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Finding the Correct Fit or Quickly Finding an Exit for School Superintendents: Perceptions From Those Who Placed Them or Are Commissioned to Replace Them

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FINDING THE CORRECT FIT OR QUICKLY FINDING AN EXIT FOR SCHOOL
SUPERINTENDENTS: PERCEPTIONS FROM THOSE WHO PLACED
THEM OR ARE COMMISSIONED TO REPLACE THEM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gain an essence and understanding of the phenomenon of short superintendency tenure through the qualitative lenses of superintendent search agents. Research questions included the roles of educational preparation, leadership qualities, and contextual factors in superintendent tenure. Superintendent search agents matching the criteria boundaries of working for an agency with at least 10 years of search experience and also the firm's non-profit status were chosen for this research work. These criteria were used to reduce bias due to financial reward and lack of institutional or association experience. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with superintendent search agents to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of school superintendent short tenure. Observations included a job shadowing experience and geographical observation of the agents' descriptive locations of the phenomenon as described in the interview. A focus group of current and former practicing school superintendents was used to assist in the triangulation of data. Emerging themes included understanding the role of the superintendent, preparation for the role of superintendent, leadership traits, and contextual factors impacting superintendent tenure. Additional sub-areas of study included job complexity, school boards, stepping-stone jobs, impact of search agencies, non-traditional hiring, occupational pipeline, trust, ego, mentorship, community, applicant pools, rural and urban settings, career and place-bound superintendencies, and diversity. Findings included relationships, communication, trust, correct fit, impact of school boards, and finding the correct fit. Implications include identifying success in the position role and the impact of career

versus place-bound superintendencies.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Study Rationale and Foundation

The American public educational system is rooted in a tradition that transcends the past two centuries. It can be seen as one of the greatest success stories of the nation's history (Labaree, 2010). Since the inception of public schooling, politics and educational reform have been continued topics of debate (Zhao, 2009). Labaree (2010) saw educational reforms as a conflict between social goals and personal hopes. Academic standards, graduation rates, teacher accountability, and standardized testing have all been areas of recent educational reforms focused on closing the achievement gap in standardized testing scores between minority and Caucasian students, along with low-income in comparison with financially well-off student populations (Zhao, 2009). The majority of the educational reforms have not focused on district leadership, including the school superintendent (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

Traditionally, district leadership had not been widely viewed as having a direct impact on student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Former U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett (as cited in Marzano & Waters, 2009) referred to school district leadership as a bloated educational bureaucracy that did not contribute to student achievement. A collection of recent studies, however, showed a correlation between the effectiveness of district leadership and student achievement and thus provided evidence to discredit Bennett's statements on the

accusation of district leader not contributing to the academic success of students (Marzano & Waters, 2009). The school superintendency is a multifaceted position that possesses high academic and political expectations from the community. The role is an executive office that is responsible for executing policies within the school community that are adopted by the board of education (Story, 1952). Story (1952) saw a trend in which the school boards were relying heavily on the school superintendent for leadership in making recommendations along with being the executor of the policies.

Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson (2011) strongly asserted that the position of the school superintendent has changed alongside of the school reform movements. “By 2010, most superintendents and principals realized that their responsibilities in relations to school reform had expanded, requiring them to both design and carry out needed changes” (Kowalski et al., 2011, p. 1). The position of the American school superintendent has drastically changed over the past two centuries, and the position will continue to transform to meet the challenges that exist (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

Statistical research has asserted that school leadership and the position of the superintendent does have a correlation on student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009). According to Kowalski et al. (2011), the position also requires numerous other leadership skills and includes the roles of

- superintendent as the teacher-scholar who supervises classroom instructional practices and assures uniformity within the school curricular structure,
- superintendent as the business manager ensuring managerial duties and industrial success of the school system,

- superintendent as the statesman ensuring local democracy and engaging in policymaking,
- superintendent as the applied social scientist through theoretical scientific problem solving skills, and
- superintendent as the communicator through keeping all stakeholders informed through continual communication strategies. (Kowalski et al., 2011)

Houston (2001) posed a difficult question with regard to the positional status of the school superintendent in stating, “This brings me back to the central question of why anyone would want to do these jobs. Superficially, the current role isn’t very attractive, and the challenges we can see for the future make it potentially more difficult” (p. 433).

Normore (2006) asserted that the future issues facing the leadership position of the school superintendent go much deeper than job responsibilities. A fear in public education throughout the United States is that qualified candidates are not entering the field of school leadership and seeking the role of school superintendent. Trevino, Braley, Stallone-Brown, and Slate (2008) stated, “Key positions such as the superintendency need longer tenures so that long term positive influences occur” (p. 99). Many of those who do enter the profession of school superintendent or district level leadership lack proper training (Hoyle & Torres, 2008). Even more alarming is the short tenure of school superintendents in a singular school system (Normore, 2006). Glass et al. (2000) shared that an average tenure of a school superintendent currently serving in a district is between five and six years. Sanders et al. (1998) shared that school boards have reacted to the shortage by considering non-educational candidates from the business world to fill the role of school superintendent. The lack of qualified candidates, coupled with the changing role of school leader, opened the door for school boards to nationally search for qualified candidates or

consider outsourcing the position to the business profession. The Council of the Great City Schools (2006) stated that many of the best non-traditional candidates have come from military, legal, and corporate backgrounds.

Collins (2001) asserted that change in culture of traditional work practices could lead to either new innovation or catastrophic failure of an entire system. The innovation and increase of superintendent search firms has been the result of small pools of qualified candidates, changes in the professional role of the school superintendent, and the desire to look outside of the traditional practices of hiring (Sanders et al., 1998).

Besides sheer numbers, the candidate pool also has to carry the perception of quality. Consultants actively engage in recruiting candidates to make the pool look better – experienced superintendents, prestigious university degrees, state of the year winners and so forth. A good mix of candidates helps to stretch the board’s perspectives. (Stellar, 2010, p. 11)

Many schools boards began to consider hiring superintendent search firms to assist in the process of overcoming the challenges in hiring the best fit for the school district (Riede, 2003).

Superintendent search firms have existed in relatively small numbers since the 1950s and, until the year 2000, had only a small impact on the hiring practices of the school superintendent (Riede, 2003). The American Association of School Administrator’s (AASA) electronic bulletin board managers witnessed an increase of superintendent search firms as they documented 233 firms and organizations soliciting job postings during a two-year span starting in the year 2000 (Riede, 2003). Superintendent search firms have offered a wide array of services and expertise to clients, and this service was not intended for every school district due to the large financial

costs or district need to attract qualified candidates. The Council of Great City Schools (2006) asserted superintendent search firm job responsibilities include

- interviewing the school board and key stakeholders to gather information and qualifications for the ideal superintendent fit needed in the district;
- completing a review of the district's data, needs, and finances;
- assisting the school board in developing a timeline and plan of action for the recruitment process;
- assisting the school board in creating a marketing plan and placing advertisements in the appropriate media sources;
- reaching out to potential candidates and holding confidential interviews;
- arranging interviews with candidate finalists;
- providing assistance to the board by coordinating visits and information packets for the candidate finalists;
- vetting candidates and conducting background checks; and
- assisting the board by notifying candidates of the final board decisions.

As the aforementioned might suggest, traditionally large urban districts have utilized the services on a more frequent basis (Glass et al., 2000). Kingsbury (2009) stated the costs for superintendent search firms have ranged between \$25,000 and \$200,000. Small rural districts have lacked the financial resources necessary to conduct methods of procuring a superintendent through these means (Glass et al., 2000). Other avenues do exist, however, for those districts that do not have large amounts of money to spend in leadership recruitment. Numerous superintendent search agencies run by state superintendent associations, educational institutions, and non-profit firms exist to provide services free of charge or at low cost to rural and urban

districts. Kingsbury asserted that superintendent search agencies are not the correct fit for every school district and the process of selecting the correct firm is critical in the success of the process. Local context and the desires of the community seem key in the equation.

Individuals have started superintendent search firms for numerous reasons and have come from many distinct backgrounds of expertise. Search firms have been comprised of university professors, retired superintendents, legal experts, and non-educators (Glass et. al., 2000). Success rates have varied. Many superintendent search firms have struggled to remain competitive due to the large amount of time required to complete the superintendent search procedures. Riede (2003) noted that many superintendent search firms have closed their doors due to the large amount of hours required in the search process. Stellar (2010) believed that most search agencies were genuine in attempting to fill the needs of their client school boards. “The goal is to have board members feel their district can attract a candidate pool with quantity and quality. A large number of candidates is important—the more the better, in the view of the client board” (Stellar, 2010, p. 13).

The school superintendency is in a state of crisis to find qualified candidates. The lack of qualified leaders directly impacts student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009). This research study focused on obtaining the perspectives and understandings of superintendent search agents on the overall essence of school superintendent tenure, along with potential confirmation of any factors pertaining to that tenure that are inherent in preparation programs, contextual factors that led to superintendents tenure longevity, and specific leadership characteristics in relation to tenure length.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to examine specific factors of the school superintendents' jobs and longevity of the school superintendents' tenure. I believe a crisis in the quantity and quality of candidates for school superintendent exists throughout the United States. This epidemic is growing due to retirements of the baby boom generation coupled with short tenures in the profession. With an attempt to garner the most unbiased information on the epidemic from those closest to the phenomenon, this study researched through the lenses of superintendent search agents. In part, this was due to the fact that a considerable amount of published research on district leadership and the position of the superintendent exists, yet relatively little is known or documented from the perspective of the superintendent search agents. According to the research of Glass et al. (2000), 17.7% of superintendents surveyed are hired through a superintendent search firm. I believe superintendent search agents can provide the missing knowledge needed to better understand and document the role of specific factors and tenure in the school superintendent position. Numerous individuals and groups, including practicing superintendents and school boards, exist too closely to the problem to fully alleviate the bias that comes from knowledge. C. Heath and Heath (2008) asserted that having too much information on a subject, and thus losing the ability to explain the knowledge, causes a bias or lack of understanding. Superintendent search agents can provide insider information, yet with an outside perspective, regarding the essence of superintendent tenure in the context of the politics of local education.

The first specific area of study was the role of proper preparation for the position of school superintendent and length of tenure. "The relationship between what is taught in graduate leadership education programs and the daily practices of school administrators is a conundrum"

(Hoyle, 2007, p. 148). This study identified whether factors of graduate-level superintendent preparation programs are inherently perceived as part of the phenomenon with regard to the tenure of superintendents placed through a search agent.

A second specific area of study was the role of specific leadership characteristics and the impact on school superintendent tenure. Glass et al. (2001) stated that the roles of movers, shakers, and peacemakers generally exemplify the role of school superintendents. This study identified whether these and other specific characteristics are inherent in the phenomenon regarding longevity of school superintendent tenure.

A third specific area of study was the role of specific contextual factors that lead school superintendents to leave or be dismissed causing an end of tenure. Glass et al. (2001) stated, “The 2000 study indicates that 40.1 percent of superintendents attributed their hiring to personal characteristics” (p. 47). This study identified if characteristics, as they have been found to impact the hiring process, are similarly found as part of the essence of the phenomenon regarding longevity of superintendent tenure in K-12 schools.

Research Questions

This study focused on the position of the educational superintendent and specifically the research question, “Why is the average tenure of school superintendents short lived?” Additional questions included the following:

1. What is the role of proper training and the longevity of educational superintendent tenure?
2. What is the role of specific leadership characteristics and long-term school superintendent tenure?

3. What is the role of contextual factors and long-term superintendent tenure, or among those contextual factors, themselves?

Delimitations

Joyner, Rouse, and Glatthorn (2013) described delimitations as “the boundaries of the study and ways in which the findings may lack generalizability” (p. 209). The study has the following delimitations:

1. The study did not include interviews of school board members, thus focusing on perspectives of only the school superintendent search firm agents interviewed and superintendents participating in the focus groups.
2. The study did not include school superintendent search firms from every geographical region throughout the United States thus providing a viewpoint from only selective regions of the United States. Multiple agents were selected for qualitative sampling.
3. The study did not account for race, gender, or educational background of the search firm employees, thus providing viewpoint undivided by specific demographic of race, gender, or educational background.

Challenges and Limitations

Creswell (2007) defined phenomenological study qualitative research as the process to, “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p. 58). This study’s qualitative format was not intended to provide generalizable data thus limiting my ability to find deeper applications past the potentially deep meanings inherent in knowledge, understanding, and discovery. Creswell identified critical challenges that accompany phenomenological research. In Creswell’s opinion, the most challenging issues are to choose the correct individuals for study by creating guidelines for research in a phenomenological study

(Creswell, 2007). Choice of participants and guidelines of the studied phenomenon will be critical in this research of school superintendents.

Superintendent selection firms personnel can provide a plethora and wealth of information not directly related to this current study. It was important that questions and guidelines for the interviews were established to provide a consistent format for me to document responses and observations. It was also important that a singular interview inside of this qualitative study did not take priority over others. Creswell (2007) advised that a phenomenological study's number of participants is dependent upon the depth and quantity of the interviews.

Merriam (2009) also saw limitation in phenomenological qualitative study that includes depth, rigor, validity, bias, and ethics. Merriam (2009) stated,

Although rich, thick description and analysis of a phenomenon may be desired, a researcher may not have the time or money to devote to such an undertaking. And assuming time is available to produce a worthy case study, the product may be too lengthy, too detailed, or too involved for busy policymakers and practitioners to read and use. (pp. 51-52)

A limited number of interviews were used to gather the qualitative data. In such, the potential bias of past or personal experiences might also have existed for those interviewed, as it would for any perceptual research. The backgrounds of superintendent selection firm personnel were diverse in nature from within and outside of the educational leadership field of experience (Glass et al., 2001). Gender and ethnicity of the superintendent search agents, however, could have introduced a bias in the research due to the limited number of superintendent search agents of minority ethnicity or female gender employed in this professional role. In fact, all in this

study were male and Caucasian. Gender and ethnicity were not considered in determining the criteria for sample selection due to the limited number of search agencies of non-profit status. Throughout the development of understanding the phenomenon, I considered this lack of perspective. Another limitation could have developed from my gender and ethnicity being male and of the Caucasian race. Although these aforementioned biases could have provided a flawed understanding in the areas of race and ethnicity, I worked to control bias through consciously examining the data and specifically looked for statements of magnitude within specific responses throughout the processes of interviewing and the identification of key themes.

The geographic location of the superintendent search agents could also have provided bias. In an effort to compensate for or minimize this bias as much as is practicable through this approach to data gathering, I chose a selection of agents who had been employed in numerous superintendent searches from differing geographical and experience backgrounds. The agents had to be affiliated with a non-profit search agency with at least 10 years of service and provided confidential superintendent searches free of charge or at cost to public school districts. Due to non-profit status and qualified services, the trend of urban-only participation with superintendent search agents was minimized. Bias of one specific viewpoint from search agents was also minimized, or rather controlled for, through the interviewing of multiple current and former agents, and thus trending data between the differing agents could be gathered for this qualitative study. The same list of semi-structured questions was used to guide all interviews.

Another significant limitation was the interview process itself, which always runs the risk of potential bias through the techniques selected and methods employed for implementing them in the field. To assuage these concerns, Merriam (2009) advised the interviewer to choose between highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interview techniques. For this

study, a semi-structure approach was utilized. This approach provided guiding questions, yet allowed for the flexibility of the interviewee to share trending data that was critical in determining a confirmation of specific factors of study to the phenomenon of inquiry. All respondents provide some level of personal bias and unique perceptions during the interview process (Gladwell, 2005). Interview bias could have included personal experience, relation to case study data, perceptions, and gaps in memory of specific details. It was my responsibility to use a process that controlled for and minimized bias to the greatest extent possible.

Limitations included, as well, my ability to record all of the information provided, a variety of observational mediums. To control for this, I made every attempt to maximize the number of perceptual frames (i.e., senses) available in the recording of data. One example was my attempt, whenever possible, to conduct interviews in person, in order to gauge not only the words a participant used but also the tones, gestures, postures, and facial expressions that can be observed and documented. Particularly important was my plan that places referred to during the interviews were visited and observed to comprehend further essence to the interviewees understanding of superintendent tenure.

Creswell (2007) expressed the need to ensure that bias in the interview process is not created through inadequate techniques of interviewing. Creswell offered the following advice:

- Identify interviewees through purposeful sampling procedures.
- Determine what type of interview is will be the most useful in data collection.
- Use adequate recording procedures.
- Design and use an interview protocol form.
- Refine interview questions.
- Determine the appropriate place for interview.

- Obtain consent form from interviewee.
- During the interview stay to the prescribed format.

Special care was given to record and store all digital media. Multiple recording devices were utilized during the interview process to ensure the accuracy of the data. Digital recordings were transcribed and submitted to the interviewee within 30 business days of the interview for approval of transcribed data. Both digital data in the forms of recordings and transcribed data were duplicated and stored in multiple, secure password protected, or locked locations in my personal residence or professional office to ensure data was accessible and risk of loss was minimized.

Definition of Terms

The following are defined terms essential to this study:

Achievement gap is the “gap between minority students, particularly African American and Hispanic students, and their White peers, and similar disparities between students from low-income and well-off families in a number of areas: standardized test scores, grades, dropout rates, and college completion” (Zhao, 2009, p. 6).

Autonomy is a human nature that allows one to be curious and self-directed (Pink, 2009).

Collaboration is working together in a group toward a common goal or purpose (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

Diplomacy is the managing of conflicts through the management of relationships (Kissinger, 1994).

Educational accountability is part of the educational reform movements that place expectations on the local school community for achievement results and progress toward closing the achievement gap (Ravitch, 2010).

Educational interest groups are collective groups that wish to influence or reform the public educational system (Ravitch, 2010) or to advance their own agenda.

Educational reforms are the movements to promote change in the American educational system (Ravitch, 2010).

Instructional leadership is the ability to lead through knowledge and understanding of curriculum and student learning (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

Leadership “is the ability to get individuals to work together for the common good and the best possible results” (Wooden & Jamison, 1997, p. 112). Leadership philosophies and styles are exhibited in many differing forms (Giuliani, 2002).

Learning is a fundamental process of inquiry and developmental growth of knowledge (Schmoker, 2011).

School board is defined as the school districts governing body facilitating local control through elected or appointed representatives (Glass et al., 2000).

School culture is the local instructional core beliefs that include collaborative structure, key vocabulary terms, vision and planning, and recognition of achievement (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010).

School superintendent is “an executive office having the rather clear-cut function of executing policies which are formulated and adopted by the board of education” (Story, 1952, p. 371).

State or federal enacted educational policy is the policy and reforms enacted at the state or federal level outside of local school board or superintendent control (Ravitch, 2010).

Superintendent preparation programs are academic-based programs intended to provide instruction for the preparation of leading a school district through the role of superintendent

(Glass et al., 2000).

Superintendent search firms are organizations commissioned by school boards to assist in recruiting larger pools of qualified candidates for the positional need of the school district (Glass et al., 2000; Stellar, 2010).

Summary

Chapter 1 discussed the purpose and importance of the study. Factors of importance included the sizeable amount of data on school superintendent tenure, yet the lack of explanation as to why the short tenure exists among professionals in the occupation. Multiple sources are cited to provide relevance and guidance to the study. Historical backgrounds and specific characteristic of superintendent search firms were showcased. Research questions were listed to provide boundaries in the study of relationship between specific factors and the tenure of superintendents. Key terms used in this study were defined or clarified. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature relevant to the school superintendent tenure, preparation programs, common factors that lead to superintendents resigning or being forced to leave, and leadership characteristics. Multiple sources and formats are utilized in the literature review. Chapter 3 presents the methodology for this phenomenological study of school superintendent through the lenses of superintendent search agents.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“The name given to that one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once is the Tipping Point” (Gladwell, 2002, p. 9). Gladwell (2002) studied the world of fashion, children’s television, and school shootings as examples of tipping points in American culture. The author maintained that culture change could be attempted for centuries without success, yet overnight a reform, invention, or idea can gain traction and have a tipping point that leaves a lasting legacy.

History is full of leaders who experienced dramatic personal tipping points and through their legacy of leadership changed American culture. Goodwin (1995) described in detail how Franklin Roosevelt’s bout with polio crippled the future president’s physical movement while sharpening the mind and preparing a leader to rehabilitate a crippled America during the Great Depression. Giuliani (2002) described how two planes flying into the World Trade Centers in New York City on a bright September morning turned his theories of leadership into practice that comforted a nation during crisis. Truman (1955) stated that a decision in 1945 to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, in hopes to end a horrific war started a debate that would far outlast his terms as the President of the United States. Rampersad (1997) expressed how African-American Jackie Robinson playing the game of baseball for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947 started a chain reaction that propelled the Civil Rights movement in America. Goodwin

(2005) shared how a prior defeat for a seat in Congress set Abraham Lincoln up for success in the Presidential election.

Many have searched for a tipping point that would transform the American educational systems.

Imagine an “Education Nation,” a learning society where the education of children and adults is the highest national priority, on par with a strong economy, high employment, and national security. Where resources from public and private sources fund a “ladder of learning” for learners of all ages. (Chen, 2010, p. 1)

The leadership position of the school superintendent has been the center of the educational reform debate. The position has transformed over centuries, but the transformation has lacked a singular tipping point that transcends an educational culture into one that closed the achievement gap for all students.

Transformation of the American educational system and the position of the superintendent were described by C. Heath and Heath (2010), who utilized case studies of breaking personal bad habits, changing long-held tradition in a company, and changing traditional curricular practices in elementary schools. C. Heath and Heath asserted that culture change could be accomplished through

- directing the rider, through investigating into practice, thinking in terms of specific behaviors, and recognizing a final goal for the change;
- motivating the elephant, through emotion, breaking down the big idea, and cultivating a sense of identity; and
- shaping the path through simplifying or changing the process, building habits of change, and working in collaboration.

This review focused on the continually changing roles and challenges of the school superintendent. Although tipping points and drastic overnight epidemics of change have been rare, many theories, people, and interests have shaped the path to the modern-day position of school superintendent. This literature review focused on the history of the school superintendent, preparation for the school superintendency, reform movements that impact the role of the superintendent, the politics and diplomacy need in the role of school superintendent, and the longevity of the school superintendent tenure.

History of the School Superintendent

The history of America should be an inspiration, not a task. It ought to be known in its grand simple lines by every child in the Nation in words which would only fill to such pages as these. Let it be so acquired first in its upmost brevity, then enlarged again and again, gradually approaching to a newer view of the multiplicity of detail . . . finding new truths which fit precisely into those already familiar, there will be no difficulty in keeping alive the interest nor in remembering. It will be grafting on to the living, not on the dead.

(Parmele, 1896, p. iii)

To comprehend the future, evaluation of the past has been critical. The American public educational system dates back over two centuries. The positional status of school superintendent has been rich with history, stature, and tradition. The position of the school superintendent has closely mirrored the transitions in American historical culture. Glass et al. (2000) traced the history of the school superintendent back to the urban American cities in the mid-1800s. The position of the early school superintendent was to manage day-to-day operations among multiple school buildings in a district. Many of the early school superintendents were considered to be

reformers of public education by spreading the ideas and philosophies of the common school movement (Glass et al., 2000).

As antebellum America transitioned in the Industrial Revolution, so did the position of the school superintendent. Emphasis was placed on efficiency and productivity of the school culture. School curriculum dedicated specific time to vocational trades and transitioning an untrained labor force into skilled workers. Educator and school administrator Booker T. Washington (1901) shared insights and text from the Atlanta Exposition speech.

Cast down your bucket where you are—cast it down in making friends in every many way of the people of all races by who we are surrounded. Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. (Washington, 1901, p. 219)

School superintendents held the role of manager with the role of manufacturing educated students through a guaranteed curriculum (Glass et al, 2000).

The Industrial Revolution period of American history transitioned into the global perspective of the Age of Imperialism. The position of the superintendent transitioned to a multi-role occupation. As urbanization grew, so did the need for school superintendents to be the curriculum managers, scholars, and business managers (Kowalski et al., 2011). The position mirrored the industrial capitalist birthed in the philosophy of manifest destiny. Thomas and Moran (1992) asserted that superintendents of this era wished to shed the social status of educator for that of a corporate manager. Educators and administrators who opposed the autonomy and complete control of the superintendent capitalist were discarded as educational traditionalists.

The eras of the Great Depression, WWII, and post-war America brought a number of reforms to the educational society and also the role of the school superintendent. The Great Depression era brought about distrust in the corporate management philosophy of leadership. Instead, a localized democratic control was preferred (Glass et al., 2000). According to Kowalski et al. (2011), the role of school superintendent took on the responsibility of a local statesman that ensured local democracy in the school system. Ashbaugh (1936) was quoted in an editorial with regard to the role of the school superintendent:

The problems of housing, finance, curriculum, activities, service agencies, etc., are enormously more complicated today than they were a century ago. In every one of these fields as the activity became more complex and required greater technical skill, the school board has laid larger demands upon the superintendent. (p. 293)

As the post-WWII baby boom started, the role of the school superintendent also gained the job classification of scientific manager (Glass et al., 2000). This new role was part of the urban school reform efforts of the 1950s. The reform movements were in response to the cultural shifts to social problems. The school superintendents of this era were responsible for the implementation of the theoretical social sciences into the curriculum along with the addition of specialized teachers and student classes (Kowalski et al., 2011).

The Civil Rights and Vietnam Conflict era of the 1960s brought the widespread introduction of interest groups into the forefront of the American educational system. Gamson (2004) asserted local superintendents had lost instructional focus due to the influence by local business and the political interests they represented. Kowalski et al. (2011) also warned that superintendents of the 1960s were experts of keeping the peace yet lacked foresight and vision of the future.

During the height of the Cold War, a publication commissioned by Secretary of Education Terrel Bell, entitled *A Nation at Risk*, provided a new focus to educational reform and the role of the school superintendent (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Ravitch (2010) stated,

Far from being a revolutionary document, the report was an impassioned plea to make our schools function better in their core mission as academic institutions and to make our educational system live up to the nation's ideals. It warned that the nation would be harmed economically and socially unless education was dramatically improved for all children. (p. 25)

Alsbury and Whitaker (2006) asserted that *A Nation at Risk* reinforced educational bureaucracy through limiting local governmental control of educational control. The focus of the reforms called for the restructuring of school to provide more services for students (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2006).

The reforms toward child-centered education continued into the era of No Child Left Behind (2002) legislation. During this reform movement, school accountability grew in the areas of standardized testing and the standards movement. Glass et al. (2000) asserted that the No Child Left Behind reforms moved the job responsibility of the school superintendent away from manager and into the new role of testing expert.

Nir and Eyal (2003) maintained that the position of the school superintendent continued to be one of stature and power. Dufour and Marzano (2011) asserted that effective school superintendents know and understand how to limit reforms and initiatives through creating a culture of collaboration. Glass et al. (2000) believed the future of the school superintendency

would be filled with new challenges that continue to build on the historical roles and responsibilities of the past two centuries of history.

The Changing Role of the School Superintendent

Abraham Lincoln's address to Congress in 1862 (as cited in Dufour & Marzano, 2011) provided a statement endorsing a need for cultural change by stating, "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise to the occasion. As our case is new, so must we think anew" (p. 25). Harris, Lowery, Hopkins, and Marshall (2004) conducted a study on the motivators and inhibitors for the position of school superintendent. One of the detailed conclusions of the study was that the position of school superintendent is regularly changing, and the added challenges can make the job seem almost impossible. Therefore, the stressors are an inhibitor for qualified candidates to apply for the position of school superintendent. Christie (2002) reflected on multiple studies in reference to school leadership and the impact of changing roles and responsibilities of superintendents and school administrators. One survey of 175 superintendents declared that 71% of the respondents believed the position of school superintendent is in a state of crisis due to (a) school boards, (b) demand for long hours, and (c) stress and the impact this has on individuals seeking the position.

Despite the negative stressors of the role of school superintendent, a study conducted by Graham and Messner (1998) showed an overall positive satisfaction with the positional status of the school superintendent. Wiggins (1988) conducted a study on stress and the impact on school administrators. The study surveyed 52 school superintendents, and the research found the superintendency was slightly higher than mildly stressful on the rating scale; 28 of the respondents were not aware of job-related illness resulting from stress while employed as a school superintendent.

The role of school superintendent has incorporated the critical leadership trait of communication with all educational community stakeholders (Kowalski et al., 2011). Gladwell (2009) referred to efficiently communicating leaders as pitchpersons that both communicate with passion and are able to sell the audience on the concept or theory to the extent they are willing to spend every dollar in their wallets to own a stake in the concept. A true pitchperson realizes that the most important part of the pitch is the product, not the salesperson. In selling a product communication by the pitchperson morphed from the role of instiller of information to the role of collaborator and motivator. The effective school superintendent of the 21st century has been a leader that can direct and empower while communicating through a common language that expands past superficial jargon (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). C. Heath and Heath (2008) asserted that a common language is required and is critical to the success of delivering a message that sticks with the listener and thus has the possibility of fostering communication and understanding. According to the research of C. Heath and Heath (2008), three strategies have assisted in providing traction of understanding in a leader's message. A leader must "be concrete, say something unexpected, and tell stories" (p. 264).

Johnston (2004) wrote about how the simplest of words or actions can change the outcome of a conversation and thus impact a simple moment or an entire life by motivating or destroying. Pink (2009) asserted that an organization's success or failure depends on a leader's ability to motivate employees. Motivation of employees has been necessary for exhilarating tasks and also the drudges of daily toil. Pink believed that motivating employees through the daily drudgery does not happen by posting inspirational poster, daily pep rallies, or continual extrinsic rewards. Instead, Pink recommended

- offering a purpose to the boring and dreaded tasks. By explaining why the task is so important, employees can feel a purpose to completing the task as a critical part of the corporation's mission.
- acknowledging the task is boring. The act of empathy and understanding will provide employees with the knowledge this is a rare instance of drudgery and the corporation cares deeply about the emotional feelings of its employees.
- allowing people to complete the task their own way. Autonomy provides a freedom to the individual employee to provide solutions and methods completing the tasks. Autonomy can provide the self-satisfaction through a boring work task.

Pink (2009) hypothesized that the lack of autonomy is one of the critical reasons for employee discontent in the work environment. The solutions have included giving controlled freedom over portions of the task to the worker. Autonomy in tasks transitioned the managerial role into one of facilitation and accountability of outcomes, not the methods by which the outcome was reached. Kelly (2007) shared a philosophy of leadership that included the key elements of autonomy, as well as motivating by assisting employees in setting goals and helping employees reach their personal dreams. Kelly believed that dissatisfaction in the workplace is caused by the inability of employees to set life goals and managers' lacking the leadership skills to assist in the cultivation of the goals. The first step in a manager who understands and motivates an employee is to listen (Kelly, 2007).

Steil and Bommelje (2004) studied the impact of listening as a communication strategy with many successful organizational leaders. The SIER model of listening conceptualized through research includes sensing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding as a method for leaders to control listening ability. Erkens and Twadell (2012) maintained that a fatal mistake of

school administrators is attempting to foster a collaborative conversation, all the while not effectively listening and rushing to a decision-making step of action.

Petersen (2002) maintained that instructional leadership at the level of the school superintendent is one of the least-understood roles, yet one of the most important. Petersen (1999) indicated that four essential leadership attributes in superintendents that are instructionally focused are as follows:

1. Possessing and verbalizing an instructional vision.
2. Creating an organizational structure that supports and enables an instructional vision from the leadership.
3. Assessing and evaluating personnel and instructional programming on a consistent basis.
4. Allowing and encouraging organizational adaption.

Petersen (1999) conducted a correlational analysis to determine if a statistically significant relationship between articulated instructional vision and a district's academic success existed. The result of the study showed a statistically significant relationship. The author hypothesized that this correlation showed a need for the superintendent to have a strong instructional and personal relationship with educational staff if the district wishes to achieve academic increases (Petersen, 2002).

Erkens and Twadell (2012) examined district instructional leadership as it related to the implementation of the professional learning communities philosophy. The authors believed that seven interconnected leadership characteristics exist in highly effective professional learning community leaders:

- Creating and sustaining collaborative relationships.

- Aligning systems.
- Facilitating shared responsibility.
- Building coherence and clarity.
- Modeling practices and expectations.
- Reflecting on leadership effectiveness of self and others.
- Developing leadership capacity in self and others. (Erkens & Twadell, 2012, p. 13)

Schmoker (2011) agreed with the philosophy of leaders' creating and implementing collaborative learning communities, yet had distinct viewpoints on instructional and curricular leadership with the collaborative structure. Schmoker advocated for a return to the basics of math and language arts, as he contended that technology and the differentiated instruction have taken away from the focus of instructional leaders' progress toward student learning. Many of the educational reforms and movement toward standards, he felt, provided too wide-ranging initiatives for educators to facilitate and students to gain foundational skill sets (Schmoker, 2011).

The school superintendent of the past and in the future needs to lead his or her employees through drastic shifts in politics, curriculum, and technology through a strategic vision (Glass et al., 2000). Leading change in a position of change has been a challenging task. Black and Gregersen (2003) asserted that leading strategic change is one of the most difficult tasks of any leader due to the culture of comfort and tradition that transcends organizational structures over a long period of time. Buckingham and Coffman (1999) provided an in-depth analysis of managerial skills through the Gallup organization's one million participant interviews on workers' reflections on leadership qualities. Buckingham and Coffman believed that great organizational managers defy transitional organization structure in the unorthodox practices of

(a) utilizing personal talents and seeking employees with specific talents, (b) defining performance outcomes and practical ways to measure progress, (c) placing and hiring according to specific talents, and (d) finding the correct fit for each employee. Redinger (2009) shared viewpoints on emerging leaders, and asserted that the key addition to the job responsibilities of the school superintendent has been to hire and place employees in the correction positions.

Myers (2012) profiled case studies on the curricular change of implementing professional learning communities in a school system. The case study reflected the following recommendations on implementing systematic change:

- The leadership needs to train all stakeholder groups on the initiative. It is the superintendent's role to be present and actively participate in the training. This will show a commitment to the change. It is important that the stakeholders include school board members.
- The leadership needs to prepare for skeptics and doubters of the initiative. Skepticism will grow if the school leadership does not provide a detailed rationale for the change along with creating a plan for the implementation. Open and honest dialogue is required for success.
- The leadership needs to understand the importance in limiting other initiatives that could compete for time or interest. Prioritization must be provided in the district. Too many initiatives will detract from the overreaching goals.

Andero (2000) asserted that the instructional and curricular role of the school superintendent is that of a liaison and communicator between the school board and the academic leadership of the school district. Andero felt that the role of the modern school superintendent has diminished in recent decades, but a prevalent role change was the impact a superintendent has on the local

instructional policy decisions. Andero conducted a descriptive study to evaluate the role change of the school superintendent in relation to curricular policy making. Andero concluded the effective superintendents need to work in collaboration with the school board and other administrators to ensure the needs of students are met accordingly.

Kowalski et al.'s (2011) analysis of the superintendency showed a considerable increase from 13.2% to 24.1% in women holding the position. Nomore (2006) believed the increase of women in educational leadership roles is a direct reaction to the role of school superintendent requiring instructional leadership and collaborative skills. Brunner (1998) conducted a study that investigated superintendent's definition of power in relation to collaborative decision-making. Out of the 47 participant superintendents, 22 were women and 25 were men. The study asked superintendents to define power as *power over*, *power with/to*, or *a mixture*. The end results concluded that 17 defined power over, 22 defined power with/to, and seven saw it as a mixture. Men comprised 15 of the 17 that defined power as power over. Women comprised 17 of the 22 that defined power as power with/to. The author concluded superintendents who defined power as power with/to as leaders willing to collaborate more on decision-making (Brunner, 1998). The statistical findings showed that women are more collaborative in the position of superintendent than men in this specific sample group.

Preparation for the Position of the School Superintendent

Eddie Rickenbacker was a WWI ace, owner of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, and founder of Eastern Airlines. Rickenbacker (1967) wrote the following with regard to the concept of preparation for the future:

For the past forty years, I have been venturing to predict some of the developments that the future will bring. These predictions have never been imaginative prophecies so much

as projections of current knowledge. I have always been interested in the world around me and have sought to add to my store of information about it. Looking ahead is part of living. (p. 428)

According to Kowalski et al. (2011), 14,000 practicing school superintendents existed throughout the United States in 2010. These school superintendents led districts in differing geographic locations and faced many unique challenges in leading a school system.

J. L. Hoyle (2007) conducted research to investigate the preparation programs and the impact that training has on the success and failure of school superintendents. The case studies exemplified in J. L. Hoyle's research followed two superintendents and their ability to build capacity within their district. Each case study showed academic success, yet one of the two superintendents was able to build capacity within the local district while the other superintendent failed to include respect for traditional parts of the school and community and thus was released from the position of superintendent. J. L. Hoyle (2007) concluded that preparation for the school superintendency lacked training on building capacity among stakeholders and the interpersonal relations required in the position. Kowalski (2008) worried that the politics and differences between adjoining states created an inconsistency that negatively impacted the continuity of preparation programs and the consistency of licensure requirements.

Kowalski (2008) investigated the preparation and licensing procedures in Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky. Throughout the United States, licensing and preparation in most professional occupations has had set standards and training guidelines. The licensing and preparation curriculum for school superintendents has had very little consistency across the United States due to the guiding frameworks developed by political entities, as opposed to professional organizations (Glass et al., 2000). Recent corporate reform movements have included the belief

that the school superintendent and other educational leadership positions benefit from organizational management outside of the traditional educational preparation programs and licensure (Ravitch, 2010). Kowalski et al. (2011) reported that as each state has unique licensing requirements and due to the perceived quality and quantity of candidates, multiple states are considering alternative licensure requirements that would allow for school superintendents without an educational background or traditional preparation programming to become licensed and serve as a school superintendent. Glass et al. (2000) reported that even with all the questions and concerns with preparation programs, 74% of school superintendents responding to a nationwide survey expressed good or excellent preparation for the position through an academic preparation program. Houston (2001) provided a differing viewpoint in asserting that the majority of licensure and academic programs focused on the preparation of school superintendents were created in the past for the leaders of the past.

Irby, Brown, Duffy, and Trautman (2002) maintained that the leadership positions had traditionally been male dominated, and thus preparation programs based in traditional leadership theory had a gender bias in training, vocabulary, and behavior. Women holding the position of school superintendent have almost doubled in the last decade to account for 24.1% of the profession (Kowalski et al., 2011). For many years, the filters in the hiring systems and preparation program limited the number of female applicants being selected for leadership positions, yet the recent shifts toward collaborative decision making have propelled women into a greater number of leadership roles (Irby et al., 2002). Yong-Lyun and Brunner (2008) asserted that a glass ceiling keeping minority groups and non-traditional gender roles from further advancement exists for women wishing to obtain the position of school superintendent. Numerous leadership theories have been created based on non-gender principles of leadership.

The synergistic leadership theory is a non-traditional leadership theory, inclusive of both male and female voice, through the factors of “leadership behavior, organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, beliefs, and values” (Irby et al., 2002, p. 312).

Kowalski et al. (2011) believed changes in leadership preparation have helped to increase the number of female school superintendents during the past two decades. Even with the increased percentage of female school superintendents, gender equity in school leadership could take up to three additional generations to evenly balance itself between men and women.

J. R. Hoyle and Torres (2008) asserted that even with a change in curriculum, school superintendent preparation programs do not possess the same rigor and quality of training. The history of administrative preparation programs dated to the early 1900s at Stanford University with the purpose of instilling school management and teacher supervision (J. R. Hoyle & Torres (2008). The continual expansion of programming and the diminishing standards for entry has led to perceptions of a subpar cohort of leaders entering the profession of school superintendent. The AASA issued a response to the national standards movement and reforms in public education by publishing the first national guidelines for preparation of school superintendents in the 1980s. Technology and the structural changes in educational delivery assisted in creating programs that cater to working professionals and non-traditional schedules of course programming.

J. R. Hoyle and Torres (2008) evaluated four of the top *U.S. News and World Report*-ranked superintendent preparation programs. The study concluded that all four programs showed high quality in the areas of rigorous standards, relevant course work, and research-based processes. The study provided only a snapshot of the overall culture of school superintendent

preparation program yet showed that institutional examples of quality exist and can work as models of reform and guidance for other programs.

Today's school superintendents are expected to be multi-dimensional with skills that encourage and lead, yet the preparation programs for school leaders focus on traditional methods of management, finance, and a legal curriculum of study (Busch, O'Brien, & Spangler, 2005). A concern of preparation programs has been the leadership skills being assessed in isolation without contextual experience that required the use of multiple attributes and leadership roles. New models have been introduced in colleges and universities throughout the United States to train educational leaders through leadership analysis, vision and strategic planning, and the incorporation of internships with reflective opportunities. The key to the new formative theory of school superintendent preparation has been a strong mentorship by experienced members of the profession (Busch et al., 2005). Crow (2008) shared that his work with administrators has shown that collaboration is the most significant form of professional development and that most learning has taken place outside the academic institutions.

Rose (2000) asserted that the role of veteran school superintendents has been to identify, educate, and mentor upcoming superintendents. The profession of school superintendent provided some conflicting data on mentors and mentorship. According to Glass et al. (2000), "77.9% consider themselves mentors to others interested in the superintendency as a career. Some 58.5% indicated that they were assisted by a mentor in their own career development" (p. 50). Mentorship has been defined in numerous terms and methods, yet all studied have definitions that asserted a strong value and emphasized constructive feedback and relationship value outside of the traditional supervisor and employee organizational structure. Houston (2001) believed that the pipeline of leaders for the position of school superintendent can be vast

if the right individuals are encouraged and mentored into the challenging and changing role district leadership.

Preparation for the position of school superintendent has included job-embedded experiences through experiential levels and job roles within the educational system (Yong-Lyun & Brunner, 2009). A recent study by Yong-Lyun and Brunner (2009) showed the most likely and traditional path for both men and women holding the position of school superintendent was teacher, principal, central office administrator, and then superintendent. Glass et al. (2000) asserted that the traditional career pathway has not deviated in recent decades. Kowalski et al. (2011) hypothesized the traditional career path trends were founded through state legislation. With the changes in state requirements for superintendent licensure, the future trends could deviate from the traditional career pathway to obtain the position of school superintendent. Keedy, Bjork, Winter, Rinehart, and Ricciardi (2007) urged states to consider federal licensing requirements and examination for the position of school superintendent.

Interest Groups and Reform Impact on the Position of the School Superintendent

Former President George W. Bush initiated the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002). Bush (2010) provided his rationale for the need of American educational accountability by stating,

In recent years, the national educational debate has bogged down in modest proposals like school uniforms and unrealistic calls to abolish the Department of Education.

Success was often defined by dollars spent, not results achieved. I had come from a world where accountability was a daily reality. In baseball, any interested party can open the newspaper, analyze your performance in box scores, and demand change. “More

pitching, Bush!” was a familiar refrain. Education was a lot more important than baseball, yet most people had no idea how their schools were performing. (p. 274)

Student achievement and local school accountability have become the foci of many of the recent school reform movements in America (Petersen & Young, 2004). Kowalski and Bjork (2005) asserted that school administrators either embrace massive reforms or simply resist the changes that come with the reform movements.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) legislation was arguably the first of educational reforms to place non-managerial role pressure on the school superintendent. Petersen and Young (2004) studied the impact on the school superintendent with respect to new occupational demands and the resultant role responsibilities:

- Assessment and accountability through requirements of reporting and maintaining high standards added the responsibility of instructional leadership.
- Parental choice infused flexibility into a traditionally non-flexible and rigid system. The new flexibility impacted school finances as the tax funding followed the student, pushing schools to consider marketing to attract students.
- Resource flexibility impacted the bottom-line tax dollars allocated to the school systems. For funding to be provided, school systems had to provide evidence of annual yearly progress in closing the achievement gap.
- Teacher quality evaluation was taken away from local control and standards were created and monitored by state and federal levels.

Through study of historical educational reform movements, Gamson (2004) argued that corporate reforms, accountability, and assessment are not products created in the current era; instead they were a product of prior century’s methodology of efficiency. The schools are a

public entity and therefore have felt pressure from industrial standards. It is the purpose of authentic leaders to see through the reforms and find a balance that includes the worthy pieces of the reforms, but yet, realize there is not one path to efficiency and success (Gamson, 2004).

The school superintendent and district leaders have been responsible for ensuring the reform transitions took place in the local school system, and this put a new pressure on schools that had never been felt by schools before the reform movement (Ravitch, 2010). Alsbury and Whitaker (2006) asserted that the new accountability reforms detract from the authority and decision making of the local school superintendents through mandates for change that do not meet the needs of the precise local community. Houston (2001) believed that accountability reforms stress that education can be influenced through external mean and methods.

The choice of school reforms were enacted as a method of providing social justice for all students to receive a quality education through breaking down the geographical barriers that would traditionally divide low performing and high achieving schools (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2006). School choice has included such options as tax credits and vouchers with a specific amount to spend toward payment in a public or private school of choice or the opportunity to spend tax funded dollars towards an education in a charter school (Kowalski & Bjork, 2005). Home-schooling regulation and accountability have also become issues of the school choice movement (Houston, 2001). Cunningham (2003) believed the reforms leading to school choice are a direct result of the general population losing public confidence in the traditional system of education and the leadership of the local school superintendent. The movement has thus been a result of democracy reinstalling democratic grassroots control over the decision-making and local interest. Powerful and wealthy individuals, organizations, and foundations became involved in the school choice and reform movements (Clinton, 2007). Whereas the traditional

role of organizations was to support educational endeavors advocated by the agenda of the district leadership, the new generation of educational philanthropists and interest groups have come to the bargaining table wishing to influence the district philosophies with new platforms promoting reforms backed by money and influence (Ravitch, 2010).

Alsbury and Whitaker (2006) studied the reform movement on the role of the school superintendent and concluded that reform movements that are intended to create a school system that supports social justice can instead create an organizational structural that widens the achievement gap by forgetting the face behind the standardized data points of accountability. Petersen and Young (2004) discovered that school choice has shifted resources within the school system to market and promote the schools and has a level of competition between public, private, and charter schools. C. Heath and Heath (2013) advocated through research that too many choices lead to the lack of ability to definitively make a decision. The results can thus produce an indecisive culture. Gladwell (2009) provided a case study on the marketing of special ketchups whereas if the traditional product meets the multiple needs of the consumer, the market will not shift to a new or singularly attributed product. The future role of the school superintendent will have to determine if the current model or organization of public schooling meets the need of 21st century students (Kowalski et al., 2011).

One intention of the reform movement was to transition control of the school from the want of the bureaucratic levels of education to the need of local schools and students (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2006). Many superintendents believed that the local needs were not met through the reforms due to the lack of money to accompany the local control as outlined in the reforms. Unfunded federal mandates opened the door to extended influence from interest groups wishing to impact local decision-making (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2006). Christie (2002) believed that site-

based control occurs when local schools have the autonomy to control curricular, staffing, and budgetary issues.

Glass et al. (2000) reported that community interest groups were extremely active in attempts to influence school boards on budgetary matters in areas with high tax property tax rates. School superintendents from 57.6% of all respondent school districts admitted feeling pressure from community interest groups, and 90.5% of respondent school superintendents from districts with over 25,000 students expressed feeling pressure. Glass et al. (2000) indicated that many board members throughout local school systems directly represent interest groups wishing to change the landscape of local public education. A continuing role of the superintendent has been to navigate through the interest groups to examine and implement local policy that is in the best interest of students.

A belief in the reforms of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) was that all children deserved quality teachers no matter the geographic location of the school, and thus obstacles to those needs had to be confronted and eliminated (Ravitch, 2010). Each school receiving federal Title 1 funds was required to enact a plan to ensure all teaching professionals were considered highly qualified (Petersen & Young, 2004). Limiting the power of teachers' associations and unions became a political battle that unfolded at the state and local levels of education (Ravitch, 2010). Evaluation based on standardized test scores became a highly debated subject in public education as school systems attempted to close the achievement gap (Kowalski et al., 2011).

Multiple states have enacted systems of accountability that include state takeover of failing schools and the firing of teachers and administrators employed in the failing schools (Petersen & Young, 2004). Chen (2010) maintained that a transformational shift is taking place

in school systems that will require teachers to become facilitators, and school superintendents will be required to ensure that high standards are met in the areas of instructional leadership and technology integration among staff members. Boss, Zeigler, Tucker, and Wilson (1976) asserted that interest groups can be maintained through effective leadership due to the fact they lack legitimacy credibility in educationally related issues. A school superintendent's role is to mediate and minimize the conflict created by interest group reform movements. Kowalski and Bjork (2005) asserted that the greatest enemy to school reforms comes from the educators inside of the schools due to the underfunding and change of culture brought through interest groups and political reform on the educational system.

Diplomacy and the Politics of the School Superintendent

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (1994) maintained that understanding the politics of diplomacy in leadership was critical to best

act on assessment that cannot be proved at the time that [the individual] is making them; [the individual] will be judged by history on the basis of how wisely [the individual] managed the inevitable change and, above all, by how well [the individual] preserves the peace. That is why examining how states[people] have dealt with the problems of work order—what worked or failed and why—is not the end of understanding contemporary diplomacy, though it may be its beginning. (pp. 27-28)

Boske (2009) asserted that school leaders hold a great amount of influence and thus to thrive in a school leadership environment, a superintendent must be able to understand and predict the political climate while also understanding the relationship between policy and the social environment. Superintendents need to lead through the incorporation of reflective dialogue with multiple stakeholders in the educational culture. Houston (2001) saw the political issues of

deregulation of school that could break a longstanding local monopoly on education. The educational system's devolution of power from centralization to decentralized places has created political issues that will also impact the role of the school superintendent.

Technology is an educational tool that has impacted the school political and instructional climate. Chen (2010) believed that superintendents and district leaders needed to embrace technology as a 21st century learning method. Collins (2001) asserted that technology on its own merits could not revolutionize an organization, yet it can become an accelerator on the path to greatness. Houston (2001) believed that technology could impact traditional educational format through the disintermediation caused by technological advances. No longer will a school need to have brick and mortar buildings, traditional schedules, or the same make-up of traditionally needed teaching staff. The school superintendent will be charged with finding methods to instill cultural change over a period of time. Houston (2001) also believed that the influx of technology will directly impact the role of superintendents through the demassification of society. Demassification includes the belief traditional society has political and societal norms that transcend from the mass outlets and thus create a common bond and relationships in organizations, cultures, communities and schools.

Superintendents have been challenged to find ways to politically hold the local school culture together through creating a common culture that can transcend the advances in technology and the erosion of traditional norms (Houston, 2001). Dufour and Marzano (2011) believed that superintendents and district leaders wishing to foster long-term cultural change must do so through collaborative action with stakeholders in the school community. "Leadership in the future will be about creation and maintenance of relationships: the relationship of children

to learning, children to children, children to adults, adults to adults, and school to community” (Houston, 2001, p. 430).

Economic decline and population shifts have led to political conversations of consolidation, closure, and collaborative sharing of resources between districts facing impending financial turmoil (Howley, Howley, Hendrickson, Belcher, & Howley, 2012). Cunningham (2003) maintained the number of school districts have shrunk from 128,000 in the 1930s to 15,000 in the year 2000. The shrinkage in districts correlated to the shrinkage of local control of schools. Carr and Kefalas (2009) profiled two rural schools merging due to dwindling resources and the negative impact the consolidation would have on the local economy. The consolidation of the local schools was predicted to be a demoralization of local pride, a loss of local control, and a catalysis that would contribute to local students leaving the locality after graduation and thus creating a brain drain void that would impact the region for generations.

Urban schools have fought similar battles through flight of students due to reform movements that provide access to vouchers for private education and charter schools (Ravitch, 2010). Howley et al. (2012) maintained that the loss of schools impacts the entire community through identity loss. The superintendent has been a key individual who assists in the communication and recommending the hard political decisions that can either positively transition or decimate the community. The reality of tight budgets and local political identity is a call for superintendent diplomacy to create a vision of shared leadership that includes collaboration and strategic planning for the future (Howley et al., 2012).

Transparency of local finances through tax dollars has traditionally been an area of contention between the community, school board, and superintendent. A community’s philosophy on spending and tax rates directly and indirectly shared the local beliefs of

educational support (Kowalski et al., 2011). The research collected by Glass et al. (2000) showed that finances are the largest issue faced by both the school superintendent and the school board. Ravitch (2010) believed that educational reforms will continue to make finances a greater issue of concern as money is removed from the public school and now follows the child. Bird and Wang (2011) studied the school superintendent's budget-building methods in relationship to specific leadership characteristics. The research showed a statistically significant relationship between superintendent authenticity and level of transparency in the budget-building practices. Bird and Wang concluded that school superintendents are highly advised to be collaborative and transparent with regard to tax dollars collected for the purpose of funding local schools due to the highly charged political emotions that have been produced through community the standard of spending on education.

Consistent and quality teacher evaluation has been a direct result of the reform movement focused on instructional emphasis and the limiting of control by teachers' associations and unions (Ravitch, 2010). J. R. Hoyle and Skrla (1999) asserted that a majority of school superintendents wish to be evaluated under the condition that evaluations are positive in nature. Kowalski et al. (2011) noted that quality evaluations of superintendents can provide guidance, expectations, and vision from the school board through summative and formative evaluative strategies. Glass et al. (2000) found that the most significant belief by superintendents for an evaluative process was a systematic approach to provide feedback on job performance. J. R. Hoyle and Skrla believed little research on the subject of school superintendent evaluation due to the lack of consistency and deficiency of prior evaluative experience by the school board members. Cleveland, Petersen, Sharp and Walter (2000) asserted that the largest mistake made by school boards is the incomplete or undefined process of superintendent evaluation.

The position of school superintendent has been one filled with conflict and has been one required to make difficult decisions on a daily basis. Regular and defined superintendent evaluations have limited the practice of vindictive or singular issue focus (J. R. Hoyle & Skrla, 1999). Cleveland et al. (2000) maintained that accountability is a critical part of 21st century education. Evaluation can be an accelerator of success and understanding if it is conducted through a transparent and constructive approach void of unneeded personal politics. J. R. Hoyle and Skrla (1999) concluded their research with a suggestion that all superintendents negotiate and define the evaluation process upfront during contractual negotiations.

Longevity of Tenure for the School Superintendent

Former President Gerald Ford (1979) wrote about the feeling of loss and discouragement when a leader is asked to leave unwillingly:

I was terribly hurt and disappointed, but at the same time I was proud of the efforts we'd made. We had run a good campaign, I'm not the type to brood over defeat. I didn't like to lose, but I wasn't going to sit there and wring my hands, I told the children that I didn't want any moaning, no sour grapes. I knew how upset they were—all of us had worked hard—but the important thing now was to look to the future. (p. 434)

It has been inevitable that superintendents and other school leaders will become wounded over time due to the conflict nature of the role (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000). Being wounded has been a universal experience of leadership. The residual fear of self-doubt and distrust come from being wounded deeply. Wounding experiences have led to heightened leadership skills and experiences that assist in future crisis situations (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000).

Ongoing debate existed as to if there was a crisis in attraction to the position and retention of qualified candidates to the position of school superintendent (Keedy et al., 2007). Winter, Rinehart, Keedy, and Bjork (2007) expressed concern on the number of qualified superintendent candidates who do not wish to make the movement to the school superintendency. The lack of attraction by qualified candidates was alarming due to the impending retirements of the post-WWII generation. Many state legislatures believed the shortage to be fact, and have enacted rehire policies that allowed former school superintendents to return to the profession while continuing to collect pension payments (Kowalski & Sweetland, 2005). The little research that has existed with regard to qualified candidates interested in the position of school superintendent did present alarm to the perception of the occupation from those who best understand the job roles (Winter et al., 2007).

Kowalski et al. (2011) surveyed school superintendents who have practiced in multiple districts as to the rationale for the movement. The most prominent reason for moving was to locate a new challenge, followed by school board relations, supplemental pension, and to seek occupation in a higher performing district. “Very few superintendents said their contracts were not renewed (2.3%) or that they were otherwise dismissed (0.3%)” (Kowalski et al., 2011, p. 38). A critical factor in the success of the school superintendent was the strong relationship with school board with regard to vision and strategic planning (Petersen, 2002). A significant correlation was found in a study reviewing the organizational mission and the school superintendent’s vision. The superintendent has had a defining role in shaping the organizational vision of the school district and it is critical that the school board and superintendent share a similar understanding of the vision (Peterson, 2002).

A distinct difference existed between leadership characteristics of school superintendents that are place-bound and come from the school community and those that are career-bound and come from outside the school community (Nestor-Baker, 2002). Carlson (1969) characterized both inside and outside candidates through the following comparison between school superintendents:

Insiders

- Selected when boards like the way the schools are administered
- More difficulty in persuading the board what change is needed
- Make rules to tighten existing procedures
- May default in the authority relationship with the teacher
- Constrained in management of interest groups by their history in the district
- Have a longer tenure

Outsiders

- Receive higher salaries, and have a better bargaining position with the board
- Have a mandate from the board to makes changes
- Make more new rules
- New rules are related to change
- Have more flexibility initially because they are unattached to the schools' social system
- Tend to expand central office staff
- See themselves as expendable to the school system. (p. 233)

Nestor-Baker (2002) compared the findings of the 1960s career- and place-bound school superintendents to the superintendents of the new millennium. Many of the findings were

comparable, but differences existed as place-bound superintendents were shown to take more risks in leading cultural change. One significant finding in the research study was the use of relationships within the school environment. Career-bound school superintendents predominantly used relationships as a method to achieve goals. On the contrary, place-bound school superintendents predominantly used relationships as a pathway to cultural change (Nestor-Baker, 2002). Collins (2001) in his research of companies that moved from good to great stated, “Ten of eleven good-to-great CEOs came from inside the company, whereas the comparison companies tried outside CEOs six times more often” (p. 10). Stellar (2011) believed that outside candidates receive the opportunity of additional time to understand the local expectations, unlike internal candidates who are expected by the school board and community to have immediate impact upon receiving the position due to the inside view of organizational practices.

Stellar (2011) believed that first 100 days of an incoming school superintendent can be the most critical to the longevity of tenure. Incoming superintendents can assist in the transition by

- controlling first impressions by assisting in the drafting of the announcement of introducing the new school superintendent.
- assimilating into the new culture without bringing too many new concepts from previous positions held.
- utilizing the time between the acceptance of the position and the office start date by laying a framework for success through identifying critical stakeholders and developing a plan for entrance and systematic action in the school system.

- making sure that board members understand and approve of the entrance plan into the district.
- staying away from the desire to make drastic sudden changes. This is true even with strategically small initiatives as redecoration or new furniture. The eyes of the community are upon the new superintendent (Stellar, 2011).

Gladwell (2008) asserted many of the most successful leaders in history were not the most talented or intellectually gifted in their profession but instead were in the correct location to be given the opportunity to succeed and thus excelled due to the opportunistic circumstances.

Stellar (2010) asserted that there is no utopian fit for a school superintendent, and thus a potential superintendent needs to look closely at the community and should also look closely at the candidate to ensure a proper fit. Dufour and Marzano (2011) believed that the key to continual success, efficiency, and growth of vision comes through collaboration between the district leadership and the educational community stakeholders. Deasy (2000) profiled his experience as an incoming superintendent in a school district plagued with financial issues, low morale, and lack of collaboration to a district of collaboration and success. Deasy attributed the success to shared organizational vision of the school board, superintendent, and community stakeholders through the following methods of

- open and transparent dialogue at school board meetings to instill faith in the community stakeholders.
- focus by the school board and superintendent on student learning and instruction over managerial functions.
- monthly administrative meeting providing an open and honest collaboration that was focused on outcomes.

- allowing school principals to lead in their buildings and the central office providing behind-the-scenes support.

Lonardi, Willower, and Bredeson (1995) maintained that a school superintendent's success is dependent on the achievement of those who are employed by the school system. "Superintendents are recognized for what they inspire others to accomplish" (Lonardi et al. 1995, p. 4). Harris et al. (2004) conducted a study to evaluate motivation factors of Texas school superintendents. An open-ended response space was provided for respondents to share thoughts and belief with regard to the superintendency. The authors noted three specific pieces of advice provided by the surveyed superintendents:

- Make sure it is the community's vision, not yours.
- You can always defend a decision, if it's the best thing for kids.
- If it were easy, everyone would want to do the job; consider your talents and hang in there! (Harris et al., 2004, p. 116)

As Figure 1 reflects, the American public school superintendent continues to be in a state of ever-changing crisis (Houston, 2001). Consistent and effective district leadership has been linked to school achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009), yet national surveying (Kowalski et al., 2011) showed a continued lack in longevity of tenure for position of the school superintendent. Research on the position school superintendent resembled a historical model of adaptations (Glass et al., 2000). Figure 1 begins with the historical model and moves clockwise with subjects impacting superintendents.

Conceptual Framework

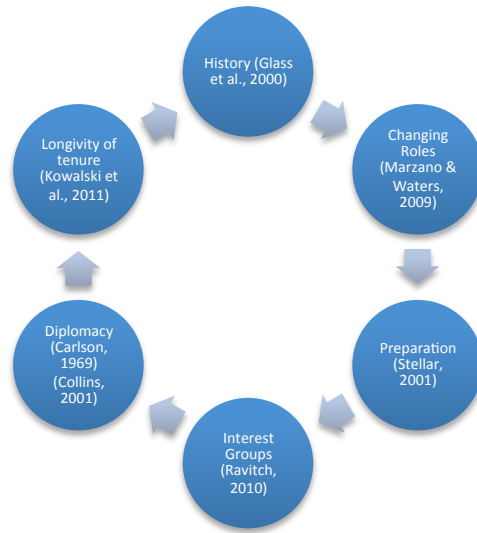


Figure 1. Superintendent research

The American public school superintendent position has morphed and added responsibilities that coincide with the historical contexts of imperialism, industrial revolution, public service, civil rights, global competition, and school reforms. Throughout these changes to the job responsibilities, the role has continued to expand in multiple areas without the loss of previous duties (Glass et al., 2000). The bubble of changing roles in Figure 1 maintains the responsibility of instructional leadership has transformed the position from a managerial and oversight to one who possess the knowledge as a lead instructor of teachers (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Educational institutions of higher learning have struggled to create preparation programs to meet the needs of the 21st century superintendent's role as an instructional leader.

The preparation bubble in Figure 1 indicates there is no one-size-fits-all for school superintendents. Each school district holds unique demographics and needs (Stellar, 2001). It has been critical for schools and superintendent candidates to research and possess patience in selecting the proper fit from the small pool of applicants. A portion of the uniqueness of each

school corporation has been the influence of both local and national interest groups in creating methods of school reform.

The interest group bubble in Figure 1 asserts reforms have required school superintendents to possess the skills of a strong political communicator and education advocate (Ravitch, 2010). The school superintendent has needed to weigh, implement, and communicate to community industry, interests groups, and political politicians while running a state-funded institution focused on student learning. The position has taken on an air of diplomacy to run according to the wishes of the public alongside of upholding educational standards.

The diplomacy bubble in Figure 1 depicts ongoing debate on candidates best suited to run a public educational institution. Many of the reformists have advocated for candidates outside of an educational background. School boards have debated between leadership qualities of those from within the organization and those outside of the organization (Carlson, 1969; Collins, 2001). Each categorical difference in background held unique trends in qualifications and expertise.

For all the uniqueness and changes throughout the position of school superintendent, tenure of the leadership position has not dramatically changed (Kowalski et al., 2011). Fewer qualified candidates are accepting the challenge to become school superintendents as exemplified in the longevity of tenure bubble in Figure 1. The position of school superintendents is in a state of historical crisis without a distinct solution within sight.

Recent research stated that 17.7% of school superintendent vacancies are filled through superintendent search firms (Glass et al., 2000). Superintendent search agencies have a large impact in the profession, yet little research has been attempted or published in regard to their role in placing or replacing superintendents. Currently, the phenomenon of superintendent search

firms' roles in the process is a mystery. Many facts are known, but an understanding is elusive (Gladwell, 2009). I believe looking through the lenses of the search agents provides a unique understanding to superintendent tenure, as portrayed in Figure 2.

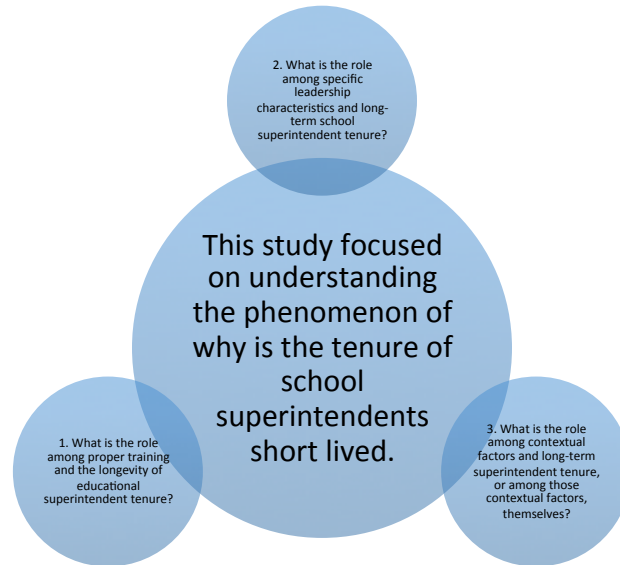


Figure 2. The phenomenological study through the lenses of superintendent search firms (Gladwell, 2009).

To best understand the phenomenon of school superintendent tenure through the lenses of superintendent search agents, I developed three questions that coincided with the researched areas of preparation, effective leadership characteristics, and contextual variables that will be studied to see if they present themselves as factors in the essence of superintendent tenure in K-12 education. Each of the three questions is represented in Figure 2 in bubbles surrounding the research question of superintendent tenure. The phenomenological study was intended to gain the essence and understanding of the role of search agents' perspective of the tenure crisis, not a solution to the tenure crisis.

I used interviews, observation of the interviewees, location of the phenomenon, and document analysis to gain the best essence and understanding of the search firms (Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2009) as displayed by the skeleton framework of three triangles in Figure 3. To connect for triangulation purposes, a focus group of current superintendents represented by the outside missing triangle in Figure 3 was utilized to compare the findings (Creswell, 2007). Perspectives of the practicing school leaders provided real world core comparison to the information being gleaned from those who are hired to place or replace school superintendents.

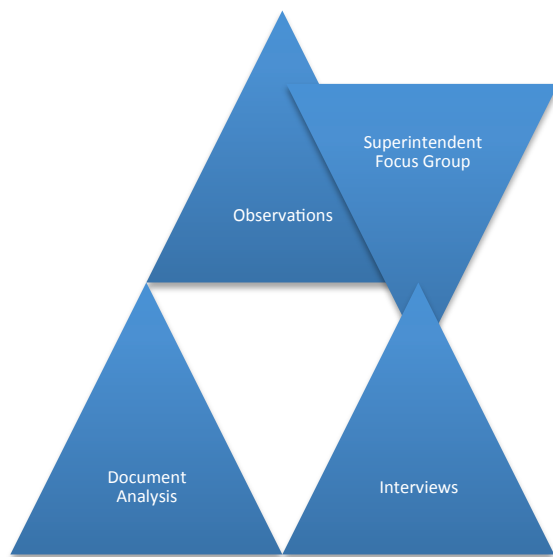


Figure 3. Phenomenology methodology for essence and understanding (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2009).

Summary

The positional role of the school superintendency has been a unique leadership role that most in the profession have found to be exhilarating and challenging (Houston, 2001). D. Heath and Heath (2011) asserted that the myth of easy success does not exist without dedication, failure, and perseverance. This chapter described the history, changing roles, preparation,

reforms, politics, and longevity factors directly impacting the role of the school superintendent.

This chapter also reviewed the theoretical and practitioner leadership qualities through a conceptual analysis of related literature. The position of school superintendent is not for every leader. “The superintendency isn’t so much a job as it is a calling” (Houston, 2001, p. 433).

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology for this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Prange, Goldstein, and Dillon (1981) spent 37 years in phenomenological study and analysis of the attack of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Their objective was to weave together multiple viewpoints into a broader view on one historical turning point. Each interview brought a unique perspective and viewpoint to the research.

Prange believed that there were no deliberate villains in the Pearl Harbor story. He considered those involved on both sides to be honest, hardworking, dedicated, and for the most part intelligent. But as human beings some were brilliant and some were mediocre, some broad-minded and some of narrow vision, and some strong and some weak—and every single one fallible, capable of mistakes of omission and commission. (Prange et al., 1982, pp. ix-x)

Prange et al. did not intend to propose a reason for the attack but to provide a rich and intimate understanding from those directly involved in the historical turning point associated with the start of United States involvement in WWII.

Merriam (2009) described qualitative research as a method of uncovering the meaning of an occurrence or data point instead of studying the rationale or cause of an event that could be quantified. Merriam (2009) believed that qualitative research is written to provide the reader a rich description full of characteristics. Creswell (2007) asserted that qualitative research is a

rigorous method of data collection that includes the researcher's interpretations of situations and thus reflects the background of the researcher. Joyner et al. (2013) believed qualitative study is research focused on the understanding of situations that occur naturally. It was with these purposes in mind that this study was not meant to generalize or solve the issue of short superintendent tenure but instead to provide a rich description and describe characteristics of the issue.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain the unique and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of short tenure among school superintendents. Merriam (2009) described phenomenology as a research method not interested in categorizing to simple generalizations. Phenomenologists are interested in going directly to the source to find the intense, yet basic human experience. This study offered such a source. The unique and relatively uncharted phenomenon of school superintendent tenure was studied through the lens of the school superintendent search agents geographically located in the United States. I made efforts to become intimate with the phenomenon of superintendent tenure by creating strong relationships with selected retired and current school superintendent search agents, through observation of the interviewees and location of the phenomenon, comparison focus groups, and one-on-one interviews.

Gladwell (2009) described the difference between a puzzle and a mystery: a puzzle is missing pieces of knowledge and thus leaving an unknown. On the other hand, a mystery exists when too much information on a subject exists and provides too many differing points of knowledge to clearly understand the outcome. I believe that superintendent search agents are mostly unstudied puzzle pieces that will open an understanding to the school superintendent short-tenure phenomenon through this phenomenological research study. Special emphasis was

given to the antecedents of preparation, leadership characteristics, and contextual factors to the length of tenure for school superintendents. It was not my intent to find fault or uniqueness among the superintendent search agents or the clients they have placed but instead to research and analyze the widely unknown perspectives from the agents who place or are commissioned to replace superintendents.

Research Questions

This study focused on the position of the educational superintendent and specifically, “Why is the average tenure of school superintendents short lived?” Additional questions included the following:

1. What is the role of proper training and the longevity of educational superintendent tenure?
2. What is the role of specific leadership characteristics and long-term school superintendent tenure?
3. What is the role of contextual factors and long-term superintendent tenure, or among those contextual factors, themselves?

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Participants

Kowalski et al. (2011) stated that 17.5% of school superintendents throughout the United States are placed through superintendent search firms. Search firms are composed of search agents from numerous differing education backgrounds including university professors, former superintendents, administrators, lawyers, and non-affiliated agents. I studied and held multiple interviews with former and current superintendent search agents.

Riede (2003) maintained that many superintendent search firms are created and also disband yearly due to the intensive nature of the profession. Kingsbury (2009) warned that all superintendent search firms do not hold the same credibility and high standards desired by clients. Many of the search firms were created without the proper knowledge or understanding of the leadership role of the superintendent or the structure of school boards.

Selection and qualifying protocols for interviewees is one of the most important first steps in developing a qualitative research plan of action for this study. The qualification boundaries in this research are set in place to provide specific areas of consistency of professional practice and experience level of study participants. Locating superintendent search agencies that fit the research study purpose was critical. The following criteria were used when selecting agencies in this study to provide an assumed viewpoint of experienced educational background and longstanding tenure in the profession of superintendent searches.

1. The school superintendent search firm represented by the agents had to have been in operation for at least 10 continual years to prove longevity of practice.
2. An institution or association of non-profit status had to run the school superintendent search firm from which agents were selected for interviews, thus monetary advancements for the firm and agents did not impact placement of superintendents.

Through the preliminary research of superintendent search agencies, hundreds of agencies exist throughout the United States. From those, I was able to find multiple agencies, institutions, or associations that did match the boundary criteria created for this study. Many of those matches only offered a limited scope of service due to finance or geography, personnel comprising the agency, or experience levels in education. These additional sub-criteria offered additional guidance in selection of the idea participants for this research.

- Scope of services: financial and geographic. The optimal participants for this study were agents that service both rural and urban districts. Traditionally, this could only be accomplished by agents working as a non-profit to school corporations. Kingsbury (2009) shared that the average cost for a superintendent search agency assistance costs between \$25,000 and \$200,000. Due to limited resources in the educational setting, traditionally on a national setting, only larger urban districts have the opportunity to employ the services of superintendent search firm (Glass et al., 2000). This omits rural districts that are the most struggling to attract qualified candidates to the superintendency (Kowalski et al., 2011). Although agents with a limited focus on only urban school corporations could have been utilized for this research, their expertise would have caused a limited perspective of rural superintendent searches.
- Personnel comprising the agency. The optimal participants for this study were agents with time allotted as a primary job description for superintendent searches. Search agencies run through state superintendent associations struggle from a narrowed perspective caused by the lack of time dedicated to superintendent searches. These associations hold limited financial and time resources that could be spent on search capabilities. Although agents with a limited amount of time dedicated to the superintendent search process could have been utilized for this research, their lack of dedicated time to superintendent searches could have caused limited priority focus on superintendent searches.
- Experience levels in education. The optimal participants for this study were agents with a direct link to academic preparation of superintendents. Preparation programs

of superintendents throughout the nation are in question as to the effectiveness (Hoyle, 2007). When higher education can link with the practitioner superintendent, practical rigor and knowledge in preparation can be obtained (Hoyle & Torres, 2008). Although agents with a limited link or experience to the academics of superintendent preparation programs could have been used for this research, their lack of current academic preparation could have caused a limited perspective on specific changes impacting superintendent tenure.

Scope of service, personnel comprising the agencies, and experience levels in education coupled with the criteria boundaries of this research study made finding the correct agencies and agents critical in finding understanding of tenure through their perspectives.

Creswell (2007) recommended that phenomenological studies include the study of five to 25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. Merriam (2009) asserted phenomenological studies could include multiple interviews with the interviewee with regard to the phenomenon and, more importantly, that the number of interviews is not as important as finding the saturation point of emerging themes inside the data. It was my goal to become intimate with the subject of superintendent tenure through multiple interviews and observations of the same interviewees. A thorough collection of data, along with a smaller and diverse pool of interviewees, gained a greater understanding than a less intimate relationship with a broader pool of interviewees. Through preliminary research, multiple agents of vast experience existed within the criteria and appeared a viable group to be potentially invited to participate in this research.

Interviews

Merriam (2009) explained that the researcher is the main research instrumentation of qualitative study. Therefore, before, during, and after the interview process, my biases were identified and acknowledged as side notes to the transcriptions. Through the qualitative research, personal bias could not be ignored or discarded, instead subjectivity was noted and monitored throughout the process.

Creswell (2007) explained interviews conducted by the researcher make up some, if not all, of the qualitative data analysis. Patton (1987) stated,

On the surface this (interviewing) appears to require no more than knowing how to talk and listen. Beneath the surface, however, interviewing becomes an art and science requiring skill, sensitivity, concentration, interpersonal understanding, insights, mental acuity, and discipline. (p. 108)

Two semi-structured interviews and one observation took place with each participating superintendent search agent. Semi-structured follow-ups took place as needed with search agents. It was my intent that all interviews take place in person. Prior to any interview, observation, or document analysis, the Informed Consent was thoroughly explained, provided, and signed.

Prior to first the in-person interview, time was spent with the participant so that I gained an understanding of the work environment, gaining as well an understanding of the agent's history and discovering the cultural challenges of in placing school superintendents as part of the observation process. The first semi-structured interview included questions directly related to the research questions (Appendix A). These questions were intentionally generalized to allow

the participant opportunity to explore personal thoughts and feeling from their experiences with the topic.

The second interview took place at least 28 calendar days after the first interview to allow for transcription and revisions to the first interview data. The second interview included a set of questions (Appendix B) that provided extended conversation, clarity, and new themes. To provide additional contextual information and observations, follow-up informal sessions with each superintendent search agent or representative took place after the second semi-structured interview sessions.

Merriam (2009) categorized interview questions into three descriptions of highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. This research study utilized the semi-structured interview style. Semi-structured questioning provided a scaffold for the interview process yet allowed freedom by participant or me to provide depth of response or topic through deviation from the question, yet focused on the research topic. Both interviews were completed in a semi-structured format to provide guidelines and consistency of themes (Patton, 1987) and allowed the interviewee and me to explore additional topics and patterns within the basic questions (Merriam, 2009). Both the first and second semi-structured interviews lasted a minimum of 60 minutes. An interview guide form (Appendix C) utilized a loose format for the two semi-structured interviews. Notes were kept throughout the interview process.

If needed to gain further insights, semi-structured follow-up interviews were requested of the participant (Creswell, 2007). The semi-structured follow-up interviews were intended to provide richness of depth and context to gain additional understanding into the role of superintendent search firms with relationship to superintendent tenure (Creswell, 2007). Patton (1987) explained that depth of questioning is achieved through listening, observing, and then

following-up with additional questions. All follow-up interviews were requested of the superintendent search agent as needed. I was cognizant of the interviewees' resource of time and thus limited the number of follow-up interviews to less than four contextual interviews following the semi-structured interviews.

Observations

Merriam (2009) suggested observations are a critical component and data collection instrument during a qualitative research study to provide context and non-verbal occurrences inside of the phenomenon.

Observations take place in the setting where the phenomenon of interest naturally occurs instead of a location designated for the purpose of interviewing; second, observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview. In the real world of collecting data, however, informal interviews and conversations are often interwoven with observation. (Merriam, 2009, p. 117)

Observations of superintendent search agents and the location of the phenomenon during this research study took place in both the natural habitat of the phenomenon environment and prior/during the semi-structured interviews. Prior to the in-person formal interview, time was spent with the superintendent search agent gaining an understanding of prior background and experience in the field of superintendent searches. During the pre-interview observation, an observation form (Appendix D) was kept to provide understanding with non-verbal and perceptive actions along with background information pertaining to the agency and agent (Merriam, 2009). Both open access of all areas and guided access were desired when appropriate. It was understood that some information and areas might not be available to

observe due to prior confidentiality agreements between the clients and search agencies. It was also understood that other individuals associated with the search process or institution/association could be in the office. This research study was only focused on superintendent tenure through the lenses of search agents; thus, comments or observation of any other individual were irrelevant and not documented for research purposes. These individuals were not considered as participants or engaged in information/content in regards to this research study. The observation form was include and focused on the six observed features of

1. The singular or multiple settings of the observation
2. The individuals being observed
3. The events happening during the observation
4. The conversations and themes being observed
5. The non-verbal and physical attributes being observed
6. The personal behaviors of the observer. (Merriam, 2009)

Observations were also included, returning to the physical and geographical location of the phenomenon happening, as a follow-up to information gleaned during either the interviews or focus group processes. During these on-site observations I intended to observe detail of the contextual location to gain further understanding of the interview and phenomenon of superintendent tenure. I read each interview transcript before entering the location of the phenomenon and also after visiting each in hopes of garnering more of the essence provided in the interview statements. These observations were limited to only public locations and thus did not compromise confidentiality of interview participants with individual observation sites. There were also no additional participants at the public sites through the observation process. Semi-structured follow-up interview questions were formed in part from these observations.

Focus Groups

The use of focus groups with practicing school superintendents provided a practitioner's perspective to the phenomenon of superintendent tenure. I used the data collected during the superintendent focus groups to assist in the triangulation of data. The focus group participants met one time for a length of 100 minutes. The focus group started by reviewing the Informed Consent and stressing confidentiality among all the focus group members. I stressed that although confidentiality was expected, it could not be guaranteed due to multiple former and current superintendents' involvement in the focus groups. The nature and professionalism in the position, however, lent to confidentiality of data shared along with proper courtesy during the focus group process, and thus helped maintain a level of minimal risk to all involved. To ensure all understood the levels of risk involved in participation, a review of the informed consent process and procedures followed the statements of confidentiality.

Instructions were shared with participants that included the guidelines of one person talking at a time, rotating first person to answer to the semi-structured questions, passing on a question by any member, opting out of participation without penalty at any time during the superintendent focus groups.

A list of 20 semi-structured questions (Appendix F) similar to questions used in the search agent interviews were used in the focus group. At any point, a superintendent could choose to end participation in the focus group. All comments from that particular participant would be withdrawn and focus groups would continue forward with a new question. No members of the focus group opted to withdrawal. During the transcription, participating superintendents were not referred to by name. Pseudonyms were used during the transcription to generalize all participants, names of school corporations, and specific leaders mentioned during

focus groups. Transcription took place personally by me and were provided to the superintendents through a password locked email attachment. Superintendents then had 14 calendar days to make any needed revisions or deletions and send back through a password locked attachment. No follow-up focus group sessions were requested. Superintendents wishing to withdraw after the transcription could do so. No superintendents withdrew from this research. Only their statements were redacted from the transcriptions.

Document Analysis

Documents can provide a critical insight into the research questions due to the objectivity of written protocols and guidelines followed by the superintendent search agencies (Merriam, 2009). Documents included a wide array of format including but not limited to written text, graphic organizers, digital artifacts, and physical artifacts.

I requested public documents pertaining to the superintendent search process, timelines and protocols provided to school boards, and data collected relevant to superintendent tenure. This request happened after the informed consent process when setting up the first semi-structured interview. Documents were then retrieved in person after the conclusion of the first semi-structured interview. Documents were analyzed at my home residence and kept in a locked cabinet.

To protect confidentiality, all documents were returned in-person to superintendent search agents during the second semi-structured interview. All identifiable data used in writing the report were given pseudonyms and descriptors or redacted from documents. Table 1 provides an ordered summary of the aforementioned procedures involved during this research study.

Table 1

Summary of Procedures Involved in This Research Study

Research Order	Who or What Was Involved	Why
1. Investigation and selection of superintendent search agents	Internet searches by me, contact by phone or email with agencies and associations.	To ensure that agencies and agents matched research criteria boundaries.
2. Sent letter and initial Informed Consent to possible participants, noting a follow-up phone call to explain research, and thorough explanation of Informed Consent	I sent letters to possible participants. This was a critical part of the informed consent process.	To recruit participants and share full scope of research study.
3. Informed consent	I provided participant the Informed Consent form. Between 6 and 12 search agents were participants in this research study.	This only happened after a thorough explanation of the informed consent process. Informed consent was fully understood before any observations, interviews, or documents analysis took place.
4. Observations	I gained understanding of the background of agent/agency, and geographic area served prior to the first semi-structured interview.	To gain an understanding and background prior to the interviews.
5. First semi-structured Interview	General semi-structured questions intended to focus on research questions. Semi-structured interviews were a minimum of 60 minutes.	Provide basis for research study.

Table 1 (continued)

Research Order	Who or What Was Involved	Why
6. Document analysis	Documents were requested and provided after first interview. Documents were to be returned physically during the second interview.	Document analysis to add to the research.
7. Observations (continued)	Observations of the physical location of the phenomenon referenced during the first interviews.	Provide depth and understanding to interview data.
8. Transcription	First interview with search agent was transcribed within 14 calendar days. Search agent then had 14 calendar days for revisions or additions.	Provide a timeframe and process for accuracy of data.
9. Second semi-structured Interview	More specific semi-structured questions were intended to build on first interview and observations with search agents. Minimum of 60 minutes.	Provide depth and additional understanding to data.
10. Transcription (continued)	Second interview with search agent was transcribed within 14 calendar days. Search agent then had 14 calendar days for revisions or additions.	Provide a timeframe and process for accuracy of data.
11. Superintendent focus group	Focus group of former and current superintendents answered semi-structured questions related to study research questions.	Triangulation of data.
12. Semi-structured follow-ups	Only were requested for clarification as needed with search agents. Maximum of four, 30-minute follow-ups.	No follow-ups past the two interviews were needed with the search agents participants.

Table 1 (continued)

Research Order	Who or What Was Involved	Why
13. Writing report	Coding of data happened throughout the process. Writing of report happened after full data collection and analysis.	To gain essence and understanding of the phenomenon of superintendent tenure.
14. Sharing report	Provided research study back to participants.	To share research understanding with participants after completion.

Data Analysis and Organization

The interview, observation, and the organizing and analysis of the qualitative data took place during the winter and spring of 2014. The process of bringing order to the data through interpretation and finding patterns and significance can be complex and challenging (Patton, 1987). Merriam (2009) believed the process of data analysis needs to start early in the research study data collection to assist in consolidating, reducing, and interpreting the qualitative data. A first step in the organization and analysis process was creating protocols for transcription of the interview and observation data. These protocols included the amount of time required to transcribe and return to the interviewee for approval, the coding method organization, the symbols and words used in the coding, and process of creating themes from the coded materials.

To protect the identity of the superintendent search firm agents and clientele, pseudonyms were given to all search agents, search agencies, school corporations, referenced individuals, and specific location referenced by the agent. I maintained confidentiality for all participating interviewees and referenced individual and organization by redacting or providing pseudonyms.

Interviews were recorded digitally on multiple devices including a Panasonic digital voice recorder, an iPad digital voice recorder, and an iPod audio voice recorder. Digital copies of the interviews were kept in a locked cabinet, in the two locations of my personal residence and professional office to ensure safety of the recording (Creswell, 2007). Each case study had a separately labeled file containing collected interviews, observation, and related materials. All digital and non-digital data storage locations were protected by a computer digital password or locked file located at my personal home address or professional office to protect confidentiality.

I personally transcribed all interviews. Personal transcription provided multiple times of hearing the interviews coupled with the writing of qualitative data. Transcriptions and observation sheets were redacted of specific names of search agents or clients. Transcriptions were emailed using a password protected attachment file to each superintendent search firm agents to ensure accuracy of statements. Any desired corrections from the participant was made within 14 calendar days of the original interview and sent back through the same means of password protected email. Multiple agents did provide clarifications and expansion of their statements. In compliance with the Indiana State University IRB, original and copies of digital recordings are destroyed within a prescribed timeframe to protect the identity of the superintendent search firms' clientele participating in the research.

Generating Categories, Themes, and Patterns

All transcribed data and observation protocol sheets were read multiple times before coding to identify categories, emerging themes, and patterns in the data. Patton (1987) explained qualitative data analysis as artistic and creative, and thus my judgment played a critical role in the process. Guba (1978) asserted a research evaluator must figure out convergence to understand what research goes together. Creswell (2007) described patterns as finding two or

more correspondence in the effort to establish fewer non-overlapping pieces of data. Guba suggested the researcher start the process by locating the reoccurring regularities and note the emerging categories, themes, and patterns in the data.

Guba (1978) warned that many pitfalls exist and need to be closely monitored during the categorical stages. A warning sign to mismanaged categorizing is evident when a large number of unassignable data exists. A second problem addressed by Guba was the issue of divergence and how to best move past the surface level of data. Inclusion of previous data, making connections between categories, and the suggestion of new categories were suggested. Patton (1987) suggested that when redundancy exists on a continual basis, the emergent themes, categories, and patterns have been exhausted.

This research study used the semi-structured interview format with all interviewees during semi-structured interviews and the less formal contextual interviews. Due to the similarities of the interview questions and formats, I believed similar categories, themes, and patterns emerged from the data through frequency, thus causing a saturation point of emerging themes. Once themes, categories, and patterns are recognized, the focus shifted to understanding how the data provided a rich and intimate understanding of the research questions proposed in the study.

Data collected in this study were viewed not only in frequency but also in the magnitude of the data. This allowed me the opportunity to consider themes and patterns that were potential keys to understanding, but might not have been mentioned in frequency. The magnitude of statements were a consideration factor in this study to gain a deeper essence and understanding.

Coding Data and Emergent Understandings

Merriam (2009) described coding as a form of data analysis that simply designates research data to provide easy access to the data. Qualitative data can be as large as multiple pages of notes to as simple as one word in the quest of finding the essence of the qualitative phenomenon. Saldana (2009) stated qualitative data coding is the method of making sense out of the data emerging throughout the raw data.

It is important for the researcher to begin the coding process by identifying data having potential relevance to the research questions (Merriam, 2009). During open coding, the researcher utilizes a loose method of identifying possible patterns through a “repeat of the exact word(s) of the participant, your words, or a concept from the literature” (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). After reviewing the comment patterns, along with magnitude of acquired data, a statement cluster was formed and a common code assigned to represent the multiple data forming together under the specific category. Creswell (2007) recommended researchers use a method of horizontalization in the analysis of phenomenological data. Merriam asserted that horizontalization imaginative variation is the process of seeing the phenomenon from differing viewpoints and listing significant statements. Each statement was treated as holding the same amount of weight and importance during the initial data analysis. I read the transcripts multiple times and attempted to bracket out the concept of main themes along with differing personal bias that coincided with the raw interview data.

Creswell (2007) asserted one core phenomenon becomes apparent during the open coding process. Additional coding themes will provide support to the centralized phenomenon. Creswell and Merriam (2009) suggested fewer categories create more manageable data and method of communicating the results. Creswell recommended the researcher to create a visual

axial coding paradigm showing the supporting theme relationship to the core phenomenon. Through this process, significant statements could be non-overlapping and non-related statements. Any related statements were clustered into overarching or a related category. Significant statements were then categorized into themes to provide the “what” and “how” essence of the experienced phenomenon.

The what of a phenomenological study is described in a written textural description of the specific happenings during the phenomenon. The researcher writes a description of what specifically the interviewees experienced (Creswell, 2007). How the experience happened is analyzed through the writing of a structural description. The structural description “reflects on the setting and contexts in which the phenomenon was experienced” (Creswell, 2007, p. 158). The essence, including a theoretical approach, was described in an exhaustive combined writing of both the textural and structural descriptions of significant data. It was critical during the entire process for me to bracket viewpoints and thus removed personal perspectives and viewpoints to gain a fresh perspective on the research. Although a completely bracketed study is desired, very rarely can personal and past experiences be completely detached from the research (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Alternative Explanations

Qualitative study is not intended to create generalizations or comparisons between a sample and a population (Merriam, 2009). Instead, qualitative research has the purpose of learning from life. Creswell (2007) asserted the researcher needs to step back from the data numerous times throughout the process to ensure important data points and understanding is not lost through a narrowing focus. Stepping back from the data occurred through bracketing or the simple process of reanalyzing the raw data and themes. Patton (1987) asserted alternative

explanations come from logical assumptions and then seeing if data from the research can support the possibility. It was important to list all alternative explanations that were considered and tested during the data analysis.

Emerging themes and understandings not originally addressed in the research questions were noted and categorized. I determined the significance of statements and emergent themes in relation to superintendent tenure. If critical to the understanding, needed changes were noted and made in the research study. A factor of credibility in a research study is the amount of time a researcher spends accounting for alternative explanations to the contrary opinions (Merriam, 2009). I provided alternative explanations and possible additions in the written report. These new explanations included possible themes in understanding the essence of superintendent tenure not originally conceptualized in the original research question. Evidence of exploring alternative explanations were also seen in the coded data collected from the interviews, observations, and data analysis.

Writing the Report

Merriam (2009) maintained writing is a form of thinking that cannot be overshadowed by any number of activities of preparation. Creswell (2007) asserted that qualitative research is to be documented and written to provide the reader a persuasive emotion of verisimilitude to ensure the reader feels they are actively involved in the study. Research without a proper documentation is of little insight if unrefined through the writing process. When writing the report, the researcher needs to realize when experiencing difficulty in writing the cause is most likely the subject requires further exploration (Merriam, 2009).

Translating the themes and magnitude of data into a narrative account was the overall goal in creating the essence of a qualitative study. There are multiple methods of writing

qualitative study, and thus the researcher must decide who the audience is and who wishes to benefit from the understanding portrayed through the research study (Merriam, 2009).

Once it is clear who will be reading the report, you can ask what that audience would want to know about the study. The answer to that question can help structure the content of the report and determine the style of presentation. (Merriam, 2009, p. 239)

The target audience for this research study was current and future superintendents, as well as school board members, due to the direct implications of holding a greater understanding could have on their professional roles and responsibilities. Merriam advised the researcher to stay away from writing long and lengthy quotes from the interview. Instead, it was suggested to use smaller quotes and weave multiple themes into the narrative and thus create a flow that enables the reader to better follow and understand the research themes. Bracketing of personal beliefs and experiences in phenomenological study was encouraged to avoid personal bias of previous experience to cloud the research results. Creswell (2007) suggested the researcher provide a personal end to the research by using reflexivity to conclude the research by “casting their initial problem statement within an autobiographical context” (p. 189).

Human Subjects

The research proposal for this study went before the Indiana State University IRB for approval. The IRB helped assess the protections for study participants that were accorded by me, as well as the risks as compared to the intended benefits for participation. All participants in this study were voluntary and signed an Informed Consent form (Appendixes G and H) before participating in any observation or interview. Note that a thorough informed consent process of dialogue and conversation occurred prior to offering participants Informed Consent forms. This helped ensure that those involved fully understood the risk, benefits, and time required to

participate. Toward that end, I spoke with each possible participant and shared the relevant research guideline and expectation of consent. Only after full verbal consent and written release was obtained was a volunteer participant included in the study. Any participant could withdraw from the study at any time. No participants withdrew from this research study.

Validity and Reliability

Merriam (2009) asserted that the goal of all research is to produce valid and reliable research results in an ethical manner. Patton (1987) believed there are two aspects in trusting the validity of research analysis results.

1. The researcher must determine and state the confidence level in the data and analysis.
2. The reader must be able to self-verify and validate the findings if so desired.

The researcher can strengthen both the self-confidence and reader confidence in data through the process of triangulation. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) described triangulation as a method to increase credibility through multiple measurement points converging on one location or theme. This research study used interviews, observations of the interviewees and phenomenon location, document analysis, and focus groups of practicing school superintendents to triangulate the qualitative phenomenological study of superintendent tenure (Appendix E).

Reliability of the data hinged on the study allowing replication and producing similar results. Merriam (2009) stated that reliability in qualitative study could be one of the most difficult aspects to obtain due to the human behavior. I acknowledged the assumption that differing superintendent search agents had unique if not contrary viewpoints on superintendent tenure. I ensured reliability through the creation of boundaries for the selection of superintendent search firms by using only agents from firms that were run as non-profit associations or institutions and possessed at least 10 years of experience. The factors of non-

profit status, and experience level were critical to ensure and maintain credibility of the participants involved and relevance to gain essence of understanding between similarly structured search agencies.

Personal Statement

I am blessed to be appointed the superintendent preceded by serving in three years as the Assistant Superintendent/Chief Academic Officer in the Warsaw Community Schools Corporation in Warsaw, Indiana. My movement to the position of superintendent happened in an accelerated pace, yet followed the traditional order (Glass et al., 2000) of teacher, principal, central office administrator. Prior to my current central office positions, I served two years as the principal at Northfield Junior Senior High in the Metropolitan School District of Wabash County in Wabash, Indiana. My educational career started as a history teacher at Warsaw Community High School. My passion for history, leadership study, and personal narratives had led me to spend hundreds of hours researching, interviewing, and documenting historical figures from American history.

I have been married for 12 years. My wife is an assistant professor of education at a small liberal arts college in northern Indiana. Her influences and knowledge have provided me with a strong elementary curricular base that parallels my personal understanding of secondary curriculum. I have three children, two of whom are adopted from Ethiopia. The perspective gained through my travels to third-world countries impacts my global thoughts on leadership development, attainment, and retention. I am a firm believer in the concepts of servant and transformational leadership.

Throughout my educational career, I have worked for a seven different educational superintendents. I have watched the position become a revolving door and often was

hypothesized by the rationale for the quick turnover in leadership. As I have professionally transitioned into the role of superintendent, interest and study of the educational superintendent has become what Machiavelli described in *The Prince* (as cited in Smith, 1992) as the art of war. My art of war is to study, research, and understand the strengths and flaw of those that preceded me in the quest for the successful attainment, and procurement of the position of the educational superintendent. Former President Harry Truman reflected on his study of the art of war when in office by stating, “The years ahead were to make great demands upon the wisdom, courage, and integrity of statesmen everywhere” (Truman, 1955, p. 561). I predict that at the end of my career in education, I will be making a similar statement.

Summary

Chapter 3 described the methodology that was used in this qualitative phenomenological study of superintendent tenure through the lenses of superintendent search agents. The boundaries were developed and noted to study participants affiliated with superintendent search firms who possessed a prescribed longevity and non-profit status of the institution or association. I proposed the development of themes through the multiple observations and interviews of multiple superintendent search agents along with the practicing superintendent focus groups surrounding the phenomenon.

This chapter focused on the in-depth process that took place during the semi-structured and contextual interviews and observation process of data collection. I described the self-transcription process and timelines along with the process of identifying emergent themes, and coding the data to find emergent understanding. I identified validity and reliability as critical components, in addition to the interviews, observations, and data analysis; a superintendent focus group was proposed to provide for triangulation of the data.

I identified the bias that transcends qualitative phenomenological research. I stressed this study was not intended to find a solution to the short length of superintendent tenure, but to understand the phenomenon in a rich and intimate study through the lenses of the superintendent search firms who are commissioned to place or replace school superintendents.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Extensive research documents the history, job description, and changing roles of the school superintendent. Research and quantitative data also have shown minimal tenure average and a rationale for stating that a crisis exists within the traditional pipeline of school superintendents. This traditional pipeline is supplied through proper education and promotion and has followed the progression of teacher, building administrator, central office administrator, and then the positional title of superintendent of schools for a specific educational corporation. From the dire need for individuals to accept the positional role of school superintendents, search agencies have arisen to assist in providing a requested service of attracting and narrowing pools of qualified candidates.

Many previous quantitative surveys backed by a plethora of reviewed literature have attempted to determine the specific qualities of leadership and needed educational background for successful school superintendents. Although these previous research findings can be helpful in identifying successful leadership traits in the position, little clarifies the staggering low tenure of the position. Even less is documented on the role or understanding of tenure from the perspective of the superintendent search agencies who have been charged to place or are commissioned to replace school superintendents.

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to research, analyze, and

gain essence and understanding of school superintendent tenure through the lenses of superintendent search agents.

Research Questions

This study focused on the position of the educational superintendent and specifically, “Why is the average tenure of school superintendents short lived?” Additional questions included the following:

1. What is the role of proper training and the longevity of educational superintendent tenure?
2. What is the role of specific leadership characteristics and long-term school superintendent tenure?
3. What is the role of contextual factors and long-term superintendent tenure, or among those contextual factors, themselves?

Presentation of Study Sample

Search agents from the mid-western region of the United States were selected for this research study. The agents differed in years of experience, prior educational experience, number of times placing school superintendents and rationale for becoming involved in the search procedure process. Both current and former search agents matching the aforementioned criteria were interviewed during this research study. All participant search agents were male gender of Caucasian race. Table 2 depicts the generalized demographics of the superintendent search agents interviewed during the research study.

Table 2

Summarization of Superintendent Search Agent Experience and Demographics

<u>Superintendent</u>	<u>Years of Experience as a School Superintendent</u>	<u>Years of Experience as a Search Agent</u>	<u>Estimated Number of Participated Searches</u>
AP1	10-15	25-30	800-850
AP2	20-25	1-5	1-50
AP3	10-15	1-5	1-50
AP4	10-15	5-10	200-250
AP5	1-5	1-5	1-50
AP6	20-25	5-10	150-250

Prior to the interviews, receipt of informed consent, field observations, and the gathering of demographic data were conducted. At least two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participating agent. Interviews with each participating agent were conducted in person. The initial interview lasted at least 60 minutes and was composed of a minimum 20 semi-structured questions found in Appendix A. The second interview of at least 60 minutes was conducted with an additional minimum of 15 semi-structured questions found in Appendix B.

Supporting documents pertaining to the school superintendent search process and the search agents were requested. These documents provided clarity and understanding of the timeline and protocols used by the search agents in assisting schools through the search process. These plans were made available for analysis during this research process. Job shadowing observations were conducted prior to the interview process. Phenomenological observations

between or after the interviews were conducted at the places of the phenomenon happening to provide a better essence and visual understanding of the interviews. Contextual semi-structured interview follow-ups to the interviews were requested when needed.

A superintendent focus group was organized and asked similar semi-structured interview questions as those asked of the superintendent search agents. This focus group was created to assist in the triangulation of qualitative data. The superintendent focus group was composed of current and former practicing superintendents. Their gender, education, and qualifications differed and were not taken into account for this research study triangulation. Table 3 reflects the experience and demographic details of the superintendent participants in the focus group.

Table 3

Summarization of Superintendent Focus Group Participant Experience and Demographics

Focus Group Participants	Years of Experience as Superintendent	Superintendent in Rural or Suburban/Urban	Number of Superintendencies
FG1	6-10	Rural	6
FG2	10-15	Suburban/Urban	2
FG3	30-35	Both	13
FG4	16-20	Both	3
FG5	1-5	Rural	1

Specific names or identifiable descriptions of search agents, superintendents, school corporations, schools, and geographic locations were substituted with a generic title or redacted to protect confidentiality. Quotations were only altered for readability by imposing punctuation and removing filler words such as “um” and “well.”

Summary of the Interviews and Field Observations

Interviews were semi-structured to allow essence of understanding and personal narrative to become evident in the qualitative data. The following themes and supporting data provide a condensed, yet detailed report of the interviews conducted with superintendent search agents meeting the aforementioned criteria of this research study. When evident, themes of both quantity and magnitude were detailed in relation to the phenomenon of school superintendent tenure.

Understanding of School Superintendent Tenure

Each interviewed superintendent search agent provided a unique understanding into school superintendent tenure. It quickly became evident that investigation of tenure starts with a deeper understanding of the profession. The search agents spoke from the language of the superintendency and also as search agents continually researching the academic field. Without the professional knowledge and background of the superintendency, tenure and its complexities become a jargon-filled conversation without a clear picture of the phenomenon. Sub-themes included job complexity, dysfunction of school boards, finding a new challenge, and stepping-stone district with the new generation of superintendents.

Job complexity. Each of the superintendent search agents described the extreme and ever-changing complexities of the school superintendency. AP6 stated, “Some folks would say the good Lord would have a hard time being superintendent” as he described the lengthy list of factors school superintendents faced on a daily basis. He described these factors as a list that had grown and continues to grow without an end or reprieve in the near future. AP1 stated there has been a “real historical shift in the culture of the superintendency” during the past generation. He attributed the politicization of the position as a factor directly impacting tenure. “The

politicization of public education has scared a lot of people out of the business. I just don't want to put up with the politics of this. I mean the community politics of it."

AP6 reflected on some of the state and national educational reforms and stated that many are "unrealistic" and "regrettably" create a culture where issues are not addressed with the precision of a "surgeon" but instead the "meat axe" of a butcher. He stated the belief, "We have a lot of expertise walking out the door. As opposed to implementing these reforms a little more responsibly. Some were implemented without any knowledge if this was really going to work."

AP2 stated a "national strategy" exists to prove the "failure" of public education. The governmental agencies continue to "throw" challenges at superintendents until they are "inundated" with many requirements that they are bound to "fail."

AP2 discussed the "high pressure" that contributes to the turnover of superintendents inside of the profession. "It is high demand, so you have to manage your time so you can renew yourself or you have to go someplace else to renew yourself." He asserted that the position has changed so much that he reflects on his own successful experience in the superintendency and wonders if he "would last" in today's politicized culture. AP4 also referred to the stress felt during his own personal experience in the leadership position. He left the active superintendency after bouts with health related issues. AP4 continued to state,

There is a theory out there regarding stress . . . scientific theory that a person's weak point is where stress tends to concentrate. I just can't help but wonder if that ongoing issue had some significant issue to my ending up in that situation.

AP5 stated it is very easy to become "married" to the job and if superintendents are not careful, the "pace" can impact the personal life. He went on to say that if most past or current superintendents were "honest" about their leadership roles and work, they will admit the position

takes a large “toll.” He admitted that there are some “exceptions” to that statement, and some superintendents exist who “relish the ring so to speak and they thrive on conflict.” The “superintendency” is a more difficult job than it was 10 years ago, and it is “impossible for anybody to understand the superintendent’s job responsibilities until they are superintendent.” AP3 asserted many of the veteran superintendents are longing to return “to the old days.” He continued to state many of the superintendents today realize they will have “less autonomy” and that is “reality.”

AP2 spoke about the new challenges that superintendents face with “social media.” He said it was a new way to go “straight to the top” without time to think or properly react to a situation at hand. AP1, AP2, AP3 and AP6 all referred to “building projects” and the new political requirements required for local funding of projects as a new strain on the school leadership. AP1 also believed that “school finance scared a lot of people out of this business.” AP5 stated,

The evaluation model makes it more difficult. The declining fiscal status of school corporations makes it difficult. Are you going to need to consolidate or not? The whole notion of what is open enrollment makes it difficult. How heavily are you going to recruit, and now you can no longer set up qualification for those who recruit.

AP6 stated that the new issues facing a specific school district in the midst of a current search for a superintendent included “declining enrollment, declining test scores, and a nine-member board all with political constituents of their own. It will be a real challenge” to find a quality superintendent wishing to lead this specific system. He also pointed out that a large number of the factors determining superintendent tenure are “not necessarily within your control” as the superintendent, but that is one of the things that “makes the job” of school superintendent “very

challenging, very exciting; it is never boring.”

Dysfunction of school boards. All of the participating search agents discussed in length the complexity that AP1 called “dysfunction of school boards” and the impact on superintendent tenure. “They do not have the slightest idea of what they are doing or why they are doing it. They do not have any sense of how their behavior impacts the organization.” AP2 asserted that the “vast majority of boards really want to do a good job,” yet there are many that are just “totally uninformed” and do not understand or know “what the hell was going on” inside of the school system. He went on to relate a story of a specific school district where the board “did not know financially what was going on, so they were just making up stuff” in order to look competent to their community. He stated that as a search agent, one can quickly identify a “board” who has a “bad reputation” with consistent turnover of superintendents without even knowing the past history. “I am convinced that the board and the superintendent did not trust each other.” AP4 believed, “The worst is when a school board is not honest with a” superintendent. He stated that a superintendent has to be “authentic.” Likewise, “the board has to present who they are authentically.” If either side is not upfront and starts “lying . . . it is not going to go well.” AP6 stated,

Many times those successful school systems, you see stability in the board, and in turn you see stability in the leadership. One of the keys that have certainly be proven is that constant turnover does not usually breed a good situation for a school district.

He went on to further discuss the qualifications required to become a school board member.

It is the one position that is so key to a school corporation, and the only requirement is you have to be warm and 18. There is no requirement for any training. . . . Absolutely nothing other than being old enough and alive to serve on a school board.

AP6 believes that eventually federal, state, and local communities will start “looking at that group as well” alongside the requirements and standards currently being implemented on teachers and administrators. At this point though, “no one has been willing to look at school boards.”

AP6 continued to say he can recognize a school board that “understand their role” after only a couple minutes of “chatting with the board.” Contrary to negative school boards, he stated strong school boards understand how to “ask good questions” and portray a willingness to “learn and listen.” They understand their overall “role is to help the new superintendent to be successful.” He asserted that strong superintendent and school board relations possess “trust” and the ability to “seek multiple opinions.” He also stated a school board and superintendent need to “understand” each other on a personal level. You need to “laugh together, talk about things and get to know each other as people.” AP2 stated a “good board” asks “tough questions” and a superintendent needs to be “thoroughly prepared for meetings” to instill a strong working relationship with the board. That way “If there is a rift or disagreement, it is handled in the background and not the front” for the community to see. He asserted a role of the superintendent is “to help the board look smart in the way they carry out their job.”

AP3 discussed an example of a school board that was recognized as highly effective throughout a superintendent search process. From the very first moment, they “listened” and “asked great questions.” Although the previous superintendent was not the best fit, they portrayed “total support of the superintendent” and were committed to ensure he was successful. He continued to state how this school district was committed to keeping “the vision,” and they understood this started with “supporting the superintendent.”

AP4 discussed how school boards need to understand organizational structure of the

school that is “above the line and below the line.” He continued to say, “Above the line is policy. Below the policy is administration. The board should not get here,” as he said while pointing to the word administration. He asserted that almost “without fail” boards will “get involved” in the micromanagement of a school system. He stated that this is a problem because “theoretically, the board has one employee, the superintendent. If things are not going right, they deal with the superintendent.” Realistically, many boards do not adhere to this guideline, and thus, they “get into all the other stuff.” AP5 concluded many of the same assumptions while also including that the superintendent walks a fine line in guiding the school board. Too often the superintendent becomes the “lightning rod,” and tension leads to a shorter tenure as superintendent. He believed most school board members want to accomplish good, but “poor” leaders exist who acquire or assume the role as a board member. AP2 shared a story that coincided with the superintendent becoming the “lightning rod” of the school board due to micromanagement of the “administrative” side of the district. “The board got cross-ways . . . The community of [the district] supported him. The board went ahead and voted him out. He went down the road to [another district]. They saw a good candidate and hopped on the chance.” AP3 and AP1 also described an example of a district that did not fully understand the magnitude of their decisions. The district is currently going through “a real tough situation” because the previous “superintendent they hired was here four months” before being fired. AP1 stated,

Number one, they did a search on their own. Number two, they did not know what the hell they were doing. Number three, they hired their third candidate because they screwed up on the first two who are both now superintendents and doing a good job.

AP6 stated that “boardsmanship” and ethical practices of board members impacts superintendent tenure average. He believed that this is especially evident in the process of

contractual negotiations with the incoming superintendent. The superintendent's contract can be a hot political topic in a community because, "Most boards realize that if they are not in financial trouble, they are headed that way." He recalled instances where a "dysfunctional board . . . did not live up to what they had promised a candidate during the interview process . . . when it came time to finalize the contract." He went on to state,

This is a business contractual agreement. You never get a chance to do it right other than the first time. If it gets messed up the first time, you hardly ever get a chance to fix it in subsequent contracts.

As a search agent, he urges districts during the superintendent search to stay away from this ethics question by going into the process knowing "what your total dollar commitment is the superintendent's package. . . . Know what your top dollar is for that package because that is what it is going to cost the corporation." AP2 stated, "Some boards, they low ball salaries and say they will make it up to you" at a later time or in a future contract. The reality is that "politically, then cannot give you more than what they are giving the teachers or other people. It is just not going to work." This friction can cause hard feelings between a board and superintendents. Contracts and money can become the reason for superintendents to leave for another school system.

Needing a change. AP2 discussed when it was time for a superintendent to leave because it was just simply time for a change in the district and also a personal time of change for the superintendent. He asserted that a superintendent enters the superintendency with full credibility and slowly loses political capital throughout the tenure in the position.

The superintendent walks into a superintendency with a full bucket of water. Every time you make a decision, take a cup of water and throw it over your shoulders and the time to

leave is just before the bucket is empty. For me, it is when you know you have played a lot of chips you needed to play to get things done. There are not many chips left to play. You are just tired. You are just exhausted in the job.

He also stated advice on superintendents wishing to stay in a district for an extended amount of time for personal reasons over professional responsibilities.

I never set my heart on the thing that I was going to work there the rest of my life.

Because the minute you make that decision, you start making decisions that are not in the best interest of kids. You start making decisions in the best interest of you.

AP1 referred to a specific superintendent who was loved and respected in his district, yet something was missing. He had become too “comfortable” with himself and needed to find a new “challenge.” “He recognized that he was on automatic pilot, and he recognized it was time for another challenge, and so he took it.” AP5 cautioned too much change can take a personal and professional toll on the superintendent “because when you move you are creating a new network” of colleagues, employees and community members. He continued to say, “I think it still takes energy to build trusting, sincere relationships . . . those that move frequently, ultimately had less energy to serve and build and network because they were constantly doing it over and over again.” He theorized that people exist who see themselves as “change agents” and are willing to “pick up stakes and leave” successfully, but they are few and far between. These are individuals “who are willing to roll up their sleeves and identify the real problems and focus on the solutions.” AP6 stated, “Depending upon the needs of the district, it will sometimes take more than one superintendent to help bring a district to where it wants to be.” He went on the question if a school district can see sustainable results and “impact” without consistent leadership being in place for at least “five years.” “For that district to excel and continue to

excel, you would hope that it is a five plus. Yes, I think that if you study successful district, longevity in the superintendency is usually one of the key pieces.”

AP1 noted a generational change in superintendents considering the desire to move districts. He stated that it is now more about “family” and if the “majority of the school boards” are “happy” with the results and superintendent’s performance. He questioned why a superintendent would “go down the road” to another school district to solve “their problems” for simply a larger amount of money.

The generation today does not see size of district nearly as important as they used to. My generation, three years and out was kind of standard. This generation now asks better questions. Am I happy; is my family happy; is the board responsive?”

Multiple superintendent search agents discussed the generational differences between the candidates currently being placed into the school superintendency and those of prior generations. AP1 stated that he sees school superintendent tenure as a “cultural” within generations, not a “systematic” issue. He continued to state that his “generation was schooled on bigger is better, move on to move up, and size of a district is all about status, honor, prestige.” He stated the philosophy of his generation was “driven” by the goals of reaching each “rung” in the ladder of success. He continued to say the philosophy of his generation was now being replaced by a generation of instructional leaders more focused on “curriculum, instruction and assessment.” He stated that superintendents from the past generation “are just hanging on. The smart ones are like that and surround themselves with people who do it for them. The younger superintendents have now come up understanding” the multiple skills sets required to be a manager and instructional leaders of schools. He stated that many of the previous generation are being pushed into “retirement” due to many of the changes in state retirement programs. He continued to state

“retirement” from a school district or a specific state location does not mean they are retiring from the educational profession. He stated, “Over 50% of superintendents are retired and are working in retirement. They are double dipping the retirement systems and coming out smelling like a rose.”

AP3 also stated “the age of superintendents” keeps rising, and with state “retirement systems” changing, a “domino effect” is starting to take shape. AP6 stated that the “financial” piece of state retirement plans play a large role in superintendents leaving a district to practice their trade in “other states.” He cited specific examples of superintendents reaching the “age of 55” then retiring to go to another state “for 10 years and retire there at 65.” This provides a superintendent the opportunity to be vested in multiple state retirement plans and thus acquire a large financial gain. He continued to state the surrounding states each offer unique benefits once vested in the system and the financial gains and possibilities have encouraged numerous superintendents to cross state lines for these financial rewards.

Stepping stone districts. AP2 stated “the rural jobs, especially the smaller districts are stepping stone jobs. Someone is going to take the job in the twilight or beginning of their career.” He continued to state, “A lot of smaller districts understand that they are going to get a rookie” due to their geographic location and limited finances to pay top dollar for a superintendent. It is a continual game of “dominos” where “someone goes here and this one opens up.” AP3 stated many of school systems currently involved in a search due to the fact “even a beginner” superintendent is “looking to step up and take another job.” He continued to state, “We see a lot of people that have been a superintendent applying at a larger district because they want the experience in a bigger district and making more money.” AP5 described two current searches where both superintendents were “moving to larger school corporations.” He

continued to state “higher challenge” and bigger used to “mean more kids, bigger staff, and bigger budget.” In today’s educational climate, it can also mean “more help, greater resources, larger opportunities for professional development and success.”

AP6 stated that some smaller and rural districts understand they will always be “stepping stone” districts. They realize “that you find a good person and they only stay with you three, four years and they move up. There are some small districts that realize they will always be that type of a district.” AP3 explained “small districts with 1,000 or 1,500 kids” can be a difficult superintendency. The superintendent has to wear a large number of “hats” by assuming the roles of “budget manager, transportation manager and legal liaison” along with the role of instructional leader. Jokingly he stated that the “town drunk” would complete “the whole nine yards.” He went on to state an understanding of why a superintendent would wish to have a larger district.

When they move up and start seeing how nice it is to have an assistant superintendent, when you have a business manager. The desire to keep moving up the line, where you can be the superintendent to supervising your central office and overseeing the whole district rather than sitting down for hours at a time during the summer doing the budget.

AP1 stated larger “urban” school systems are also stepping stones in the context of continual turnover of national superintendents. In the larger urban districts,

There is a cadre of folks with their little suitcases full of tricks. They will go marking into the capital with the bag of tricks and 15-months later, they have pissed everyone off, and they take their bag and they go on to Detroit, Cleveland, Minnesota. They don’t mind getting bought out for a half-million and walking into the job for a quarter-million. They know another 18-months they will be bought out here, and then another half million

they will go over there.

Search agency impact on tenure. The question arose with all interviewed search agents if superintendent search agencies increase or decrease the tenure of school superintendents. AP6 stated, “There are some headhunter groups that are getting paid to find warm bodies. If they have a license or have prior experience,” some agencies will place them into a candidate pool. He continued to state that a school board needs to closely interview agencies to ensure they understands the “needed skill sets,” “culture” and “fabric of the community.” He strongly believed in the mission and values of the agency he is associated with as a search agent. “We try hard to find candidates who match the culture and skill sets the district needs.” AP2 stated that his agency and other reputable agencies will not “place” superintendents whom were recently placed by the agency within the past “two years” due to the belief “there ought to be a commitment” by both the superintendent and school board “to make it work.”

AP5 stated the belief search agencies are “not a variable” in superintendent tenure. AP1 concurred by stating he did not believe search agencies impact superintendent tenure. Instead he asserted, “The chemistry of the entire board and the superintendent is going to determine how long you are going to last in the position” and not if someone contacts a superintendent about an opening. AP4 “saw some truth” in the theory of search agents can negatively impact superintendent tenure. “I am sure that part of the human condition is wanting to advance yourself,” and thus generous and flattering offers from search agencies can encourage a superintendent to consider leaving a current position. AP3 also believed some search agencies “are going to recruit people. They pull people out. When it look like it is a little more prestigious and money is a lot better.” He continued to state, “My guess would be the headhunting groups shorten tenure of superintendencies.” He also warned of the dangers of

headhunting groups, especially in the urban areas “don’t understand the local politics. . . . I see those searches not being successful and the superintendent leaves after a very short period of time.”

Academic Preparation for School Superintendency

Throughout the interviews with superintendent search agents, the theme of academic preparation to produce quality and quantity candidates arose and became intertwined throughout the themes. There were also distinct viewpoints on the current pipeline leading to the superintendency. Recent local, state and federal changes were also noted in changing the landscape of the profession. Sub-themes included college and university graduate courses to prepare superintendents, non-traditional business integration of school superintendents, a pipeline to the superintendency, quality and quantity of superintendents in the applicant pools and mentorship.

College and university graduate courses to prepare superintendents. AP6 stated colleges and universities do “a good job” preparing future superintendents, but many areas exist where “they could do a whole lot better.” He realized that in no way a superintendent can be prepared “for every scenario, but you can at least equip them with the process so they can at least avoid” the problems and then know where to get the “help.” He saw a major area of concern in preparing future superintendents for the challenges faced in handling a “school board.” “Your survival as a superintendents is how you work with your board. I have yet to find in a graduate preparation program that has to deal with boardsmanship.” He continued to say, “Tongue in cheek, I think we should have a class called the care and feeding of board members.” AP5 shared there are “situations where coursework is more important than others in the application and value it brings to the administrative role.” During his own role as a superintendent, he found the skills taught in preparation related to “reflection” and “building relationships” as important to

learn and understand. He believes that preparation needs to be a “balance of training and experience” but to fully understand it will take “on the job training” in the role of superintendent. AP2 recognized a dire need in the superintendency to better understand the concept of “coaching people by asking questions” and “bargaining” with educational stakeholders. “You develop lot of relationships and you work with lots of different groups. Everything is bargained . . . and negotiated in the end.” AP1 stated the superintendency is all about “interpersonal skills” that cannot be taught in the classroom. He believed that preparation needed to be a combination of “theory and practice” to best prepare the next generation of superintendents.

AP6 also expressed concerns with relevance and the preparation programs staying current with the “pressing issues” of the superintendency. He asserted “higher education” can be “archaic and slow to make decision” in restructuring of programs and course offerings. Jokingly he stated,

We just say that if we had make decisions in our districts the way they run higher education, they would not have even heated up the tar. They would have just thrown it at us and run us out of town.

He continued to assert that “hot button issues” exist inside of the superintendency that are not being discussed enough within the preparation classes such as “legal issues, finance” and courses directed towards “special education.” He also expressed deep concern for the large number of classes that have transitioned to “online” format. Although he sees these are more “cost effective” and convenient for the student, he questioned if it is truly preparing the next generation of school administrators. In preparing students to become superintendents “individuals have to communicate with people on a day-to-day basis. It is a people business. You cannot quite create that sense and that interaction in an online setting that you can in a

classroom.”

Non-traditional business integration of school superintendents. A large issue of concern addressed by all participants is the change in numerous states to allow the appointment of superintendents without educational preparation, experience, or licensure. AP1 asserted, “It stinks, and that is all I can say about the idea.” AP6 stated, “You can be a superintendent now without a licensure if the board is willing to apply to the state for a license for you. We have yet to work with a board that did not want a licensed superintendent.” He predicts in the near future there will be “a situation where somebody on the board has a brother-in-law or cousin twice removed” they wish to appoint far outside of the traditional preparation pipeline. He questioned if the non-traditional superintendents from the business community would have the understanding to make “proper recommendations” about educationally related matters. He asserted, “A for-profit background is different than a service oriented business” of education. “In a profit driven organization there are winners and losers. You make a profit, or you don’t make a profit. In education we would like to make everybody a winner if we could. There are no throw-away.”

AP3 traced the history of the non-traditional superintendent model to President Ronald Reagan’s educational philosophies and the belief schools needed to look for superintendents from the leadership in the “business, religious, and military fields.” Although he believes there are “characteristics of leadership that are universal,” he also believes this is not a good idea.” “Bottom line, I don’t think you can transplant a business leader into education anymore than you could transplant me into running General Motors or some other business organization.”

AP2 stated the belief appointing a non-traditional candidate to the superintendency “is not real bright.” He then asked the rhetorical question, “It would not be real bright to put me in

charge of a hospital. I do not understand all the inner workings of a hospital.” The only place he could see a non-traditional superintendent work is in an “urban district” where the superintendent can “surround themselves with people who understood the field very well.” Although he stated, success would be a “case-by-case” experiment, he worries non-education based superintendents “are not going through the chairs” and without the background it will be very “difficult” to succeed. On the contrary, AP5 saw where the practice could be successful in a “complex” system. AP4 recollected a successful non-traditional placement of success “in Seattle where a retired military general was successful as the superintendent of schools.” His warning was success would only happen in districts with multiple layers between the superintendent and the instruction of students. In those districts the superintendent can be “the thinker, visionary, and general or however you want to approach leadership. You have a lot of support people who can translate what happens in the classroom to you.” In a smaller district, a non-traditional superintendent would be “pretty dicey” and most likely not accepted.

Pipeline to the superintendency. AP5 explained traditionally the pipeline to the school superintendency was educator, assistant principal, principal, central office, and then the superintendent of the school district. He asserted a superintendent does “not have to be in your third or fourth decade to understand” the role of superintendent, a broad range of experiences along the way” is evident in successful superintendents. He continued by stating, “I strongly believe that in order to become a superintendent of schools . . . that you have needed to have stood on every rung of the ladder to the top.” He explained further that when an individual is “not close to the position” or has an “understanding of demands” associated with the position, an under-estimation of the magnitude associated with the role occurs. Many without that understanding have been appointed to the position and have “found this does not fit very well.”

He went on to explain this role “does not fit for everybody.” Many times a superintendent finds out, “I am not comfortable being the person who recommends very difficult decisions to a board of school trustees,” and then it is even more difficult “getting consensus from that board to support” the recommendation.

AP5 believes there is a large difference between a principal and central office administrator.

They were not comparable roles. I could not go home at the end of the day and say this compared to this or pros or cons. The demands were different; the roles were different, aside from the fact they were both in education.

AP5 assesses that the “vast majority of candidates” for the superintendency are now “coming out of the principalship.” That change in the pipeline is “unusual” from previous generations and lack the “seasoning” that comes with “breadth and depth of understanding.” He noted another unusual trend where more superintendent candidates are coming from the elementary and middle school principalship.

Biggest issue is you look for people, and all they have ever had is a building-level position and they have never really dealt with the district-wide responsibilities. I can guarantee it is a whole different issue running a building than running a district.

He continued to state the pipeline really “depends upon the district” and their specific needs and desires. AP4 believes district size and “complexities” impact the pipeline to leadership positions.

For a job at a fairly large district, with complexities, you look for prior experience at the central office first and foremost. There are people who are able to make the jump from the principalship to the superintendency, but that rarely happens in a larger school

district. You see it in very small districts. A person who is coming from the principalship does not have the experience of working with a school board, or seeing board dynamics.

AP2 stated the reasons of pay and security inside of the position as a breakdown of the traditional pipeline of preparation. “If you work in a bigger school district, you will take a pay cut from being a principal to a superintendent. You will take a lot more grief for a lot less pay.” He stated the belief that it is a shame that superintendents are no longer “going through all the chairs” and thus lack the school district perspective needed to be successful.

Quantity and quality of candidates in the applicant pools. AP4 stated, “The last few years I was involved” in the search process, “we saw the pools getting smaller. I doubt that this has changed much because of the increasing complexities of the job.” He continued to state, “I just don’t think we are going to see a glut of candidates” anytime in the near future. AP2 stated the quantity of candidates in the pool also “depends on the history of the school board” and many school districts exist that the reputation exists “Nobody wants to work for them” even though “there are buku [*sic*] people licensed to be superintendent.” He continued to state that location of the job opening is a factor in the quantity of candidates applying for an open position. He believed that if an opening for a superintendency is in close proximity to an urban setting, “there are lots of applicants.” But if the opening is located in a rural setting “there will not be a hell of a lot of applicants. It just depends on where you are at.”

AP6 reiterated the district “reputation” is key to generating a large pool of applicants. “Is it a growing district or one that has a lot of financial problems?” He continued to provide the rhetorical question of “major challenges” and some districts and boards create a toxic environment “that the good Lord could not work for.” He saw a strong pool today having around

“20” applicants, but this is drastically down from the traditional “30” applicants common in pools just a generation ago. Simply “the pools are smaller.” AP4 reflected on the “cases” where he did not feel good with the pool of candidates and possible recommendations and stated, “It was not a good feeling. The mistakes were in my opinion due more to the quality of the pool than they were” the agents not “doing our job.” He continued to say that times existed where it was known the candidate was not the “best.”

AP5 expressed the fact that a pool only really needs “one person in the pool,” and some of the “smaller” school districts are obtaining very small, yet qualified pools. He continued to reflect on times when “we walked away thinking, I wish the choice were broader and deeper, and it was not.” He also asserted that in a large pool, “Not everybody is qualified for the job.” He stated that “crisis” is a “strong word” yet he holds “many concerns.” Success or failure of the pool is “ultimately determined by success or lack of success of the next generation,” and it is very difficult to tell immediately how the tenure will unfold. He continued to assert lack of quality, “not quality people” comes from “an experience perspective.” Too often, individuals are “thrust into a role they simply don’t have the context or demands” to be successful within. AP6 refereed the “quantity” of the pool, but has some great questions about the “quality” of candidates inside of the pool by stating,

We could get 20 applicants in some cases, depending on the district and desirability of that district you could go upwards from there. In most of those cases, 2/3 at least, most likely ¾ of those candidates you would week them out quickly. There are few quality candidates in the pool.

AP1 asserted, “tire kickers” and “professional applicators” are always going to exist in the pools, and it is the job of search agents to help identify these individuals who are not

“qualified” for the superintendency. The idea of “quality” not being in the current pool of candidates is “bull-shit” even though it is heard “all the time.” He continued to state, “You are going to have quality people that are ready” in the pools. AP3 stated the quality of applicants in the pools are “really healthy” right now. He continued to state, “The quality has never been higher” due to the fact the educational profession is “losing the good old boys who were managers. The new superintendents are coming in as strong instructional leaders.” AP6 provided an example of an applicant pool from a district with an “excellent board” and “strong potential” for growth. The pool was full of “sitting superintendents” and “assistant superintendents.” If the candidate did not have “central office experience” they “did not have a shot at” an interview. This school district had an “outstanding pool” due to a reputation of treating the superintendent right. “They will have a hard time picking somebody” due to the vast quality of the pool. “That is a good problem to have.”

Mentorship. AP2 stated, superintendents who “try to tackle it all by yourself” quickly find the philosophy “hazardous” to their “health and career.” He continued to state mentorships for the superintendency would be helpful in many situations to provide the needed comradely although he was not positive mentorship alone would increase tenure in the position. AP4 stated, “There are all kinds of mentors out there” and while some superintendent might not be the best fit to mentor, “certainly” superintendents exist that see mentorship as a way to “teach” the next generation of school leaders. He asserted that the connection between the mentor and mentee comes down to a strong “relationship” and desire to continually learn from each other.

AP1 believed mentorship should be “on the job” and not prior to the experience in the seat as superintendent. He theorized mentorship has waned between superintendents due to superintendent being “less assured” and thus not leaving the “home” district to collaborate with

others in the field. There is also a question of “ego” getting in the way. He recalled a recent meeting with a fellow superintendent, saying, “I did not trust him” and relayed that it felt like a competition had been created by a competitive ego. “I think there is a lot of that out there. I am not going to tell you my secrets because they are working.” AP5 expressed concern with some forms of mentorship. He believed that “wonderful superintendents” can be “horrible mentors” to others. He worries competition can cloud a mentorship but believed this can be corrected by finding common ground with instructional practices to bring superintendents and districts together.

AP3 remembered a movement within specific regions to create an official “mentorship” program for superintendents due to the “lonely” feeling the job can create. Although an official practice never took shape, he asserted “I don’t think there is a new superintendent out there that has not been mentored by other superintendents in the field.” AP6 stated that a non-formal mentorship between superintendents does exist. As a superintendent, he would “call” new superintendents in the region and “Take them to lunch and get to know them. Let them know, here I am.” He asserted a mentorship could “take away the quote loneliness.” Issues exist that can only be understood by “other superintendents.” “I think it is good to have more than one mentor in a region. . . . I would think it would have a very positive effect on increasing the success rate of superintendents.”

Positive and Negative Leadership Traits Impacting Superintendent Tenure

All interviewed superintendent search agents shared the first step inside of the search process was working with the board to describe the leadership strengths they wished for and the weaknesses they wished to avoid in the next superintendent. The theme of positive and negative leadership traits impacting superintendent tenure quickly became evident during the interview

process. Sub-themes included, non-negotiable, communication, trust, community and ego.

Integrity and communication. All agents stated honesty and integrity are considered a non-negotiable. AP2 stated, “Don’t tell me you want somebody honest, because if they are not honest, we are not going to recommend them to you anyway. We will assume that honest is already on the table.” AP4 stated, “If a person has integrity, nothing else matters. If he does not have integrity, nothing else matters.” AP5 asserted only candidates “with integrity” would be recommended by search agents for an interview with the school board. He continued to state that success in the superintendency “starts” as an “ethical” person with high “integrity,” but then the superintendency also requires a “willingness to put in the time it takes to be successful.” He continued by stating superintendents do not have to be “workaholics,” but a “strong work ethic” is required due to the job not being a “traditional” workday. Simply a superintendent has “to be willing to put the time in to be an effective leader.” He also believed it is the role of the superintendent wishing to have a long tenure to “do a good job, do a good job, do a good job, and then tell people about it.”

All interviewed superintendent search agents mentioned the need of strong communication skills as a must in both being hired and obtaining longevity in the leadership position of school superintendent. AP1 stressed “communication, communication, and communication” are the keys to a successful superintendency. He saw this a “frequent telephone conversation” and “frequent one-on-one conversations” with board members and especially a strong relationship with “the board president.” AP2 questioned how a superintendent could expect to succeed without the proper communication and “people skills.” “How are you in the people business if your people skills are not good?” He continued to state the longstanding superintendents know how to “listen. By “listening” people feel “comfortable when you talk to

them.” AP1 stated, “Those that are the most successful have good interpersonal skills. I mean exceptional interpersonal skills.” AP3 believes a superintendent needs to “listen twice as much as they talk.” He humorously quipped this is the reason why you have “two ears and one mouth.” He continued to assert quality leaders “can’t communicate until you have listened to what everyone has to say. The second part is that you have to listen to all sides.” When you “listen to what people say. Sometimes you don’t have to say anything and you have the greatest communication available.” AP6 stated, “As a superintendent you have to be able to communicate verbally and in a written form that is clear and concise.” He continued to state,

The skilled leader is someone that when you walk away, you feel like they listened. You felt like they tried to understand from your perspective. You felt like they gave it a fair hearing and looked at it from all angles. That takes a unique individual to have that skill set. You need to be a good listener.

AP6 pondered and then provided an example of a current superintendent he believes to identify strong communication skills. He stated the superintendent “gets out of the office” and is regularly “in the buildings” throughout “the district.” He continued to state, “If you spend a little time with her and you are not pumped, there is something wrong with you.” The personality traits of being “positive and upbeat” along with a “very pro-kid demeanor” are evident in her “enthusiasm.” He continued by describing the superintendent as a “listener” and a “humble” leader that always uses the word “we” when talking about achievements. AP6 believed the experience within the district before assuming the role as superintendent cultivated the leadership style of this superintendent.

AP4 did not believe a candidate with weak communication skills should even be considered for the superintendency. “You are the head leader, head learner, the leader of the

district. If you cannot write your way out of a paper bag, it is not going to be good.” Inside of the communication skills, AP1 believes the strong leadership trait of communication includes the ability to “read the politics,” yet “know enough not to play” politics. He continued to state that the understanding of the whole picture creates a “trust” in the educational and school community. He related ways in which a superintendent could “float some trial balloons” through communication and thus measures the opinion from the stakeholder community. “I am sure you cannot communicate too much,” and “trust” will be the biggest reward.

AP1 discussed the need to have a strong “personal and professional” relationship with the school board and particularly the “board president.” “I know them personally, so I can converse with them about their personal life, family and hobbies. I can be in a friendly conversation with them about non-school matters.” He continued to say the approach as a superintendent should be “to give them all the information I can give them.” This belief will move a school board and superintendent away from “a blame game” into a collaborative and communicative environment. He did caution that the relationship cannot “look like a friendship” because this would cause those outside of the inner circle to start questioning motives and ethics.

Trust. AP5 described trust as a leadership trait vital to the “working dynamics of the school corporation from top to bottom.” He continued by stating trust is the basis of an “effective administrative governance relationship” and a way to “foster a strong professional relationship with your peers, your colleagues and your school board.” He continued to state “stability of governance” provides the community trust in the schools. AP4 asserted, trust from the community is critical to a longstanding tenure. He believes

it is up to the superintendent to win the community. It is part of your job to get out there and communicate to the community what you are about. What kind of person you are.

What your motivations are. What your values are.

AP3 stated trust was a leadership trait he witnessed in all long “tenured” superintendents. He reflected on his personal experience with trust in moving into the role of superintendent by stating,

I was trusted enough that teachers and the board wanted me to move up in the organization . . . I think that is what you see with the long tenured people. There is a lot of trust . . . The longer you are there, the easier it is for you to stay.

He continued to state the way a superintendent addresses difficult conversation can make or break a long-term “relationship” with an employee or stakeholder. “There is no such thing as a win-lose situation. It has to be win-win for both sides.” If you lose your cool as a superintendent, you will “never regain respect” from that individual. Instead a superintendent always needs to address difficult conversations through using the model of forming conversations around “caring, critique and consequences.”

AP2 shared an example of a superintendent who gained trust by growing up in the system.

He was a middle school principal there for a long time before becoming superintendent. He had roots in the community. His kids grew up there. He was well connected with the different families. He was well connected with the powerful families. . . . People trusted him. . . . For that district, he was just the right package.

AP1 also shared an example of a successful hometown superintendent’s leadership traits.

He looks like a leader. Carries himself like a leader. He walks into a room, you know he is a leader. He just has that command presence about him. He is honest as the day is long. He is totally sincere in what he does. He has an eye for talent. He is smart enough to know what he does not know. He schmoozes the board with tremendous amount of skill. They eat right out of his hand. He is just that way. He balances his lack of K-12

by surrounding himself with good people. . . . He is an exquisite family man and does not blush to tell you that.

He continued to emphasize the importance of valuing of their personal family as a leadership trait. “I have castigated many, many, superintendents and potential superintendents and told them till you have some regard for your family, I am not interested” in helping place you in a superintendency.” A school system expects the superintendent is a visible and active part of the community.

Community. AP3 stated the superintendent has to be “active” and “involved” as the “spokesperson for the district and lead the district in that manner as the community goes.” AP2 stated the superintendent must have a “clear picture of the relationship” expected by the board and the community. He continued by stating “20-25 years ago, we were autocratic” and did not need community approval for decisions. Today, a superintendent must garner “community support” and be part of the community by shopping and being involved in the community. “These people pay your salary, and they pay you well.” AP4 also asserted the firm belief “without qualms” a superintendent should be a “taxpayer . . . involved in the community” otherwise people are going to begin wondering if “this guy does not care about me.” AP1 also believed an effective superintendent is a resident of the community, yet “Would I insist on it? No, not in the 21st century” due to some of the family dynamics of dual income working spouses.” AP6 stated a successful superintendent needed to have the ability to “lead” and “work” with a “diverse group of people.” He also stated, “You are not only working with just your parents, you are working with the business community, the non-parent community.” “If I don’t pay taxes, shop there, attend and get involved in the community that I am supposed to be leading,” how will I be able to gain the support of “taxpayers and constituents.” AP5 stated the

superintendent must be a “visible” part of the community. He believes “modeling is a critically powerful leadership trait” to exemplify in front of the community stakeholders.

AP4 believed successful superintendents understand the position is truly “more than lip service.” The leadership position is really “all about kids.” He continued to provide an example of an effective long-standing superintendent by stating, “I have never seen him make a decision that is not in the best interest of kids. Never.” He believes this is “pretty rare” and is “easier said than done.” AP6 asserted that effective leaders tend to exhibit the traits of “servant leadership” or “transformational leadership.” Although he believed both leadership styles are critical, an analogy was provided by stating the superintendent must have multiple tools to handle all situations.

When a carpenter or plumber that comes to the job, they do not bring just one screwdriver or one hammer or one wrench. They bring a combination of wrenches. As a superintendent you will have to bring to the job in your toolbox some different Leadership styles to match the correct situation. For longevity in the superintendency, he asserted “situational” and “collaborative” leadership is crucial. He continued to state school boards want to appoint “someone who can lead or has proven they are a leader” to controls the “reins of a school system.”

To the contrary, each of the interviewed search agents identified traits that have negatively impacted success and longevity of superintendent tenure. AP4 referred to these traits as the “demons” that impact productivity of a school corporation. He continued to state an example of a superintendent who saw himself as “anointed, instead of appointed.” Neither the search agents of the school board understood the “ego” involved until it was too late. AP5 provided an example of a candidate with an “overinflated” resume of “skills and traits.” Quickly

after appointment, “everything went awry,” and the “lack of credibility prompted distrust in the people that worked closely with that individual.” He continued to state the lack of “ethics catches” up with misguided superintendents and negatively impacts tenure. AP6 regretted the fact that a few negative individuals in the profession “paint” the entire profession with the brush in an unethical manner.

Ego. AP1 described with anguish a negative example of a superintendent he considered to be a “miserable failure” due to an ego gone amiss. This superintendent was “smart as hell” but unfortunately saw himself as “invincible.” He continued to state that it “quickly” became “evident” that this superintendent did not understand “the pace of the community” or how to manage his “personal finances.” He tried to “mix what he was doing in the office with” his “personal finances” and fast lifestyle.

AP3 asserted superintendents needed to have a “balance” of “ego” and “self-doubt.” He continued to state superintendents’ need to have both to provide vision and perspective.

Deep down in my heart . . . I will do better than anyone else. . . . The other side of me is just the opposite of that. The other side is that I have the doubt that I can really do it. The other side is on the verge of going, am I really good enough to do that.

He continued to assert, if you have “the ego with self-doubt you are always asking, what could I do to be better next time?” Too many times the superintendent is quick to take credit and blame others. “In my mind a superintendent should never claim success. A good superintendent makes sure success is always put on the people that are working to” move the mission and vision of the district forward. The superintendent needs to be confident enough “to take the blame if things went wrong.”

AP6 stated the lack of “transparency” and “genuineness” has been the downfall of many

superintendents. AP2 stated communication includes an openness and transparency in sharing “results whether they are good, bad or indifferent.” He also referred to the “mushroom theory” where many superintendents have held the belief of keeping the board and community in the dark and feeding them crap as a method of manipulation that has never been appropriate in the educational field. AP1 also shared a philosophy of keeping “the board fighting with each other” instead of moving towards “a vision” as a negative form of leadership. AP3 understood the lack of “collaboration” could be a downfall in the position. AP1 stated, “I don’t think they know how to do it single handedly . . . that is a false way to present myself. You can say, “Here is where we are at and this is how we need to get there.”

AP2 stated, “This is not a job” for people who “have to be liked.” “There are people that hate you, and they do not even know who you are.” He continued to say, learning how to “say ‘No’” can be one of the most difficult obstacles for a superintendent to overcome.” AP4 compared the superintendency to a “football quarterback.”

When a football game is in progress, you tackle the guy with the ball. It is not because they don’t like you. It is because they want the ball. As the superintendent, you have the ball. People are going to come after you. . . . You try to keep that in perspective.

AP2 stated that the negative traits become the superintendencies that lower “tenure.” These are the tenures that last only “about a year” or less.

Contextual Factors Impacting Superintendent Tenure

All interviewed superintendent search agents asserted there was not a one-size fits all leadership style or method leading to superintendent success or longevity of tenure. Instead the leadership style or method was based on the geographic location, culture, situation and contextual factors of the district. The theme of contextual factors impacting superintendent

created a multiple method approach to success among those interviewed. Sub-themes included the correct fit between a superintendent and a school board, rural verses urban and suburban fit for superintendents, diversity of race and gender as a factor in superintendent tenure, impact of career-bound versus place-bound superintendents on tenure, and when is it time for a superintendent to end tenure?

The correct fit between a superintendent and a school board. Each of the interviewed search agents saw his or her role in some fashion is a service that assists candidates and school boards find the correct match. AP1 summed his beliefs in the statement, “I don’t care how long you are there, you care how well you are doing” and that will be different with each district. AP6 stated his role a superintendent search agent is to assist in finding a good match for that particular district from the candidates.” He continued to state, “I have always said that most communities usually have the school system they deserve.” AP5 sees the “fit” as a marriage between a school board and the superintendent candidate. “Hopefully your marriage would last more than four or five years. The reality is that you spend a lot of time together, and sometimes it is just not a good fit.” He continued to state, even though a “successful match” was procured at the state, “there are people with who you cannot work” with and “sometimes that goes both ways” thus ending the relationship. He also asserted the need for the superintendent to keep all board members on a equal level. He does not believe the board president should have a “higher prestige” as it can cause “competition” among the board. AP4 analogized the “fit” as a “dance” between the “superintendent with the school board, district and community.” He continued to state,

There is a fit that is a very important part of this thing. We try to, as best we could, match the candidates to the board so that we had someone who would be a fit for not only

the board, but the community. The community expectations, the community values. AP2 shared an example of a superintendent the board desired and hired, leaving the agents saying “how the hell did they decide that.” He stated, “It is all about chemistry. There is just sometimes, there is some kind of chemistry that strikes up between the board and a candidate.” This can happen for different reasons of “experience” level or simply a “comfort” level with the candidate. AP1 references “chemistry” as the appointed candidate “that can look all five to seven” of the school board members “in the eye.” He believed “that is the one” the school board “will hire.” He continued to state that “sometimes they reject” our recommendations “for the strangest of reasons, or at least what they tell us are the reason after” the search has ended. At that point he says “You got the best one, because you got the one you wanted.”

AP3 drew a distinction between the “correct fit” and a convenient fit. He shared the case of a recently released superintendent. “He was never really a good superintendent. He was never a good principal. He was a good business manager. Probably because they went through a couple superintendents and were looking for stability. He happened to be the person that was there because he was a community member.

Contrarily, AP1 shared an example of a multiple generation superintendent. “He went to school there; he went to war and came home, went to school, started teaching there, became a principal there, became the superintendent there, and retired as the superintendent there.” He continued to assert, “There is something about” local citizens that “does not trust outsiders.” If possible, they “want to bring somebody in and train them.” They then see themselves as a step ahead. AP3 mentioned that “politics” with the power groups are not going to change, but most communities would like to bring somebody in long-term.” He continued to state, “They want someone who will put their roots down there. Raise their family because it is their community.”

AP6 also asserts that most communities “want someone who wants to come and stay for a while.” They “hunger” for someone to have longevity and stability in the district. “Most boards know that the process of finding a new superintendent is an exhausting process.” He stated,

Most boards do not want to turn around and do that every two or three years if they do not have to. Most boards will say to us, can you find someone that will come and stay for a while.

AP4 stated the “correct fit” would not always be the correct fit in every circumstance or regional school system.

Rural verses urban and suburban fit for a superintendent. AP4 believed and stated “a really outstanding person” could come from a “metropolitan area” and move to a “rural area” and “not connect.” AP2 stated the “best fit” is different for each person. Smaller rural districts require a superintendent who “knows it all” due to the lack of support staff in the central office. AP1 shared an example of finding the “correct fit” in a specific geographic location. This superintendent is currently in a “small rural” district. This superintendent “was raised small rural. He understands small rural. . . . His wife is small rural and want to raise their kids small rural.” This superintendent feels so comfortable that he can be found on a “snow day . . . on a tractor plowing out the driveway” of the schools.

AP3 stated, to fully understand superintendent tenure, a broad understanding of school district demographics needs to be evaluated. He referred to a current state where over “200 or more of the districts are considered rural or suburban” school districts. AP6 stated, “the vast majority” of school districts in the Midwest region of the United States are considered “small and rural.” He continued to state the “average size” of a district is “between 1900 and 2000 students.” He also stated the concern that with “the privatization of public education and shifting

of resources, it is going to be extremely difficult for many small to medium sized district to survive. That means the leaders of those districts are going to struggle.” The result of those struggles include the possibility of not finding “the people with the right motives and qualities to lead” as the superintendent. In turn and due to the lack of district leadership, “a kid out in rural American does not have the same opportunity for an education as a kid” from a suburban school district. AP4 believes the large number of rural districts as a reason for short tenure average because they are many times considered in “preparation for a larger district.” He continued to state smaller districts have a difficult choice when selecting their superintendent. Is it better to hire a superintendent for “two or three years” or is “average” with a longer stability the desire of the school board. He continued to retell an occurrence that transpired in a small rural district where the board concluded “average is good enough for our kids. We do not need high flyers” as our superintendent. He stated this was “one of the most depressing days” experienced in the work as a superintendent search agent. AP5 believed that smaller districts can struggle greatly when “a community is just not demanding enough to really improve the livelihood of the kids being served” through district leadership. AP3 stated rural districts will many times attempt to “go off on their own” to run a search due to the fear of relinquishing of local control.

AP1 believes that a superintendent in a rural area needs to understand “the change of pace” and the “conservative nature” of rural school systems to obtain longevity as a superintendent. “You better know your pace of change, because it is going to be a little slower” than “invincible high rollers think it ought to be.” He also stated that educational politics “are alive and well everywhere,” but “it may be a different kind of politic” in the “rural” setting. “Out in the harvest fields, everyone is someone’s cousin.” AP6 also vocalized the fact that “rural districts . . . will certainly have politics, a little different type of politics,” yet also concluded

“there are less special interest groups in rural areas.”

AP6 stated urban settings can be more politically “challenging” due to the larger number of “special interest groups” with which the superintendent needs to work. “It is very difficult to keep all those folks happy because what they want to counter to what one of the other groups wants.” He continued to state many special interest groups are a direct result of “industry” and each brings an interest in education “for a variety of reasons. Taxes being one of them and also from the work force.” AP4 believed urban and metropolitan districts have larger issues of “diversity,” “poverty,” economic conditions,” and “school facility issues.” He also has seen cases where “the major and the school superintendent can be at odds going after the tax dollars. I think it is a tougher road to hoe” when measuring longevity of superintendent tenure.

Diversity of race and gender as a factor in superintendent tenure. AP6 stated that as a search agent, “I don’t care if you are Black, White, yellow or green. Bottom line is that you have the skill set” to serve as superintendent. He continued by stating, “There are a number of districts based on the culture of the district you would like to have a minority individual to be a candidate for that district.” He asserted minority candidates would “understand the culture and would probably have an easier time assimilating to the needs of the district.” AP3 stated due to the rural nature of the Midwestern region of the United States, many places still exist that are “prejudiced against” a candidate or superintendent of diversity because of “skin color.” He continued to state that he does not currently “know of any minority” superintendents in smaller districts. He did not believe the pools are growing in quantity with minority candidates as “we are still long for that” to take place.

All interviewed superintendent search agents agreed female superintendents are becoming more prevalent in school districts. AP6 believed more are entering the field and

“Hopefully we will get more.” He did see a challenge for younger women desiring the superintendency.

It is a challenge for a lady, especially if they are in their child-rearing or child-bearing years. It is a twenty-four/seven job. You really have to make a commitment to it. Most of the ladies we have seen: their kids are raised, or they are at a point they can do it. AP4 believed female superintendents are “stereotyped” and that “bias” can lead to a shorter tenure if trouble arises. He also asserted that certain boards “had no interest in hiring a female” as their superintendent. AP5 remembers distinctly working with boards where the “unspoken” will of the board was to only hire a male superintendent. AP3 also remembered searches where it was “pretty obvious, they were not going to hire a female.” The search agents would recommend a “female candidate,” but the board would refuse to move her “forward” in the process. “In some cases that previously had a female superintendent that did not work out, “You can almost read the mindset of the board that the last female failed” and does not have a desire to try this again.

Impact of career-bound verses place-bound superintendents on tenure. AP6 stated, “Anytime you bring in a new person, no-matter how good the circumstances, it is going to take a while from them” to understand the complexities of the district. He believed there is an “advantage” to hire within the district. “If you have someone internally who has the demonstrated leadership and it is planned for them to move into a leadership roles. . . . The district can keep move ahead.” He said that many districts simply “do not have anyone who is ready inside.” AP3 states that he likes the concept presented by “Jim Collins” in “growing your own” leaders from the community. Although he cannot “think of too many places that have grown their own” and developed a “succession plan,” even though he guessed “internal

candidates” are more vested in the community and would have longer tenure.

AP4 believed it sends a “positive message” when districts “promote from within.” “It conveys we place value on our people.” He continues to state that place-bound applicants are not always the candidate selected for the position to even start a tenure. As a search agent, he stressed to school boards to place all applicants “on a level playing field because even though you are the internal candidate you are going to be nervous.” AP1 has also seen “quality” place-bound candidates who “believed they were the heir apparent. No they were not,” and they were left without the opportunity to move up. He contributed the non-hiring to knowing “all the warts” of the internal place-bound candidate. The career-bound superintendents are submitting applications “with all strengths,” so it is the strengths of the external candidate against the warts of the internal candidate.” He continued to state that on occasion, boards are willing to appoint place-bound candidates. He only recommended this if “that internal candidate will be accepted by all the staff, all the faculty, and all the community without facing the competition. If they are going to be embraced by everybody, go ahead and appoint them.” AP2 believed the advantage or disadvantage of place-bound verses career-bound superintendents during the application process has already been “determined before we get there” as search agents due to their body of work presented.

AP5 saw an advantage to place-bound superintendents, as career-bound traditionally were not “there long enough to see how” their “decisions play out.”

If you are moving every two to three years, you have a lot of great ideas. You get them passed in year one or two. You get them implemented. Generally speaking, there is not enough data to assess if they were sound ideas or not.

AP4 reflected on some disadvantages of being a place-bound superintendent that included

“making tough decisions when it is people you have known a long time and worked with.”

Although he personally, he “did not want to get in trouble in my own community.” AP6 felt like districts able to “cultivate internally and grow future leaders” could be a positive advancement, yet it is always critical that the district does not become too stagnate or “inbred” in their “thinking.”

“I think a mix of both is probably a good course for a district.” AP1 asserted that nothing impacts a school system more than the occasional “new blood.” He continued to state, “You don’t want to perpetuate doing it the way we have always done it.”

When is it time for a superintendent to end tenure? AP4 stated the “President of the United States” is limited to an “eight year” term, and he believes the school superintendency might be set up for the same leadership tenure timeline. AP6 stated a school system needs 10-15 years to provide stability and focus of initiatives. AP5 questioned how superintendents with tenure under five years could claim any long-term achievements. It provides an opportunity to understand if the changes in results were by “chance” or “grand design.” He continued to state, no exact timeframe or “template” for the correct time a superintendent should move on from the current tenure.

Each interviewed search agent expressed a different reason or time fore leaving tenure of the school superintendency. AP1 recalled asking a long-time superintendent how he was never fired during his career. “He said, sometimes you get out ahead of them. That is one kind of longevity.” He continued to state that two reasons exist for superintendents to continually keep their options of moving open. He believed a superintendent should consider a move when things are going well.

If you are happy where you are at? You are making progress where you are at? The

board agrees with you where you are at, you don't have to move. You don't have to find a job. That is when you should look for the next job.

He continued to state that searching and keeping options open when successful can make a superintendent "feel very guilty." The question enters the psyche of "what is my board going to think? Is my leadership going to be accepted by the board and file if I don't want to be here?" He believed that although awkward, "You should leave when you are on top."

The best superintendents leave because they are looking for a new challenge. I would say the majority of superintendents leave because something is going south and they are getting out ahead of them.

AP1 believed the second reason to leave is "If you are unhappy, the board is unhappy with you;" chances exist you are "not going to make as wise of decisions" when your leadership is in question. AP6 stated, "There are superintendents who lead and then all the sudden look behind and realize no one is following." He continued by using the analogy of a "marriage" between the school board and the superintendent. "It has a honeymoon, then reality sets in. Depending upon both sides, that relationship can work or it can come apart. When that happens, folks need to move on."

AP3 believed there is both a "philosophical" and "personal" answer of when a superintendent should leave a tenured superintendency. "Philosophical is when you have worn out your welcome" and "know" you no longer have the "support of the board or community." On the personal level, you simply "know that it is time to leave." AP4 stated, most superintendents "know when to fold them. Leave things in good shape." AP6 asserted the "primary function" of a superintendent "is kids" and believes superintendents need to remember students are "the mission."

Observations

When specific locations and individuals were referenced within the interviews of the search agents, I made every effort to observe the physical and geographical location of the phenomenon. These contextual observations provided an opportunity to observe the visual locations and structures coinciding with the emotions portrayed through the understanding of superintendent tenure from superintendent search agents. As the researcher, I spent time at each location reading the transcribed interviews and pictured in my mind the events, individuals, community, and leadership styles described by the search agents.

API described a specific hometown superintendent with strong leadership characteristics in the following characterization.

He looks like a leader. Carries himself like a leader. He walks into a room; you know he is a leader. He just has that command presence about him. He is honest as the day is long. He is totally sincere in what he does. He has an eye for talent. He is smart enough to know what he does not know. He schmoozes the board with tremendous amount of skill. They eat right out of his hand. He is just that way. He balances his lack of K-12 by surrounding himself with good people. . . . He is an exquisite family man and does not blush to tell you that.

This superintendent served in two locations. The first superintendency was away from his hometown in a rural “stepping stone” district to gain experience. His first district was observed as a conglomerate of small schools consolidated over the previous generations. Old dilapidated school buildings and foundations can still be found throughout the district. Most of the school buildings are in need of repair and date from the 1960s. The central office building resembled a modular constructed home and is located in a rural area adjacent to farm fields. The surrounding

city was full of historic buildings weathered by time and modernization. Little industry or new construction was noted during the observation. In multiple ways, it could be imagined the current reality and images resembled generations of downtrodden economies. A career-bound superintendent with a young family and without rural roots could anguish without the modern comforts of clothing stores, chain restaurants and community living, thus causing a superintendent with a family to wish for a “move up” the ladder of superintendent positions.

After acquiring experience, this superintendent moved to a suburban setting. The district is spread across multiple miles and locations. The buildings are observed to be in strong physical shape and most have been built in the past two decades. The district office is surrounded by other businesses on a thoroughfare leading to an urban city settings. The brick office exterior portrays a resemblance of strong funding and a professional environment.

Suburban family comforts of shopping malls, higher education facilities, artistic theatres, chain restaurants and parks exist within walking distance. Blue and white color industry was evident. Multiple housing additions were within a couple short miles of central office and nearby schools. The previously noted conflict of moving up the ladder to higher support and monetary pay structures would be realized by higher economic status of the community. The “stepping stone” districts can be observed to be critical fit for superintendents wishing to have both career and family success.

AP2 described a specific location and superintendent as an ideal example of a place-bound with long tenure in the following characterization.

He was a middle school principal there for a long time before becoming superintendent. He had roots in the community. His kids grew up there. He was well connected with the different families. He was well connected with the powerful families. . . . People trusted

him. . . . For that district, he was just the right package.

This community is observed to be an area full of heritage and a storied history dating back to the 1800s. This city could also be described as a suburban community without an urban area within close proximity. Large historic brick houses were located within close proximity to the schools displaying a value of the schools from the community powerbrokers. Schools were also located close to community parks and public access areas. The central office building is located on a raised area overlooking the transportation department and the high school. Close proximity could provide a strong visual presence and trust of the superintendent to multiple stakeholder groups inside of the schools.

It was evident in the observation this location valued heritage and tradition. Family names would hold a strong weight within the community and outsiders would most likely not be fully accepted until root had been placed in the community for multiple generations. A location like this is primed for a long-term and community place-bound superintendent. The heritage would promote succession plans of leadership to ensure comfort and ease of the high standing tradition that would not fit the reforms of the more urbanized school districts.

AP3 described a location currently going through a superintendent search process. This rural school board first attempted to hire a superintendent without the assistance of a search agency and has been “a real tough situation.” The superintendent was fired after only four short months of the job. The board then resumed a search with the assistance of an agent. The location of this district is rural community within a 15-minute drive to a larger suburban area. The central office is isolated away from schools in the district. The central office was observed to be a desolate and un-kept physical structure. Walking through the location provided a feeling of loneliness as described by multiple agents due to the poor lighting and lack of modern

technology. Multiple rooms were used as storage of past educational materials providing a feeling a slow cultural and educational pace of change.

AP4 related a personal story of being a place-bound candidate for a superintendency. He stated that to the board knowing the “internal” candidate, moved him to be a finalist for the position. He continued to state school boards can fall for a candidate with “all sizzle but no steak.” He asserted as an internal candidate you are still going into the interview “on pins and needles.”

After my interview, the superintendent came to me and said the board wanted me to come to you. They are not sure whether to go with you or not. They really like this other candidate. I said, wait a minute. The other candidate had two shots. Even though they know me, I only had one. I would like to have another shot. They granted me another shot. I got the job, but I have always used that experience with boards who are considering internal candidates.

The geographic location of this event was observed to include a central office location that has been expanded over time. The community likewise has expanded over time to include multiple high fluent industries to mix with a traditional and conservative culture. This is evident in the school system’s school buildings. Multiple buildings portray the new industry and architectural advancements and others resemble the culture of the 1970s and tend to portray a fiscal conservative atmosphere. This mix exemplifies the internal battle described in choosing between a local place-bound superintendent and the candidate with “sizzle and no steak.”

AP5 described a personal story of moving to a larger suburban district and spending time “on each rung of the ladder” until reaching the superintendency.

I would like to tell you that it was a perfect grand design, but it was by chance. Probably

the best thing that happened to me was leaving (one district) and moving to (another). That was the one big move me made. I was able to be in a corporation that was big enough to move from the principalship to the central office, to the superintendency without ever having to move my family. It worked out pretty well.

The district was observed to be a growing district that has continually expanded in the past two decades. School buildings were observed to be immaculate condition. The community is a suburban setting that has continually grown in tax-base population thus creating a larger school district. The suburban community is comprised of multiple housing developments. The schools were surrounded by community parks, portraying a joint advancement and partnership between the school and city.

AP6 described a superintendent and location exemplifying the strong leadership trait of communication. This particular superintendent rose through the ranks inside of the school. He stated the superintendent in this urban district “gets out of the office” and is regularly “in the buildings” throughout “the district.” He continued to state, “If you spend a little time with her and you are not pumped, there is something wrong with you.” The personality traits of being “positive and upbeat” along with a “very pro-kid demeanor” are evident in her “enthusiasm.” He continued by describing the superintendent as a “listener” and a “humble” leader that always uses the word “we” when talking about achievements.

This superintendent is employed in a large urban district. It was observed that urban sprawl, traffic and sheer magnitude of the schools naturally creates a communication gap. The large physical dimensions of the central office and individual school portray a professional environment that differs greatly in formality from classroom environment. To create a close-knit professional learning community would require a visible administration who could talk on many

differing levels of occupation. It was concluded this superintendent is not one who would wear “all the hats” in the role of superintendent, but instead would be focused on a visibility to multiple stakeholder groups. The positions would move from an educational role to a corporate leader, thus opening up one of the rare possibilities mentioned for successful placement of a superintendent without an educational background.

Superintendent Focus Group Summary

A focus group of five current and former school superintendents was formed to assist in the triangulation of qualitative data received through the interviews of the superintendent search agents. The focus group participants were asked semi-structured questions directly relevant and similar to the questions asked of the search agents. The purpose of the focus group was not to provide contrary opinions or overshadow the data collected from superintendent search agents, but instead to assist in understanding a different dimensions of the phenomenon. These unique dimensions of the phenomenon and statements of significance are noted in the following summary of qualitative data responses.

All five superintendent focus group members asserted the complexity of the position impacts longevity of tenure. FG1 stated, “Change burns political capital.” FG2 stated a “failure to staff” causes undo stress along with politics between the “superintendent and school board.” Once that happens, it is time to ‘dust off the resume.’” FG3 stated many superintendents are ready to “move on” to a new location or “new challenge.” FG4 saw the complexity of leading through “change” as a challenge of longevity. He stated the sometimes the superintendent can be the “drum major out in front of the band” and turn around to notice no one is “there anymore.” FG5 stated the politics of “rural” verses “urban” play a vital role in superintendent tenure. “Understanding the politics is huge.” Taking a specific side on issues can impact longevity.

“Just don’t lie.”

When asked about the impact on tenure caused by superintendent search firms, all five focus group members saw a positive impact on the profession. FG4 recollected interviews conducted without the assistance of a search agency where “illegal” questions were asked and the search agency can work as a “buffer.” FG1 stated search agencies are a great resource, but “rural” districts like to run their own process. FG2 stated the “role” of a search agency is to “help vet” the board through a process. FG3 shared many districts do “not know what they are doing.” FG5 stated a concern for improper protocols within the hiring process.

Three of the five interviewed current and former superintendents believed current academic preparation in preparing superintendents is strong. FG1 dissented from the majority by stating, “There is no class on how to fire the 3rd shift custodian for watching pornography.” While FG2 saw merit in the preparation programs, he stated, “You are now the conductor of the symphony,” and no classes can replace “sitting in the seat.” FG3 saw deficiencies in the areas of “budget” within the classes. He continued to assert superintendents need to locate mentors that can be “trusted” for advice.

Four out of the five current and former superintendents participating in the focus group expressed pessimism on the quality and quantity of the current applicant pools. FG2 described the applicant pools as “a shallow puddle.” FG1 stated the pool or puddle could be a “trickle.” FG1 expressed concern for applicants in all levels of the educational field. FG4 saw districts “growing their own” as a way to increase the “pool size.” He personally saw his district as one never worried about leadership “pools” to talent of returning educators.

The superintendents participating in the focus group each identified one leadership trait providing success in the superintendency. FG1 stated “relationship building” is key to success.

FG2 believed integrity was the key to success. FG3 coupled integrity with “honesty” and trust. FG4 shared “resiliency” through hardship is a key to success. FG5 stated “making a decision” is a critical component of success.

On the contrary, the superintendents stated one deficiency negatively impacting superintendent tenure. FG5 shared “lying” is an inexcusable trait. FG4 shared a lack of patience. FG3 shared “trust” and “trustworthiness” can be the downfall of a superintendent. FG2 believed the lack of “honoring the past” impacts a superintendent’s tenure. FG1 concurred with the “lack of integrity” as a negative trait. Communication was not listed by any of the interviewed superintendents as a key to success or failure.

The current and former superintendents involved in the focus group had split opinions on the longevity of tenure increasing. FG1 and FG4 both envisioned tenure decreasing due to the communities and school board looking for a specific “skill set.” The skills mentioned included budget, buildings and curriculum. FG5 was optimistic about tenure increasing due to the energy and drive of superintendents in the field. FG2 and FG3 described situations where it would “depend” on the local “politics” and “climate.”

Summary

Chapter 4 included the presentation of qualitative data obtained from the phenomenological research. Summaries of the formal in-person interviews, semi-structured, contextual interviews, observations, a superintendent focus group and examinations of documents related to school superintendency search agents in relation to superintendent tenure were presented through themes of data. The logic flow of Chapter 4 included the global understanding the role, challenges and responsibilities. Academic preparation and mentorship in connection to quality and quantity of pools was documented as a theme due to the impact it has

on superintendent tenure and the desire of reforms to move outside of traditional boundaries. Leadership traits and deficiencies were evaluated to better understand the impact these characteristics have on tenure length. Each school district is different, so contextual factors impacting tenure from numerous topics were evaluated as a theme. Key themes were noted in terms of quantity and statement of magnitude.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the short tenure of school superintendents through data provided by superintendent search agents previously or currently employed by a non-profit institution or association with the agency having at least 10 years of experience in the field of superintendent searches. Through this qualitative study, the perceptions of superintendent search agents were explored. This study sought to find understanding and essence of the phenomenon of school superintendent tenure through following research questions.

Research Questions

“Why is the average tenure of school superintendents short lived?” Additional questions included the following:

1. What is the role of proper training and the longevity of educational superintendent tenure?
2. What is the role of specific leadership characteristics and long-term school superintendent tenure?
3. What is the role of contextual factors and long-term superintendent tenure, or among those contextual factors, themselves?

Challenges and Limitations

With respect to the interpretation and discussion of this study's results, limitations may have impacted the findings, and thus a few points of caution are warranted. The eight superintendent search agents interviewed provided particular viewpoints of the phenomenon. Each superintendent came from a unique background with a differing educational experience. Four participating search agents were retired and no longer active in current searches. Four participating agents are currently involved in the profession. All did come from the Midwestern region of the United States and also from an agency of non-profit status. These factors limited the perspectives of superintendent search agents in other regions of the United States and the many agencies assisting in the superintendent search process in a for profit business.

Criteria for selection of search agents did not include the factors of gender or race. All search agents did discuss these factors within the research interviews on superintendent tenure. All interviewed search agents were of Caucasian ethnicity and male gender. These factors could provide biased and limited personal perspective of race and gender. All search agents did have experience working with districts of large minority populations, and district leaders of diverse ethnicities and genders. As the researcher, my own Caucasian ethnicity and male gender also could provide limited viewpoint in the aforementioned areas impacted by research on ethnicity and gender. I consciously attempted to minimize these possible limitations when disseminating and coding the research data.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

Interviews were semi-structured to allow essence of understanding and personal narrative to become evident in the qualitative data. The themes and supporting data provides a condensed, yet detailed report of the interviews conducted with superintendent search agents meeting the

aforementioned criteria of this research study. The following provides a detailed synopsis of the finding during this research study. When evident, themes of both quantity and magnitude are detailed in relation to the phenomenon of school superintendent tenure.

Understanding of School Superintendent Tenure

Each interviewed superintendent search agent provided a unique understanding into school superintendent tenure. Understanding of school tenure quickly emerged as a theme to better understand the position and daily challenges of the American public school superintendent. This theme, although broad in subject matter, made up a great amount of the qualitative data provided by the search agents. The search agents viewed this theme and following sub-themes as the foundation to understanding the positional challenges before fully understanding tenure. Sub-themes included job complexity, dysfunction of school boards, finding a new challenge and stepping stone districts.

Job complexity. All six interviewed search agents believed the position of school superintendent is extremely complex in nature. In many cases including state and national reforms, they believed the school superintendent is held to unrealistic expectations. Common themes of complexity among the interviewed agents included social media, declining enrollment, legislative reform movements and standardized test scores. The sub-theme of job complexity was supported by research previously cited in this study (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2006; Ashbaugh, 1936; Chen, 2010; Glass et al., 2000; Harris et al., 2004; Houston, 2001; Kowalski et al., 2011).

Dysfunction of school boards. All six interviewed superintendent search agents cited dysfunctional school boards as a factor of short superintendent tenure. Although the general consensus was school boards want to do a good job, questions about ethics, micromanagement, and lack of vision dominated the interviews. Statements of magnitude included AP6 questioning

when accountability of school board would be held in standards with teachers and administrators. AP2, AP3, and AP6 stated beliefs of a direct link between superintendent tenure and the quality of a school board. The sub-theme of school board dysfunction was supported by research previously cited in this study (Boske, 2009; Christie, 2002; Cleveland et al., 2000; Hoyle & Skrla, 1999; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Peterson, 2002).

Needing a change. All six superintendent search agents noted a point of exhaustion both professionally and personally that could require a change in the profession. The superintendency takes a continual bargaining of political capital with stakeholders and can run out quickly due to controversial issues. Superintendents who act as change agents tend to burn capital more quickly and thus have a shorter tenure. Generational differences in money, prestige and retirement were noted as reasons for movement with past generations and reasons for consistency with the current generation of superintendents. Statements of magnitude included AP5 believing constant professional movement creates a personal and professional drain on a superintendent. AP6 shared a district needing change might require multiple superintendents to achieve the desired goal. The sub-theme of needing a change was supported by research previously cited in this study (Chen, 2010; Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski & Sweetland, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2011; Wiggins, 1988).

Stepping-stone districts. All six interviewed search agents concluded districts considered to be stepping stone districts impact statistical tenure average. Rural school districts make up the majority of districts throughout the Midwest region of the United States. Superintendents in rural districts lack support personnel and resources and thus perform multiple roles within the school environment. Urban stepping-stone districts were noted in the interviews with perceived turnover and expectation of a short tenure due to the politicization of the job. A

statement of magnitude came from AP5 when he described that upward movement did not have to include financial status, more employees, or more kids. Instead it could mean more resources, greater help, and additional opportunities for professional development. The sub-theme of stepping stone districts was supported by research previously cited in this study (Boss et al., 1976; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Cunningham, 2003; Howley et al., 2012; Kowalski & Bjork, 2005; Ravitch, 2010).

Search agency impact on tenure. Four of the interviewed superintendent search agents distinguished a difference between for-profit and non-profit superintendent search agencies. They believed for-profit companies could impact superintendent tenure through recruitment of superintendents away from the current superintendency. Two search agents did not believe search agencies impacted tenure and believed only chemistry with the board could make or break superintendent tenure in a district. The sub-theme of search agency impact on tenure was supported by research previously cited in this study (Glass et al., 2000, Kowalski et al., 2011; Kingsbury, 2009; Stellar, 2010; Stellar, 2011).

Academic Preparation for School Superintendency

Throughout the interviews with superintendent search agents, the theme of academic preparation to produce quality and quantity of candidates arose and became a consistent theme. Distinct viewpoints exist among the superintendent search agents on the current pipeline leading to the superintendency. Recent local, state and federal changes were also noted in changing the landscape of the profession. Sub-themes included college and university graduate courses to prepare superintendents, non-traditional business integration of school superintendents, pipeline to the superintendency, quality and quantity of superintendents in the applicant pools, and mentorship.

College and university graduate courses to prepare superintendents. All six interviewed superintendent search agents believed colleges and universities do an adequate job academically preparing future superintendents. Multiple areas of academic improvement were noted, including finance, boardmanship, special education, legality issues, and coaching stakeholders in the bargaining process. A statement of magnitude was provided by AP6 in questioning the effectiveness of online course structure to support the superintendents need in being a relational leader. The sub-theme of college and university graduate courses to prepare superintendents was supported by research previously cited in this study (Glass et al., 2000; Hoyle, 2007; Hoyle & Torres, 2008; Houston, 2001).

Non-traditional business integration of school superintendents. Four interviewed superintendent search agents did not professionally believe in a non-educational appointment of a school superintendent. Two search agents did see merit in unique circumstances. All six agents did not believe this model could be accomplished in a rural setting and only imagined a minimal success in an urban setting. A statement of magnitude was provided by AP3 when he stated leadership skills could and should be learned by educators from examples in the business community. Stronger leadership skills from the business models run by educators could lengthen tenure and increase success. The sub-theme of non-traditional business integration of school superintendents was supported by research previously cited in this study (Glass et al., 2000; Hoyle, 2007; Kowalski, 2008; Ravitch, 2010).

Pipeline to the superintendency. Three superintendent search agents strongly believed the breakdown of the traditional pipeline of assistant principal, principal, central office administrator and then superintendent directly impacts tenure. AP2, AP4, and AP5 believe the large step from the principalship to the superintendency causes gaps in knowledge and

understanding from the district perspective thus limiting success and possible longevity of tenure. The sub-theme of pipeline to the superintendency was supported by research previously cited in this study (Glass et al., 2000; Houston, 2001; Keedy et al., 2007; Kowalski et al., 2011; Yong-Lyun & Brunner, 2009).

Quality and quantity of candidates in the applicant pools. All six interviewed superintendent search agents cited a decrease in the number of applicants for the superintendency in relation to previous generations. Although many individuals are certified for the superintendency, this drop was attributed to politics and accountability associated with the position. All six interviewed superintendent search agents alluded to the quality of candidates being strong with instructional practices. All six search agents also agreed the quality and quantity of the pools were dependent upon the strength and reputation of the local school board. A statement of magnitude was shared by AP5 by identifying the success of the pools cannot be judged in the near future and only can be measured as a success or failure by future generations. The sub-theme of quality and quantity of candidates in the applicant pools was supported by research previously cited in this study (Glass et al., 2000; Houston, 2001; Hoyle, 2007; Keedy et al., 2007; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Winter et al., 2007).

Mentorship. Five interviewed superintendent search agents believed in a link between mentorship and success of superintendents. The overall belief stated mentorship comes in multiple forms including pre-superintendency, formal, informal and collegial. A statement of magnitude was provided by AP1 as he discussed the extreme competition between current superintendents impacting mentorship and collaboration in the name of competition. The sub-theme of mentorship was supported by research previously cited in this study (Busch et al., 2005; Crow, 2008; Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011; Rose, 2000).

Positive and Negative Traits Impacting Superintendent Tenure

All interviewed superintendent search agents shared the first step of the search process was working with the school board to describe the leadership strengths they wished for and the weaknesses they wished to avoid in the next superintendent. The theme of positive and negative leadership traits impacting superintendent tenure quickly became evident during the interview process. Sub-themes included leadership traits of non-negotiability, communication, trust, community and ego.

Integrity and Communication. All six superintendent search agents believed integrity was a non-negotiable trait of a successful superintendent. If integrity and ethical leadership characteristics were in question, the search agents would not suggest the candidate due to the probability of a failed tenure. All six interviewed superintendent search agents emphasized communication as a critical skill in both the written and verbal forms. All six search agents also believed listening is a strong form of communication needed to obtain lasting tenure. Statements of magnitude included the belief by AP1 and AP4 that communication with the school board is a critical component of longevity and success. AP1 also believes that communication encompasses the ability to read and understand, yet not to play politics. The sub-theme of integrity and communication was supported by research previously cited in this study (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Erkens & Twadell, 2012; Gladwell, 2008; Heath & Heath, 2010; Kowalski et al., 2011; Steil & Bommelje, 2004).

Trust. Five superintendent search agents directly used the word trust in the interviews as a positive character trait that increases superintendent success and tenure. The consensus was that trust positively impacts relationships. Trust was noted as important factor with the school board, parents, teachers and the community. A statement of magnitude was made by AP3 in

stating when a superintendent loses his cool, trust is broken and a relationship is damaged usually beyond repair. The sub-theme of trust was supported by research previously cited in this study (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2006; Bird & Wang, 2011; Cunningham, 2003; Gladwell, 2002, 2009; Johnston, 2004; Pink, 2009).

Community. All six interviewed superintendent search agents mentioned the importance of the superintendent relationship with the community as a factor impacting tenure. The school superintendent is expected to be an active as visible member of the greater community. Community support and acceptance of the superintendent is a product of the evolution in the job requirements of superintendent in recent generations due to the impact of taxing structure reforms. All six interviewed search agents believed a superintendent should live in the community they serve. Living in the community provides a sense of transparency, relationship, and understanding of culture. When evaluating leadership styles, multiple effective theories were discussed including situational, collaborative, servant, and managerial. A statement of magnitude was provided by AP1 when he mentioned the superintendent needed to relate and communicate with non-parent community members outside of the school system to fully gain community support and understanding needed in a successful superintendency. The sub-theme of community was supported by research previously cited in this study (Chen, 2010; Gamson, 2004; Glass et al., 2000; Howley et al., 2012; Ravitch, 2011).

Ego. All six superintendent search agents interviewed mentioned the impact of ego on superintendent tenure. Five of the interviewed search agents related ego to a negative trait. One search agent saw ego as a needed leadership characteristic in a successful school superintendent. Multiple agents mentioned the superintendency is not a position to acquire leadership style. The superintendent cannot need and desire to be accepted by all stakeholders. A statement of

magnitude was made by AP3 when he stated successful superintendents needed a combination of ego and self-doubt. The ego provides the confidence to make hard decisions, whereas the self-doubt provides opportunities for reflection. The sub-theme of ego was supported by research previously cited in this study (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Collins, 2001; Gladwell, 2008; Kelly, 2007; Lonardi et al., 1995).

Contextual Factors Impacting Superintendent Tenure

All six interviewed search agents saw their role as a service that assists candidates and school boards in finding the correct match or working chemistry. Understanding of contextual factors impacting school tenure quickly emerged as a theme. Sub-themes included the correct fit between a superintendent and a school board, rural verses urban and suburban fit for a superintendent, diversity of race and gender as a factor in superintendent tenure, impact of career-bound verses place-bound superintendents on tenure, and when is it time for a superintendent to end tenure.

The correct fit between a superintendent and a school board. All six superintendent search agents mentioned the importance of a correct fit between a superintendent and school board as a needed contextual factor for longevity of tenure. Multiple agents admitted the most qualified candidates are not always selected as the superintendent. The choice is made by the board and usually is determined by the chemistry between the superintendent and school board. Conflicting opinions emerged in the importance of the relationship between the board president and the superintendent. A statement of magnitude was made by AP3 and AP6 when they stated the difference between the correct fit and convenient fit. They noted school systems that hire superintendents based on convenience over quality. The sub-theme of the correct fit between a superintendent and a school board was supported by research previously cited in this study

(Boske, 2009; Cleveland et al., 2000; Hoyle & Skrla, 1999; Kelly 2007; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Peterson, 2002).

Rural verses urban and suburban fit for a superintendent. All six superintendent search agents drew a distinction between superintendent tenure in rural districts in comparison to suburban and urban districts. Success in small district does not guarantee transference of skills or success in a large district or vice versa. Perception of the superintendent search agents noted small districts providing longer stability, yet budgets and the amount of responsibility accelerate the desire for upward mobility of superintendents. All search agents noted political influences in all sizes of school districts and also noting a different type of politics exist between the geographical diverse settings. Statements of magnitude included a comment by AP1 stating successful superintendents in a rural district needs to understand the pace of culture and change tends to be slower.

Understanding the pace of change directly impacts success or failure of the superintendent. AP3 stated rural districts tend to attempt searches on their own believing the empowerment of sole control of the search process will ensure solidarity of the district without abdicating power to community outsiders. This decision contributes to unsuccessful superintendentcies and below- average tenures. The sub-theme of rural verse urban and suburban fit for a superintendent was supported by research previously cited in this study (Boss et al., 1976; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Cunningham, 2003; Howley et al., 2012; Kowalski & Bjork, 2005; Ravitch, 2010).

Diversity of race and gender as a factor in superintendent tenure. All six interviewed superintendent search agents recalled selections by school boards they believed were influenced by decisions based on race or gender. Four search agents were able to provide

specific instances directly related to rural cultures lack of acceptance away from a traditional Caucasian male candidate. All six agents spoke positively about the cultural progression of female superintendents. All six agents also stated in similar statements the lack of minority representation in the superintendency. A statement of magnitude was presented by AP3 when he expressed minority candidates are not entering the superintendency applicant pools or preparation programs in large numbers. The question of recruitment of minority candidates into preparation programs was discussed without resolution of how to encourage rural districts to consider hiring minority candidates. This was supported by research previously cited in this study (Brunner, 198; Irby et al., 2002; Kowalski et al., 2011; Nomore, 2006).

Impact of career-bound verses place-bound superintendents on tenure. All six interviewed superintendent search agents discussed the pros and cons of both career-bound and place-bound superintendents without resolution of which has greater success in the superintendency. The consensus of perceptions in the interviews was each school district differs in needs, yet place-bound would usually have a longer tenure. Career-bound superintendents traditionally do not have long-term tenures. They are hired to bring new ideas and make needed cultural changes to a district. Place-bound superintendents are hired to continue a mission and vision while providing stability to a district. A statement of impact was provided by AP6 when he asserted a mixture of both career-bound and place-bound are needed to perpetuate success and assure district leadership does not become stagnate over time. A second statement of magnitude came from AP4 when he asserted an internal candidate need to understand the school board members might not know or understanding his/her service internally within the district. Many times, the understanding of the organizational dynamics past the current superintendent can be overlooked. The sub-theme of the impact of career-bound verses place-bound superintendents

on tenure was supported by research previously cited in this study (Carlson, 1969; Collins, 2001; Gladwell, 2008; Nestor-Baker, 2002; Stellar, 2011).

When is it time for a superintendent to end tenure? All six interviewed superintendent search agents agree there is not a template time for superintendents to end tenure in a district. Instead the personal and philosophical question of what is right for the district and personal health must be asked. An idealistic view of leaving the district in better shape than acquired was mentioned numerous times. All superintendent search agents would like to see tenure continue to grow to an extent. Two search agents asserted that long tenure could produce negative effects. All also noted the lengthening of tenure in mid-western United States in the recent years. Opinions were split on the ideal time a superintendent should serve in a district. The sub-theme of when is it time for a superintendent to end tenure was supported by research previously cited in this study (Black & Gregersen, 2003; Collins, 2001; Keedy et al., 2007; Maslin-Ostowski & Ackerman, 2000).

Conclusions and Implications

The school superintendency is a critical position for the advancement of student achievement, yet superintendent tenure shows a continual turnover in the profession thus potentially negatively impacting student achievement. Superintendent search agents hold an inside viewpoint and understanding of the profession. Based on this research through the lenses of superintendent search agents, conclusions exist, and some areas merit additional attention.

The role of the school superintendent is very complex in nature. School leaders wishing to enter the field need to fully understand the history, challenges, and reforms in the current position of school superintendent. It is concluded from the findings a superintendent can do all the right things, and still not be the correct fit for a community. The correct fit for one day will

not be the correct fit for the next day. Successful tenure is dependent upon the realization of issues a district faces and potentially could face in the future. Complexity impacting tenure comes from multiple sources, including student achievement, employee relations, community, interest groups, and the school board governing the superintendent.

The superintendent is the only employee directly reporting to the board of school trustees. School board members, appointed or elected, have bias and personal reasons for serving. School boards generally wish to do a good for their communities but have distinct viewpoints on the leadership style of the superintendent. Superintendents with longevity of tenure understand and are able to communicate roles and responsibilities with their school board members. Too many times this education piece is overlooked. Without the proper training, school boards micromanage and cross the line between policy and administration, making a successful and productive tenure difficult to achieve.

Superintendents must take care of themselves personally and professionally to handle the stress of the occupation. Without the proper care, the position takes a toll on their health and wellness. On a political level, superintendents must make a multitude of decisions everyday. Each of those decisions has a positive and negative impact on their relationships. The negative-impact decisions burn political capital over time. The superintendent must make decisions in the best interest of the students, and this decision-making can also impact tenure when proper relationships are not fully formed and cultivated. The superintendent must also take the time and energy to nurture difficult relationships. Although all might not agree with the superintendent's decisions, a successful relation is when all parties walk away with a respectful understanding.

It is concluded a hierarchy in the superintendency is formed by the natural desire for advancement. Superintendents move from a small district to a district with significantly more

resources and potentially a higher salary. This desire for mobility negatively impacts the statistical average of the superintendent tenure. Large urban districts can also create a carousel of superintendents through continual turnover and buy-out of contracts. A general desire to seek a correct fit was noted to be more commonplace with superintendents who find a district that matches their personalities.

Hundreds of superintendent search agencies exist throughout the United States. These agencies have many different visions and impacts on superintendent tenure. Many non-profit agencies were created to assist rural districts find superintendents during the confusion created in consolidation of districts. Others consider themselves headhunters and are paid by bringing set numbers of candidates to the interview table. The context, practices, and mission of the search agency can negatively or positively impact superintendent tenure. It is concluded the search agencies do more help than harm with tenure. As with any profession, competition and bad business practices exist.

College and university preparation is a factor in preparing future superintendents for the leadership roles of superintendent. Questions exist about the validity and relativity of the course structures. Superintendents cannot rely on the academic preparation alone for their knowledge base. Superintendents need to continually be learning and advancing in a multitude of areas of the profession. The superintendent is the head learner and leader of the school district and thus is continually viewed as a role model of learning. A gap does exist in course offerings for preparing superintendents. Theory and practice can only go so far. It is concluded that no preparation program can teach moral and ethics or prepare students for real-world decision-making.

Recent reforms have allowed non-traditional placement of school superintendents with business backgrounds. The success of this method has yet to be determined. Leadership skills from all walks of life and professions should be evaluated. Many skills exist from the business world and running of the business community that can increase productivity and superintendent longevity of tenure. It is concluded that success of non-traditional superintendents is limited and will not work in the majority of Midwestern schools due to the need for an understanding of pedagogy.

The quantity and quality of the applicant pool is worrisome to the profession of school superintendents. These factors will directly impact districts with low-performing test scores, limited budgets, and reputations of mistreatment of superintendents. It is concluded that strong candidates will migrate towards districts with long previous tenures that treat superintendents fairly.

The pipeline to the superintendency is a worry for the profession. Superintendents are coming into the position without district-level experience. This lack of experience can take a toll on the superintendent through vital mistakes or lack of development in personal leadership characteristics. Methods need to be put in place to assist superintendents through a network within the profession.

Mentorship is a critical component to successful tenure. This network can take the form of either official mentorship or a collegial relationship between superintendents. A worrisome byproduct of the reform movement is an anti-collaborative attitude of competition. Without more attention to collaboration, the competitive spirit will cause a negative impact on superintendent tenure by attempting to solve all problems internally without proper support of others in the field.

The superintendency is a position that relies on strong communication skills. Superintendents deficient in verbal articulation, writing, or listening skills will not last long inside of the profession. Communication of vision and leadership is critical with many stakeholder groups. Communication with stakeholder groups, employees and school board members is critical to system-wide success and longevity of the superintendent.

Without trust and integrity, nothing else matters. Superintendents must always be in control of their emotions. Decisions should be deliberate and explained in detail. Broken trust equals a broken relationship. A superintendent cannot afford to have broken relationships in the community causing a direct impact on student achievement.

The superintendent needs to be a resident of district. In the current political tax reforms requiring referendums for building projects, a district must know the superintendent is a member of the greater community. Residency shows faith and understanding of the district. This trust and comradely is especially important in rural districts.

Major difference in jobs between the rural and urban school superintendent. It is concluded these jobs are not comparable on many levels, including support personnel, budgets, and professional opportunities. It is critical for superintendents to understand the fit that best matches their personalities and skill sets. Superintendents out of their skill sets are destined for failure in the superintendency. Those superintendents finding the correct fit in a rural setting will have a longer tenure. Those wishing to use the rural settings as a stepping-stone will negatively impact tenure averages, thus providing a false sense of insecurity.

Race and gender are still a concerning issues within school leadership. American culture with race and gender has progressed in recent decades. Unfortunately equality in the leadership role of the superintendency has not yet taken shape in the Midwestern region of the United

States. Women are just starting to enter the role of superintendent in larger numbers. Minority candidates are not pursuing the superintendency in mass numbers. Current demographic data on tenure of these groups are incomplete due to the lack long term data collection on the issue.

Major distinctions can be made between career-bound and place-bound superintendents. The perception is that place-bound superintendents do not perpetuate change as fast, but they do have longer tenure. Career-bound superintendents perpetuate change but lack the longevity of tenure to evaluate the impact of their decisions. It is concluded place-bound superintendents do have an opportunity for a longer tenure due to their community links and stability-enhancing factors. Career-bound superintendents are needed in our educational culture to make needed changes but rarely put down roots. Their continual movement negatively impacts tenure average.

The role of the superintendency cannot be placed into a one-size-fits-all box. Each superintendent has multiple contextual factors impacting tenure in the position. The correct time to leave is when the superintendent feels the job is done and another person taking the helm can have a greater impact on student learning.

Suggestions for Further Research

The understanding garnered in this study indicates that further research needs to be conducted on the differences in tenure and leadership characteristics between place-bound and career-bound superintendents. Carlson (1969) conducted a research study detailing the characteristics between the two differing classifications of superintendents. Numerous researchers have replicated similar studies during the past four decades without providing detailed data on longevity of tenure. Most have concluded that place-bound superintendents stay

in a singular location longer. The viewpoints of the superintendent search agents in this study was mixed in regard to this assumption.

A similar study of the definition of superintendent tenure would be insightful to better understand what happens to a superintendent after leaving a school corporation. Marzano and Waters (2009) concluded that longevity and internal transitions created a more productive school corporation. Yet numerous of the participant search agents referred to superintendents they considered highly successful as ones that had held many superintendencies over multiple years. A comparative study of superintendents with longevity in a singular school corporation with those that served in multiple locations would provide further insight.

Further research also needs to be conducted on the rationale for why superintendents leave. Kowalski et al. (2011) stated that superintendents surveyed provided the rationale of leaving for a new challenge as the number one reason for a relatively quick exit. Participants in this research study noted that this is the case for the best superintendents, but most left because of politics or disagreement with the school board. These two explanations are very contrary and the subject deserves additional consideration on why superintendents are leaving. Does there need to be more training for the superintendent, board, community or all the above?

End Notes

This research study provided a voice and understanding from the relatively undocumented role of superintendent search agents. Their perspectives provided a unique glimpse into themes impacting tenure. Those themes included preparation, leadership roles, and contextual factors directly impacting tenure.

The purpose of this research study was not to find a simple cure to low superintendent tenure. As noted by all search agents and superintendents interviewed, a magic number of years

in the superintendent's seat does not guarantee success of the superintendent or the school district. Longevity of tenure can also have a counter-impact of stagnate culture and self-protection of the positional status. Instead, this research is intended to focus on understanding the issues surrounding the tenure and specific insights into the essence of success and failure as a school superintendent.

Although this research focused on the superintendency and many assumptions might be concluded by the reader, the long-term intended impact and focus of the superintendent always needs to be on the best interest of the current and future students. All interviewed search agents and superintendents mentioned the superintendent's true impact is on the students. Without this consistent eye on the prize of whole student success, the position lacks relevance and purpose for tenure.

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APPENDIX A: FIRST INTERVIEW SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONS

1. Why did you enter the professional field of assisting in the placing school superintendents?
2. How long have you and/or your agency been practicing?
3. What was your experience prior to working for a superintendent search agency?
4. How many school superintendents have you placed or participated in placing?
5. How do you market to both school board and superintendent candidates?
6. Is there a crisis in the number of superintendents willing to lead school systems? Why or why not?
7. Is there a crisis in the quality of superintendents willing to lead school systems? Why or why not?
8. Describe the superintendents you have placed?
9. Describe the districts and school boards you have assisted in helping place a superintendent?
10. Please explain you and your agency's role placing a school superintendent from the beginning to the end.
11. Why do you believe the national average of school superintendent tenure is less than seven years?
12. What is the average tenure of the school superintendents you or your agency have placed?
13. What has been your most successful placement? Why and how long did/has this particular superintendent served?

14. What has been your least successful placement? Why and how long did/has this particular superintendent serve?
15. Do most school boards follow your protocols, suggestions, and guidelines? Please share examples of both.
16. Do those that follow your protocols, suggestions, and guidelines tend to have superintendents with longer tenure? Please share examples.
17. What factors lead to school superintendent having a short tenure in a school district or corporation?
18. What factors lead to a school superintendent having a long tenure in a school district?
19. Describe an ideal placement by your agency? How long would the tenure of the placement be?
20. Does your (and other) school superintendent search agencies increase or decrease the national tenure average?

APPENDIX B: SECOND SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONS

1. What preparation (academic or experience) best qualifies superintendents for lengthy tenures?
2. What does an effective mentorship for a superintendent look like? Do you believe a strong mentorship lengthens tenure?
3. Do superintendent search agencies lengthen or shorten tenure?
4. Have you or your search agency placed superintendents without educational experience (business model)?
5. Do you believe the placements of school superintendents from outside of the educational profession will shorten or lengthen school superintendent tenure? Why or why not?
6. How long does a superintendent need to be in a district before he/she can claim the cultural change?
7. What does a successful superintendent's relationship with the board look like?
8. Describe what effective communication in a superintendent looks like?
9. Please share your knowledge of a superintendent placed by your agency that embodied great communication.
10. Do you believe communication helped their tenure.
11. Does transparency help or hurt superintendent tenure?
12. Should a superintendent live inside of their own district? Does that help or hurt tenure?

13. Does being a servant or transformation leader bring longer tenure than the traditional manager? What about dictatorship?
14. Share about a location that understand the role of the superintendency and a strong working relationship exists?
15. Have local and national educational reform movements lengthened or shortened school superintendent tenure?
16. Do you foresee longer or shorter tenures for school superintendents? Why or why not?
17. What strengths would an elementary and then a secondary principal have going into the superintendency?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW FORM

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

I= Interviewee

R=Respondent

Question:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

APPENDIX D: OBSERVATION AND NOTES

Location:

Date:

Start Time:

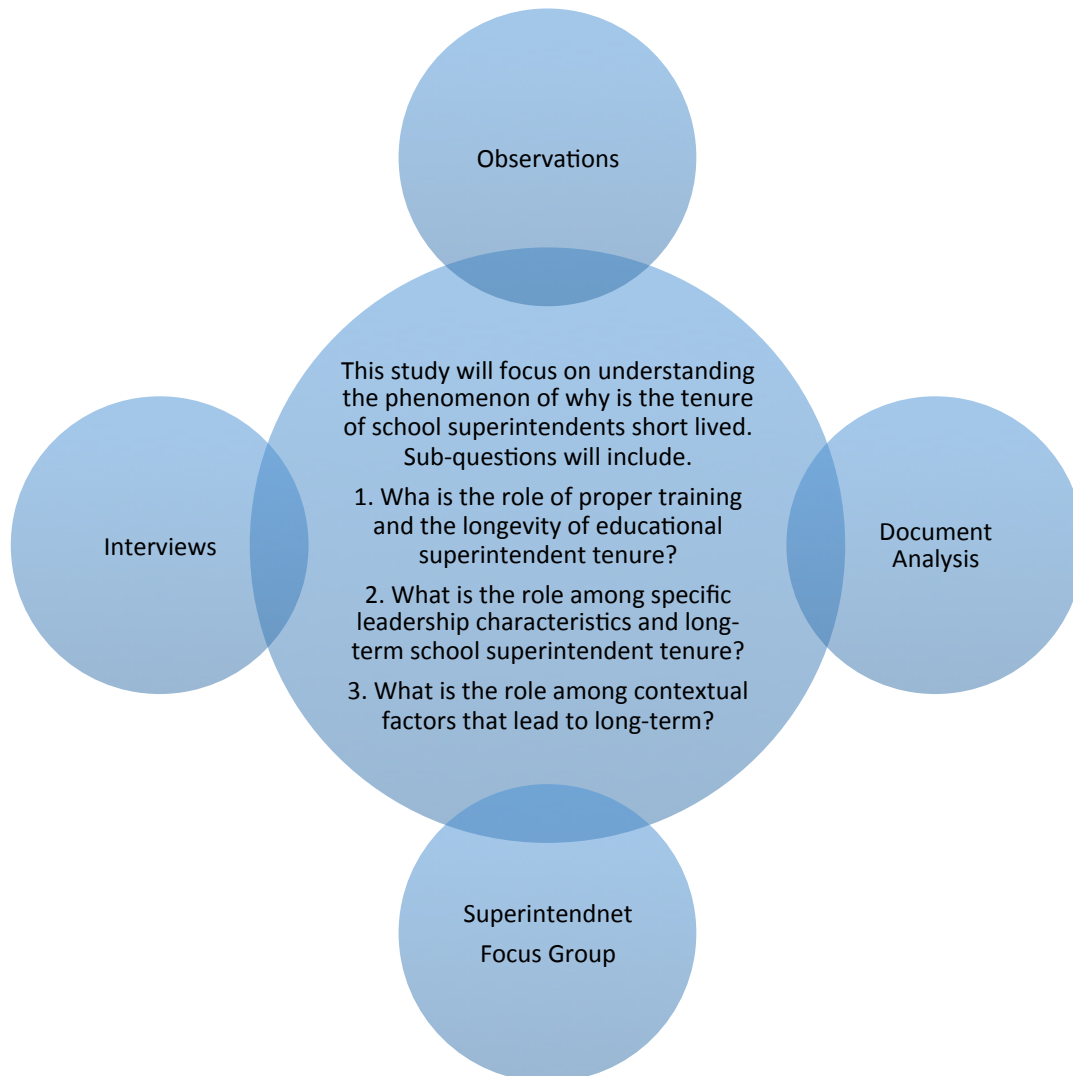
End Time:

Name of Event:

Participants:

Descriptive Notes	Common Themes

APPENDIX E: SOURCES OF DATA COLLECTION



APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why is the national average of school superintendent tenure under seven years?
2. Describe a superintendent that has long tenure in one location.
3. Describe a superintendent that has short tenure in one location.
4. If you have been in multiple locations as a superintendent, why did you make the move?
5. What would you accredit the short or long length of tenure in each specific location?
6. Do you believe the practices of assisting schools recruit and hire superintendent through superintendent search agencies increase or decrease national tenure average of school superintendents?
7. Are current academic preparation programs properly preparing superintendents for the position?
8. What should the progression pipeline to the superintendency look like?
9. What are your thoughts about non-traditional (from the business community) superintendents?
10. Do you believe there is a large pool qualified superintendent candidates?
11. Were you mentored into the role or have you mentored others into the role. Do you believe the mentorship leads to greater success?
12. Describe the leadership characteristics of a successful school superintendent.
13. Describe the leadership characteristics of an unsuccessful school superintendent.
14. What does effective communication as a superintendent look like?

15. Do inside (place-bound) or outside superintendent (career-bound) candidates have longer tenure and why?
16. Do rural or urban superintendencies have the possibility of longer tenure?
17. Do the national, state and local reforms increase or decrease superintendent tenure?
18. How much impact does school board politics have on superintendent tenure?
19. How much impact do educational reform movements or localized interest groups have on superintendent tenure?
20. Do you foresee superintendent tenure increase or decreasing?

APPENDIX G: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (SEARCH AGENTS)

Finding the Correct Fit or Quickly Finding an Exit for School Superintendents: Perceptions from Those Who Placed Them or are Commissioned to Replace Them

You are asked to participate in research conducted by David Hoffert, Ed.S., a doctoral candidate under the supervision of Dr. Ryan Donlan at Indiana State University, Department of Educational Leadership. This study is being conducted as part of a Ph.D. dissertation. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked along with a minimum of five other former or current superintendent search agents to participate in an observation and semi-structured interviews because of your current or former experience as a search agent.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand short length of superintendent tenure through the lenses of the superintendent search agents and a focus group of school superintendents. The crisis of short tenure of school superintendents has an ever-growing impact on school culture and arguably, on student achievement.

This study will focus on your perceptions regarding school superintendent training, leadership qualities, and contextual factors in relationship to job tenure. Research will be conducted with agents from a search agency run by an institution or association of non-profit status, as well as with working superintendents in K-12 schools.

- **PROCEDURES**

Observation – You will be asked to participate in one job-shadowing observation at a location of your choice. The job shadowing will consist of at least one hour of your time, with the exact length of the observation mutually agreed upon during the scheduling of the observation. You will select and travel to an observation site for a job-shadowing interview. The ideal location for this observation would be your office or place of work as a superintendent search agent. If you are retired, or work is completed in a mobile location, the Warsaw Community Schools central office can be provided alternative location for your participation in the job shadowing observation. During the observation the observer will take notes about the search process and the background information of the profession that could provide deeper understanding of the superintendent search process.

Interviews - You will also be asked to participate in two interviews, each at a maximum of 90-minutes-long. The interviews will take place solely with the interviewer. Both interviews will be semi-structured with 20 questions relevant to your personal insights with regard to superintendent tenure. Each interview will be recorded, and as your interviewer, I will take notes during the process. Your interviews will be

transcribed, and pseudonyms will be used for any mentioned search agents, search agencies, school corporations, schools, or school leaders. The transcriptions will be sent to you for the opportunity to review, add, change, or delete your responses. Once the interviews are completed, themes from your testimony will be identified and used to analyze data in this research study. A maximum of four, 30-minute follow-up interviews could be requested to clarify conflicting statements or if the meaning of statements provided are unclear after transcription.

• **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Potential risks could include the release of confidential or reputation-damaging information with regard to the hiring and termination processes in schools, if you select to disclose such. A significant discomfort to you as the participant could be the time spent in the research study or the possibility of an unsettling question asked in the research. Any participant, including you, reserves the right to discontinue participation or withdrawal from the research at any time during the observation or interviews.

• **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

The potential benefit for participation in this research study is a time to reflect and participate in a professional conversation that could result in some of your own professional learning. Potential benefits to the educational profession could include a greater understanding of and eventual communication of superintendent tenure and the professional roles and responsibilities associated with school leadership.

• **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information provided by you during this focus group will not be released outside of this study without your permission. Your name will not be disclosed or published. Constant measures will be taken to effectively protect all participants during this study including:

- Pseudonyms will be used in transcriptions to protect identities of all interviewees, school corporations, schools, and individuals referred to during the focus group.
- The research evidence will be stored in the researcher's personal home or professional office in a locked filing cabinet or password-protected computer during the study.
- Confirmation of transcription will take place through a password protected email attachment.
- Interview and observation recordings will be destroyed upon the completion of the study in the prescribed timeframe of three years from the Indiana State University IRB.

• **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you will not be compensated financially or otherwise for participation in this study. You may choose not to participate in this study or refrain from answering any questions within this study without penalty or consequence. If you have volunteered to participate in this study, but elect to withdrawal, you can at any time. All evidence of your testimony will be destroyed up to the point of your confirmation and approval of the transcription, as this is where data analysis will begin, and beyond that point, once testimony is synthesized with other testimony to

determine themes, it is virtually impossible to remove individual testimony without adversely affecting the research results.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If any participant has any questions arise regarding the research study or procedures, they can contact David Hoffert, at 320 Nuthatch Dr., Warsaw, IN. 46580, via telephone (260)444-9899 or (574)371-5098, or via email (dhoffert@sycamores.indstate.edu) for answers. If they have further questions, they can contact Dr. Ryan Donlan at Indiana State University at (812) 237-8624 or by email at Ryan.donlan@indstate.edu.

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

APPENDIX H: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (SUPERINTENDENTS)

Finding the Correct Fit or Quickly Finding an Exit for School Superintendents: Perceptions from Those Who Placed Them or are Commissioned to Replace Them

You are asked to participate in research conducted by David Hoffert, Ed.S., a doctoral candidate under the supervision of Dr. Ryan Donlan at Indiana State University, Department of Educational Leadership. This study is being conducted as part of a Ph.D. dissertation. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked along with a minimum of five other former or current superintendents to participate in a focus group because of your current or former experience as a school superintendent.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand short length of superintendent tenure through the lenses of the superintendent search agents and a focus group of school superintendents. The crisis of short tenure of school superintendents has an ever-growing impact on school culture and arguably, on student achievement.

This study will focus on your perceptions regarding school superintendent training, leadership qualities, and contextual factors in relationship to job tenure. Research will be conducted with agents from a search agency run by an institution or association of non-profit status, as well as with working superintendents in K-12 schools.

- **PROCEDURES**

Participation in the research will require you to travel both to and from the Warsaw Community Schools central office and to participate in a maximum of a 90-minute-long focus group interview. The interview will take place with at least 5 other former or current school superintendents. The interview will be semi-structured with 20 questions relevant to your personal insights with regard to superintendent tenure. Each interview will be recorded, and as your interviewer, I will take notes during the process. Your interview will be transcribed, and pseudonyms will be used for any mentioned search agents, search agencies, school corporations, schools, or school leaders. The transcriptions will be sent to you for the opportunity to review, add, change, or delete your responses. Once the focus group is completed, themes from your testimony will be identified and used to analyze data in this research study.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Potential risks could include the release of confidential or reputation-damaging information with regard to the hiring and termination processes in your schools, if you select to disclose such. A significant discomfort to you as the participant could be the time spent in the research study or the possibility of an

unsettling question among fellow colleagues. Any participant, including you, reserves the right to discontinue participation or withdrawal from the research at any time during the focus group.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

The potential benefit for participation in this research study is a time to reflect and participate in a professional conversation that could result in some of your own professional learning. Potential benefits to the educational profession could include a greater understanding of and eventual communication of superintendent tenure and the professional roles and responsibilities associated with school leadership.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information provided by you during this focus group will not be released outside of this study without your permission. Your name will not be disclosed or published, although you may be recognized by those in the focus group. All participants will be requested to keep all shared information confidential after the interview. Constant measures will be taken to effectively protect all participants during this study including:

- Pseudonyms will be used in transcriptions to protect identities of all interviewees, school corporations, schools, and individuals referred to during the focus group.
- The research evidence will be stored in the researcher's personal home or professional office in a locked filing cabinet or password-protected computer during the study.
- Confirmation of transcription will take place through a password protected email attachment.
- Interview and observation recordings will be destroyed upon the completion of the study in the prescribed timeframe of three years from the Indiana State University IRB.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you will not be compensated financially or otherwise for participation in this study. You may choose not to participate in this study or refrain from answering any questions within this study without penalty or consequence. If you have volunteered to participate in this study, but elect to withdrawal, you can at any time. All evidence of your testimony will be destroyed up to the point of your confirmation and approval of the transcription, as this is where data analysis will begin, and beyond that point, once testimony is synthesized with other testimony to determine themes, it is virtually impossible to remove individual testimony without adversely affecting the research results. Only your statements will be removed from the transcription.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If any participant has any questions arise regarding the research study or procedures, they can contact David Hoffert, at 320 Nuthatch Dr., Warsaw, IN. 46580, via telephone (260)444-9899 or (574)371-5098, or via email (dhoffert@sycamores.indstate.edu) for answers. If they have further questions, they can contact Dr. Ryan Donlan at Indiana State University at (812) 237-8624 or by email at Ryan.donlan@indstate.edu.

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Subject

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