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Experiences of California District Intern Program Leaders During COVID-19

By

JULIANNA SIKES
DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

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of the

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ABSTRACT

The leadership experiences of district intern program leaders in California play an important role in addressing the teacher shortage and diversifying the teaching workforce. However, limited information about their experiences exists in the empirical literature. Additionally, due to the recency of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is limited information in the literature about the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders as they enacted California credentialing policies during that time. Yet, much can be learned from the experiences of these leaders. This qualitative study examined the experiences and leadership actions of district intern program leaders during the 2020–2022 COVID pandemic period as they implemented California credentialing policies. This research project consisted of a review of selected credential policy changes, a focus group, and semistructured interviews conducted with five participants who were leaders of consortium-based district intern programs, located in three different regions in California. All interviews were transcribed and analytic coding was completed.

The experiences of participants in their leadership roles varied from 2 to 6 years. Participant vignettes and collective thematic findings are presented within this study. Five major themes emerged that have significant implications for district intern programs and teacher credentialing in California. These findings include the following leadership actions: understanding and interpreting credentialing policies; communicating to and with constituents; making changes in program delivery; navigating exam deferrals and calling out inequities; and finally, noticing shifts in intern enrollment, completion, and demographics. Understanding the actions district intern program leaders took in response to interpreting and implementing changes in California credentialing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic creates opportunities to

reimagine state and local policy and practice in order to strengthen teacher preparation, decrease the teacher shortage, and further diversify the teaching workforce.

key words: district intern program, COVID-19 pandemic, intern teacher, teacher preparation, teacher shortage, teacher diversity, credentialing, intern leader, licensure exams, policies, exam deferrals, sites of shaping

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my parents, Stephen and Linda Sikes. To my dad: I was always struck by the fact that you returned to school in your 50s to earn a bachelor's degree at UC Davis. Your perseverance to complete a degree as a returning adult student served as inspiration for me to never stop learning and motivated me to pursue my doctorate degree. Huge thanks for modeling what is possible. To my mom: I've always admired your quiet strength, your ability to push for social change, to see the struggle of marginalized groups, and how you've been an agent for change within our community and beyond. You've inspired me over the years to advocate, to work deeply on shifting inequities, and to fully be myself, even when it was hard to do so. Deepest appreciation for modeling activism, for encouraging me, and for your unconditional love and steadfast support.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

The teacher shortage has been an ongoing and growing concern both within California and nationally (Carver-Thomas, 2022). Although there are multiple routes for prospective teachers to enter the profession, overall there has been a decline in enrollment in California's teacher preparation programs over the last 10 years and, until most recently, a decline in the number of new credentials awarded (Suckow & Hickey, 2014). This has resulted in a significant workforce shortage (Suckow & Hickey, 2014). The most recent Teacher Supply Report (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing [CTC], 2022) noted that the number of new credentials issued in 2020–2021 had increased from the prior 2019–2020 year; however, the rate at which teachers leave the workforce continues to outpace the rate at which new teachers earn credentials.

In addition to the problem of the teacher shortage, there is a high need to diversify the teaching workforce so it is more reflective of the racial demographics of students in California. According to the Learning Policy Institute, having greater diversity in the teaching profession can have positive impacts for students (Carver-Thomas, 2018). For example, analysis of data from the Tennessee STAR class size study found that students who were taught by a teacher of color experienced significant long-term academic benefits (Carver-Thomas, 2018, p. 4). Although there are benefits for students in diversifying the teaching profession, the latest available teacher demographic data from Ed Data show the California workforce is 61% White, 3.9% Black, 5.8% Asian, and 21% Hispanic (Ed-Data, 2021). The teacher demographics look quite different from the student population, which, according to student data from 2022-2023 from the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System, is 20% White, 4.7% Black,

9.5% Asian, and 56% Hispanic¹ (California Department of Education, n.d.). Furthermore, data compiled in 2017–2018 from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, and reported by the Education Trust show that teachers of color make up 18.5% of the teacher workforce in California, yet students of color make up 47.2% of the student population. Although the teacher shortage and lack of workforce diversity are two significant problems facing education in California, perhaps an even more significant problem is the barriers that prospective teachers face in entering a credential program and/or the teaching profession.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified these existing problems. Namely, the teacher shortage was exacerbated; as the recent Merrimack College Teacher Survey revealed, 54% of teachers stated they were likely to leave teaching within the next 2 years (Merrimack College, 2022). This percentage reflects an increase in teacher attrition rates, as prior to the pandemic, approximately 10% of teachers left the profession annually (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the teacher shortage and at the same time enabled a diverse pool of teacher candidates to enroll in teacher preparation programs. This occurred as a result of Senate Bill (SB) 820, which temporarily suspended teacher licensure exams as entry criteria into teacher preparation programs (CTC, 2020). A review of Title II demographic data from 2020–2021 reveals an increase in enrollment for Asian, Black, and Hispanic teacher candidates when compared to 2019–2020 enrollment data (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Teacher diversification and the teacher shortage crisis have implications for teacher preparation programs, school districts, and students.

¹ The term “Hispanic” is used by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing for reporting teacher demographic data

One credentialing route that might play a significant role in addressing the teacher shortage and diversifying the teaching workforce is district intern programs. District intern programs are considered an alternative certification route, and the National Association for Alternative Certification, as cited by Karge and McCabe (2014), defines alternative certification as “a preparation program that primarily serves candidates who become teachers or other school leaders of record in classrooms/schools while participating in, or immediately after participation in the route to certification” (p. 26). Within California, the CTC defines district intern programs as “an educator preparation program approved by the Commission that is developed and implemented by a school district or county office of education” (CTC, n.d.-c). These programs, although fewer in number, tend to serve school districts in areas that lack access to traditional preparation programs or specific credential areas. As a result, such programs provide a much-needed service to regions in California and play a significant role in addressing the teacher shortage and teacher diversity.

There are three key reasons district intern programs play a significant role. First, although there has been a national trend of downward enrollment in teacher preparation programs, enrollment in intern programs has increased by almost 50% between 2012–2013 and 2018–2019, as evidenced by the most recent 2020–2021 Title II data report (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Second, intern teachers are employed as the teacher of record while completing coursework to earn a preliminary credential; therefore, intern teachers are actively filling vacant teaching positions in schools and supporting school districts in solving staffing shortages. Third, demographic data reveal intern programs are increasingly more racially diverse when compared to traditional preparation programs (CTC, 2021c). This is supported by a recent Learning Policy Institute report, which showed that teachers of color are more likely to enter the profession

through an alternative pathway, and that in 2013, 25% of all new teachers of color entered the profession through an alternative certification program (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Based on this information, it is clear district intern programs are essential in diversifying the teaching profession and addressing the teacher shortage.

Research Relevance

A CTC database evidenced district-based intern programs in California have increased in number from 13 to a total of 19 between 2021–2022, yet such programs are smaller in scale than traditional teacher preparation programs and therefore may not necessarily enroll or credential the same volume of teachers (*Accreditation Reports / CTC ADS*, n.d.). However, intern programs serve a distinct role, as they were developed in 1967 to “expand the pool of qualified teachers by attracting persons into teaching who might not otherwise enter the classroom, as well as those who bring valuable attributes and experiences into teaching” and to serve “career changers, as well as those underrepresented in the teaching workforce, and those committed to teaching in high-need schools.” (Creeggan & Noelting, 2009, p. 1). These programs follow the same CTC program standards as traditional teacher preparation programs and are fully accredited by the CTC.

Problem Statement

Although intern programs may be impactful in diversifying the workforce and decreasing the teacher shortage, some have viewed teacher intern programs as a “threat” to traditional, university-based programs (Walsh & Jacobs, 2007, p. 17). Others have suggested alternative certification pathways are “deficient and thus less rigorous” (Bowling & Ball, 2018, p. 111). Additionally, the CTC defines intern credentials as “substandard” and intern teachers are referred to as “underprepared” (Carver-Thomas et al., 2020). This was also evidenced at a recent CTC

commission meeting, when the chair of the commission referred to classrooms staffed by intern teachers as “ways that are substandard” (CTC, 2023c). These negative perceptions are problematic for several reasons. First, such perceptions diminish the validity and credibility of district intern programs, which are fully accredited by the CTC and adhere to the exact same standards as traditional teacher preparation programs. Next, these perceptions and the use of deficit-focused language stand in sharp contrast to the intent of intern programs, as they are designed to help districts meet shortages of qualified teachers and to attract persons into teaching who would not normally enroll in a traditional preparation program (Creegan & Noelting, 2009). Finally, these perceptions are counter to the current movement within California to strengthen the pipeline into the profession through “Grow Your Own” (GYO) programs, which recruit and train local school staff and community members to become educators. District intern programs are considered GYO programs, as many are developed in direct response to local school district staffing needs (Carver-Thomas et al., 2020, p. 27). Although district intern programs provide a valuable service to school districts within their region, during the COVID-19 pandemic there was a shift in the ways in which such programs delivered services and supported teacher candidates.

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically affected all aspects of education, including teacher preparation programs. This was apparent as district intern programs across California experienced significant changes in program design, delivery, and candidate composition. This occurred as a result of Governor Gavin Newsom’s Executive Order N-66-20 on actions in response to COVID-19 (EO N-66-20) (Executive Department, 2020). EO N-66-20 allowed candidates enrolled in teacher preparation programs during the 2019–2020 school year to be recommended for a preliminary teacher credential without having passed the Reading Instruction

Competence Assessment (RICA) and the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA). This executive order was extended for the 2020–2021 school year when SB 820 COVID-19 Flexibilities (2020) passed, allowing prospective teachers to enroll in preparation programs prior to having met the basic skills requirement or the subject matter competency requirement. These flexibilities occurred in response to the increasing need to address and end the California teacher shortage, which was exacerbated during COVID.

With EO N-66-20 and the subsequent passage of SB 820, district intern program leaders were faced with quickly shifting program entrance and enrollment criteria and had to rapidly alter program design and delivery. In the 2 years following the implementation of SB 820, the CTC produced over 10 Program Sponsor Alerts (PSAs) related to SB 820 COVID program flexibilities. District intern program leaders were responsible for following and enacting these state-mandated PSAs. Due to the recency of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the state-mandated requirements enacted in response, the experiences and actions of these district intern leaders have yet to be studied. However, the impacts of these state-mandated policies along with the actions of district intern program leaders have significant implications for teacher candidates, credentialing, and school staffing across the state of California. Furthermore, the examination of state policy enacted during COVID and the experiences of district intern program leaders provides valuable information to effectively address the teacher shortage and increase teacher diversity in the state of California.

Purpose

This study used a qualitative approach to examine the experiences and leadership actions of district intern program leaders during the 2020–2022 COVID pandemic period as they implemented California credentialing policies. A qualitative approach was used to dive deeper

into the experiences of district intern program leaders, which have the potential to impact policy decisions regarding teacher preparation and credentialing, as well as the program design of district intern teacher preparation programs across the state of California. The data collection process had three components: the first component was a document review of selected CTC PSAs from 2020–2021 that were developed in response to the Governor’s EO N-66-20/SB 820 COVID Program Flexibilities; the second component was a semistructured focus group consisting of identified district intern program leaders; and the third component was individual interviews of district intern program leaders after the focus group was conducted.

Research Questions

This study focused on two research questions:

1. How do the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders as they implemented California credentialing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic period address the teacher shortage?
2. What did district intern program leaders notice about diversity in intern program enrollment during the COVID-19 pandemic period?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The following review provides context for this study and covers four areas of literature relating to the study's focus. These areas are state policy requirements for alternative certification programs, teacher preparedness based on pathways and perceptions, the role of alternative certification programs in teacher workforce diversity, and the COVID-19 pandemic and teacher preparation programs. By reviewing literature in the four aforementioned areas, I synthesized existing research and revealed possible limitations or gaps in regards to the experiences of district intern program leaders and the purpose of intern programs as related to the teacher shortage and teacher diversification.

State Policy Requirements for Alternative Certification Programs

Some proponents of alternative certification programs view state mandates around certification as “unnecessary hurdles and barriers that prevent talented individuals from becoming teachers” (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007, p. 491). Yet there are numerous alternative certification programs, including those in California, that are required to follow the same standards that university-based teacher education programs follow (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). District intern program leaders are responsible for interpreting and enacting these state mandates within their programs. The literature examined below identifies the benefits and barriers state-mandated requirements present for alternative certification programs.

Teacher Licensure Exams

Teacher licensure exams are one of several state-mandated requirements needed for entry into a teacher preparation program and for successful program completion leading to a credential recommendation. As of 2020, all states had teacher licensure exams in place (Cowan et al.,

2020). In California, according to a recent CTC (2021a) annual report on the passing rates of commission-approved examinations, these exams are used to ensure teachers have competencies in basic skills, are proficient in their subject area, and demonstrate professional knowledge in order to be eligible to teach. Existing research reveals that licensure exams can either bolster or hinder prospective teachers from entering and/or completing a teacher preparation program.

There are numerous studies that have examined the impact of alternative certification programs since their inception. For example, the study done by Lutz and Hutton (1989) demonstrated that alternatively certified teachers score higher on licensing exams. Lutz and Hutton (1989) found 80% of alternatively certified teachers in Dallas, Texas met or exceeded the cutoff scores for the basic skills entrance exam in reading, 88% met or exceeded cutoff scores in math, and 75% met or exceeded cutoff scores in writing. Additionally, when alternatively certified teachers' exit exam test scores were compared to first-year traditionally certified teachers' scores, it was found that more alternatively certified teachers passed the exams in five of the seven areas on the exam (Lutz & Hutton, 1989). Furthermore, 91 of the 99 intern teachers within this study had taken the exit exam, and 84 (92%) had passed (Lutz & Hutton, 1989, p. 248). A more recent study, which took place in Arkansas, by Shuls and Trivitt (2015) revealed similar findings in that alternatively certified teachers scored higher on licensure exams when compared to traditionally certified teachers. This study also found a significant positive relationship between higher Praxis II test scores from alternatively certified teachers and student achievement. Although these studies show teacher licensure exams were not a barrier for intern program enrollment or credentialing, across time, other studies have suggested otherwise.

Two studies from Washington and Massachusetts evidenced that licensure exams produce barriers for teachers of color when it comes to enrolling in a teacher preparation

program, or entering the workforce. Yoon et al. (2019) noted that, on surveys of 177 prospective teachers of color in Washington who held limited certifications, that approximately 45% did not feel confident in their ability to pass entrance or exit exams required for licensure. Yoon et al. also found testing fees produced a barrier, as prospective teachers of color rated having fees paid as important or very important to entering a teacher preparation program. Although this study identified licensure exams as a potential obstacle for teachers of color to enter a teacher preparation program based on survey data, it did not provide data on the number of teacher candidates who took licensure entrance or exit exams and then were unable to either enter or complete a teacher preparation program. However, a quantitative study conducted in Massachusetts evidenced similar results to the Washington study. Cowan et al. (2020) found passing the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) exam was a barrier for candidates of color. Cowan et al. also found candidates of color were less likely to attempt and less likely pass the MTEL exam. This was evidenced by research data showing that teachers of color are about 7 to 13 percentage points less likely to retake the test within 1 year (Cowan et al., 2020). Cowan et al. stated that the research findings were “at least suggestive that the MTEL presents an additional barrier to candidates of color” (pp. 15–16). Given that both of these studies identified passing licensure exams as a deterrent for teachers of color to entering a teacher preparation program, one could conclude that such state-mandated exams limit the ability for prospective teachers of color to enroll in teacher preparation programs and that this in turn negatively impacts teacher workforce diversity.

Studies identifying licensure exams as a barrier for teachers of color seeking to enter the teaching profession provide an important perspective about the role these exams have in regards to workforce diversity and reducing the teacher shortage. Although the study conducted by

Cowan et al. (2020) found a positive, strong relationship between MTEL exam scores and the performance of candidates of color, the study also found candidates of color were less likely to retake the MTEL if they did not pass on the first attempt when compared to White teachers with similar scores. This study concluded with the authors finding limited direct evidence on “the effects of licensure policies” and diversity of the teacher profession (Cowan et al., 2020, p. 18). Although it appears, based on this study, that licensure exams do not negatively impact teacher workforce diversity, they do limit the entry rate and/or delay workforce entry for teachers of color if such teachers do not pass exams on the first attempt and must retake exams.

Another study on the PRAXIS II teacher licensure exam as cited by Ing and Loeb (2008), demonstrated the impact not passing exams had on teacher workforce entry and teacher diversification. Within this study, Ing and Loeb noted that test cutoff criteria can generate a false negative, impacting teachers who failed to pass the exam, yet might have been high-quality teachers. Furthermore, cutoff criteria can generate a false positive, benefiting individuals who passed the exam based on cutoff criteria, yet may turn out to be poorly performing teachers (Ing and Loeb, 2008). The results from this study also indicated licensure exams are a potential barrier for teachers of color, thus limiting the diversity of the teacher workforce. Although licensure exams are one such state-mandated requirement that may produce barriers to program entry and diversifying the workforce, the design and delivery of alternative certification programs is another state requirement that may help or hinder teacher credentialing and diversifying the workforce.

Program Design and Delivery

The design and delivery of alternative certification programs are based on state-mandated requirements. Some components of program design must be strictly adhered to and implemented

by program leaders exactly as the state policy is written, whereas other state-mandated components can be interpreted in different ways by program leaders. The interpretation of state policy affects program delivery and may produce differences across programs, potentially leading to variation in program experience.

A qualitative study conducted by Humphrey and Wechsler (2007) examined program delivery of seven alternative certification programs and found variations in clinical experience and coursework. Humphrey and Wechsler noticed although many programs considered clinical practice to be an important component of teacher preparation, most of the programs studied provided a shortened clinical practice experience. Additionally, variation was found in coursework across programs, with course content often designed to meet local district needs (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007, p. 520). Humphrey and Wechsler also found that career trajectories along with school context and placement affected the learning experiences of teachers within programs, more so than variation in program design and delivery (p. 522). Although this study included multiple alternative certification programs, only one program was a district-based intern program. However, a preceding study of a single district-based intern program by Lutz and Hutton (1989) also focused on program design and delivery.

Lutz and Hutton (1989) examined the characteristics of a single district-based intern program created by the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) and approved by the Texas Education Agency. Similarly to Humphrey and Wechsler (2007), Lutz and Hutton studied coursework and field work within the DISD program. Lutz and Hutton found that coursework was taught by program administrators, district staff, and university professors, whereas fieldwork experiences occurred under the direction of supervising teachers (p. 241). Several policy recommendations for intern program characteristics were made based on the findings from this

study. For example, the authors recommended program design to include a course sequence with a preteaching training program in the summer or early fall, utilizing both university and school district personnel (Lutz & Hutton, 1989, p. 252). Additionally, Lutz and Hutton recommended that programs provide interns field experience opportunities to practice teaching under the supervision of an experienced, supervising teacher (p. 252). Given that this study focused on a single district intern program, the authors did not focus on variation in program design or delivery, and the recommendations provided were targeted at the local level. A contrasting study by Romero (2010) examined the politics and practices of 74 state-sponsored intern programs within California, and, similar to Humphrey and Wechsler, identified variations across programs. Unlike Lutz and Hutton (1989), Romero provided recommendations that could be applied to multiple programs.

Romero (2010) conducted a qualitative study of intern programs within the state of California. This study occurred during a time when state subsidies were available for the development of intern programs. Based on the programs studied, Romero identified four distinct models of intern programs. Two of the four models envisioned unique programs, with one model designed to meet local district needs and the other aimed to change the nature of teacher preparation programs on a larger scale. The other two program models did not focus on redesigning teacher preparation programs and instead sought to increase the number of teachers entering the profession through the delivery model (Romero, 2010). Through interviews of local program directors, Romero found “significant diversity in the structure, curriculum, and design” of the programs, and attributed differences to the ways program directors adapted state goals and regulations (Romero, 2010, p. 376). Although this study focused solely on intern programs within California, and the study by Humphrey and Wechsler (2007) focused on different types of

alternative certification programs in multiple states, both studies identified variations across programs. Romero found some programs mirroring the design of traditional preparation programs and others redefining teacher preparation program design, whereas Humphrey and Wechsler found the variations across programs to be distinct from the design of traditional preparation programs. According to the two studies by Romero and Humphrey and Wechsler, the design of intern programs and alternative certification programs can vary based on decisions made by program leadership and by the interpretation of policies. Yet other studies suggest otherwise.

A study by Walsh and Jacobs (2007) examined 49 alternative certification programs across the country and found that the structure of alternative certification programs mirrored that of traditional preparation programs. Walsh and Jacobs asserted that alternative certification programs were not really alternative, as the program design and requirements were found to be the same as traditional programs. For example, Walsh and Jacobs found a third of the programs studied required the same amount of coursework as a traditional program. Walsh and Jacobs conclude their study by finding that of the 49 programs studied, none met their criteria for a “genuine alternative program,” which includes program characteristics of academic selectivity, candidates possessing strong subject-matter knowledge, streamlined courses of study, and intensive new teacher support (Walsh & Jacobs, 2007, p. 35). In addition, Walsh and Jacobs found very few programs met the components of a model program (p. 32). Although Walsh and Jacobs’s findings are critical of alternative certification programs, out of 49 programs studied, 34 were intern programs, and of those programs, just 10 were district-based intern programs, with only three of the 10 programs being California district-based intern programs. Given the small sample size of California district-based intern programs ($n = 3$) included in their study, it is

difficult to discern whether these programs fully meet the model of a genuine alternative program or meet all the model program components as identified by Walsh and Jacobs. As a result, these findings indicate a further need to study California district-based intern programs and the experiences of California district intern program leaders.

Teacher Preparedness Based on Pathway and Perceptions

Multiple studies comparing traditional teacher preparation programs to alternative certification programs have focused on teachers' feelings of preparedness based on their program pathway. Findings from these studies have led to negative perceptions of alternative certification programs, with some holding the view that alternative certification teachers are less prepared and such programs "fast-track" teachers into certification by reducing program requirements (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007). These views may have negative implications for teachers enrolling in alternative certification programs seeking entry into the profession.

A quantitative study conducted by Kee (2012) utilized national data from the 2003–2004 Schools and Staffing Survey and compared alternatively and traditionally certified teachers. This study found that alternatively certified teachers in programs that allowed them to begin teaching prior to having had coursework or field experience, or who had had brief practice experiences consisting of 1 to 7 weeks, felt less prepared during their first year of teaching. Only 18% of these teachers felt well prepared after completing 1 to 7 weeks of practice, in contrast to 62% of alternatively certified teachers who had between 8 and 11 weeks of practice and reported feeling more prepared (Kee, 2012, p. 34). Although this study was national in scope, another study by Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) found, based on survey data of teachers in New York City, that traditionally prepared teachers felt significantly more prepared across most dimensions of teaching when compared to alternatively certified teachers. The number of alternatively certified

teachers surveyed consisted of a small sample size ($n = 48$), and within that, only 2% were teachers from intern programs. Based on the small sample size of intern teachers within this study, and that the study did not focus on teachers outside of New York City, it is difficult to determine whether or not intern programs, and particularly California-based district intern programs, produce teachers who feel more or less prepared to teach as compared to traditionally prepared teachers. A third and more recent study by Matsko et al. (2022) identified similar results to the study by Darling-Hammond. Matsko et al. found traditionally prepared teachers reported more “favorable perceptions” in preparedness when compared to alternatively prepared teachers (p. 235). Yet this study took place within Chicago public schools, and the authors acknowledged the results may not be generalizable to other school districts and other states (Matsko et al., 2022). Although these three studies illustrate that traditional preparation programs produce teachers who feel more prepared to teach, none of these studies have explicitly focused on district intern programs as a subset of alternative certification programs, making it difficult to discern the feelings of preparedness among district intern program teachers as compared to traditionally prepared teachers.

Although these studies focused on the perceptions of alternative certification programs in relation to traditional programs, there is a lack of research examining whether or not these perceptions help or hinder prospective teachers from enrolling in or completing a district intern program. Additionally, there is a lack of research as to whether or not perceptions of district intern programs affect teacher diversity. Although it is uncertain if perceptions of district intern programs affect teacher diversity, there are extant studies evidencing the critical role alternative certification programs play in diversifying the teacher workforce.

Role of Alternative Certification Programs in Teacher Diversity

Alternative certification programs were designed to attract a diverse pool of teacher candidates as well as career-changers into the field (Creeggan & Noelting, 2009). As a result, alternative certification programs play a critical role in diversifying the teacher workforce. Several research studies show alternative certification programs not only attract teachers of color at a higher rate than traditional programs, they also support teachers of color with program completion by providing intentional structures and support.

A qualitative study conducted by Scott (2019) examined reasons Black male special education teachers selected alternative certification teacher preparation programs. In this study, Black male special education teachers cited three main reasons, which included lower program costs, targeted recruitment and outreach from the programs, and personal connections to the field of special education (Scott, 2019). Additionally, Black male special education teachers voiced that they could receive the same quality education as a traditional preparation program while paying lower tuition by enrolling in an alternative certification program (Scott, 2019). Furthermore, the teachers in this study identified positive aspects of their alternative certification program, including mentoring from Black faculty and being able to teach full time while taking coursework to earn their credential (Scott, 2019). Based on this single study, the reasons for selecting an alternative certification program, along with the positive program aspects indicated, alternative certification programs are beneficial for prospective teachers of color, specifically for Black male teachers enrolling in the field of special education.

The study by Scott (2019) evidenced beneficial reasons for Black male special education teachers to enroll in alternative certification programs and provided recommendations that could be applied to other alternative certification programs as well as traditional preparation programs,

regardless of credential area offered. These recommendations included increasing the number of Black male faculty in teacher preparation programs, providing on-the-job training while completing program coursework, providing more training in core content subject areas as well as subject specific pedagogy, and increasing induction support (Scott, 2019, pp. 345–346). These recommendations, when implemented by teacher preparation programs, support the development and retention of Black male teachers, which aids in diversifying the teacher workforce. Although this study by Scott (2019) focused solely on Black male special education teachers within alternative certification programs, a second study by Bristol et al. (2020), which focused on preservice teachers of color in alternative certification programs, found similar results.

Bristol et al. (2020) found alternative certification programs attracted and supported teachers of color, which in turn aided in teacher diversification. Bristol et al. examined support received by Black male teachers through affinity groups in alternative certification programs. Similarly to Scott (2019), Bristol et al. conducted qualitative research and found affinity groups supported teachers with feeling comfortable to express school-based challenges they were experiencing, enabled them to collaboratively solve practice dilemmas, and allowed them to practice self-advocacy for both personal and professional growth (p. 490). Although Bristol et al. found the use of affinity groups within alternative certification programs a key factor in supporting teacher diversity, Scott (2019) found the use of targeted recruitment and retention strategies helpful in increasing teacher diversity. The study by Bristol et al. focused on curricular changes programs could make, whereas the study by Scott identified changes in program practices, such as faculty diversity, to aid in supporting teachers of color and teacher diversification. Furthermore, although each study revealed different findings based on their

research question, the overall results of both studies indicate alternative certification programs play a positive role in diversifying the teaching profession.

Although Bristol et al. (2020) and Scott (2019) focused on alternative certification programs and teacher diversity, another study conducted by Ardley et al. (2022) examined the role of teacher educators within various preparation programs in deterring systemic racism as a way to increase teacher diversity. This study consisted of an analysis of conversations of teacher preparation program participants at the Kappa Delta Pi 2020 Summit. Through research, Ardley et al. found teacher education programs that intentionally create inclusive environments and practices help to develop the assets of teachers of color and also remove barriers for teachers of color. Three key recommendations emerged from this study: perspective taking and honoring the voices of prospective teachers of color, ending White supremacy in the form of microaggressions from White teacher educators to prospective teachers of color, and providing teacher education programs with tools or actionable steps to create “contexts and experiences” (Ardley et al., 2022, pp. 9–11). All of these recommendations supported prospective and current teachers of color (Ardley et al., 2022, p. 227). Similar to Bristol et al. and Scott, Ardley et al. recommended programmatic and curricular changes for teacher preparation programs in order to best support teachers of color. These changes aid in diversifying the teaching profession.

Although the three aforementioned studies focus on the experiences of teachers of color within alternative and traditional preparation programs, another study by Cherfas et al. (2021) focused on the experiences of after-school staff of color who enrolled in nontraditional teacher preparation programs. This study examined seven programs across the United States, with only one being an intern program. The study found most participants felt supported by their programs; however, Black teacher candidates had more negative experiences than their White peers within

programs (Cherfas et al., 2021, p. 15). Specifically, some Black teacher candidates felt coursework about understanding race and teaching students of color was geared towards educating White teacher candidates and as a result ignored or generalized the experiences of teacher candidates of color (Cherfas et al., 2021, p. 5). This study, in contrast to the studies by Scott (2019) and Bristol et al. (2020), found Black teachers had more negative experiences in nontraditional programs that did not specifically consider the needs and experiences of Black teachers when designing curriculum. However, the recommendations from this study are similar to those from the study by Scott (2019). Namely, Cherfas et al. recommended states allocate resources to strengthen recruitment between nontraditional preparation programs and after-school staff. In addition, Cherfas et al. recommended that states reduce barriers to enrolling in nontraditional programs by offering financial scholarships, loan forgiveness opportunities, and programs include teacher licensure exam support, along with mentor teacher support. Although the study by Cherfas et al. produced different results than the studies of Bristol et al., Ardley et al. (2022), and Scott, all four studies indicated alternative certification programs are beneficial in diversifying the teaching profession when such programs focus intentionally on recruiting candidates of color, have intentional curricular content, and have structured systems of support in place for teachers of color. Although all of these studies point to the benefits of alternative certification programs in fostering teacher diversity, another study suggests otherwise.

A report on the recruitment and retention of teachers of color conducted by Carver-Thomas (2018) stressed the importance of diversifying the teaching profession, noting students of color benefit both academically and socially from having a teacher of color, and “high quality teacher preparation is key to teacher retention” (pp. 4, 7). Although this study found similar implications to policy and practice as the study by Cherfas et al. (2021), this study did not

include intern programs, nor did it promote intern programs as a viable pathway to support the development or retention of teachers of color. On the contrary, Carver-Thomas (2018) noted teachers of color are more likely to enter the profession through alternative certification programs than White teachers, yet teachers in alternative certification programs are more likely to leave the profession than teachers from traditional programs (p. 6–7). Furthermore, Carver-Thomas (2018) pointed to research evidencing teachers with “the least comprehensive teacher preparation” are two to three times more likely to leave the profession, and presumes intern programs do not provide comprehensive teacher preparation (p. 7). Although the views in the study by Carver-Thomas (2018) of alternative certification programs were unfavorable, the study also noted that alternative certification programs vary in terms of rigor and comprehensiveness (p. 7). Even with the variation in rigor and comprehensiveness within these programs, the recommendations focused solely on supporting teacher retention through traditional teacher preparation programs or teacher residencies. Additional recommendations included developing Grow Your Own (GYO) programs and, similarly to Cherfas et al. (2021), providing scholarship, loan forgiveness, mentoring, and adjusting state teacher licensure requirements (p. vi). This study had similar recommendations to studies focusing on the benefits of alternative certification programs in supporting teacher diversification. However, this study, along with prior research referenced within the study, did not support intern programs as a subset of alternative certification programs or view intern programs as a viable pathway to support teacher diversification.

Although all of these studies provide differing perspectives on the relationship between alternative certification programs and teacher diversity, there are limited studies focusing specifically on district intern programs and their role in supporting teacher diversity, as revealed

by the study by Cherfas et al. (2021). In addition, there is a current lack of qualitative research on how teacher diversity may have shifted during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is demonstrated through the review of subsequent studies focusing on teacher preparation programs during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Teacher Preparation

Due to the recency of the COVID-19 pandemic, limited studies exist about the pandemic and teacher preparation programs. Additionally, few U.S.-based studies exist, as a result, it is helpful to look outside of the United States for research on the COVID-19 pandemic and teacher preparation. Through a review of this available body of research, what is evident is the COVID-19 pandemic affected teacher preparation programs in terms of practicum experience, curriculum delivery, and candidate experience.

A qualitative self-study conducted by Moorhouse and Tiet (2021) examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of coursework within teacher preparation programs. The authors focused on how their own preparation program provided a pedagogy of care within an online learning environment as the program shifted to online teaching because of COVID-19 school closures. They defined pedagogy of care as “a desire to care from the teacher, a deep understanding of the needs of the cared for, and an acknowledgement of the act of caring and a want to be cared for by the learners” (Moorhouse & Tiet, 2021, p. 211). Moorhouse and Tiet found developing and implementing teaching strategies emphasizing humanism within the online learning environment strengthened connectedness between the instructors and teacher candidates (p. 217). Moorhouse and Tiet also found a need to prioritize care of teacher candidates over delivering course content and that demonstrating care of candidates in an online environment occurred differently than in person. For example, Moorhouse and Tiet found demonstrating care

in person, such as providing snacks, greeting teacher candidates as they entered the classroom, and responding promptly to teacher candidate questions could not occur online. As a result, they had to provide different, explicit strategies for showing care. These came in the form of personal sharing online, utilizing class groups on an instant messaging platform, and the use of surveys to gather teacher candidate feedback about course content and assignments (Moorhouse & Tiet, 2021, p. 219). This study focused on a single preparation program as well as limited courses within the program, taught by the authors of the study. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other programs, nor are they generalizable to preparation programs that provided instruction in an online or hybrid format prior to the start of the pandemic.

Whereas Moorhouse and Tiet (2021) focused on shifts in instruction to foster a pedagogy of care within an online learning environment, a study by Nel et al. (2021) focused on reenvisioning the teaching practicum experience as a result of COVID-19 school closures. Within this study, Nel et al. examined shifts in student teaching placements in traditional preparation programs in South Africa. The authors asserted that “COVID-19 induced decisions and adaptations to the teacher practicum can be leveraged to address important re-design issues (Nel et al., 2021, p. 250). Utilizing a grounded theory approach, this study found traditional programs had to utilize online modalities and other course-embedded approaches for teacher candidates to demonstrate competency in the teaching standards. Some of these modalities included the use of case studies, video analysis, and simulations (Nel et al., 2021, p. 262).

Whereas Nel et al. (2021) identified shifts in the fieldwork aspect of teacher preparation, and Moorhouse and Tiet (2021) focused on instructional delivery, a third study by Hebert and Hickey (2022) focused on preventative behaviors of preservice teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hebert and Hickey conducted a quantitative study of 743 undergraduate students at a

public regional university located in the southeast United States, education majors (n = 118) making up a portion of the sample size. Through survey analysis, Hebert and Hickey found preservice teachers were 97% more likely to “report the pandemic had resulted in them somewhat or seriously considering a career change” when compared to other undergraduate majors within the study (p. 194). Additionally, preservice teachers reported greater concern about contracting COVID-19 than other students (Hebert & Hickey, 2022, p. 194). However, Hebert and Hickey found that even with concern of contracting the virus, preservice teachers were less likely to practice social distancing or other preventative behaviors when compared to other undergraduate students within the study (p. 195).

The recommendations from this study include continuing to study preventative behaviors and how those behaviors might change as the COVID-19 pandemic progresses (Hebert & Hickey, 2022, p. 196). Although this study examined preservice teachers' experiences, the study was confined to traditional teacher preparation programs, and the focus was on preventative behaviors and career change considerations. This is in contrast to the two aforementioned studies, which focused on the curricular aspects and fieldwork components of traditional teacher preparation programs during COVID-19. Although the three studies each focused on a different aspect within teacher preparation, they all point to the need for preparation programs to adapt and change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

One area where adaptation and change needed to occur was the area of teacher recruitment and retention, as the pandemic exacerbated teacher shortages. This is evident in the study by Hebert and Hickey (2022), which found preservice teachers were more likely to indicate a career change as a result of the pandemic. This finding points to a need to identify strategies for teacher retention.

A subsequent study by Carver-Thomas et al. (2022) examined this very issue within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. That study researched school districts' responses to shortages during the pandemic as well as strategies to increase teacher retention. The study found that increased teacher retirements and resignations during the COVID-19 pandemic in addition to a limited supply of teachers created high vacancy rates in many California school districts (Carver-Thomas et al., 2022, p. v). As a result, some school districts implemented incentives such as utilizing federal funds to increase teacher compensation as a way to attract and retain more teachers. Districts also developed the teaching talent of existing school staff by creating GYO programs or through teacher residency programs (Carver-Thomas et al., 2022, p. vi). According to Carver-Thomas et al. (2022), these district-based approaches to attracting and retaining more teachers produced favorable results for districts in solving staffing shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, districts implementing GYO programs identified such programs as a key strategy for recruiting more teachers of color (Carver-Thomas et al., 2022, p. 9). Additionally, Carver-Thomas et al. (2022) found teacher residency programs had "consistently resulted in higher retention rates," and as a result, such programs supported districts in reducing teacher turnover and shortages (p. 9). Although these district-based approaches produced favorable results, other approaches by districts were viewed as less favorable.

Carver-Thomas et al. (2022) found there was an increase in districts hiring underprepared teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Carver-Thomas et al. (2022) noted that the hiring of underprepared teachers may provide districts with a short-term solution to staffing shortages exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, yet such hiring practices did not solve the overall teacher shortage challenge (p. 6). Underprepared teachers are classified as teachers who are

either interns or are teaching on a permit or waiver (Carver-Thomas et al., 2022, p. 6). Although teachers enrolled in teacher preparation programs have specific credentialing requirements to meet prior to teaching in a classroom, and requirements differ slightly for traditionally prepared teachers compared to teachers prepared through an intern pathway, Carver-Thomas et al. (2022) indicated that the intern preparation pathway results in a “substandard credential” due to these different credentialing requirements (p. 6). According to Carver-Thomas et al. (2022), intern credentials, permits, and waivers are “substandard credentials and permits” that are issued to candidates who have not “completed the coursework, clinical practice, tests, or other requirements for a full teaching credential (p. 6). These different credentialing requirements can be seen in Appendix A, which outlines the California credentialing requirements that must be met prior to teaching for traditional and intern pathways.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, these credentialing requirements changed, and what is interesting to note about this deficit view of interns is that during the COVID-19 pandemic, all teachers enrolled in alternative and traditional preparation programs were able to be recommended for a “full” or preliminary teaching credential without having passed the required teacher licensure exams due to the SB 820 COVID program flexibilities (CTC, 2020). Teachers, regardless of preparation pathway, who received their preliminary credential were not considered “underprepared,” nor was their credential considered “substandard,” even though at the time of credentialing they did not meet the full requirements for their credential.

Although the study by Carver-Thomas et al. (2022) was not in favor of districts utilizing interns and permit holders to fill staffing vacancies as a means to address the long-standing teacher shortage, studies by Scott (2019) and Bristol et al. (2020), which focused on the benefits of alternative certification programs for teachers of color, provided a more supportive

perspective of intern programs. For example, Scott concluded that alternative preparation programs that provide a safe learning environment and create a system of support for Black male special education teachers “may find success with recruiting and retaining Black men into their programs” (p. 348). Given this information, it may be wise to look critically at the background and experience of intern programs and teachers through a strength-based lens to see how such programs and staffing choices may enhance a school district as well as meet the district’s staffing needs.

Although the findings from the study by Carver-Thomas et al. (2022) pointed to utilizing GYO approaches or residency programs over the hiring of interns and permit holders as a means to increase teacher retention and address the teacher shortage, the study called for implementing several evidence-based approaches at the state level to systematically address the teacher shortage. One approach ,”to implement statewide recruitment initiatives to help prospective teachers navigate the process of becoming a teacher by helping them understand the different credential program pathways, including intern programs (Carver-Thomas et al., 2022, p. 15). Another recommendation was to invest in community college to 4-year university pathways to prepare aspiring teachers (Carver-Thomas et al., 2022, p. 15). Although these approaches supported increasing the number of credentialed teachers by focusing on recruitment and teacher preparation prior to a prospective teacher earning a bachelor’s degree, the recommendations favored traditional teacher preparation pathways and also proposed new models for teacher certification, yet did not identify the intern program pathway as a viable route to teacher credentialing. Although the pandemic revealed inequities in education that also affected teacher preparation programs, as evidenced by the critique of the aforementioned studies, the recommendations within this study favored traditional pathway programs, residencies, and

proposed developing teacher credential programs at the community college level. What is absent are recommendations that focus on intern programs as a valid means to teacher credentialing. However, intern programs played a key role during the pandemic by supporting districts in immediately addressing staffing shortages.

Summary of Literature Review

Although each of these studies linked policy to alternative certification programs and provided recommendations for policy changes, no study examined the interplay between state policy and the experiences of district intern program leaders. This was evident in the study by Carver-Thomas et al. (2022), which focused on strategies at the district level. Additionally, there were findings that focused on candidate experience, as seen in the Shuls and Trivitt (2015) study, or linked alternative certification policies to student achievement, as seen in the Lutz and Hutton (1989) study as well as the Cowan et al. (2020) study, yet did not focus on the program leader experience. Furthermore, the current literature on alternative certification programs provided proposed policy and programmatic changes as implications for future study. This was seen in the study by Romero (2010). What is absent are findings that situate the role of the district intern program leader as an institutional agent, responsible for interpreting and enacting state policies. As a result, the current literature lacks recommendations for actions these leaders could take at a programmatic level and state level to improve enrollment or credentialing or increase teacher diversity.

In addition to a gap in the literature about the role of district intern program leaders and their responsibility to interpret and enact state policy, there is also a gap in the literature on studies that focus solely on district intern programs. Although there are studies focusing on alternative certification programs, such studies tend to group all alternative certification

programs together, as noted by Scribner and Heinen (2009) and Shuls and Trivett (2015). The challenge with these studies is that they fail to take into consideration that some alternative certification programs do not lead to a teaching credential, whereas others do, making it difficult to effectively analyze alternative certification program data in these studies (Shuls & Trivitt, 2015). Given that there is a lack of research specifically on district intern programs, there is also an absence of research on how state policies, particularly policies enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic period, may affect teacher diversity and credentialing. Although several studies, such as the ones conducted by Hebert and Hickey (2022) and Nel et al. (2021) examined teacher preparation programs during the COVID-19 pandemic period, they did not explicitly focus on state policy or on teacher diversity and credentialing. In addition, there is limited research about the experiences of district intern program leaders and their role in supporting teacher diversity. The existing studies, such as the ones conducted by Scott (2019) and Bristol et al. (2020), focused on teacher diversity within alternative certification programs, yet did not amplify the voices or experiences of the leaders of these programs, nor did the studies focus explicitly on district intern program leaders. This research study addresses these gaps in the literature.

An Ecological Model—Sites of Shaping Theory

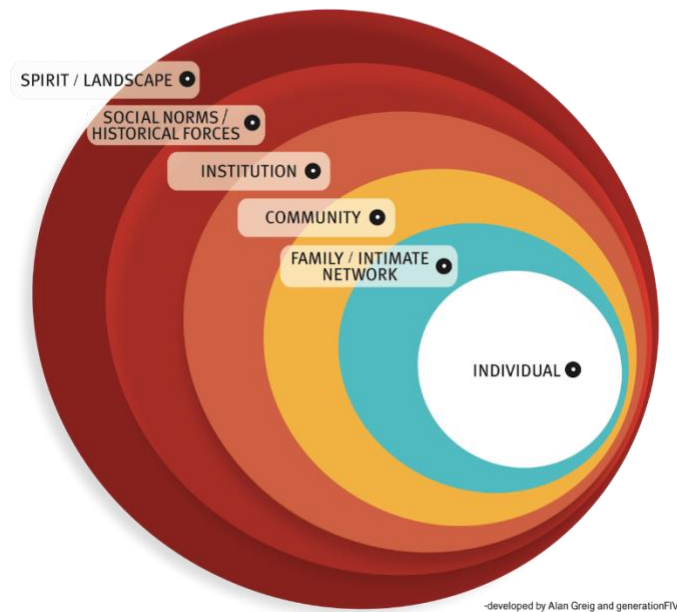
In order to study the experiences of district intern program leaders during the 2020–2022 COVID-19 pandemic period as they implemented CTC credentialing policies, a framework that examines the role of the individual in relation to larger institutional and structural policies must be used. The theoretical framework that informed this research is the sites of shaping model, developed by Staci Haines and designed by Alan Greig and the organization generationFive (Haines, 2019). The sites of shaping model is an ecological framework based on a public health model and rooted in social justice. It can be used to better understand how people’s perceptions,

actions, beliefs, and ways of being are shaped at the following sites: individual, family/intimate network, community, institution, social norms/historical forces, and spirit/landscape (Haines, 2019, p. 47). Additionally, it can reveal how each site shapes one into, or in contradiction to, “the social norms and historical forces” one lives within (Haines, 2019, p. 48). Given that this framework is used to understand how social norms and historical forces shape individuals, it is an appropriate framework to use when studying the experiences of district intern program leaders within an educational context, situated within the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Although many scholars may be more familiar with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory as a framework to illustrate the influence of social environments on human development, the sites of shaping model has been selected because it situates examining the influences of social norms and historical forces through the lens of social justice (Haines, 2019; Tissington, 2008). Just as the latest iteration of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model contains five environmental levels—the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem—that the individual interacts with and is influenced by, the sites of shaping model contains six nested “sites” that an individual is shaped by and shapes (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Haines, 2019). The six sites within the sites of shaping are the individual, the family/intimate network, the community, institutions, social norms/historical forces, and spirit/landscape (Haines, 2019). The six sites are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Sites of Shaping Theoretical Framework

Sites of Shaping/ Sites of Change



Note. From S.Haines.

In an interview with Staci Haines, she described how the sites of shaping was developed during the AIDS/HIV epidemic and utilized to drastically reduce the epidemic by examining actions, policies, and behaviors within and across each site. She shared how embedded systemic injustices and institutional policies and actions along with individual actions were misaligned, thus perpetuating the AIDS crisis (S. Haines, personal communication, April 5, 2023). For example, Haines shared how providing individuals with free condoms did not have an effect on ending the AIDS/HIV epidemic; instead, it helped individuals talk about and practice safer sex. However, when legislative policies and advances in medical practices at the institutional site

were combined with changes in behaviors at the individual site and integrated with actions at the community and family/intimate network sites, then cases of AIDS/HIV were reduced significantly (S. Haines, personal communication, April 5, 2023). Haines further described how the sites of shaping model can be used to assess how injustices are perpetuated along each of the sites, as well as how injustices can be changed. Based on the example Haines provided, one can see how individuals can both be shaped by and also shape different sites to bring about transformational change.

Conceptual Framework

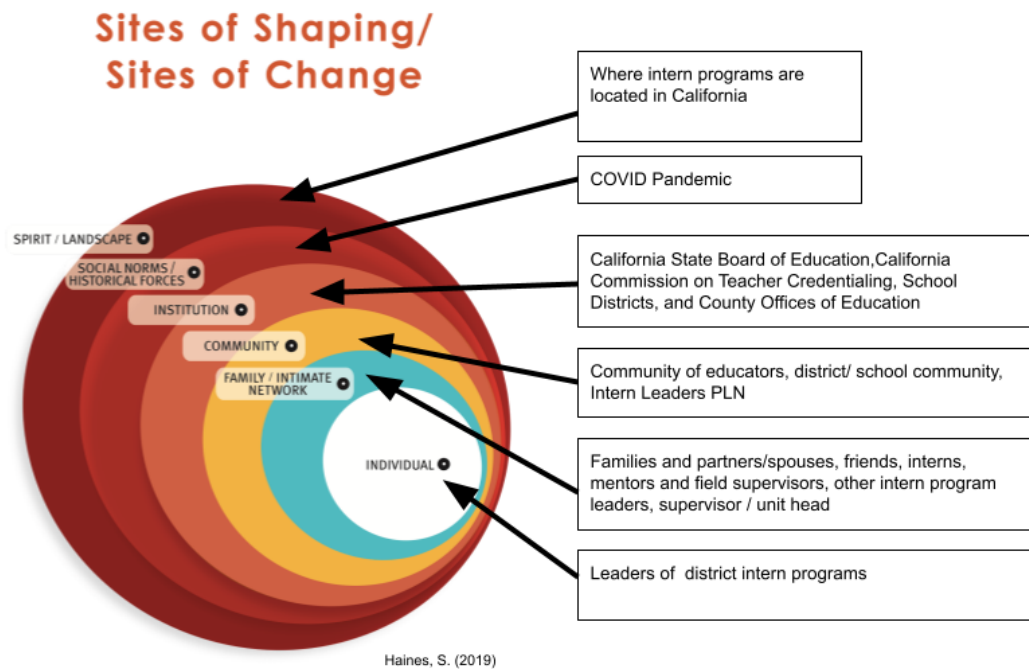
The concept of perpetuating or changing injustices along each of the sites of shaping to produce transformational change relates to this study because this research deeply examines the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders and how their experiences and actions shaped and were shaped by several sites. Specifically, this study examines the interplay between the ways in which district intern program leaders interpreted and enacted California credentialing policy created at the institution level (Site 4) and enacted those policies at the community (Site 3) and intimate/family network (Site 2) levels. Additionally, this study examines how the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders have the potential to shape these sites and thus change policy and practice related to teacher credentialing, the teacher shortage, and teacher diversity.

Figure 2 illustrates how this study maps to each site on the sites of shaping framework. At the first site is the individual. For this study, individuals include district intern program leaders. At the second site is the family and intimate network. For this study, this site includes intern teacher candidates. Intern teachers are placed at this site because district intern program leaders work closely with the interns within their programs and provide interns regular guidance

and support. The third site contains the community, and for this study, this site includes school districts, intern programs, the intern leaders' professional learning network (PLN), and the community of educators. The fourth site is made up of institutions, which for this study include the CTC, school districts, and county offices of education. The fifth site contains social norms and historical forces. For this study, this site includes the COVID-19 pandemic period. The final, sixth site contains spirit and landscape. For this study, this sixth site will represent the geographic region where district intern programs are located. For example, some of the intern programs within this study are located in counties that lack access to a nearby university-based teacher preparation program, whereas other intern programs in this study are located near universities. Furthermore, the intern programs studied serve rural, suburban, or urban school districts, or a combination thereof, based on the location of the intern program.

Within this study, the examination of how change occurs or how injustices are perpetuated will be done by studying the interplay between individual district intern program leaders' experiences and actions (Site 1), the impact on intern candidates (Site 2) and school communities (Site 3), the institutional policies and practices of the CTC (Site 4), and the historical forces of the COVID-19 pandemic period (Site 5).

Figure 2 *Conceptual Framework*



Note. PLN = professional learning network. Adapted from S.Haines.

Summary

This study focused on the experiences of district intern program leaders as they interpreted and implemented state credentialing policies developed during the COVID-19 pandemic period. This study is important because there is limited information about state policies enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic period as well as the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders as they enacted these policies during the pandemic period. For example, the Learning Policy Institute produced a report in 2022 examining school districts’ responses to teacher shortages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Carver-Thomas et al., 2022). Although this report provided recommendations, such as increasing the capacity of traditional teacher preparation programs to credential more teachers, what was absent were the voices of district intern program leaders as well as a critical analysis of COVID-19 program flexibility policies

enacted by the CTC (Carver-Thomas et al., 2022). In addition, although there have been numerous studies on alternative certification programs, such as the study by Bowling and Ball (2018), which identified over 130 alternative certification pathways, there have been few studies focusing specifically on district-based intern programs as a subset of alternative certification programs, and even fewer studies focusing specifically on district intern programs in California.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Within this chapter are the following sections: research design, setting and participants, data collection, data analysis, positionality, trustworthiness, and limitations present within the study. This chapter provides an overview of the qualitative study, a review of the research questions, demographic information on the setting and participants, and an overview of the data collection and analysis, as well as the methods used to address each research question.

Research Design

This study explored the experiences of district intern program leaders as they interpreted and responded to a series of credentialing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Given the lack of research on district intern program leaders, the major intent of this study was to discover what their experiences were during the COVID-19 pandemic period by engaging in conversation. A qualitative approach was used because the inductive and iterative nature of this research method enabled me to best understand each leader's experience and actions during a set point in time. In addition, I utilized a focus group method in order to investigate the experiences of district intern program leaders as they shared in a group setting. The focus group approach facilitated an "interactive discussion through which data are generated" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 114). Additional data were generated through the discussion and meaning making that occurred among participants during the focus group. After the focus group, I held individual interviews with each participant to gain more information and insights for the study.

Research Questions

This study focused on the following research questions:

1. How do the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders as they implemented California credentialing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic period address the teacher shortage?
2. What did district intern program leaders notice about diversity in intern program enrollment during the COVID-19 pandemic period?

Setting and Participants

This section provides a demographic snapshot of each district intern program leader participant and their program. Currently, there are 19 district intern programs in the state of California (CTC, 2023a). Some of these programs serve a single district, whereas others are consortium based, serving multiple districts. This study focused on leaders from five consortium-based district intern programs, located in three different regions in California.

The rationale behind selecting these five leaders to study was twofold. First, the leaders from these programs had been in their job role for different lengths of time and were all part of a statewide intern leaders' PLN. The PLN serves an important purpose, as it is one of the few forums where district intern program leaders come together to collaborate, problem solve, and identify issues affecting their programs. Although intern programs and induction programs fall under the purview of the California Council on Teacher Education, specific programming for district-based intern programs is often missing. Furthermore, unlike teacher induction, which has an established annual statewide conference and regular cluster meetings, prior to the creation of the intern leaders' PLN, no formal or informal statewide group focusing specifically on the needs and issues affecting district intern programs existed. The PLN meets quarterly, and the familiarity and collegiately the leaders have with one another supported the semistructured focus group for this research.

The second reason for selecting these five leaders is that their programs are demographically different from one another, based on location, size, and when their program was accredited by the CTC. Two of the programs are located in the Southern San Joaquin Valley, two are in Superior California, which is north and inland California; and one program is located on the North Coast. The programs range in size in terms of numbers of candidates enrolled as well as total credential programs offered. The smallest program at County Office of Education A has an enrollment of 30 candidates with three credential programs, and the largest program at County Office of Education E has 263 candidates enrolled in five credential programs. Three of the five programs received CTC accreditation prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas County Office of Education A received accreditation in October of 2020, as the pandemic was surging. Additionally, County Office of Education B received provisional accreditation by the CTC for its multiple-subject program in 2021 while the COVID-19 pandemic was still underway. County Office of Education B also operates as the satellite program of County Office of Education D for the education specialist credential intern program. The demographics of each intern program, length of accreditation, and years of experience of each program leader provided a diverse group to study.

District Intern Program Leader A

“I led everything as it related to interns for our program.”

Participant A was the coordinator of the County Office of Education A Intern Program and served in that position for 3 years before moving to a new leadership position in 2023. Participant A began her role as a district intern program coordinator while the program was going through initial accreditation by the CTC. Although Participant A had the support of some part-time staff, she was the main person responsible for making all decisions related to the

operation of the intern program. She stated, “It was pretty much my show.” She described how she led all aspects of the program, ranging from attending meetings to reading and understanding state policy, advising interns and reinterns, admitting candidates to the program, and hiring instructors to teach courses. She was also tasked with rewriting the program design to align with new state special education program standards that went into effect in 2021. When reflecting on her experience of leading during the COVID-19 pandemic period, Participant A shared, “It was a difficult time for all of us,” noting that program leaders, candidates, instructors, and field supervisors were experiencing stress as a result of school closures and changing requirements at the state level.

The County Office of Education A intern program that Participant A led is located in the Southern San Joaquin Valley and was accredited by the CTC in 2020. The County Office of Education A intern program offers three credential programs: multiple subjects, educational specialist: mild to moderate support needs, and educational specialist: extensive support needs. The program serves candidates from school districts in three counties. Although the program was originally designed for candidates to attend courses in person, during the COVID-19 pandemic, instruction shifted to online. Title II reporting data from 2021–2022 showed the total program enrollment was 30; due to the recent accreditation, the program did not have any program completers.

District Intern Program Leader Participant B

“Everyone was in survival mode.”

Participant B is the leader of the County Office of Education B intern program and has been in the position for 7 years. Participant B is responsible for all aspects of leading a district intern program, including coordinating field supervisors, enrolling preservice candidates, staying

current with state policy, and supporting intern candidates with understanding requirements for program completion. During the one-on-one interview, Participant B disclosed, “During this time period I had two maternity leaves. So just for context, you know, some of this, it wasn’t me that had full hands on it at all times.” Although Participant B was out on maternity leave during part of the COVID-19 pandemic, a unique aspect of her leadership experience is that she coordinates the education specialist satellite intern program delivered by the County Office of Education D Intern Program. As a result, Participant B manages and coordinates two intern programs that have different processes and structures.

County Office of Education B is located in Superior California and was provisionally accredited by the CTC in 2021 to offer a multiple subject intern program. County Office of Education B also offers a satellite intern program through County Office of Education D for the educational specialist mild to moderate credential and the educational specialist extensive support needs credential. The multiple subject intern program and the education specialist intern program serves candidates from two counties. County Office of Education B initially designed the intern program to be delivered in a hybrid format with candidates attending class two times a week, with one class in person and one class delivered in a synchronous or asynchronous online format. During the COVID-19 pandemic, instruction moved from hybrid to completely online. Due to the provisional accreditation status of the multiple subject program, County Office of Education B does not yet have Title II reporting data on candidate enrollment or completion. Program enrollment and completion data for candidates enrolled in the education specialist intern program are reported by the County Office of Education D.

District Intern Program Leader Participant C

“I really struggled knowing what was current with regulation.”

Participant C is director of the County Office of Education C Intern Program. She has been in her position for 3 years. Participant C began her leadership position at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and stated, “I oversee everything, especially during the pandemic there was not any additional support with a coordinator.” Participant C handles onboarding of preservice interns, reviews applications, checks California Basic Education Skills Test (CBEST) and California Subject Examination Test (CSET) scores, interviews prospective candidates, and helps candidates with job development and finding teaching positions. She also provides academic and emotional support to candidates as they are going through the program, supports candidates as they transition from preservice to the intern program, aids in course development, and coordinates intern program faculty such as instructors, coaches, and mentors.

The County Office of Education C Intern Program is located in Superior California. There are four credential programs offered, including multiple subjects, education specialist mild to moderate support needs, single subject math, and single subject science. The program was accredited by the CTC in 2015, and approximately 95% of the program’s candidates come from the county where the program is located. Additionally, County Office of Education C enrolls candidates employed in school districts located in four nearby counties. Title II reporting data from 2021–2022 showed total enrollment at 96 candidates, and 48 candidates completed the program (*Title II Higher Education Act*, n.d.).

District Intern Program Leader Participant D

“I am all things intern.”

Participant D is the coordinator of the County Office of Education D Intern Program and has served in that position for 6 years. Participant D is in charge of developing the course sequence, ensuring program standards are met, and coordinating district mentors and program field supervisors. Currently, Participant D is cofacilitating a group to incorporate anti-racist

frameworks and curriculum into intern program coursework. In addition, she is responsible for supporting permit holders who are not yet intern eligible. She does all this without additional staff support. Furthermore, Participant D supports the County Office of Education B Education Specialist Intern program, which is a satellite program of the County Office of Education D Intern Program. In addition to those leadership duties, Participant D instructs in the intern program and oversees the Teacher Performance Assessment (EdTPA) teacher licensure exam process for interns.

The County Office of Education D Intern Program, which Participant D leads, is located on the North Coast and was accredited by the CTC in 2018. There are four credential programs offered, including multiple subjects, single subjects, and educational specialist mild to moderate support needs as well as extensive support needs. The intern program serves candidates from two nearby counties and also operates a satellite program at County Office of Education B, which serves candidates in two counties in Superior California. Based on the most recent Title II reporting data from 2021–2022, the total program enrollment was 134 candidates and 51 candidates completed the program (*Title II Higher Education Act*, n.d.).

District Intern Program Leader Participant E

“That was one of the most challenging parts of my life ever because I was supporting so many emotional needs of the interns and supervisors and mentors.”

Participant E is the program facilitator of the County Office of Education E Intern Program. She has been in her position for 6 years and is responsible for managing all aspects of the multiple subject and single subject intern programs. When she first started, she led the multiple subject program, yet due to recent staffing shifts, she now oversees the single subject program along with the multiple subject program. There is another program facilitator who

manages the education specialist intern program. Participant E shared that her leadership responsibilities included “ensuring that the incoming candidates have met all of the prerequisites for admission to the program,” and that she “monitors their progress from start to finish through the program, including their clinical practice experience.” Participant E shared, “So you know, just really involved with their process from start to finish.” In addition to supporting interns within both credential programs, Participant E also supports an extended program that provides specific guidance, workshops, test support, and individual coaching to candidates who are on credential extensions.

The County Office of Education E Intern program is located in the Southern San Joaquin Valley and offers five credential programs, including multiple subject, single subject, education specialist mild to moderate support needs, education specialist extensive support needs, and early childhood special education credentials. The program was accredited by the CTC in 2015 and serves candidates from four different counties. Title II reporting data from 2021–2022 showed total enrollment at 263 candidates and 109 candidates completed the program (*Title II Higher Education Act*, n.d.). Table 1 shows the demographics of each district intern program selected for this study.

Table 1 Intern Program Demographics

Program	Year of initial accreditation	Region	Program leader years in job	Number of credential programs	Total enrollment	Completers current
County Office of Education A	2020	Southern San Joaquin Valley	2	2	30	0
County Office of Education B	2021*	Superior California	7	1	27	NA
County Office of Education C	2015	Superior California	3	5	96	48
County Office of Education D	2018	North Coast	6	4	134	51
County Office of Education E	2015	Southern San Joaquin Valley	6	5	263	109

Note. Data compiled from 2020–2021 Title II data and CTC Program Accreditation data (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.; California Commission on Teacher Credentialing., n.d.-a). NA = __Not Applicable as this program had no completers that year____

The documents selected for review consisted of EO N-66-20 and six CTC PSAs relating to COVID program flexibilities and EO N-66-20. These documents were produced between April 2020 and September 2021. Table 2 identifies the documents used in this study and the date they were released for program implementation.

Table 2 Documents for Analysis

Document number	Title	Date	Pages
Governor's Executive Order N-66-20/SB 280	CTC Guidance Regarding Executive Order Actions Related to COVID-19	September 23, 2021	4
CTC PSA 21-05	Preliminary Multiple Subject and Single Subject Program Flexibilities Extended into 2021–2022 due to the Continued Impact of COVID-19	June 28, 2021	7
CTC PSA 21-02	COVID-19 Flexibility Provisions for Educator Preparation Programs: Demonstration of Subject Matter Competency Prior to Student Teaching	April 29, 2021	3
CTC PSA 20-16	Senate Bill 820 Signed by Governor Newsom Extends COVID Flexibilities for Academic Year 2020-21	September 29, 2020	2
CTC PSA 20-11	Commission-Approved Flexibilities and Specificities for Preliminary Education Specialist Candidates in the 2020–21 Academic Year	August 14, 2020	4
CTC PSA 20-10	Commission-Approved Flexibilities and Specificities for Preliminary Multiple and Single Subject Candidates in the 2020-21 Academic Year	August 14, 2020	6
Governor's Executive Order N-66-20		May 29, 2020	6

Note. CTC = California Commission on Teacher Credentialing; PSA = Program Sponsor Alert.

Appendix B shows key COVID-19 health events compiled by the American Society for Microbiology (2021) that occurred worldwide, on or around the same time as related credentialing regulations were released during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in April 2020 there were 1 million confirmed COVID-19 cases reported worldwide. The following month, California Governor Gavin Newsom passed EO N-66-20, which authorized COVID-19 program flexibilities. Then, in September 2020, the global death toll from COVID-19 reached 1 million. That same month, the CTC released PSA 20-16, which extended the COVID-19 program flexibilities from the governor's EO N-66-20 to the 2020–2021 academic year. The timing of the COVID-19 health events and subsequent policies provide additional context for this study.

Data Collection

Data was collected during a 1-week period from December 7, 2023, to December 14, 2023. Prior to collecting any data, I sought and obtained approval from the University of California, Davis Institutional Review Board for my research plan. Institutional review board approval was granted on November 15, 2023, and the following day, I contacted prospective participants through email to invite them to participate in the research study. Prospective participants were identified to take part in the research study based on their position as a leader of a district-based intern program as well as their involvement in the intern leaders' PLN. Five prospective participants were invited to participate and all five agreed to participate in the focus group and the individual interviews. Prospective participants confirmed their participation through an email response and identified a preferred date for the focus group by responding to a DoodlePoll. One participant became unavailable the day of the focus group interview and thus

was unable to participate, yet participated in the individual interview. Individual interviews following the focus group were scheduled based on participants' availability.

Prior to focus group and individual interviews, I conducted a pilot interview with one district intern leader outside of the analytic sample. The pilot interview was held on September 29, 2023, via Zoom, and lasted approximately 20 minutes. This pilot interview allowed me to practice interviewing and determine the strengths and weaknesses of the initial interview questions. Following the pilot interview, I made slight adjustments to the interview questions in order to more closely align the questions to my research area of focus.

After the pilot interview and once prospective participants had confirmed their participation, I held a brief informational meeting to orient participants to the study. This meeting was held on November 20, 2023, via Zoom, and lasted approximately 30 minutes. At this meeting, I shared with participants the purpose and focus of the research study. Participants were invited to ask questions to ensure they had a thorough understanding of the scope of the study and how they would be participating.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) asserted qualitative researchers “can never capture an objective ‘truth’ or ‘reality,’” yet various strategies can be used to ensure the validity and credibility of research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 244). One strategy is to collect data from multiple sources. For this study, data were collected from three sources: documents, a semistructured focus group of district intern program leaders, and individual interviews of the district intern program leaders who participated in the focus group.

The first data collection was a review of six selected CTC PSAs from 2020–2021 and EO N-66-20 (Governor Gavin Newsom, 2020). This review informed the development of interview tools and questions. The PSA documents are available to the public on the CTC website and

were produced in response to EO N-66-20 (Governor Gavin Newsom, 2020) and Senate Bill 820 (Executive Department, 2020), both of which provided flexibilities for teacher preparation programs due to the COVID19 pandemic. Document analysis was used as a method in order to “provide a context within which research participants operate” (Bowen, 2009, p. 29). The analysis of these documents guided the focus group and individual interviews, as documents were reviewed in order to generate questions to ask the focus group and interview participants. For example, participants were asked to share their understanding of EO N-66-20, signed into action on May 29, 2020, which temporarily suspended certain credential requirements due to COVID school and testing center closures. Connecting focus group and interview questions to specific documents as well as information contained in the documents allowed for a rich, generative discussion during the focus group and subsequent interviews.

The second data collection occurred through a semistructured focus group of district intern program leaders, which was held on December 6, 2023. Four out of five intern program leaders selected for this study participated in the focus group. The focus group enabled data to be socially constructed based on the interaction of the group members (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, a qualitative focus group allowed for flexibility during the process and the examination of unobservable behavior such as the leaders’ interpretation of state credentialing policies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants selected for the focus group were invited to participate in the study through a recruitment email. Four participants accepted the invite and then completed a short demographic survey, which provided me with background information and allowed me to focus on asking open-ended questions during the focus group interview. The focus group was conducted via Zoom and lasted approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes. Consent

was obtained verbally prior to the start of the focus group. Appendix C provides the focus group interview protocol and questions.

At the beginning of the focus group, participants were informed the focus group would be recorded, and information shared would remain confidential. Furthermore, I informed participants their responses would only be used for the purpose of this study and their names and program names would be replaced with pseudonyms. During the focus group I wrote field notes to collect data and identify follow-up questions. At the conclusion of the focus group, I wrote detailed analytical memos containing my initial thoughts and impressions.

Data collected from the focus group included transcripts, which were coded and analyzed for key themes, relating back to the research questions and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Coding and analysis occurred using ATLAS.ti. Data collected from the focus group were ongoing, deductive, and inductive. This process allowed for emergent themes, patterns, and connections to be identified (Maxwell, 2013). In addition, through the semistructured focus group process I gathered information-rich cases for analysis.

The third and final data collection was through semistructured interviews of individual district intern program leaders. A total of five individual interviews occurred, which consisted of interviews of all four focus group participants and one other participant who was unavailable for the focus group. The individual interviews were conducted 1 week after the focus group via Zoom, and each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. These interviews were recorded via Zoom and consent was obtained verbally prior to each interview. Additionally, I informed participants their responses would be used only for the purpose of the study. During the interviews I wrote field notes to collect data and gather important information. At the conclusion of each interview, I wrote detailed analytical memos containing my initial thoughts and

impressions. The data collected from the interviews included transcripts, which were coded and analyzed for key themes, relating back to the research questions and theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Coding and analysis occurred using ATLAS.ti. The data analysis was ongoing, deductive, and inductive. Appendix D provides the individual interview protocol and questions.

The purpose of the semistructured interviews was to generate additional information, insights, and new perspectives from each participant. The semistructured interviews were designed to enable participants to follow up on or expand on ideas and information shared during the focus group. Allowing participants to further express their ideas and share information in depth in an individual setting supported collecting rich, thick data. Furthermore, collecting data from individual interviews, documents, and the focus group allowed for an analysis of the interplay between the district intern program leaders' experiences and the themes present in the documents. This approach ensured validity and reliability through the triangulation of data.

All data collected were stored on a password-protected computer. To ensure privacy of participants and their programs, and to remove researcher bias, several measures were put in place. First, participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms. Next, the location of each district intern program was replaced with a region name from the California 2020 Census Data region map, which groups counties into named regions (California Census 2020, 2020). Finally, the names of each district intern program were replaced with pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded on Zoom. Within 24 hours of each interview, I watched each recording, and while reading the written transcript, I corrected transcription errors. Transcription errors included words not being accurately transcribed from the recording, duplication in words, or mislabeling who was speaking. After I had cleaned each interview

transcript, I wrote a detailed analytic memo, outlining the process I used to review the transcripts, and noted general themes that emerged from the interviews.

ATLAS.ti was used for the coding of all research data and I followed a multistep process for the analysis of the focus group and interview transcripts. First, I created a list of initial codes and definitions in ATLAS.ti and then did a first review of the data using open coding and in vivo coding to identify emergent themes and look for commonalities among the participant focus group responses as well as the individual interviews. During this step, more codes were added to the codebook. During the next review, I grouped codes into categories as I looked for commonalities among all of the transcripts. Then, during the third review, I grouped categories into themes and looked for connections between the data and the theoretical framework. With this step, I used theoretical coding to link findings to the categories on the theoretical framework model. During the fourth and final review, I used axial coding and looked for evidence in the data as they related to the research questions. During this step, I coded participant responses and information from the transcripts, showing how each response answers the research questions. This multistep process ensured thoroughness and accuracy, and allowed for a robust analysis.

Positionality

My worldview along with my cultural, social, and professional backgrounds guided my research design, analysis and how I interpreted the findings. Creswell and Creswell (2017) stated, “The researcher’s intent is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world” (p. 46). Additionally, Creswell and Creswell (2017) asserted that the researcher must acknowledge how their “interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences.” (p. 46). One of the ways I made sense of the findings within this study was through a social constructivist lens. According to Creswell and Creswell, two key tenets of social

constructivism are that “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” and that individuals make sense of their world “based on their historical and social perspectives” (p. 46). Given that my research focused on examining the experiences of district intern program leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic period, it was important to utilize this worldview to support a qualitative design and to help me see how individual district intern program leaders interpreted their experiences from personal, cultural, and historical perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, a social constructivist worldview supported the use of the sites of shaping theoretical framework, developed by Staci Haines (2019), within this study. In addition to holding a social-constructivist worldview, I, like the participants in the study, am a district intern program leader. My work for the past 8 years has focused on supporting intern teachers to obtain their credential by reducing barriers to entering the teaching profession through structured systems of support. Directing a district intern program greatly influenced my decision to explore the research questions in this study.

Along with being a district intern program leader, I hold cultural identities that are both similar to and different from the participants in the study. First, I identify as White, from a middle-class background, college educated, and speak English as my primary language. I also identify as queer and nonbinary. Although some of these identities afford me privilege and positionality, others lead me to experience marginalization and discrimination. All of these identities shape the values and beliefs I hold about the field of education, and influence my positionality as an educational researcher.

Within an educational context, being White, college educated, middle class, and an English speaker are all identities that enable me to navigate educational systems with ease. For example, I went through a traditional, college-based teacher preparation program. My experience

in my teacher preparation program included early field experiences of observing cooperating teachers teach. Additionally, I had opportunities to practice teaching in a small-group setting, under the direction of our college supervisor. These experiences, when compared to my perception of the preparation of intern teachers, who begin teaching immediately, led me to believe traditional programs were better or of higher quality than intern programs. Early in my educational career, I believed intern teachers were not as prepared as traditional program teachers, and rarely considered hiring interns when I was a principal. This bias was challenged as I accepted my current position as director of teacher intern programs and had to look critically at my previously held beliefs about teacher preparation and quality. Then, as I engaged in research for this study, my beliefs about teacher preparation broadened.

Given that I am a leader of a district intern program and founder of the intern leaders' PLN, I now view intern programs as a valuable and viable pathway to entering the teaching profession. In addition, since founding the intern leaders' PLN, I regularly collaborate with the intern program leaders identified in this study and facilitate the intern PLN. This was beneficial for this study because it granted me insider status and credibility among the participants; however, it is possible my familiarity with the participants could produce bias during data collection and analysis. Additionally, my position as a district intern program leader may impact the interactions with participants in this study. As a way to reduce potential researcher bias, I decided not to include my own program in this study.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness in this study, three measures were in place. First, I used triangulation by collecting and analyzing data, using different methods (document review, focus group and semistructured interviews). This approach enabled me to see each method's strength

and limitations in supporting the conclusions of the research (Maxwell, 2013). The second way I ensured trustworthiness was to keep an audit trail of the research process. This audit trail provided reviewers details about how data were collected, how coding categories were developed, and the rationale behind decisions made throughout the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The final way I ensured trustworthiness was to conduct two different member checks of the study. The first member check was done to ensure internal validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and was from the participants of the study. Participants were sent a copy of the focus group transcript, their individual interview transcript, their participant vignette, and a draft PowerPoint of the initial findings. They were then asked to check each document for validity. Participants were also asked to provide feedback to ensure an accurate record of what was said, and were invited to modify or redact what was shared (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The second member check occurred at the California Induction Conference as I presented initial findings from this study. Two participants from the study along with leaders of intern and induction programs attended the presentation. They reviewed my research findings, checking for missed perspectives or biases. The feedback gathered informed the presentation of findings as well as the discussion chapters of this research study. Additionally, leaders provided feedback as to whether or not the findings of my study were plausible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All of these steps, when done in combination with each other, ensured trustworthiness of this study.

Limitations

This study has three limitations. First, this study was limited to five district-based intern programs in Northern and Central California. Each program serves multiple school districts in its region. In addition, this study focused only on district intern programs, which are one type of alternative certification program. As a result, the findings from this study may not be

generalizable to traditional preparation programs, other types of programs within alternative certification pathways, or teacher preparation programs outside of Northern and Central California. Second, this study examines credentialing policies during the 2020–2022 COVID-19 pandemic period. Although some of these policies have ended, other policies from this time period continue to influence current credential policies as well as interpretations of current credential policies. For example, PSA 21-10, released in August 2020, focused on implementing new options for meeting the statutory subject matter competency requirements in response to AB 130, and has continued to undergo interpretation from state and local policy leaders (CTC, 2021b). Given this, some of the findings from this study may be more relevant than others when applied to the present-day landscape of teacher credentialing. Finally, an added challenge within this study was the complexity of the 2020–2022 time period due to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic. Every aspect of personal and professional lives was impacted to some extent. Understandably, participants within this study remarked on having difficulty remembering when specific policies came out or when certain events occurred.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I will summarize findings from the focus group and individual interviews, and provide an analysis and discussion of the findings as they relate to the two research questions:

1. How do the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders as they implemented California credentialing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic period address the teacher shortage?
2. What did district intern program leaders notice about diversity in intern program enrollment during the COVID-19 pandemic period?

Across the research questions, five findings emerged showing key leadership actions participants engaged in as they implemented California credentialing policies. These findings included leaders understanding and interpreting credentialing policies, communicating to and with constituents, making changes in program delivery, navigating exam deferrals and calling out inequities, and finally, noticing shifts in intern enrollment, completion, and demographics. When looking at the second research question, three of these five key findings were noticed: communicating to and with constituents, navigating exam deferrals and calling out inequities, and, noticing shifts in intern enrollment, completion, and demographics. The key findings are detailed below.

Key Finding 1: Leader Seeks to Understand Credentialing Policies

In response to Research Question 1, I found all participants engaged in actions and processes to understand and interpret changes in credentialing policy with the goal of supporting their interns for program completion to address the teacher shortage. Participants felt this was key for program delivery. One of the ways participants sought to understand credential policy

changes was by attending CTC office hours and webinars. Additional ways participants found information and then engaged in processes to make sense of policy changes was by consulting with other intern program leaders and by reading through PSAs and other communications from the CTC. All five participants acknowledged engaging in these actions to understand credential policy changes.

For two of five participants who began their role during the COVID-19 pandemic, knowing where to get information and how to interpret it was especially important. For example, Participant C explained:

I really struggled knowing what was current with regulation because I came in mid pandemic. I came in May, 2021, right in the middle of everything, so trying to filter through what was—what had happened, the changes, but then what was current at the time, and then, as things became current, trying to interpret the laws independently, was really challenging to understand what different things meant.

Participant C added that knowing where to find information and how to interpret it was essential.

As she further explained:

It's twofold. It's because of COVID, but because of coming in new to a program, who to reach out to, who to ask for support, to help interpret and understand what was ok and how the regulations were going to be enforced. I think that was the part that I did not understand when I first came in. And then as new regulations came out, trying to understand what it was.

Another participant, who was also new to her role during the pandemic, talked about how she sought out others to better understand the credentialing changes. Participant A shared:

It was a very difficult time for all of us because so many things were unclear, even though we were getting directives from CTC. I felt so appreciative that I had the support of our small intern director group as well as the office hours that the CTC was putting on to help clarify some things.

A third participant shared how she made sense of the policies written in the PSAs. Participant B explained:

So making sense of the PSAs, I would say I very much leaned on partners at County Office of Education D, and then also our partners in our Intern Director PLN. Like being able to come together with other people who were grappling with the same things and being able to talk it through and hear how they were interpreting it and what they were doing with their programs. That was really, really helpful. And that helped me very much to interpret.

Although all five participants found understanding and interpreting policy changes key to running their intern programs, they also expressed frustration about the lack of clarity in the policy changes. As a result, they sought out ways to make better sense of the changes. For instance, Participant E expressed that just reading the PSAs to understand credentialing policy was difficult, due to the lack of clarity. As a result, she attended CTC office hours and webinars.

Participant E shared:

I felt like some of the CTC's communications were very clear and others to be challenging to navigate. When did the office hours with the commission start? But at that time period, you know, like March 2020 to like, end of May, were office hours happening then? I don't recall. Yeah, I know they had trainings, or like meetings, you know, more formal presentations which were helpful. But I don't recall office hours happening back then at the onset, and I think that would have been really helpful from the commission to just have that time for the groups to get together and hash things out a little bit.

Similar to Participant E, Participant A attended CTC office hours to gain a better understanding of policy changes, yet did not always find office hours helpful. Participant A shared of her experience:

I feel like we got a lot of non-answers through CTC, and we just kinda had to work through it ourselves. And I understand they were also figuring it out at that time as well, so they probably didn't have cut and dry answers for us.

Locating information related to credentialing policy changes and engaging in specific actions to understand and make sense of the policies were ways in which participants better prepared themselves to accurately advise intern candidates regarding their credentialing requirement. These actions, taken by all participants, ensured intern candidates were able to complete program requirements during this critical time period and earn a preliminary teaching

credential. Therefore, the actions that participants took to understand and interpret policy changes are one key finding that addresses the teacher shortage.

Key Finding 2: Leader Communicates to and With Constituents

Just as participants engaged in various processes to understand and interpret changes in credentialing policy, in order to support intern candidates with program completion requirements, they also intentionally engaged in communicating to and with various constituents, including other intern program leaders, district staff, and intern teachers, to inform them of credentialing changes. The mode of communication varied based on the nature of information shared, as well as whom participants were communicating with. All five participants in this study emphasized the importance of quickly and accurately communicating to all constituents in order to inform them of policy changes and to reduce the spread of misinformation.

Leader Communicates With Other Intern Program Leaders

One of the main types of constituents participants communicated with was other district intern program leaders. This communication occurred through organized group meetings such as the intern leaders' PLN as well as through individual meetings. Additionally, all five participants found communicating with one another led to an increased understanding of credentialing policy changes, increased support, and a sharing of how intern programs were implementing the policy changes. For example, Participant A stated, "So we would meet regularly in a small intern director group to share ideas, to talk about what was coming down the pipe so that we could prepare for it. That was so helpful." Another participant who led a satellite intern program spoke of how she communicated closely with their host program along with the intern leaders' PLN. As Participant B stated:

So I worked really closely with the County Office of Education D. They were an amazing support. I would say, I very much leaned on partners at County Office of Education D, and then also partners in our Intern Director PLN.

Another participant shared how having a group of job-alike peers to discuss credential policy changes was essential for her understanding of the changes. As Participant C explained:

I didn't have any other staff to discuss what was going on. I reached out to our local region. So that regional group was really, really important because it was practitioners, and they'd already had time and experience interpreting law.

Leader Communicates With District Staff

Although communicating with other intern program leaders was essential for understanding policy changes, communicating with district staff was key for delivering those changes and for assuring districts that interns could still complete their credential requirements. For instance, Participant E shared that she did “a lot of outreach to districts to let them know that the program was staying on track. It was just changing.” Additionally, four out of five participants shared ways in which they communicated credential policy changes to district staff.

As Participant A shared:

I did a lot of outreach to our districts and got in to see particular site principals as well, as often as I could to let them know what was happening. I also created a newsletter specifically targeted to the administrative team for each district to ensure that we were giving them the most recent information.

Participant A also used the newsletter she created to dispel any misinformation about credential policy changes. As she stated:

There was a lot of misinformation that was getting floated around by people who had heard things, or maybe didn't understand what it meant. And so if those things were coming to my attention, I would make sure to put that in our newsletter.

Another participant shared how she attended Superintendents Council meetings as a way to keep multiple districts in the county informed about policy changes. Participant B shared:

So we have Superintendents Council meetings where our superintendents come together once a month, and honestly, I took the same stance with them as I did with our

candidates. I'm going to keep you all up to date with what I know as this all evolves. And we don't have a blueprint. We don't have it all in black and white. But I would go to those superintendent council meetings, basically with every new PSA and say, Okay, this is where we are at today.

Sharing policy changes with district staff was one piece of information participants communicated; yet another piece was informing districts about the progress of their intern teachers. Participant E shared how she created a shared spreadsheet as a way to communicate to districts how their interns were doing in meeting program completion requirements. Through this approach, Participant E found collaboration increased between the program and districts.

Participant E shared:

It's an interactive, shared document, so you know, just things like that, just trying to think outside of the box on how to keep people informed. And we track the interns' progress toward meeting the assessment requirements and whether or not they're, you know, on track for completing the program in 2 years. So that tool has been really helpful with a number of our districts, and they can go in and make updates as well.

In addition to informing districts about the progress of their intern teachers, two participants shared how communication with districts was a way to support districts during the COVID-19 school closures. For example, Participant B shared how she would ask superintendents, "What kind of conversations can you be having with your teacher candidates? What kind of support do they need?" Participant D shared how she supported districts through this example:

Each of us in our office, we have different relationships with different districts. So my district was W School District, because that was where I worked. Some people had really good relationships with SR School District, which is the largest district in our area. So we just kind of reached out to the folks that we knew and had personal relationships with to see how we could support, and most of that support looked like, "Hey, if you need an idea, call me. We can talk about it."

Once schools began to open back up, Participant D explained how the communication and support changed from having conversations with districts, to providing in person support. Participant D stated:

As we moved out of COVID, but as we returned to the classroom, the county office, we put ourselves open to be substitutes. So we were subbing in the district almost twice a week, for a while there. Because there was a lack of subs and that was an important component that our superintendent had. So we all went out and subbed a couple of times a week.

Leader Communicates With Intern Teachers

Just as communicating with district staff was key for informing constituents about policy changes and providing support, a critical group participants communicated with was intern teachers within their programs. Participants found it essential to communicate frequently with intern teachers in order to keep them abreast of credentialing policy changes directly affecting them, to correct any misinformation as credentialing policies continued to change, and to provide support. For example, Participant C shared,

Let's say there was a lot that had to go on with conversations, a lot of personal conversations to help people work through that and to help understand from what CTC was saying, to clarify, because rumors started spreading about what was OK and what wasn't OK and how things were adjusting. So for programs I feel like it was a challenge a lot because people would hear things that were incorrect.

Similarly, Participant D shared how she communicated with her interns about credential policy changes: "So personally, I would go into the class...in the very beginning I would go into the classes every night just to answer any questions that our interns would have." A third participant stressed the importance of communication to interns in order to prevent misinformation. Participant E shared, "We tried to overcommunicate what was happening, because it never failed that someone would hear the initial messaging and potentially misinterpret, and then you know, the rumor mill would spiral out of control." Communication with and to different constituencies was a key leadership action that all five participants engaged in as a response to changing credentialing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

The way in which Key Finding 2 connects to Research Question 1 is that participants communicated changes in credentialing and corrected misinformation in order to help intern

candidates understand what they needed to do to complete their program requirements in the midst of changing credentialing policies. This in turn supported intern candidates with earning their preliminary teaching credential, thus reducing the teacher shortage.

Key Finding 2 also addresses Research Question 2, as through communicating with intern candidates, participants learned more about the experiences and background of their intern candidates and noticed shifts in the diversity of their candidates. As Participant B shared, “Because of the size of our program, and because of the really high emphasis that we place on relationships, when I look at this list of seven people, I know all of their stories.” Participant B elaborated by sharing, “Two are first-generation college students, and coming from backgrounds of poverty and trauma and one was part of the foster care system as a child.”

Key Finding 3: Leader Makes Changes in Program Delivery

A third key finding that addresses Research Question 1 was that each participant made changes to program delivery based on credentialing policy changes. These changes, which were made in order to best support intern candidates with program completion, thus aiding in adding more credentialed teachers to the workforce, included changes in course delivery and clinical practice. This finding was consistent across all interviews. Participants shared that some of the changes they implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic period when EO N-66-20 was in effect continued even after the executive order ended.

One program delivery change that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic period was the way in which intern programs delivered courses. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, four out of five programs delivered coursework in person, whereas one program delivered coursework in a hybrid format. Once school closures occurred, all programs shifted to an online format. Four of the five programs were able to make this shift immediately, whereas one program, County Office

of Education E, closed for a week to make the transition to online learning. Participant E shared the experience of school closures by stating:

We were closing down our schools. Our interns were freaking out. We were freaking out. So what we did is, we went dark for 1 week. When I say that, we offered no classes whatsoever, all contact, except for like the emotional contact between supervisors and interns, that was still going on. We wanted that to continue, but no clinical practice experiences were happening during that week.

During that week of closures, Participant E brought in a consultant to train instructors how to create an online learning environment and also how to teach online. This included training on adult learning theory, using Zoom, and how to set up courses in Canvas Learning Management System. Participant E shared, “So none of our instructors had any experience with teaching in an online format. So within that week, all of the courses that were currently in progress were immediately transitioned to being online.”

Although the County Office of Education E Intern Program closed for a week to transition to online learning, the other intern programs remained open as they transitioned. Part of the transition involved training course instructors how to teach online. For example, Participant C shared:

We were fully in person as well, and what resources we could use to train up people. We really used Padlet and Google Classroom to help support the organization piece of going to Zoom, but also Zoom was new to most and also to our instructors, so we also gave some professional development on how to teach on Zoom rather than the classroom.

Similarly, Participant D shared:

We were really fortunate that we had been using GoReact prior to the pandemic for some observations, so that was a real easy transition for us. Zoom, not so much, we had to bring people in to support our faculty for using Zoom.

Additionally, for Participant A, who led a program that started midpandemic, the transition to online was rather seamless. As she stated:

Our program was new, and it had only been approved in October of 2020, so we were well into the shutdown when we were approved, but we did roll out our first cohort in

January of 2021. By that time most of our schools in our county were either back in person full time, or had some sort of modified schedule. We had originally planned to have our program in person for the classes or the courses, but we did switch over to Zoom, and that's how we started—was through Zoom.

Participant A also shared how that transition went for the instructors in the program. She shared, “Most of our instructors adapted pretty well, because at that point, you know, we were approaching a year into the pandemic and they were pretty familiar with how this was happening.” Transitioning to an online learning format for intern program coursework and providing instructors with training in order to teach online was a common change across all five intern programs.

A second change that occurred during the pandemic period was the way in which clinical practice occurred for candidates. As schools shut down and instruction moved online, field supervisors shifted from observing intern teachers in person to observing intern teachers instructing their students on Zoom. As a result of clinical practice moving online, participants found they needed to train their field supervisors to use online tools for observations. For example, Participant E shared:

We transitioned to clinical practice to be online as well. From informal meetings being held on Zoom or over the phone, to classroom observations being conducted through Zoom, that required some updating and training for our supervisors to understand how they even enter into a Zoom room, how they need to kind of stay in the background on in the Zoom room because some of them tried to interject when our interns were teaching.

The transition to online clinical practice produced challenges as well as benefits for some programs. Participant E shared one challenge:

One of the struggles that we had when on Zoom was that a number of our districts, for various reasons, refused to allow the interns to record for clinical practice. So our clinical practice piece changed drastically to be very document focused instead of observation focused because there was no way for admissions into Zoom.

On the other hand, Participant D spoke of the benefits of moving to online. Participant D stated:

There were some benefits...we were able to bring on fieldwork supervisors that weren't retired, and so that was a huge benefit to us in terms of the number of supporting supervisors that we could have in our pool.

Although changes to course delivery and field supervision occurred during the pandemic period as schools were closed, participants shared how some of those delivery models continued, even after schools reopened and the governor's executive order ended. For example, Participant C shared how their clinical practice model shifted to online during the pandemic and remained online afterwards. Participant C stated, "We used GoReact. We brought that in, did training for our coaches and resident mentors to use GoReact as a tool, and have continued to use that.

Similarly, Participant D shared how moving clinical practice online "allowed us to support and serve students in kind of faraway places." Although this was an initial benefit, Participant D also shared the downside to moving online. As she stated:

That has also come back to haunt us, because now we can't ever go kind of fully back in person because of this commitment to serve underrepresented regions that don't have education preparation programs close to them.

The changes that participants made in clinical practice and field supervision address Research Question 1, as these changes enabled intern candidates to continue in their intern program even in the midst of school closures and complete their program requirements, resulting in a preliminary teaching credential. Keeping programs operational through shifts in clinical practice and field supervision increased the number of credentialed teachers in the workforce, thus directly addressing the teacher shortage. Additionally, although these changes were done in response to EO N-66-20 and school closures, through the testimony previously shared by Participant D one can see how these changes enabled one program to reach teacher candidates in rural areas, thus increasing access to teacher credential programs and addressing the teacher shortage. Changes to clinical practice and field supervision were a change that all participants enacted.

Key Finding 4: Leader Navigates Exam Deferrals and Calls Out Inequities

A fourth key finding that addresses Research Questions 1 and 2 is that participants found themselves navigating the impact of exam deferrals and calling out inequities produced by these policies. Participants shared how the changing guidance on exam deferrals affected how they advised candidates on enrollment and completion requirements, which in turn affected the teacher shortage. Listening to participants' stories as they shared how they navigated such changes and the way it impacted them was poignant.

All five participants shared examples of how exam deferrals and the CTC's changing guidance on deferrals impacted how they advised candidates on program enrollment and completion requirements. Participant B summarized this by stating, "I think the biggest piece was the testing and as we know and saw, the testing really ebbed and flowed about what the state was telling us was required and not required." Additionally, Participant C shared that when the guidance from the CTC was clear, it enabled her to provide very clear advice to incoming interns. Participant C shared this:

PSA 20-16, I believe that is the one that I read and felt like it was very impactful. This one clearly outlines what are the areas you can defer, and why. So when they're very clear, because we are running a program, and when we have what the requirements are, it is very helpful. We can clearly say that to our candidates that this is why. CTC is saying this. This is how it is outlined.

Participant D shared a similar perspective:

The PSA 21-02 where it talked about the flexibility provisions, because that gave us some language that we could use when advising our interns, and that we could use that language to justify why we made decisions that we made. For example, demonstrating subject matter competency through any of the allowable statutory options prior to being recommended, so that was helpful.

However, when the PSA documents from the CTC were unclear, it created challenges for participants in terms of how to interpret and enact credential policy changes, and also impacted intern teachers' ability to complete the intern program. Participant E shared this example:

I struggled with the flexibilities for the deferrals, especially with subject matter competency. There is definitely a reason subject matter competency needs to be met prior to entering into the program, and there were some exceptional challenges with interns not meeting subject matter competency while in the program. And I'm still dealing with that. I'm on my last two that are still struggling with passing CSET.

Participant C shared a related experience:

I really struggled because I thought, coming in, my knowledge was that our candidates qualified to defer the TPA and RICA. We'd always encouraged them to do the RICA, but the TPA, we were under the assumption that they could still defer. There was a big challenge when clarifying information came out from the CTC that now they must pass the TPA and the language that came out in August said that.

Participant C continued:

But it's so, it's so muddled like you said. It's not clear exactly, and so it's always trying to understand and interpret and ask questions of what does that mean? And that was a big challenge for one of our cohorts, because they thought they could defer to induction and then they were told they could not.

Although exam deferrals impacted how participants advised intern candidates on program enrollment and completion, the deferrals also impacted other leadership actions taken by participants. For example, four out of five participants shared how once the RICA and TPA exams were deferred to induction, and interns could be recommended for a preliminary credential prior to having met those requirements, participants began supporting preliminary candidates in induction programs. Participant E shared this example:

The governor was able to defer the assessments into induction. But then, again, that caused another huge ripple effect in our induction program because we like your programs, have induction programs as partners in our unit. So what we did with that relationship is we began taking on more of a leadership role when our candidates were going into the induction program to make sure the induction program had the resources and materials and the understanding that they needed to have to support our interns who just entered those programs on deferrals.

Not only did participants support their own candidates in induction with passing RICA and TPA, they also supported candidates from other preliminary teacher preparation programs. This was evidenced by four out of five participants. As Participant D shared, "We were supporting IHE

[Institutions of Higher Education] candidates that were going into our induction with the passage of their TPA and RICA because they weren't getting that support from where they had just finished their preliminary program." Providing support to induction programs is an example of a specific leadership action participants took in response to changing credentialing policies.

One of the more critical findings from this study was that although participants were supporting intern candidates in induction with passing their exams, participants also identified inequities that were produced by exam deferrals and experienced by interns. These inequities stemmed from how credentialing policies related to exam deferrals were interpreted and implemented during the pandemic period. What participants noticed was that these policies were applied differently to candidates based on when they enrolled in an intern program, and as a result such policies impacted an intern teacher's ability to complete their teacher preparation program. This finding addresses Research Question 1, as intern candidates were held to different requirements, which in turn affected intern candidates with program completion and earning a preliminary teaching credential. Additionally, this finding addresses Research Question 2, as participants noticed shifts in the diversity of intern candidates who were enrolled in intern programs during the time these policies were in effect.

The main policy that participants referred to as being inequitable was SB 820, which extended COVID-19 program flexibilities through August 2021. This policy affected candidates who began an intern program in 2020, and also affected candidates who enrolled before 2020. Candidates who enrolled in an intern program in 2020 were able to enroll prior to having satisfied the basic skills or subject matter competency requirements; instead they could defer taking CBEST and CSET exams once they were in an intern program (CTC, 2020). What participants noticed as a result of these exam deferrals is that although they encouraged intern

candidates to take and complete their exams, many candidates within their programs continued to defer or delay completing exam requirements. This then affected the intern candidates' ability to complete their credential requirements and ultimately earn a preliminary teaching credential.

Participant B shared an example of the messaging she provided school superintendents regarding teacher licensure exam requirements for interns:

My very utmost message to them was, encourage your candidates to do their best to take the exams anyway, because there are testing spots. We don't want to have these exams stacked on top of each other at the end of the candidates' program, which, as we know, is what happened to many.

When examining completion data from her program, Participant B noticed seven out of 14 candidates who enrolled in 2020 had still not passed licensure exams. Participant B noted that the seven candidates represented a more diverse population of intern candidates than she had previously seen in her program. She stated, "Three are LGBTQ, one is an English learner, two are first-generation college students, and coming from backgrounds of poverty and trauma, one was part of the foster care system as a child." Participant B shared her experiences of working with these seven intern candidates:

When I look at this list of seven people, I know all of their stories, and I know, I know the barriers that they faced and how hard they worked, and it's just, like I feel the tears behind my eyeballs. Thinking that after everything they did, all of the effort, and time, and perseverance that they put through to have them still be stuck now. It's just gutting. And this situation is unique to this 2020 group.

Although some candidates were delaying taking exams, other candidates believed they could defer taking exams until they were in an induction program. For instance, Participant E noticed some interns within her program weren't completing exam requirements and told her, "Oh, I don't have to do it. I'm gonna get a deferral and go into induction, or I'll just go on an extension." As a result, Participant E worked closely with local school districts to hold intern candidates accountable for completing their exams. Participant E let districts know "that this is

not the best approach that they want their hirees to take and that we need to be on the same page with the messaging.” She continued to state, “I tell the district, we have no teeth with this. Your district has the teeth to tell them if you don’t pass your assessment by a certain date, you will be non-reelected.” Participant E noticed districts that worked in partnership with the intern program and held candidates accountable for completing exam requirements “saw a tremendous increase in their candidates that were completing the assessments.” Although Participant E worked with districts and interns within her program to hold interns accountable for completing exam requirements, she, along with other participants, noticed there continued to be interns who delayed completing exams.

As a result of candidates delaying completing their exams, and changing guidance from the CTC, participants found themselves having to make decisions about whether or not to file for credential extensions for these candidates. For example, participants had to determine if a candidate could qualify for an extension based on information from PSA 21-13, which indicated candidates could only be eligible for an extension due to “test center closures or capacity issues related to COVID-19” (CTC, 2021e). Although this initial policy guidance was provided to programs by the CTC, the interpretation of this policy guidance continued to change. Participant D shared this experience related to changing CTC guidance: “During that time, too, they were saying that you couldn’t apply for an extension if testing was the only reason why the intern didn’t finish the program. And then they just did a complete about face.” Participant D also shared how she advocated for interns in her program by filing for extensions for candidates who realistically could not get to an open testing center due to how far away the center was. Holding candidates accountable for completing exam requirements and determining whether or not to file

for credential extensions was one way participants navigated exam deferrals and responded to inequities stemming from credential policy changes.

Another inequity participants noticed was how SB 820 was applied to candidates who were already enrolled in an intern program and slated to complete their program in 2020. The legislation of SB 820 allowed intern candidates to be recommended for a preliminary teaching credential prior to having completed RICA and TPA exams (CTC, 2020). Then in July 2023, subsequent legislation came out, which enabled this same group of candidates to be recommended for a clear credential without having taken and passed RICA or TPA exams as long as they satisfied two criteria: (a) they completed a 2-year commission-approved induction program prior to June 30, 2025, and (b) they completed 2 years of teaching service with satisfactory evaluations prior to June 30, 2025 (CTC, 2023b). The credential policy changes outlined in PSA 23-05 (CTC, 2023b) based on SB 820 legislation addressed TPA exemptions of candidates with COVID-19 pandemic deferrals. Although PSA 23-05 (CTC, 2023b) was implemented after the time period of this research study, two of the five participants referred to PSA 23-05 as impacting their intern programs. As Participant E said of this legislation:

I think it comes down to an equity issue for our students, because many of our students now are going to have clear credential holders that did not take a TPA. I know it really doesn't impact our programs, because this happened when they were in induction, but how does that ensure that the equity piece is in play for the quality of the teacher in front of our students? The decision to defer, or excuse me, to completely waive the TPA for induction candidates, blows my mind, because how can we now, as intern programs, justify why our interns need to take an assessment?

Participants navigating exam deferrals, calling out inequities resulting from credential policy changes and how those policy changes affected different groups of interns based on when those interns enrolled in their programs, then taking action to support interns, was a fourth key finding from this study.

Key Finding 5: Leader Notices Shifts in Enrollment, Completion, and Demographics

The fifth and final finding that addresses both research questions is that participants noticed changes in program enrollment and completion, as well as changes in intern demographics. Although some participants felt these changes occurred as a result of changing credentialing policies, others connected shifts in enrollment to leadership actions taken during the pandemic period. This is an essential finding from this study.

The main credentialing policy that participants saw impacting program enrollment was SB 820, which extended COVID-19 program flexibilities through August 2021 and allowed candidates to enroll in an intern program prior to having satisfied the basic skills or subject matter competency requirements (CTC, 2020). Four of the five participants noticed an increase in program enrollment both during the pandemic and afterwards, and attributed increases to exam deferrals stemming from SB 820. One example was shared by Participant D, who stated, “In general, I think the trend when all of the restrictions were relaxed a little bit it allowed more people the opportunity to come into the program without having those stringent deadlines having to be met.” Participant D also shared observations about enrollment in her own program: “Definitely the number of interns increased substantially, like from 30 or 40 to over 50 interns in the program during when the pandemic hit.” Although three of the five participants attributed the increase in program enrollment to exam deferrals for CBEST and CSET, one participant attributed high enrollment numbers to recruiting and outreach. For instance, Participant C shared this:

I believe our overall numbers went up largely because of the classified employee-teacher grant. So we went out to each district and had what we call the roadshow. We went out to the district office, so it was a lot more recruiting for the classified grant and we had a large number because we knew our districts needed so many teachers, and they had a great number of classified employees that could qualify.

Increases in program enrollment was one finding that occurred for four of the five participants within this study.

In addition to program enrollment increasing, participants noticed shifts in program completion. Similar to program enrollment, participants attributed the shifts in program completion to exam deferrals stemming from SB 820. For instance, participants noticed candidates within their programs who continued to defer or delay completing exam requirements, or who were unable to pass exams, even after multiple attempts. This then affected the intern candidates' ability to complete their program and be recommended for a preliminary credential. Participant D shared this experience:

And our interns are paying the price. A lot of them are literally paying the price because of having to repeatedly take exams. I have five interns that if they don't complete those requirements from that year, they've run out of options.

Although exam deferrals enabled candidates to access and enroll in an intern program, the changing guidance and way in which SB 820 was implemented affected intern candidates with program completion.

Although SB 820 policy changes regarding exam deferrals negatively affected program completion for one group of intern teachers (as discussed under Key Finding 4), there was a positive effect for another group. For example, the legislation of SB 820 allowed intern candidates who were already enrolled in an intern program and slated to complete their program in 2020 to be recommended for a preliminary teaching credential prior to having completed RICA and TPA exams. This was a positive finding of this study, as the deferral allowed this group of teachers to receive their preliminary credential and thus remain in the teacher workforce. Additionally, in July 2023, subsequent legislation came out in PSA 23-05, which enabled this same group of candidates to be recommended for a clear credential without having taken and passed RICA or TPA exams as long as they satisfied two criteria: (a) they completed a

2-year commission-approved induction program prior to June 30, 2025, and (b) they completed 2 years of teaching service with satisfactory evaluations prior to June 30, 2025 (CTC, 2023b).

Although PSA 23-05 (CTC, 2023b) was implemented after the time period of this research study, two of the five participants referred to this PSA as impacting program completion. As described in Key Finding 4, Participant E shared her concern about having clear credential holders who were not required to have passed the TPA while in their teacher preparation program or in the induction program.

Although program completion changed during the pandemic due to credentialing policy changes and leadership actions, participants also noticed a change in intern demographics. Although participants did not link changes in intern demographics to a particular credentialing policy change, all five participants shared general observations of their program data and noticed demographic shifts. For example, Participant D shared, “Just a general observation is that our workforce became, our interns became much more diverse in terms of ethnicity and in terms of gender.” Another participant, Participant B, shared similar observations about candidate demographics as she viewed her program data and noticed more candidates from rural areas, more males, and an increase in Hispanic/Latinx candidates. As Participant B noted, “So I would say that the cohort we have now I feel like is representing a more diverse group than prior.” Based on participant responses from the focus group and individual interviews, changes in intern candidate enrollment and completion occurred as a result of credentialing policy changes and leadership actions in response to those changes. Additionally, participants noticed a more diverse candidate population enrolling in their intern programs during and after the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Through an inductive analysis of focus group and individual interviews, five key findings regarding the actions and experiences of district intern program leaders emerged from this study. These findings include leaders understanding and interpreting credential policies; leaders communicating with and to constituents; leaders making changes in program delivery; leaders navigating exam deferrals and calling out inequities; and leaders noticing shifts in intern enrollment, completion, and demographics. These findings are interrelated and illustrate the main actions leaders took as they implemented changes in California credentialing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic period. These findings address Research Questions 1 and 2, connect to the theoretical framework, and provide implications to policy and practice. An analysis and discussion of the findings is detailed in the next section.

Discussion and Analysis

This section provides a discussion and analysis of the findings as they relate to each research question, contribute to the literature, and relate to the theoretical frameworks. The five key findings from this study address the two research questions:

1. How do the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders as they implemented California credentialing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic period address the teacher shortage?
2. What did district intern program leaders notice about diversity in intern program enrollment during the COVID-19 pandemic period?

The goal of this study was to examine the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders as they implemented California credentialing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic period to see how those experiences and actions addressed the teacher shortage and to see what district intern program leaders noticed about diversity in intern program enrollment.

Participants in this study shared experiences of leading their respective programs during the pandemic and provided examples of the impact changes in credentialing policies had on their leadership actions as well as on intern teachers within their programs. Their narratives exemplify the importance of interpreting and implementing credentialing policy changes in such a way as to support intern teachers with program enrollment and completion, thus reducing the teacher shortage.

Although participants' narratives demonstrate leadership actions that addressed the teacher shortage, not all of the findings provide evidence that their experiences and actions directly influenced the diversity of intern teacher program enrollment. However, the overall experiences and actions of participants in this study expand upon existing literature on alternative certification programs and the ways in which such programs address the teacher shortage and attract and enroll a diverse group of intern teacher candidates.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

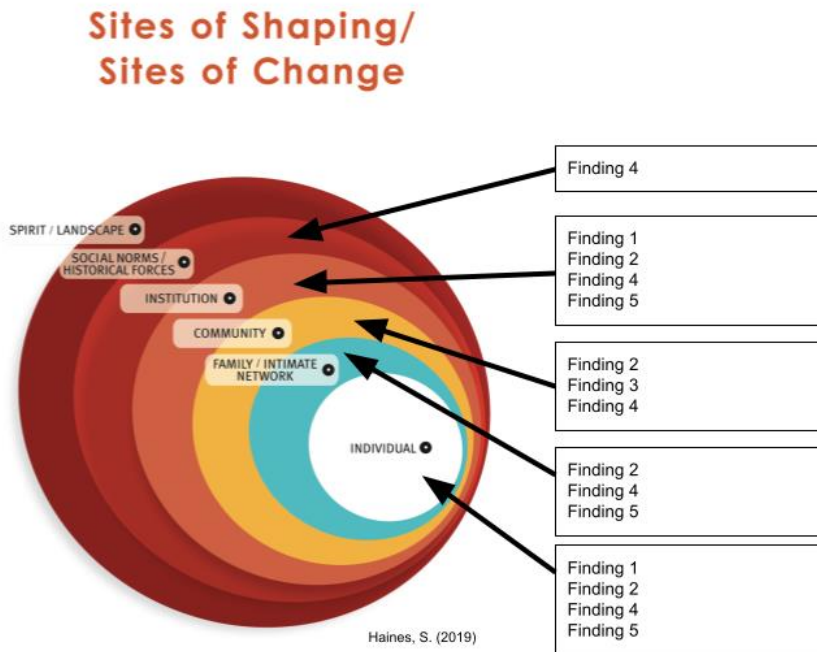
Research Question 1: How do the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders as they implemented California credentialing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic period address the teacher shortage?

Connections to the Theoretical Framework. The theoretical framework that informed this study is the sites of shaping framework, developed by Staci Haines and designed by Alan Greig and the organization generationFive (Haines, 2019). The sites of shaping theoretical framework provides a useful tool for situating this study's five findings within the larger educational landscape, and using this framework as a lens to view and analyze the findings allowed me to better understand how the actions and experiences of participants addressed each

research question. All five findings address Research Question 1, and three of the five findings address Research Question 2.

When examining the findings for each research question through the lens of the sites of shaping framework, I was able to understand how participants' perceptions, actions, beliefs, and experiences were shaped by and then shaped back the different sites on the framework. For example, with Finding 1, as changes in state credentialing policies occurred at Site 4, the institutional level, participants at Site 1 were faced with understanding, interpreting, and then implementing those changes within their intern programs located at Site 3, the community level. Additionally, with Findings 2 and 3, as participants noticed how credentialing policy changes were impacting interns at Site 2, the intimate network level, they made changes to program delivery at Site 3, and communicated those changes to local school districts, also at Site 3. The interrelatedness of these findings is illustrated in Figure 3; Appendix E lists the findings as they are connected to research questions and the theoretical framework. Examining the findings through the sites of shaping framework evidences how the findings weave together and how change occurring at one site on the framework influences and/or produces change at another site.

Figure 3 Findings Connected to Theoretical Framework



Note. Adapted from S.Haines.

Contributions to Literature. Within this study, all five findings, illustrating the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders, directly or indirectly address the teacher shortage. For instance, with Findings 1 and 2, participants sought to understand and interpret credentialing policy changes and communicated those changes to constituents. This was done in order to support intern teachers with program completion so they could be recommended for a preliminary teaching credential, thus increasing the number of credentialed teachers in the workforce.

Participants unanimously shared experiences about the lack of clarity in credentialing policy changes, as well as the importance of communicating changes to interns in order to keep interns informed, to correct misinformation, and to provide interns with support. The primary way participants did this was by checking in with and communicating to intern teachers during

their online classes. When these leadership actions are examined through the lens of the sites of shaping framework, what is noticed is that participants at Site 1 took action in response to changes at Site 4, the institutional level, and enacted those changes within intern programs and at school districts located at Site 3, the community level. Furthermore, participants at Site 1 also communicated changes to intern candidates located at Site 2, the intimate network level.

When examining participants' actions in relation to existing literature, what is noticed is that participants' actions of checking in with interns during online classes is similar to the "pedagogy of care" employed by Moorhouse and Tiet as they established a social presence through relationship building with teachers while they instructed online during the COVID-19 pandemic (2021, pp. 211–212). Although Moorhouse and Tiet focused on developing relationships with teachers in order to provide effective instruction online, participants within this study focused on supporting intern teachers by addressing interns' questions regarding credential policy changes as they attended intern teachers' online classes. This finding suggests that having a regular presence with interns and focusing on communicating accurate credential information supports intern teachers with program completion and ultimately earning a preliminary teaching credential. This in turn supports reducing the teacher shortage as more credentialed teachers are able to remain in the workforce.

Whereas Findings 1 and 2 illustrates participants' experiences and actions related to understanding, implementing, and communicating credential policy changes, Finding 3 demonstrates changes participants made to program delivery. Although existing literature by Romero (2010) found "significant diversity in the structure, curriculum, and design" of intern programs and attributed differences to the ways program providers adapted state goals and regulations, participants within this study interpreted and adapted state policy in ways that

resulted in a uniform change in program delivery across all five intern programs (Romero, 2010, p. 376). When returning back to the sites of shaping framework to analyze this finding, what is noticed is that participants took action in response to state policy changes occurring at Site 4, the institutional level; however, they also took action in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, occurring globally at Site 5, the social norms/historical forces level. For example, the program delivery changes that participants made included moving instruction from in person to online, and also changing intern teachers' clinical practice experience. These changes, which occurred at Site 3, the community level, were made in order to keep intern programs operational during COVID-19 school closures.

Finding 3 is similar to findings in existing research by Nel et al. (2021) and Moorhouse and Tiet (2021); however, their research focused on traditional teacher preparation programs, and not district intern-based programs. Despite the difference in program delivery models, research by Nel et al. found teacher preparation programs had to utilize online modalities and other course-embedded approaches for teacher candidates to demonstrate competency in the teaching standards related to fieldwork and clinical practice requirements. Similarly, all five participants in this study shared examples of shifts made in clinical practice and fieldwork requirements, such as utilizing video recording to conduct observations and using document-based tools as a means for candidates to demonstrate growth in the Teacher Performance Expectations. In addition to shifts in clinical practice and fieldwork, participants in this study made changes to instructional delivery and shifted instruction online. This finding is similar to findings of Moorhouse and Tiet, who studied changes to instructional delivery as their teacher preparation program shifted instruction from in person to online.

The shifts made by leaders in clinical practice and fieldwork as well as instructional delivery occurred as a result of COVID-19 school closures, and the drive behind making these changes was to keep intern programs operational during the pandemic period so intern candidates could complete program requirements and earn their preliminary credential. Finding 3 indicates changes to an online format for clinical practice, fieldwork experiences, and instruction were beneficial to interns as they allowed them to continue to their intern program and complete program requirements, thus leading to a preliminary credential. Based on this information, Finding 3 supports Research Question 1.

Whereas Finding 3 evidence changes to program delivery, Finding 4 illustrates ways participants navigated exam deferrals in order to support candidates with program completion. Finding 4 expands on research about the impact teacher licensure exams have on alternatively certified teacher candidates. For example, existing literature by Yoon et al. (2019) and Cowan (2020) found licensure exams produce a barrier, particularly for teachers of color, when it comes to enrolling in a teacher preparation program or entering the workforce. Meanwhile, participants within this study found the deferral of licensure exams increased access for teachers to enroll in intern programs. However, participants also found exam deferrals created a barrier to workforce entry, particularly for interns who continued to delay taking exams while enrolled in an intern program, or who were unable to pass exams prior to their intern credential expiring.

Participants took actions such as filing for credential extensions for candidates whose credentials were set to expire, holding candidates accountable for completing exams, or voicing concerns to the CTC regarding policy implementation. This was done in an effort to keep intern teachers enrolled in programs so they could complete exam requirements. Viewing participant actions through the lens of the sites of shaping shows that participants responded to changes at

Site 4, the institutional level; worked with intern candidates at Site 2, the intimate network level; and then also advocated for change with the CTC at Site 4, the institutional level. This is an example of participants being shaped by a site and then shaping back change at other sites. Although participants took action and did advocacy work at the larger, institutional level to support intern teachers with passing licensure exams, Finding 4 indicates that, despite this action, licensure exams continue to produce a barrier for workforce entry. This finding supports existing literature by Yoon et al. (2019) and Cowan (2020) and addresses Research Question 1.

Whereas Finding 4 focused on exam deferrals, Finding 5 focused on changes in program enrollment, completion, and candidate demographics. Finding 5 supports existing research on enrollment increases in teacher preparation programs. For example, Title II reports from 2020–2021 evidence an increase in enrollment in California intern programs (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Finding 5 supports this, as participants noticed increases in program enrollment both during the pandemic and in the 2 years following the height of the pandemic. Although Title II data provide overall data reflecting increased enrollment in intern programs, they do not indicate reasons for these increases; however, participants within this study did identify reasons for increased enrollment. These reasons included entrance exam deferrals, targeted outreach in local school districts, and recruitment of classified staff. Given this information, findings from this study expand upon existing research.

Although Finding 5 shows a positive impact on enrollment within intern programs, participants noticed positive and negative impacts on program completion resulting from changes in credentialing policies. This is a finding where credentialing policy changes related to SB 820 produced an advantage for one group of interns, based on timing of program enrollment, which allowed them to be recommended for a preliminary credential prior to having met exit

exams (CTC, 2020). Yet for another group of interns, the same policy produced a barrier, as this group was held to completing licensure exams prior to being recommended for a preliminary credential. As a result, Finding 5 provides mixed results as to whether exam deferrals positively address the teacher shortage through completion rates. This finding is in contrast to existing research by Carver-Thomas et al. (2022), which points to the allowance of waivers and postponements of licensure exams, along with increased options for candidates to meet subject matter competency requirements, as reasons for the “sizable increase in new teachers completing teacher preparation in California” (p. 6). Overall, Finding 5 addresses Research Question 1 and contributes to existing literature.

Research Question 2: What did district intern program leaders notice about diversity in intern program enrollment during the COVID-19 pandemic period?

Although all five key findings address Research Question 1, three out of the five findings address Research Question 2. These three findings include leaders communicating with and to constituents, leaders navigating exam deferrals and calling out inequities, and leaders noticing shifts in enrollment, completion, and demographics. These three findings both support and expand upon existing literature on alternative certification programs and teacher diversity.

Finding 5 is one of the findings that specifically addresses Research Question 2 and contributes to existing research on this topic. For example, demographic data from the CTC (2021c) 2019–2020 annual report card show intern programs are increasingly more racially diverse when compared to traditional preparation programs. Although this study did not focus on examining the demographics of teachers enrolled in intern programs as compared to traditional programs, participants within this study examined their local program data and noticed intern candidates enrolled during the pandemic represented a more diverse group in terms of race,

gender, age, and socioeconomic status as compared to candidates enrolled in prior years. Furthermore, participants noticed candidates who enrolled in their intern programs in the 2 years following the height of the pandemic also represented a more demographically diverse group. This is one of the ways in which Finding 5 addresses Research Question 2.

Whereas Finding 5 illustrates what participants noticed about intern teacher diversity within their programs, and supports existing research on teacher diversity within California intern programs, Findings 2 and 3 add to existing literature on diversity within alternative certification programs. For example, four existing studies indicated alternative certification programs are beneficial in diversifying the teaching profession, particularly when such programs intentionally recruit candidates of color, have intentional curricular content, and provide structured systems of support (Ardley et al., 2022; Bristol et al., 2020; Cherfas et al., 2021; Scott, 2019). Similarly, within this study, Finding 2 revealed that one participant attributed increases in candidate diversity to the intentional recruitment of classified staff, who represent a more diverse population within schools.

Using the sites of shaping to view the actions of participants within Finding 2, what is noticed is that as one participant (Site 1) networked with local districts and engaged in outreach to prospective candidates at the community level (Site 3), then changes occurred to program diversity (Site 3). This indicates that intentional outreach and recruitment actions by participants aids in increasing teacher diversity within intern programs. However, only one participant identified this particular action as leading to increased program enrollment and diversity, and other participants did not provide rationales as to why their programs are more diverse. Yet all participants viewed their intern candidate data and noticed an increase in diversity in program

enrollment. Even with this information, it would be beneficial to conduct further research regarding the reasons for increases in program diversity.

Whereas Finding 2 illustrates ways in which recruitment actions addressed teacher diversity within intern programs, Finding 3 focuses on changes in program delivery in the areas of coursework and clinical practice. Whereas existing research by Ardley et al. (2022), Bristol et al. (2020), and Scott (2019) identified programmatic and curricular changes for teacher preparation programs to best support teachers of color, the changes recommended by these researchers included intentional curricular content and creating inclusive environments.

Although participants within this study identified programmatic and curriculum changes that included moving coursework and clinical practice online, these changes occurred in response to COVID-19 school closures and were put in place in order to keep intern programs operational. Participants did not indicate that these changes were done to intentionally support teachers of color within their programs or done to increase teacher diversity. Therefore, although Finding 3 focused on changes to program delivery, this finding does not appear to specifically address diversity in intern program enrollment. It is recommended that further research occur within this area.

In this study, district intern program leaders shared their experiences and described specific actions they took as they implemented California credentialing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic period. All participants shared key experiences and pivotal leadership moments that occurred during the pandemic period as they interacted with changing credentialing policies and enacted those policies. The interplay between their actions, experiences, and credentialing policies within the changing landscape of teacher credentialing during the COVID-19 pandemic period not only addressed the teacher shortage, it also

highlighted what participants noticed about diversity in intern program enrollment. Hearing from the experiences of each participant and the leadership actions they took to support intern teachers within their programs provides insight into ways in which these participants are invested in strengthening teacher credentialing for all.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The intent of this study was to understand and identify how the actions and experiences of district intern program leaders as they implemented California credentialing policy changes during the COVID-19 pandemic period addressed the teacher shortage and to find out what participants noticed about diversity in intern program enrollment. This study used a qualitative approach to answer these two research questions:

1. How do the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders as they implemented California credentialing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic period address the teacher shortage?
2. What did district intern program leaders notice about diversity in intern program enrollment during the COVID-19 pandemic period?

Through the stories and experiences told by participants, valuable information was gained to address the research questions, expand upon existing research, and provide implications for future policy and practice. The experiences and subsequent actions taken by district intern program leaders in response to changing credentialing policies have several implications for policy and practice.

Implications for Policy and Practice

California credential policies related to COVID-19 program flexibilities and enacted between 2020 and 2022 may help or hinder teacher credentialing and teacher diversity. The experiences and subsequent actions taken by district intern program leaders in response to those policies have several implications for policy and practice that impact the landscape of teacher

education and credentialing. Staff at the CTC, leaders of teacher preparation programs, and school administrators will benefit from the following four recommendations from this study.

Change the Use of Deficit Language and Thinking Regarding Intern Programs

The first recommendation from this study is to discontinue the use of deficit language to define intern credentials and describe intern teachers. The terms “substandard” to define intern credentials and “underprepared” to describe intern teachers have been used in CTC reports and by commission staff (CTC, 2023c). Additionally, these terms appear in research from the Learning Policy Institute related to the teacher shortage and teacher credentialing (Carver-Thomas et al., 2020). Through the analysis of participants’ actions and experiences, this study sheds light on the strength of district intern programs and how they are uniquely positioned to address the teacher shortage by working in close coordination with local school districts to address and solve immediate staffing needs. Additionally, participants within this study spoke of the professional relationships they have with districts in their service region and how through these relationships they were able to effectively support teacher credentialing during the pandemic period. This study also revealed the strengths of intern teachers as they dealt with multiple changes in credentialing policies, overcame barriers, and worked to complete their program requirements. Viewing intern teachers through an asset-based lens and seeing the skills they are coming into the profession with would support their teacher development and aid in teacher retention.

When viewing this recommendation through the lens of the sites of shaping, one can see how changes in perceptions of intern programs and interns occurring at the social norms level (Site 5) could in turn influence hiring decisions made by districts at the community level (Site 3) and could ultimately support changing credentialing policies at the institutional level (Site 4),

which have different implications for teacher candidates based on their program pathway. One such policy, as outlined in PSA 24-03, is the grade span authorizations for university and district intern credentials. This policy, based on California Education Code 44326, provides a greater level of grade span authorization for university intern credential programs than district-based intern programs (CTC, 2024). This grade span authorization is based on state statutes and is more restrictive for district-based intern programs, even though such programs follow the same accreditation process and standards as university-based intern programs and traditional programs.

Formalize Regional or Statewide Organizations for District Intern Leaders

The second recommendation is to formalize regional or statewide organizations for leaders of district intern programs. Currently no formal organization of this kind exists in California. Throughout the study, participants referenced two informal networks of district intern program leaders and found those networks invaluable when interpreting and enacting credential policy changes; they also identified a need for a formal organization. A formal organization would provide intern leaders with a structured system of support where they could collaborate with one another, gain practical leadership skills, and network to further develop their respective intern programs. Within this study, participants frequently mentioned their sharing of ideas, brainstorming, and support received through existing informal networks. Therefore, a formal, statewide network would provide a cohesive and coherent system for leaders to regularly come together to work on problems of practice related to running a district intern program, provide new leaders with training and orientation to their job role, and allow leaders a collective space to discuss and understand credential policy changes.

When examining this recommendation through the lens of the sites of shaping framework, one can view the creation of formal regional and statewide networks of district intern program leaders as a mechanism for shaping state and local policy and practices. These networks then serve as vehicles for transmitting credential policy changes and interpretations of credentialing policies to individual district intern program leaders, thus shaping change at the individual level (Site 1) from the institutional level (Site 4) and the community level (Site 3).

Include District Intern Program Leaders in Policy Decisions

The third recommendation from this study is to include the perspectives of district intern program leaders when making policy decisions related to teacher credentialing and teacher preparation. Specifically, including the voices of district intern leaders when making policy decisions can reduce or change inequitable policies at the state level that have historically produced barriers to program entry and inadvertently prioritized enrollment in traditional teacher preparation programs over district intern programs. Participants within this study unanimously called for the need to be included in policy decisions affecting teacher credential programs. In addition, perspectives gained from district intern program leaders can be used to revise entrance requirements and licensure requirements, thus enabling a more diverse teacher population to enroll in and complete a district intern program.

Again, when this recommendation is viewed through the lens of the sites of shaping framework, one can view the inclusion of district intern program leaders in policy decisions as a way for the individual (Site 1) to shape back change at the institutional level (Site 4) and also impact change at the community level (Site 3) and intimate network level (Site 2). This recommendation provides viability for the voices and experiences of district intern program leaders to support and enact credential policy changes across multiple sites.

Provide Support for Interns to Complete Licensure Exams

The fourth recommendation from this study is to provide support for intern teachers who are not yet complete with licensure exams. Such support could include creating legislation to provide waivers for exams or credential extensions. Additionally, support could include building upon the legislation of AB 130, which provided new options to meet subject matter competency requirements, to provide even more expanded options for candidates to demonstrate subject matter competency through alternative means (CTC, 2021d). The rationale behind providing these supports is that within this study, participants shared examples of intern teachers who were essentially “stuck” in their teacher preparation programs, or at risk of losing their teaching job because they had not yet met exam requirements. Furthermore, all participants shared that they had current intern teachers within their programs who were also “stuck” because they were unable to meet exam requirements, post-pandemic period. Providing support for these teachers to complete their exams or identifying alternative ways for them to demonstrate they have met the content covered in licensure exams would assist in reducing the teacher shortage by placing more credentialed teachers into the workforce.

When one views this final recommendation through the sites of shaping framework, what is revealed is the significant impact the COVID-19 pandemic had and continues to have on teacher credentialing. The impact, originating at the historical forces level (Site 5), impacted intern candidates (at Site 2) both during the pandemic and currently. Although societal limitations and restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic have changed, what has not sufficiently changed is the state requirement to pass licensure exams, which continues to be a barrier for entry into the teaching profession. Thus, providing support in the form of changing legislation (Site 4) for intern teachers (Site 2) to pass exams and to also expand options for intern

teachers to meet subject matter competency requirements would aid in reducing the teacher shortage.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although a great deal was learned from this study about the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders as they interpreted California credential policy changes during the COVID-19 pandemic and how those experiences addressed the teacher shortage, as well as what leaders noticed about diversity in intern program enrollment, it would be helpful to expand upon this study in several ways. For example, this study produced mixed results as to whether or not the way district intern program leaders navigated exam deferrals positively addressed the teacher shortage as evidenced by program completion rates. Therefore, further research is needed to study the completion rates of intern teachers as well as all teachers who went through teacher preparation programs during the pandemic.

Another recommendation for future research is to conduct an analysis of teacher retention rates from district-based intern programs. This much-needed research could assist in evaluating the effectiveness, quality, and reach of district-based intern programs. Furthermore, such research could provide insights as to whether or not district-based intern programs provide long-term solutions to addressing the teacher shortage.

A final recommendation for research is in regards to diversity in intern program enrollment. Although this study pointed to the recruitment of classified staff as one reason for increased diversity in intern program enrollment, further research is needed to better understand and identify reasons for increased teacher diversity within intern programs. Additionally, future research could be expanded to include other teacher preparation program pathways. This future

research may shed light on additional strategies to increase diversity in enrollment within teacher preparation programs and ultimately support teacher diversity within California.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic period were highlighted and analyzed to see how such experiences and actions addressed the teacher shortage and to see what program leaders noticed about diversity in intern program enrollment. Findings from this study shed light on the value of district intern programs as a viable credentialing pathway, positioned to decrease the teacher shortage and support teacher diversity. The experiences of leaders within this study add to the landscape of teacher education.

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**APPENDIX A: CALIFORNIA CREDENTIALING REQUIREMENTS FOR TRADITIONAL AND INTERN
PATHWAYS PRIOR TO TEACHING**

Pathway	Bachelor's degree	Certificate of Clearance (or valid CTC document)	Meet U.S. Constitution requirement	Meet basic skills requirement	Satisfy subject matter competency	Complete 120 hours of preservice coursework	Employed as teacher of record
Traditional	x	x	x	x			
Intern	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Note. CTC = California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

APPENDIX B: COVID-19 PANDEMIC TIMELINE AND PSA CREDENTIALING TIMELINE

Time frame	COVID-19 event	CTC PSA topic
March 2020	The World Health Organization declares COVID-19 a pandemic	
April 2020	1 million confirmed COVID-19 cases are reported worldwide	April 28, 2020: PSA 20-04 COVID-19 Flexibility Provisions for Education Preparation Programs
July 2020		July 2, 2020: PSA 20-06 Program Modification Document—describes the program modifications that have been put in place to address the COVID-19 Health and Safety Restrictions for the program
August 2020	Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine becomes the first vaccine to receive approval for use in Russia	August 14, 2020: PSA 20-10 Commission-approved Flexibilities and Specificities for Preliminary Multiple Subject and Single Subject Candidates in the 2020–2021 Academic Year August 14, 2020: PSA 20-11 Commission-approved Flexibilities and Specificities for Education Specialist Candidates in the 2020–2021 Academic Year
September 2020	Global death toll from COVID-19 reaches 1 million	September, 29, 2020: PSA 20-16 Senate Bill 820 Signed by Governor Newsom Extends COVID-Flexibilities for Academic Year 2020–21 September, 29, 2020: PSA 20-17 Preliminary Teacher Preparation Program Support for Candidates who are Accepted Prior to Meeting the Basic Skills and/or the Subject Matter Competency Requirement

October 2020	U.S. Food and Drug Administration approves remdesivir for the treatment of hospitalized cases of COVID-19	
November 2020		
December 2020	The Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine receives emergency use authorization in the United States for individuals ages 16 and older	
	SARS CoV-2 variant and Delta variant are identified	
January 2021	Global COVID-19 cases reach 100 million	
February 2021		
March 2021	118 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, 2.6 million deaths, 70.5 million fully vaccinated individuals	March 16, 2021: PSA 21-01 Individual Development Plan for Documentation of Educator Preparation during COVID-19
April 2021		April 29, 2021: PSA 21-02 COVID-19 Flexibility Provisions for Educator Preparation Programs: Demonstration of Subject Matter Competency Prior to Student Teaching
May 2021		
June 2021	The World Health Organization indicates the Delta variant is becoming the dominant variant worldwide	June 28, 2021: PSA 21-05 Preliminary Multiple and Single Subject Program Flexibilities Extended into 2021–2022 due to the Continued Impact of COVID-19

July 2021		July 15, 2021: PSA 21-08 2021–2022 State Budget Act Extends Testing Flexibilities for Candidates Impacted by Continuing COVID-19 Pandemic
		July 22, 2021: Coded Correspondence 21-05 AB 130: Availability of New Options to Meet the Subject Matter and Basic Skills Requirements
August 2021	Global COVID-19 cases reach 200 million	August 24, 2021: PSA 21-09 AB 130 Clarification on Exemption from the Basic Skills Proficiency Examination
	The FDA approves the first COVID-19 vaccine Pfizer/BioNTech	
September 2021		September 3, 2021: PSA 21-10 Implementation of New Options for Meeting the Statutory Subject Matter Competence Requirement
October 2021	FDA authorizes emergency use of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for prevention of COVID-19 in children ages 5–11	October 13, 2021: PSA 21-11 Update on Implementation of AB 130 Subject Matter Requirement
		October 22, 2021: PSA 21-12 Reminder of Circumstances Authorizing Deferral of Completion of Required Performance Assessments Until Induction
November 2021	Omicron variant reported in South Africa	
December 2021	Oral antivirals receive emergency use authorization for the treatment of COVID-19 in the United States	December 17, 2021: PSA 21-13 COVID Flexibilities Extended
January 2022	Global COVID-19 cases surpass 300 million	
	FDA approves Moderna COVID-19 vaccine	
February 2022	Global COVID-19 cases surpass 400 million	

March 2022	The pandemic continues with 447 million confirmed cases, 6 million deaths, 380 million recovered cases, and 10.8 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine. 36.7% of the world remains completely unvaccinated. Only 13.6% of people in under-resources counties have received at least one dose
April 2022	April 29, 2022: PSA 22-04 Update on Subject Matter Competence and Student Teaching
May 2022	May 17, 2022: PSA 22-05 Reminder of Sunset Date for Deferral of a Performance Assessment of Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) Examination for Preliminary Credential Candidates

Note. CTC = California Commission on Teacher Credentialing; PSA = Program Sponsor Alert; FDA = U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

SECTION	CONTEXT & QUESTIONS
<p>Welcome, General Housekeeping Items, and Forms</p>	<p>Welcome focus group members. My name is Julianna Sikes. I am a graduate student at UC Davis in the CANDEL program and will be moderating today’s discussion. Thank you for taking the time to share your views and experiences.</p> <p>Before we begin, I want to make sure all of the necessary forms and surveys have been completed. Upon arrival, you received the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consent Form ● Demographics Survey ● Agenda and Focus Group Questions <p>Please take a moment to complete the consent form and demographics survey. Since I will be recording the focus group discussion for research purposes, I need your informed consent before we begin.</p> <p>Please let me know if you have any questions.</p>
<p>Consent and Ground Rules</p>	<p>Please remember your participation today is voluntary and you should only discuss things you feel comfortable discussing with me and the rest of the group. You may leave the focus group at any time.</p> <p>I will keep all information you provide today confidential. To protect your confidentiality, your comments will not be linked with personally identifying information. I will be recording our discussion via Zoom so I can listen to your comments later. This recording and my notes will be destroyed at the end of the study. To protect your confidentiality, please use your first name only.</p> <p>Additionally, your personally identifying information will not appear when I present this study or publish its results.</p> <p>Please respect the following Ground Rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confidentiality – what is said in this room, stays in this room; please don’t share what anyone said with others who are not here - Only one person talks at a time - Be respectful of others; it is OK to have different opinions - Use first names only - Minimize distractions by having cell phones off or on silent <p>I request that each of you keep what is said during the focus group confidential. However, I cannot guarantee complete confidentiality.</p> <p>Does anyone have any questions before we begin?</p>

<p>Purpose of Focus Group</p>	<p>The purpose of this focus group is to learn from district intern program leaders by examining their experiences and leadership actions during the 2020–2022 COVID pandemic period as they implemented California credentialing policies. I am interested in hearing about your experiences and leadership actions as you enacted California credential policies related to COVID-19 program flexibilities.</p> <p>There is a current gap in research about district intern programs, as well as an absence of research that situates the role of the district intern program leader as an institutional agent, responsible for interpreting and enacting state policies. As a result, the current literature lacks recommendations for actions that alternative certification program leaders could take at a programmatic level and state level to improve enrollment, credentialing, decrease the teacher shortage or increase teacher diversity.</p> <p>I will use the information that you share today to create recommendations for policy and practice to hopefully shape the future of California teacher credentialing. Specifically, information gained from this study could be used to revise entrance requirements and licensure requirements, enabling more teachers of color to enroll in and complete a district intern program.</p> <p>For the purpose of today, please share your experience as it relates to experiences and leadership actions during the 2020–2022 COVID pandemic period, only as that is the focus of my study.</p> <p>I would be happy to answer any questions before we start. Our discussion will last approximately 1 hour.</p>
<p>Introduction of Focus Group Members</p>	<p>First, we will start by having each of you tell us about your professional context.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please share your role and responsibilities as a district intern program leader. 2. What has been your experience in leading a district intern program?
<p>Experience and Actions of District Intern Program Leaders</p>	<p>Second, we will discuss your experience in leading a district intern program during the COVID-19 pandemic period (2020–2022).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. What has been your experience in leading a district intern program during the COVID-19 pandemic period (2020–2022)?

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. How did you collaborate with other constituents, such as other program leaders, CTC staff, or staff within your program to run your intern program during the pandemic? 5. What were some of the challenges you faced as a district intern program leader during the COVID-19 pandemic period? 6. What were some ways you supported teacher candidates in understanding the requirements for program enrollment and/or completion? 7. What did you notice about candidate demographics in your program during this time? 8. What did you notice about candidate enrollment and completion during this time?
<p>Implementation of California Credentialing Policies during the COVID-19 pandemic period</p>	<p>Third, we will discuss your interpretation and implementation of several selected California credentialing policies written in response to the Governor’s Executive Order N-66-20 during the COVID-19 pandemic period. For the purpose of this study, we will focus on Program Sponsor Alerts which were produced between April 2020 and September 2021, and the Governor’s Executive Order N-66-20, signed into action on May 29, 2020.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. What is your understanding of Governor’s Executive Order N-66-20, signed into action on May 29, 2020? 10. What and who was helpful in supporting your understanding of EO N-66-20? 11. What was your response to EO N-66-20 and what initial leadership actions did you take? 12. What is your understanding of PSA 20-16 Governor’s Executive Order/ SB 280: CTC Guidance Regarding Executive Order Actions Related to COVID-19 (September 29, 2020)? 13. What and who was helpful in supporting your understanding of PSA 20-16? 14. What was your response to PSA 20-16 and what initial leadership actions did you take?

	<p>15. What was your interpretation of CTC PSA 21-05, (enacted on June 28, 2021) Preliminary Multiple Subject and Single Subject Program Flexibilities Extended into 2021–2022 due to the Continued Impact of COVID-19?</p> <p>16. What and who was helpful in supporting your understanding of PSA 20-16?</p> <p>17. What actions did you take as a result of PSA 21-05?</p> <p>18. What did you notice about program enrollment and completion in terms of candidate demographics following the implementation of PSA 20-16 and 21-05?</p> <p>19. What do you notice about current program enrollment, completion, and candidate demographics?</p> <p>20. What were some ways the above PSAs and EO affected your intern program?</p> <p>21. What recommendations do you have as a result of your experience?</p>
<p>Closing</p>	<p>I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me and share your experiences. Your input and participation is critical to this project and I value your perspectives, insight and experiences.</p> <p>I will be contacting you within the next 2 weeks to conduct individual follow up interviews as part of this research study.</p> <p>I have sent you an email with my contact information. Please feel free to contact me if you think of anything else you would like to add.</p> <p>Please look for a follow-up email with your gift card. You will be asked to send a “read receipt” acknowledging your receipt of the gift card.</p>

APPENDIX D: INDIVIDUAL PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

SECTION	CONTEXT & QUESTIONS
<p>Welcome, General Housekeeping Items, and Forms</p>	<p>Welcome. My name is Julianna Sikes. I am a graduate student at UC Davis in the CANDEL program and will be conducting individual interviews as a follow up to our focus group. Thank you for taking the time to share your views and experiences.</p> <p>Before we begin, I want to make sure all of the necessary forms and surveys have been completed. Upon arrival, you received the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consent Form ● Agenda and Individual Interview Questions <p>Please take a moment to complete the consent form. Since I will be recording the interviews for research purposes, I need your informed consent before we begin.</p> <p>Please let me know if you have any questions.</p>
<p>Consent and Ground Rules</p>	<p>Please remember your participation today is voluntary and you should only discuss things you feel comfortable discussing with me. You may end the interview at any time.</p> <p>I will keep all information you provide today confidential. To protect your confidentiality, your comments will not be linked with personally identifying information. I will be recording this interview via Zoom so I can listen to your comments later. This recording and my notes will be destroyed at the end of the study. To protect your confidentiality, please use your first name only.</p> <p>Additionally, your personally identifying information will not appear when I present this study or publish its results.</p> <p>Please respect the following Ground Rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confidentiality – what is said in this room, stays in this room; please don't share what anyone said with others who are not here - Minimize distractions by having cell phones off or on silent <p>I request that you keep what is said during the interview confidential. However, I cannot guarantee complete confidentiality.</p> <p>Do you have any questions before we begin?</p>

<p>Purpose of Individual Interviews</p>	<p>The purpose of this interview is to learn additional information and perspectives from district intern program leaders following the focus group. This will be done by examining your experiences and leadership actions during the 2020–2022 COVID pandemic period as you implemented California credentialing policies.</p> <p>As shared during the focus group, there is a current gap in research about district intern programs, as well as an absence of research that situate the role of the district intern program leader as an institutional agent, responsible for interpreting and enacting state policies. As a result, the current literature lacks recommendations for actions that alternative certification program leaders could take at a programmatic level and state level to improve enrollment, credentialing, decrease the teacher shortage or increase teacher diversity.</p> <p>I will use the information that you share today to create recommendations for policy and practice to hopefully shape the future of California teacher credentialing. Specifically, information gained from this study could be used to revise entrance requirements and licensure requirements, enabling more teachers of color to enroll in and complete a district intern program.</p> <p>For the purpose of today, please share your experience as it relates to experiences and leadership actions during the 2020–2022 COVID pandemic period, only as that is the focus of my study.</p> <p>I would be happy to answer any questions before we start. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes.</p>
<p>Introduction of Individuals Being Interviewed</p>	<p>First, we will start by having you share your professional context.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there any additional information that you would like to share about your role and responsibilities as a district intern program leader. 2. What is your current experience in leading a district intern program?
<p>Experience and Actions of District Intern Program Leaders (Individual Interviews)</p>	<p>Second, we will discuss your experience in leading a district intern program during the COVID-19 pandemic period (2020–2022).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. What else would you like to share about your experience in leading a district intern program during the COVID-19 pandemic period (2020–2022) that you didn’t get to share during the focus group?

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. How did you collaborate with other constituents, such as other program leaders, CTC staff, or staff within your program to run your intern program during the pandemic? 5. What were some of the challenges you faced as a district intern program leader during the COVID-19 pandemic period? 6. What were some ways you supported teacher candidates in understanding the requirements for program enrollment and/or completion? 7. What did you notice about candidate demographics in your program during this time? What are some of your reasons for this? 8. What did you notice about candidate enrollment and completion during this time? What are your reasons for this?
<p>Implementation of California Credentialing Policies during the COVID-19 pandemic period</p>	<p>Third, we will discuss your interpretation and implementation of several selected California credentialing policies written in response to the Governor’s Executive Order N-66-20 during the COVID-19 pandemic period. For the purpose of this study, we will focus on Program Sponsor Alerts which were produced between April 2020 and September 2021, and the Governor’s Executive Order N-66-20, signed into action on May 29, 2020.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. How did you make sense of the various PSAs and EO-N-66-20 that were released between 2020–2022? 10. How did you work with local districts where your interns worked to help them understand what was happening? 11. What do you make of your candidate demographics both during the COVID-19 pandemic period and now? 12. Share one pivotal moment in your program as a result of the various PSAs and EO-N-66-20? 13. What leadership action did you take as a result? 14. What recommendations do you have at the district, local, and/or state level, as a result of your experience?
<p>Closing</p>	<p>I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me and share your experiences. Your input and participation is critical to this project and I value your perspectives, insight and experiences.</p>

	<p>I have sent you an email with my contact information. Please feel free to contact me if you think of anything else you would like to add.</p>
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	<p>Please look for a follow up email with your gift card. You will be asked to send a “read receipt” acknowledging your receipt of the gift card.</p>
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**APPENDIX E: FINDINGS CONNECTED TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEORETICAL
FRAMEWORK**

Finding	RQ 1	RQ 2	Theoretical Framework Site
Leader understands and interprets PSAs	x		1,4
Leader communicates	x	x	1,2,3,4
Leader makes changes in program delivery	x		3
Leader navigates exam deferrals and calls out inequities	x	x	1,2,3,4,5
Leader notices shifts in enrollment, completion, and demographics	x	x	1,2,4

Note. RQ = Research Question; PSA = Program Sponsor Alert.

APPENDIX F: SYNTHESIS OF LEARNING

Introduction

My synthesis of learning will cover four areas. First, I will share my evolution and development as an educational leader and a scholar–practitioner. Next I will share key experiences that shaped my decision to apply to CANDEL. Then, I will illustrate key learnings from CANDEL program coursework, how these learnings connect to the mission and vision of CANDEL, have supported my development as an educational leader, and inform my research area of focus. Finally, I will describe my worldview as a scholar–practitioner within CANDEL and how that has influenced my approach to my research.

Evolution and Development as an Educational Leader and Scholar–Practitioner

I first learned about the CANDEL program when I was a vice-principal at a K–6 school, in Fairfield-Suisun Unified. My principal, Charles, was enrolled in the program and I noticed he led the school with an equity-centered lens. This was the first time in my educational career that I experienced a leader who led in this way. Charles wasn't afraid to bring up issues of racism or inequity when examining student academic and discipline data, nor did he shy away from leading staff in professional development where we examined White privilege and institutionalized racism. He shared that his leadership focus was influenced by CANDEL coursework and conversations with those in his cohort. I was immediately intrigued and not only wanted to learn more about the program, I wanted to be part of it, so that I too could be a leader focusing on changing inequities in education.

My intrigue about the CANDEL program stayed with me as I worked in different administrative positions and confronted systemic educational inequities. An example of this was when I was a principal in Berkeley Unified and needed to hire a special education teacher. I

found there was a limited pool of teachers due to credential shortages. When I recommended an intern teacher for the position, I was required by Human Resources to provide detailed justification as to why the intern was the best teacher for the position over a fully credentialed teacher due to Education Code 44225.7, which requires schools hire a fully credentialed teacher prior to hiring an intern. Although I could clearly see the intern was the best fit for the position, I was held to following a hiring hierarchy due to the Education Code.

As I moved into other administrative positions, I continued to encounter systemic inequities, particularly in the area of staffing and teacher credentialing. This was apparent when I was a district administrator in Mt. Diablo Unified, tasked with implementing Transitional Kindergarten (TK). While I worked with both preschool teachers and newly assigned TK teachers, I noticed the preschool teachers had stronger understandings of developmentally appropriate practices and pedagogy for young learners as compared to the multiple subject teachers who had transferred into TK positions from other grade levels. I was frustrated that although we had a group of preschool teachers who understood and had experience teaching young learners, they were unable to teach TK because they lacked a multiple subject credential.

Decision to Apply to CANDEL

My moment to actively disrupt and shift inequities in teacher staffing and credentialing came when I began my current position as a director of teacher intern programs in Davis Joint Unified. As I worked to develop the program, I met with prospective teachers who wanted to teach, yet didn't understand the pathway to credentialing, or lacked the prerequisites to enroll in a credential program. In addition, I noticed teachers in the intern program were caught in an inequitable system, as they were often last hired, assigned to more difficult or hard-to-staff positions, and received limited mentoring. Noticing these inequities, I thought back to Charles,

how he modeled leading with an equity-centered approach, and realized I needed to be part of the CANDEL program to create lasting changes in teacher preparation and credentialing.

I applied to the CANDEL program the year the GRE exams were waived. Although I had wanted to apply in earlier years, I was hesitant to do so, viewing the GRE requirement as a barrier to program entry. Ironically, my view of the GRE was similar to the views prospective teachers seeking to enroll in the intern program held about the CBEST and CSET exams. My enrollment experience paralleled what my interns were experiencing, and this made me curious about researching licensure exams as one of several potential barriers to entrance and enrollment in teacher preparation programs.

Key Learnings Connected to CANDEL's Mission and Vision

Deconstruct and Challenge Systemic Issues

A key learning from CANDEL that connects to the mission and vision of deconstructing and challenging systemic issues occurred during my first year in Dr. Kurlaender's class, EDU 282A: Beginning Issues and Practices: Contemporary Leadership. In that course we read and discussed Gorski's (2019) article about avoiding racial equity detours. After reading this article, I began using the four equity frames to critically examine inequities within my work. For example, I saw how the deficit ideology detour (Gorski, 2019) played out as I examined teacher licensure exam results based on demographics. Through Gorski's frames, I saw how licensure exams were potentially acting as a gatekeeper and limiting teachers of color from entering preparation programs as well as the teaching profession. Gorski's article served as a catalyst to critically examine structural and systemic inequities related to teacher preparation, and the article set me on a path towards my research area of examining how state credentialing policies could either inhibit or encourage district intern program enrollment and completion.

A second key learning that shaped my research areas of focus, took place in Dr. Gloria Rodriguez's class, EDU 283A: Leadership Across Communities, where we explored community as a contested concept. During one rich class discussion, our cohort interrogated how schooling in the United States is colonialistic. The discussion occurred as a result of reading "Decolonizing School Systems: Racial Justice, Radical Healing, and Educational Equity inside Oakland Unified School District" (Chatmon & Watson, 2018). What stood out from our discussion was that some cohort members did not view U.S. education as colonialistic, and their view was shaped by their own identity and positionality. This experience led me to realize how we are not only shaped by our lived experiences, but we also shape the schools and institutions in which we work. The article and class discussion increased my interest in identifying inequitable practices and policies that inadvertently disadvantage some and advantage others when it comes to entering a teacher preparation program and earning a credential. In addition, the class discussion catalyzed my commitment to ensuring equity in education and, in particular, finding ways to decolonize pathways to teacher credentialing.

Engage Critically With Educational Theory and Research

I found myself engaging critically with educational theory and research in Dr. Cuellar's class, EDU 292: Access and Equity in Higher Education. There were two articles we read that affected the way I thought about teacher credential programs. The first article, by Hillman and Boland (2018), examined how the location and type of college available in a region impacts college choice for students. Through class discussion and by writing a paper about my own college selection process, I was able to see how the geography of college choice could be applied to teacher credential programs. Namely, I saw how the location and types of credential programs offered could have an impact on who was able to access and enter a credential program, and that

could affect the teacher shortage. I began to look at what school districts were experiencing teaching shortages and what credential programs existed nearby. I immediately noticed the program I was directing was just one of two special education credential programs available for prospective teachers in Lake County. I knew Lake County was one area experiencing shortages. As a result, I got even more curious about the design of district intern programs and how such programs, although small in number, could potentially serve a critical need for school districts in regional areas that lacked nearby credential programs. Connecting the research from Hillman and Boland to what I was noticing in the field pushed my thinking as an educational leader, and shifted my research focus towards examining district intern programs and teacher shortages.

A second key research article that pushed me as an educational leader and influenced my thinking about my research topic was the Stanton-Salazar (2011) article about institutional agents. This reading challenged my thinking about teacher credential programs and the role program leaders might play. Although I knew many prospective teachers seeking to enroll in credential programs faced barriers to enrollment, I felt that as a program leader, I could help reduce these barriers, yet was caught within “contradictory dynamics of inequality, gate-keeping, and empowerment” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1087) as I had to ensure prospective teachers met state-enacted program entry requirements in order to enroll. Applying the educational theory of institutional agents to the role of district intern program leaders helped me evolve my research topic. Instead of looking at district intern programs and the teacher shortage, I shifted to examine the roles and actions of intern program leaders in relation to teacher credentialing, teacher shortages, and teacher diversity.

Collaboratively Problem-Solve

There are two key learning experiences from CANDEL that engaged me in collaborative problem-solving, helped me develop as an educational leader, and furthered my dissertation focus. One experience was reading and discussing Gloria Ladson-Billings's (2021) article, "I'm Here for the Hard Re-Set: Post Pandemic Pedagogy to Preserve Our Culture." The second experience was being part of CANDEL Cohort 17.

Reading and discussing the Ladson-Billings (2021) article in Dr. Gloria Rodriguez's class piqued my interest in studying the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic period. As I read the article, I realized the COVID-19 pandemic provided a unique opportunity to dismantle ineffective educational practices and systems and replace them with new processes and possibilities. Although dismantling and changing long-standing systems is difficult and unsettling, it can create unforeseen benefits as well as challenges. As Ladson-Billings points out, "Nations have had to undergo hard re-sets in their educational systems after major catastrophes" (p. 72). After reading this article, I began to see how teacher preparation programs were engaged in a "hard re-set" in their credentialing process and program structure due to the pandemic.

As an intern program leader, I experienced firsthand a hard reset, as there were multiple changes to California credentialing requirements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes, such as deferring certain program entry requirements, opened up opportunities for teachers previously not available. Yet, there were other changes, such as placing the responsibility of supporting new teachers with TPA and RICA requirements on induction programs, that created burdens for these programs. Seeing these changes became an "aha moment" that crystallized my research area of focus. Although I knew I wanted to research the

role of intern programs, the potential barriers prospective teachers faced to program entry, and how these might relate to the teacher shortage and workforce diversity, I had not previously considered how viewing these research ideas through the lens of the pandemic might uncover critical insights and information. I began to ask questions such as, “What was going on during the pandemic that resulted in an influx of teachers enrolling in intern programs?” and “What actions did intern program leaders take collectively and as individuals as they responded to state credentialing policies during the COVID pandemic?” I began to wonder if deeply studying this specific moment in time might shed some light on key factors contributing to reducing the teacher shortage and diversifying the workforce.

Being able to talk through the above-mentioned research ideas and questions with others in my cohort has helped me gain greater clarity on my research area of focus and has contributed to my development as an educational leader. In addition, being part of Cohort 17 has reinforced in me the power of collaboration and allowed me to see what is possible when a group takes collective action to further a shared commitment of obtaining a doctorate in 3 years. Our cohort embodies collaborative problem solving through sharing research articles, self-organizing collective note-taking, and supporting and celebrating each other through significant life events. This collaborative learning experience has helped me balance the complex demands of being a scholar–practitioner, supported my research focus, and reinforced my commitment to supporting the learning of fellow educators.

Research Area of Focus

My research area of focus has shifted and become more specific as a result of key learnings from coursework, conversations with my cohort, and my experiences of leading an intern program. I am committed to disrupting inequities in education and am highly motivated

and deeply curious to research the experiences and actions of district intern program leaders during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, my study will use a qualitative approach that examines their experiences and leadership actions during the 2020–2022 COVID pandemic period as they implemented California credentialing policies. Deeply studying the experiences of district intern program leaders during this time could shed light on their role in reducing or reinforcing barriers to enrolling or completing an intern program. I am interested in using a qualitative approach because of the inductive and iterative nature of this research method. I believe analyzing intern program leaders’ experiences and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing Program Sponsor Alerts from 2020–2021 (which leaders were responsible for implementing) will produce key information that may provide us with valuable insights that could reduce barriers towards entering the teaching profession, impact policy decisions regarding teacher preparation, and ultimately shape the future of teacher credentialing in California.

Worldview as a Scholar–Practitioner

I hold a social constructivist worldview and believe this view will support my qualitative research study. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), two key tenets of social constructivism are that “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” and that individuals make sense of their world “based on their historical and social perspectives” (p. 46). Given that my research will focus on examining the experiences of district intern program leaders during the 2020–2022 COVID pandemic period, it is important to utilize a worldview that will support a qualitative design and help me see how individual district intern program leaders may interpret their experiences from personal, cultural, and historical perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Additionally, a social constructivist worldview

supports the sites of shaping theoretical framework, developed by Staci Haines (2019), which I plan to utilize. This ecological model framework examines how individuals are influenced by others, social norms, and historical forces within the lens of social justice (Haines, 2019). I look forward to deeply studying my research area of focus and believe a social constructivist worldview will support this endeavor.