementing the National School Lunch Program. With your permission I will follow up with a phone call to address any questions, comments, or concerns you may have. If your district is selected for this study, I anticipate conducting a 60 minute interview to be held at a location chosen by you or your administrator. I anticipate engaging in these conversations between October and December of this school year.

If you are selected and agree to participate in this study, you will be assigned a pseudonym to assure your confidentiality is protected. Nothing you share will ever be associated with your name in any scholarly presentations or publications related to this project. In addition, all information you provide will be confidential.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me, Alicia M. Geddis, at peldios@yahoo.com or by phone at (708) 555-1234. Thank you for your consideration, and I will contact you soon.

Sincerely,

Alicia M. Geddis

โทรศัพท์ 217-333-2159 • โทร 217-333-3378
APPENDIX D

SAMPLE RESPONSE CARD

Dear Alicia,

☐ I would like to have my district participate in the study of the National School Lunch Program.

I am willing to personally participate in the study. Please contact me at ________ to arrange a time to conduct the one 60 minute interview to be held at a location chosen by me.

☐ I am willing to have my district participate in the study. Please contact ________ at ________.

They will serve as the District’s representative.

☐ I am not willing to participate in the study. Thank you for your interest in our District.
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions

1. What role do you play (How would you describe your role) in the implementation of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in your school district?

2. In your own words, how does the NSLP operate in your district on a daily basis?

3. Do you believe any of your students are affected by food insecurity? What percentage? How?

4. Do you believe any of your students are affected by obesity? What percentage? How?

5. Is there any particular knowledge, experiences or influences that would lead you to think of the NSLP as a vehicle for transformation or social justice?

6. How do you attempt to provide greater exposure to nutritious meal options in the NSLP?

7. If you had unlimited resources and time what changes would you make to the NSLP?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS AS NEEDED:

8. How long have you worked with the NSLP?

9. How many of your students are eligible for free or reduced lunch?

10. What is a typical meal offered from your NSLP?

11. What control does the school administration have over the implementation of the NSLP in your district?

12. How would you improve the NSLP for students who are affected by obesity?

13. How would you improve the NSLP for students who are affected by food insecurity?
## APPENDIX F

### SAMPLE SCHOOL LUNCH MENU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good Fish/Wildrice Cheese on Whole-wheat Multigrain Bread w/ Fruit/Vegetable</td>
<td>Breakfast Burrito, Apple/Vegetable Medley</td>
<td>Green St. Patty's Patty w/ Veggies, Brown Rice, &amp; Bread</td>
<td>Chicken Parmesan, Spaghetti &amp; Meatballs</td>
<td>Pizza &amp; Focaccia w/ Fresh Fruit/Vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option</strong></td>
<td>Turkey/Apple Medley on Whole-wheat Bread</td>
<td>Opt: Turkey/Apple Medley</td>
<td><strong>Option</strong></td>
<td>Opt: Turkey/Apple Medley</td>
</tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Additional Menus

- **Cheeseburger on Wheat Bun w/ Fries & Pickles**
- **Roasted Vegetables**
- **Two-Sided Water w/ Fries**
- **Turkey Noodle Vegetable Medley**
- **Chicken Salad w/ Shaved Tuna & Lettuce**
- **Macaroni & Cheese w/ Whole-wheat Rolls**
- **Mexican Cheese/Salsa**
- **BBQ Meatloaf on Wheat Roll**
- **Turkey & Cheese Salad**

**HealthierUS School Challenge**

For questions or comments, please email the Food Service Director at barnea@answeds.com or call 702-633-1977.
## APPENDIX G

### MENU ANALYSIS RESULTS

### Site Production Nutrient Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Calories (kcal)</th>
<th>Standard Value</th>
<th>Deviation</th>
<th>% Contribution</th>
<th>Error Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Fat (g)</td>
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<td>27.59 (g)</td>
<td>-8.64 (%)</td>
<td>-46.95 (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturated Fat (g)</td>
<td>9.04 (g)</td>
<td>14.06 (g)</td>
<td>-5.02 (%)</td>
<td>-35.69 (%)</td>
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<td>Total Carbs (g)</td>
<td>33.21 (g)</td>
<td>52.90 (g)</td>
<td>-19.69 (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dietary Fiber (g)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protein (g)</td>
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<td>17.24 (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fat (g)</td>
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<td>17.32 (g)</td>
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<td>40.02 (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vitamin C (mg)</td>
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<td>14.88 (mg)</td>
<td>2.38 (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calcium (mg)</td>
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<td>1,042.04 (mg)</td>
<td>883.68 (mg)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iron (mg)</td>
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<td>-222.67 (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manganese (g)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Zinc (g)</td>
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### Iron Nutrient Contributions

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<th>Prot (g)</th>
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<th>Saturated Fat (g)</th>
<th>Dietary Fiber (g)</th>
<th>Protein (g)</th>
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<th>Manganese (g)</th>
<th>Zinc (g)</th>
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<th>% RDA</th>
<th>% A performers</th>
<th>% A animals</th>
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