

IMPLICATIONS OF STRESS AND COPING MECHANISMS IN THE
SUPERINTENDENCY

A Dissertation
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirement for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By

Nita C. Hawk, B.S., M.S.

Dr. Barbara N. Martin, Dissertation Supervisor

MAY 2008

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

IMPLICATIONS OF STRESS AND COPING MECHANISM IN THE
SUPERINTENDENCY

presented by Nita Hawk,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of education, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Barbara N. Martin

Professor David Kreiner

Professor Sandy Hutchinson

Professor Mike Jinks

Professor Doug Thomas

DEDICATION

In honor of my mother, whose loving and encouraging spirit taught me to dream, to set goals, and to persevere....I miss you everyday!

Effie May Johnson

July 8, 1924 – June 7, 2001

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”—Serenity Prayer (14th Century)

“The only lifelong reliable motivations are those that come from within, and one of the strongest of those is the joy and pride that grow from knowing that you’ve just done something as well as you can do it.”—Lloyd Dobens

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Barbara Martin, whose patient guidance, expertise, and encouragement helped pushed me to higher levels. She is truly dedicated to assisting students reach their goals and helping to realize they can do more. She is clear in her expectations and has a powerful way of acknowledging you when you're just about to give up. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. David Kreiner, his patience, kindness, and willingness to help me interpret and understand the statistical methods of this study were reflective of his passion for his profession. I would like to acknowledge the other members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, Dr. Mike Jinks, and Dr. Doug Thomas.

I also want to acknowledge my family. My daughter, Courtney, who is also a student, understood when I needed to focus on this project. She and my grandson, Shiloh have offered kind, loving, and patient support. My son Drew and his new bride Mary Beth have also been extremely supportive. I've been blessed with a loving family and consequently have had tremendous help in accomplishing my educational goals. Thank you to all of you for always listening to me, supporting me, and being there for me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ii

APPENDICES.....vi

ABSTRACTvii

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION 1

 Background 1

 Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study.....3

 Statement of the Problem.....5

 Purpose of the Study.....6

 Research Questions7

 Limitations and Assumptions.....8

 Design Controls.....9

 Definition of Key Terms.....10

 Summary12

Chapter

2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....13

 Introduction.....13

 Public School Superintendents-Leadership Challenges.....15

 Bureaucracy.....15

 Money and Mandates.....16

 Overwhelming Workload.....17

 High Turnover19

Gender.....	21
Professional and Self Development.....	23
Coping with Stress—In General	25
Occupational Stress	28
Stress—Corporate Executives and School Superintendents.....	31
Summary.....	32

Chapter

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	36
Introduction.....	36
Problem and Purposes Overview	37
Research Questions	38
Population and Sample	39
Data Collection and Instrumentation.....	41
Data Collection Process	41
Instrumentation.....	41
Data Analysis	44
Researchers Biases and Assumptions.....	47
Summary.....	47

Chapter

4. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA.....	48
Introduction.....	48
Data Analysis	53
Population	53

Data Collection Instrumentation	53
Survey	53
Research Questions: Analysis of Data.....	54
Research Question 1	54
Research Question 2	57
Research Question 3	57
Research Question 4	60
Research Question 5	61
Research Question 6	66
Null Hypothesis	67
Summary.....	69
Chapter	
5. FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSIONS	72
Introduction.....	72
Purpose of Study	73
Design and Procedures	74
Findings of the Study.....	75
Discussion of the Findings.....	78
Finding 1	78
Finding 2	79
Finding 3	80
Finding 4	81

Implications for Practice.....	82
Limitations for Design Control.....	83
Recommendations for Future Research.....	85
Summary.....	87
REFERENCES.....	89
APPENDICES	
A. Survey Instrument.....	99
B. Superintendent or IRB Information Letter.....	111
C. Informed Consent Form – Survey.....	112
D. IRB Approval form.....	114
Internal Review Board Approval – University of Missouri, Columbia	
VITA.....	115

ABSTRACT

The study examined in what ways and to what degree, if any, school superintendents perceive stress and what, if any, coping mechanisms were engaged. Moreover, the study sought to identify any significant differences between the frequency of stressors by gender and coping mechanisms utilized by female and male leaders. This study focused on qualities of coping mechanisms and their effectiveness. Research constructs undergirding the study included: need for effective stress management skills, need for effective leadership, organizational health, professional development geared towards developing a stress model, and creating a positive school culture. The study population consisted of 380 superintendents in the state of Missouri. All participants were currently employed as superintendents. The mixed design study utilized the *Superintendent Stress and Coping Mechanisms* survey to collect pertinent data, as well as qualitative, open-ended questions.

Study findings revealed that there is a statistical difference between the types of coping mechanisms utilized and effectiveness between male and female superintendents. While no significant difference exists between the overall occupational stressors experienced by gender, the frequency data identified high levels of stress among over 50% of the superintendents. Superintendents believed that *exercise* and *getting away* were most frequently utilized coping mechanisms, while *artificial means* was least commonly used. *Exercise* was identified as the most effective coping mechanism for both genders; however male utilized *getting away* more frequently, while woman used *exercise* most frequently. Qualitative findings established the school district personnel provided *no known* support to superintendents in developing stress management skills and coping strategies. Other themes that arose from the study included; barriers in the perception of stress as it relates to gender, inconsistencies in the leader's ability to

take time off, while superintendents agreed the school board is the predominant influencing factor, and the need for professional development programs. Implications of this research study were identified in the areas of leadership preparatory programs, as well as education in stress management skills reform at the district level.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

Background

University researchers and school recruiters are finding dramatic changes in the ability to recruit quality applicants for superintendent positions. The number of applicants is getting smaller; there are fewer first time candidates; and the quality of those applying is lower (Public Agenda, 2001). Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000) conducted a national survey of superintendents and found that 90% assert the district should give them, "more help and support to ensure their well-being and job success" (p.8). These researchers also discovered that 88% of the superintendents who participated in their survey felt that "The shortage of applicants for the superintendent's job is a serious crisis in American education. Furthermore, 92% of respondents were concerned that high turnover in the superintendency means a crisis in keeping strong leaders in the position" (p. 2). According to Houston (2001), the executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, individuals who may be considering the superintendency look at those already in the role, see how unbalanced their lives often are and decide it is not worth the stress. Researchers have found many reasons for the frustration and imbalance that affect the leaders in the Superintendent position.

The superintendents primary role has transformed from focusing on being a figurehead to being a facilitator of federal mandates (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner 2000). Superintendents have found themselves shifting their job duties to satisfy political agendas. It is more important to influence stakeholders' decisions rather than making decisions (Brandt, 1993; Forderaro, 2006; Owen, 2000). Some of the challenges

superintendents face includes pressures caused by lack of adequate funding, competing community and school groups, employee unions, state legislated mandates, intrusive board members, and the public's perceived dissatisfaction with school performance (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner 2000). Much of the pressure created by these mandates is caused by the lack of resources needed to address the issues (Public Agenda, 2001). Superintendents say inadequate resources detract most from their effectiveness (Glass et al.). Moreover, funding problems in rural schools may increase with the "graying" of rural America, if retirees on fixed incomes continue to reject higher taxes for education (Glass et al.). While lack of funding is just one of the stressors that superintendents must face; conflicts with the school board members is another.

Pressure on school leaders also comes from trying to reconcile the conflicting expectations of different constituencies (Goens, 1998; Richardson, 1998). Sometimes superintendents leave one district for another because of conflict with an important constituency--their school board. In fact, nearly 25 percent of superintendents who leave small districts report conflict with the school board as their reason for leaving (Glass et al., 2000).

To be effective in this age of reform and sustaining change, superintendents must be able to keep balance in their lives. Despite the resurgence in the study of leadership (Fuller, Campbell, Celio, Harvey, Immerwahr, & Winger 2003) the issue of stress has not been thoroughly investigated (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000; Glass, et al. 2000; Houston, 2001). According to literature, there have been a moderate number of studies on the causes of stress in the superintendency; however, there are limited studies examining how leaders are managing their stressors. If stress is an integral part of the daily lives of

superintendents, then investigating what coping mechanisms are initiated is essential. With the stressors associated with being a superintendent, how is it that some superintendents thrive in their careers, are productive, successful, and enjoy their work? It appears these leaders have developed attitudes and strategies to help them cope and get through the challenges of the job. How have successful superintendents learned to withstand the hardships and maintain balance in a world of constant stress? These questions are addressed, in part, in various studies; however, when viewed collectively, remain unanswered.

Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study

Four constructs emerged from the review of the literature to demonstrate the need for investigation of common stressors and coping mechanisms most often utilized to deal with the occupational stress experienced by superintendents in one Midwestern state. First, leadership challenges facing today's superintendents were examined through the context of various issues such as bureaucracy, money and mandates, overwhelming workload, and high turnover of superintendent positions. The second construct that emerged was gender issues as it relates to the predictor of coping skills for occupational stress. Thirdly, administrator training through preparatory programs, and professional development were investigated.

Finally, definitions of stress, symptoms, consequences, and recommendations on how to cope with stress were discussed. Occupational stress was included and reviewed as to the specific nature of job related stress and the coping mechanisms used to deal with occupational stress.

Most of the studies related to education have focused on stress experienced by educational leaders but not on what leaders do to cope with such stress (Brock & Grady, 2002; Queen & Queen, 2004). Although recent literature has addressed the issue of stress and administrative leadership positions overall there is a lack of research examining coping mechanisms utilized by superintendents and a lack of emphasis on the importance of professional development and preparation of administrators on how to deal with these stressors.

Furthermore, gender differences have not been adequately researched. Nelson and Burke (2002) stated stress profiles were based on dated information and did not present an accurate reflection of gender specific stress. Therefore, there is a need for additional research on gender difference and the effectiveness of self-development programs to aid female superintendents in developing coping skills.

Some professional conferences have presented the importance of leaders maintaining a balance in their lives. One such conference was the Association of California School Administration (2000b), which presented, “balance of work and family, which rarely, if ever, leaves.... [them] enough time for themselves. By keeping stress at bay, leaders will be better equipped to do their jobs and communicate their needs” (p.14). However, there is still a lack of research demonstrating the “how to’s” needed to manage the predictable stressors in the everyday life and job duties of a superintendent.

More importantly it is imperative to develop coping strategies to help leaders manage stress and achieve balance in their lives. This should ultimately enhance the superintendent’s effectiveness as leaders.

This study was framed through the lenses of perception of common stressors and the coping mechanisms most often utilized to manage the occupational stress of superintendents in a Midwestern state. Research and information gained from Farkas, Johnson, and Duffet (2003) and Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) helped formulate research questions and guide this study. Data collection and analysis allowed the researcher to investigate the link between common stressors and coping mechanisms, and strategies utilized to manage occupational stress. Furthermore, qualitative data gathered through open-ended questions buttressed the findings gathered from the quantitative data.

Statement of the Problem

“The popular perception of the superintendency is that of an impossible job few want to undertake in which even the best and the brightest confront escalating and competing demands...” (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000, p.6). As the demands for accountability are heightened and job expectations become increasingly unrealistic, job candidates are less interested in entering the superintendency or remaining in the role.

Work related stress for upper level management and executives are part of the leadership role; however, the stress level is on the rise (American Management Association, 1996; Brock & Grady, 2002). The symptoms of stress can surface in many different forms, including physical disorders, adverse effects on family life, and even alcoholism (Colgan, 2003; Domenech, 1996). A consistent theme among researchers regarding superintendent turnover and candidate shortages has been the increased stress associated with the position.

These challenges have led to a vast shortage of administrative candidates and high superintendent turnover (Forderaro, 2006; Queen & Queen, 2004). As a result of the

present administrative shortages, researchers and writers have significantly added to literature in the past decade on school administrator stress and burnout (Brock & Grady, 2002; Colgan, 2003; Gates & Gmelch, 1998; Nussebaum, 2007). Lashway (2002) proclaimed the stress associated with the superintendency not only forced many qualified leaders to step down but also has deterred many qualified candidates from applying. Cunningham and Burdick (1999) reported that time and stress ranked second behind only micromanagement of the school board as the main reason for qualified candidates deciding not to apply for the district's top position. Inadequate funding has also been reported as a problem.

Superintendents say inadequate resources detract most from their effectiveness (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2003; Glass et al., 2000). Moreover, funding problems in rural schools may increase with the "graying" of rural America, if retirees on fixed incomes continue to reject higher taxes for education. Problems with different constituents presents difficulty for the superintendent position.

Nearly 25 percent of superintendents who leave small districts report conflict with the school board as the reason for their departure (Glass et al., 2000). Superintendents deal with conflicting expectations from different school board members, which can lead to a lot of stress (Goens, 1998). Long hours and low salaries is another stressor often reported by superintendents (Queen & Queen, 2004).

As such, the problem that will be addressed through this research is the identification of the processes that superintendents use to find successful strategies in a stressful environment. This will ultimately lead to more individuals willing and able to assume the position of superintendent.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify and assess stressors and coping mechanisms related to job performance as perceived by superintendents in Missouri. Lodged between political and bureaucratic accountability, today's superintendent must effectively mediate between local interests (school boards, parent advisory councils, parent-teacher organizations, individual parents, teachers, civic groups) and state and federal requirements, school accreditation, and state report cards (Queen & Queen, 2004).

In addition to this difficult list, the pressure of personal accountability for decisions has made the role of the school districts' chief executive officer increasingly difficult. Recent studies supported the idea that the role superintendents undertake when trying to balance educational, managerial, and political leadership to promote school improvement demonstrated a vast complexity of problems (Howley, Pendarvis, & Gibbs, 2002).

Therefore, a logical question to ask is how does the superintendent carrying out the duties and the multiplicity of interrelated demands of this position cope with the stressors of the position? Secondly, the research attempted to determine if there was a relationship between the coping mechanisms utilized by superintendents and job performance, maintaining balance, and how the organization prepared them for the stress of the position. Finally, the investigation will examine gender differences and coping skills among the participants selected.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed within the context of this study:

1. What are the frequencies of common occupational stressors as perceived by superintendents?
2. Are there differences in occupational stressors between female superintendents and male superintendents?
3. What are the frequencies of the type of coping mechanisms deployed as perceived by superintendents, and what type of coping mechanism is most effective?
4. Do male and female superintendents differ in the type of coping mechanism they utilize?
5. What are the strategies employed by school district personnel to assist the superintendents in managing occupational stress?
6. What support did school district personnel provide to enhance the effectiveness of coping mechanisms utilized by superintendents to manage occupational stressors?

Limitations and Assumptions

There are limitations involved with all investigations and potential weaknesses in the design and application (Cresswell & Clark, 2007; Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). The limitations of this study consisted of the sample for the study, the methodology of the study, the time limitations of the study, and the use of technology for survey delivery. Geographically, the population of this study was limited to the state of Missouri and consisted of a representative sample of the current superintendents in the state. Of these 531 public school districts a representative sample was taken based on geographical location and gender. While Missouri is a typical state in the career of a superintendent

and job stressors, the results of this study cannot be generalized to other states and their job stressors because the sample selected is not representative of those populations.

This study was primarily a quantitative study utilizing descriptive statistics gathered by an on-line survey. There are limitations to the use of surveys due to the threat of validity of the instrumentation process (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Other issues that influence the results from the use of survey data is the lack of participation. Fraenkel and Wallen argued that this lack of participation seems to be “increasing over the recent years” (p.407).

The use of technology to administer the web-based survey can be viewed both as a strength and a weakness to the study. It allowed for a more timely development of the data received, but it limited the subjects to utilizing a computer to answer the questions. While the questionnaire could be completed at school or at home, which allowed for a more private and potentially thoughtful completion, it is possible that some participants may have felt uncomfortable with the technology.

The fourth limitation involved timing of the survey, as stress levels can vary significantly from day to day and even within a period of a day. The level of perceived stress affecting each participating superintendent at the time of the survey is completed may impact the result of the survey. Depending on the individual, it may be more of a snapshot of the current situation and may not reflect the complete picture of the superintendent’s job stressors. There could also be some hesitancy on the part of certain participants in reporting personal feelings related to work induced stress.

Basic assumptions of the study are that the superintendent responding to the survey honestly and as accurately as possible measured the perceptions of job-related

stressors and coping mechanisms. It is also assumed that the individual who is responding to the survey is the person who belongs to that email address.

Design Controls

A descriptive design was chosen as a means of conducting this study. A survey was utilized to describe perceptions of members of a target population regarding a particular phenomenon (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). Survey instruments have been found to be very effective at describing the characteristics of a population (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). The purposeful sample was selected from the 531 currently employed superintendents in a Midwest state.

This descriptive design was employed to collect quantitative data from results of the questionnaire followed with qualitative data obtained through the open-ended questions on the on-line survey which provided the researcher to further refine and triangulate the findings to allow for full investigation of the issue (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). Thus descriptive research was used when the researcher wanted to describe a situation in order to understand it better (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000).

The survey instrument incorporated both a Likert and open-ended question type that was modified by the researcher to include the most often identified stress factors and coping mechanisms as identified by previous studies covering stress in the superintendency. Locating a survey that would adequately measure the perceptions of stress and coping mechanisms was problematic as there was no such instrument available. Therefore, a survey was created by the researcher based on variables identified in the review of the literature. The survey was piloted with a small population of

superintendents, all familiar with the occupational stressors of the position, to “reveal ambiguities, poorly worded questions, questions that are not understood, and unclear choices, and . . . indicate whether the instructions to the respondents are clear” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 404). Unclear questions and directions were corrected or eliminated prior to administration with the sample population.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms are important to this study and are defined as follows:

Coping Mechanism: Methods by which administrators cope with the stress encountered as a result of the school environment and the resulting areas of responsibility (Queen & Queen, 2004).

District Strategies: Policy utilized by public school district.

Job Performance: That which relates to the functions necessary for performing the role of the superintendent.

Professional and Self Development: A formal procedure by which a professional body ensures that its members keep their expertise up to date with current developments.

Stress: The "wear and tear" our bodies experience as we adjust to our continually changing environment; it has physical and emotional effects on us and can create positive or negative feelings (Lyles, 2005).

Stressors: The very specific situations or events that evoke the feeling of stress.

Superintendent: Chief executive officer for Pre-Kindergarten-12th and Kindergarten-8th grade public schools, appointed by a locally elected school board of trustees.

Summary

Superintendent stress is at a point where there is an urgency to understand how to cope with the inevitable job stressors. A necessity exists to determine factors that can help those who are currently serving as superintendents to have a more successful experience as it relates to managing stress. The information from this study can be useful for those preparing for the superintendency as well as those who currently serve in this position. Gmelch (1996) stated...“By shedding greater light on the sources of stress, it may help superintendents build bridges over the barriers of stress” (p.32).

In this chapter the research questions were presented, along with the limitations and design controls for the study. In Chapter Two, a synthesis of related literature is presented that provided the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the study. In Chapter Three, a description of the research design and methodology utilized in this study is provided. Presented in Chapter Four are the research analysis and findings. In Chapter Five, the results of the study, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research are presented.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

School administration is a popular area of study, in particular the school superintendency (Public Agenda, 2001). However, there has not been a great deal of study related to stress in the superintendency and the coping mechanisms associated to the stressors (Brock & Grady, 2002). Stress and superintendency seem to be synonymous, but the specifics of work related stress in the position and how superintendents deal with it has been disregarded (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2004). The 2007 mid-decade study of the state of the superintendency confirmed,

"An important challenge facing superintendents is how to handle personal stress in a positive and constructive manner without passing it on to their staff. Intellectually understanding that stress is a normal condition of the position is just as important as finding personal coping mechanisms to reduce its negative effects. Coping, understanding, and reducing superintendent stress should be a high priority for school boards and professional associations serving superintendents and boards" (p.47).

During the last 15 years, the superintendent's primary role has transformed into one that focuses more on being a facilitator than a figurehead (Andero, 2000). It has also become more about influencing stakeholders' decisions rather than simply making decisions (Brandt, 1993; Nussbaum 2007). School administrators in the next 15 years will face even more challenges. Reviewing the second edition of the *Handbook of Research on Educational Research*, Fowler (1999) stated, "...superintendents of the next decade will deal with a society in flux" (p. 594). Glass (2002) agreed superintendent's roles and responsibilities have made drastic changes in the past few years. With the fluctuation in

expectations, and demands on the superintendent position, a growing problem is superintendent turnover (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Nussbaum, 2007).

One reoccurring challenge is getting qualified administrators to take on the superintendency, and yet another keeping them there (Nussbaum, 2007, Public Agenda, 2001). There are a number of reasons why individuals “step down” from the position of superintendent. Retirement is the most obvious answer that comes to mind, considering that stress is cited as one of the most common reason for educators seeking early retirement (Harrison, 1997; Nussbaum, 2007).

A definite barrier to transformational reform in school systems is the turnover rate of superintendents and administrators (Brock & Grady, 2002; Mizell, 2000). These studies proclaimed the absence of longevity by administrators within individual districts makes it nearly impossible to provide an operating environment that is stable to foster lasting, systemic reform.

Two serious challenges that the education profession must face are to attract the best and the brightest educators into superintendent posts and then once attracted, to retain them. One ex-superintendent who departed the position for a principalship stated that “the pressure of the superintendent’s position had begun to destroy me from within” (Osborne, 1996, p.29). Brock and Grady (2002) described the work of the school administrator as fragmented and overwhelming.

Examined in this study are both stressors and stress coping mechanisms as they relate to job performance. In order to consider both theory and research relate to stress and the superintendency, three strands of literature were reviewed. The three strands included public school superintendents and the leadership challenges they face, stress and

coping in general, and occupational stress parallels related to the public school superintendent and the corporate executive. In addition the issue of gender and how that might change coping mechanisms was examined. A number of parallels can be drawn between corporate executives and school administrators. Therefore, the review utilizes information and studies from both fields.

Public School Superintendents—Leadership Challenges

Bureaucracy

Superintendents agree that being a school leader is an exceptionally challenging job. They say the ability to manage politics is the key to survival and point to “politics, and bureaucracy” as one of the reasons colleagues leave the field (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffet, 2003, p. 15). In addition to managing all that is needed to run their district, they also juggle complaining parents, difficult special education laws, and uniformed media coverage (Keedy & Bjork, 2001). After 35 years in the business, one discouraged public school superintendent said, “I am tired of . . . dancing around the political games” (Johnson, 2002, p.26).

Moreover, Howley, Pendarvis, and Gibbs (2002) reported political and bureaucratic accountability as one of the highest pressures school administrators face. More than half (54 percent) of school superintendents say they need to “work around the system” to get things done (Public Agenda, 2001, p.16). Recent studies supported the idea that the role superintendents undertake when trying to balance educational, managerial, and political leadership to promote school improvement demonstrated a vast complexity of problems (Howley, Pendarvis, & Gibbs, 2002).

Money and Mandates

There are many other challenges that superintendents are faced with in today's school system. Superintendents identified insufficient funding as one of the biggest challenges. Keeping up with local, state and federal mandates takes up too much of their time and most believe schools are being overregulated and micromanaged (Houston, 2001; Rose & Gallup, 2007). Johnson (2002) reported 88% of the school superintendents interviewed complained that they receive mandates "without getting the resources necessary to fill them (p.27)". According to Simpson, Lacava, and Sampson (2004), the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) and special education are two areas of federal legislation that create frustration. In the *Report to the People* (2002) superintendent William James of the Cherokee County School System, introduced parents to NCLB by stating that the act brings increases federal involvement in public education at the state and local levels and increased accountability for states, school districts, and individual schools (Rose & Gallup, 2003). Since then the public, state, and local educational leaders have muddled through the complex accountability issues addressed in NCLB. Rose and Gallup (2003 and 2007), in the 35th and 39th *Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll* on the public's attitude toward public schools, focused on NCLB strategies using the responses of over a thousand adults. The most striking results from the 2003 study were that eighty-three percent of the respondents believed that decisions regarding what is taught in the public schools should be made at the state or local level and sixty-nine percent of the respondents reported that they did not know enough about NCLB to state whether they have a favorable or unfavorable opinion about these federal guidelines (Rose & Gallop, 2003). According to Rose and Gallup (2007) the updated study revealed the public's

knowledge of NCLB had increased, but that as the public knowledge grows, the public's view of NCLB becomes less favorable. It is fair to suggest that one of the reasons the public opinion is increasingly unfavorable with regard to NCLB is because the law has focused on the wrong standard of school success (Rose and Gallup, 2007). This indicates a severe discrepancy between the realities of state and federal mandates and the public understanding of the increased responsibilities of school superintendents. In regard to NCLB, superintendents have an ambivalent mind set. Although it is clear to superintendents that the law is here to stay, few think it will work the way it is presently structured, creating a stressful environment (Rose & Gallup, 2003; 2007). The vision of the law makes sense, but many superintendents think it needs adjustments in order for it to work, and many question the political intent behind it. Still, given all the challenges they face, most superintendents are optimistic about the benefits of NCLB (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffet, 2003; Rose & Gallup, 2007).

According to Wallace (2003), school leaders say their challenges are related to funding and the time it takes to comply with a plethora of local, state, and federal mandates. Ninety-three percent of superintendents and eighty-eight percent of principals say their district has experienced a huge increase of responsibilities and mandates without getting the resources necessary to fulfill them. They feel that some items are well intended, but most lawmakers do not understand the impact to the organization. Many of the superintendents feel their workload is overwhelming (Wallace, 2003).

Overwhelming Workload

Superintendents say they face countless daily obstacles in their high-stress, high visibility position, yet they respond with a "can do" confidence and a willingness to be

held accountable for their district's performance. Superintendents acknowledge that they put a great deal of energy into managing their school, which can cause an imbalance in the rest of their life (Olson, 2000).

Lashway (2002) stated school administrators must accept the ultimate responsibility for district, school, and student achievement. Standards-based accountability has become a trademark for the superintendent and a minimum expectation of the job. This trend has created a basis for perceived and experienced stress for the position (Shipps & Firestone, 2003). Howley, Pendarvis, and Gibbs, (2002) agreed that today's superintendents must effectively mediate between local interests, (i.e. school boards, parent advisory councils, parent-teacher organizations, individual parents, teachers, civic groups) and state and federal requirements/evaluations, (i.e. NCLB, school accreditation, and state report cards).

Houston (2001) alluded that the opportunities to be successful as a superintendent were filled with difficulty that included rapidly changing community demographics. Keedy and Bjork (2001) agreed that an increase in community political activism and an increase in accountability measures added to the challenges. Greyser (1999) and Brock and Grady (2002) also suggested that the role of the superintendent often leads to isolation as administrators move up the leadership ladder. Additionally, leaders tend to put unrealistic demands on themselves that they have all the right answers, which adds to anxiety and stress levels (Queen & Queen, 2004). All of these stressors lead to high turnover in the school administration (Forderaro, 2006; Nussbaum, 2007; Public Agenda, 2001).

High Turnover

The professional literature and the general media have given much attention to two specific problems in school administration: a) the decreasing pool of administrators, in particular for school superintendent; and b) the frequent turnover of administrators (Educational Research Service, 1998; Forderaro, 2006; Nussbaum, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2004). The marked burnout of superintendents and other administrators has been reflected in the studies done within the last decade. Accentuating this fact is the number of studies supported by grants through the *State Action for Education Leadership Project* (SAELP). In the spring of 2001, eight million national initiatives supported fifteen states with 3-year \$250,000 grants. These grants have been utilized for policies to attract, support, and sustain effective superintendents (Bjork, Keedy, Rhinehart, & Winter, 2002). This has been directly related to the need for increased and improved education and training for administrators to help recruit and retain more qualified leaders (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000).

Another result of the superintendent shortage has been the recent trend for school boards opting to use consulting firms to help increase superintendent candidate pools (Forderaro, 2006). Glass (2000) noted even the use of consulting firms has not necessarily increased these leadership shortages. Jones (2001) confirmed this when he noted that 8 years ago a superintendent vacancy would produce an average of two hundred-fifty applicants while today thirty is the norm. A consistent theme among researchers and theories behind superintendent turnover has been the increased stress associated with the position (Queen & Queen, 2004).

In the extensive study of the American superintendency, Glass, Bjork and Brunner (2000) found that fifty-one percent of superintendents surveyed indicated that they feel considerable or very great stress in the superintendency and an additional forty-one percent indicated a moderate level of stress. Because of this perception, many administrators viewed the superintendency as a burnout position (Queen & Queen, 2004). Colgan (2003) acknowledged that burnout is characterized by a growing feeling of helplessness and a sense that tasks are insurmountable. Eventually the stress can lead to premature superintendent turnover (Educational Research Service, 1998; Forderaro, 2006; Nussbaum, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2004).

A survey of retired school superintendents in New York cited stress as the most common reason for their decision to retire (Goldstien, 1992). Districts that have difficult political situations, little money, poor staff morale, and poor student achievements are in especially stressful positions (Brubaker & Coble, 1995; Queen & Queen, 2004). Milstein (1992) and Nussbaum (2007) concurred that educational administrators believe the main reason for high turnover rates and unwillingness to fill new superintendent vacancies is due to the fact that their work is full of stress and that superintendents face situations for which there are no easy answers.

As the superintendents retire and districts begin to search for candidates to fill these positions, ninety percent of school district personnel stated it is becoming increasingly difficult to find qualified candidates (Association of California School Administration, 2000a). Additionally, the stressful nature of the job and the implications of stress on the performance of the leaders have also been addressed in the literature. According to Glass (2000), in a study of *The American School Superintendency 2000*, it

was noted that superintendents under high stress might make decisions without benefit of reflections and rational thought. When leaders are dealing with high levels of stress, they suffer in their personal relationships and their organization does not perform well because of the preoccupation that comes with handling their own stress (Brock & Grady, 2002). If administrators continue to have difficulties coping with the stresses of their positions, the end result will be a shortage of educational leaders (Cunningham & Burdick, 1999; Giugni, 1998; Nussbaum, 2007). An even worse scenario could be if they stay in their jobs, the potential for fatigue, burnout, and depression, which might result in symptoms affecting their physical, mental, and emotional health (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Gates & Gmelch, 1998; Queen & Queen, 2004; Weber, 1999). Another related concern in the literature was how gender affected the coping skills of the superintendents (Gianakos, 2002).

Gender

Gianakos (2002), Nelson and Burke (2002), and Iwasaki, Mackay, and Mactavish (2005) reported research results have been mixed with gender being a predictor of coping skills for occupational stress. Women tend to exhibit independence and resilience to cope under work pressure; even while they risk loss of social support, through isolation and the possibility of internalizing failures (Bhatnagar, 1988; Long, 1989; Nelson & Burke, 2002; Taylor, Klein, Gurung, Gruenewald, & Updegraff, 2002). In fact, Gianakos (2002) and Nelson and Burke (2002) postulated that men, compared to females, perceive greater support in the workplace. Geller and Hobfoll (1994) agreed social support in the workplace is comforting and helps with decision making and problem solving. While men's support networks were more work-based, women seemed to gain their support

from family and friends (Nelson & Burke, 2002; Piltch, Walsh, Mangione, & Jennings, 1994). Gianakos (2002), Iwasaki, Mackay, and Mactavish (2005), and Nelson and Burke (2002) purported women's stress may increase due to on-going conflicts of balancing work and family obligations.

Stress and stress related diseases are on the increase in women as are the number of women holding superintendent positions (Gmelch, 1996; Nelson & Burke, 2002). Gmelch (1996) stated that women perceive less stress than their male counterparts when compared in stress profiles. Iwasaki, et al. (2005); Nelson and Burke (2002); Taylor, et al, (2002) argued the stress profiles were based on dated information and did not accurately reflect gender specific stress.

According to Nelson and Burke (2002), men and women differ in their choices of coping strategies. Men use "problem-focused" coping strategies: planned and rational actions, humor, and fantasy (p. 87). However, when education, occupation, and position are comparable, both men and women use "problem-focused" coping. (p. 87). Nelson and Burke added in a less selected sample, women used "emotion-focused" strategies: expression of emotions, social support, self-blame, denial, and avoidance (p. 7). Iwasaki, et al. (2005), Nelson and Burke (2002), and Taylor, et al. (2002) reported women's coping style is likely to be "tend and befriend," that is, to nurture and form relationships with others. Thus women's health is related to the number and quality of their supportive relationships (Nelson & Burke, 2002).

Nelson and Burke (2002) reported conflict between the demands of work and family is another source of stress that varies by gender. Women continue to carry the bulk of family responsibilities, even when they work long hours (Nelson & Burke, 2002).

However, the amount of time spent on work and family does not predict stress level; rather the conflict between work and family roles heightens stress (Iwasaki, et al., 2005; Nelson & Burke, 2002). Women, especially mothers, are more likely to report conflict between the demands of work and home (Fielden & Davidson, 2001; Shields, 2003). Both men and women who are managers, but especially women, experience internal work-family conflict. In turn, work-family conflict is associated with depression, anxiety, poor physical health, and alcohol use among both men and women (Nelson & Burke, 2002; Shields, 2003). Within corporations and institutions, the management of work stress is still generally considered to be an individual problem. Work settings may offer "family friendly" options and wellness centers, but the use of these benefits is by individual choice (Iwasaki et al, 2005). Overall, these constructs demonstrated the need for additional research regarding the effectiveness of self-development programs in aiding female superintendents in developing coping skills to guide them toward a focus on improved stress management.

Professional and Self Development

In the past, most of the professional development courses have focused on technical skills and knowledge required of administrative leadership positions (Brock & Grady, 2002). In the mid-nineties there was an increase in the preparation programs that address the personal dimensions of a leader. They focus on values, ethics, integrity, fairness, personal belief systems, and ethics of educational leaders (Beck, 1994; Brock & Grady, 2002)). With the increasing demands of the superintendency position there is an obvious need to focus on the self development programs for the administrative leader. Literature from other disciplines, such as the psychology and corporate business arena,

show a strong correlation between self/personal development and finding meaning in one's work (Briskin, 1996; Walsh, 1999). More writers are venturing into this arena because they have recognized the important relationship of the leader's self-development to organizational success. According to Bolman and Deal (1997), it is important to include matters of the heart, soul, and spirit into the workplace of educational leaders,

“in the workplace, all of us need a language of moral discourse that permits discussion of ethical and spiritual issues, connecting them to images of leadership....Heart, hope, and faith, rooted in soul and spirit are necessary for today's managers to become tomorrow's leaders, for today's sterile bureaucracies to become tomorrow's communities of meaning, and for our society to rediscover its ethical and spiritual center” (p.2).

Johnson (2002) reported eight-nine percent of superintendents believe leadership programs in graduate schools of education are “out of touch” with the realities of running schools today. One of the superintendents interviewed in the Public Agenda (2001) stated that too much of the professional development that is offered is “impractical and focuses on the wrong things” (p.28).

Houston (2001) asked the question: “How will we find leaders who can act as courageous champions for children and who are willing and able to change the status quo, while acting as collaborative catalysts and working with others to make that happen?” (p. 432). We must look hard to find a source for this kind of leader. As Houston goes on to say, there are four primary problems with the current leadership system: “the job is impossible, the expectations are inappropriate, the training is inadequate, and the pipeline is inverted” (p.432). On a positive note, he adds the superintendency is not so much of a job, as a calling. It chooses you in as much as you choose it; you are summoned. Part of the responsibility of the current generation of superintendents is to

summon the next generation to duty. The superintendency is a very challenging job with many frustrations and perils. It is also a job with many rewards. Superintendents have the chance to reshape the lives of children in amazing ways, and they can create a sense of community where none exists (Nussbaum, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2004).

Thus there is no escaping the amount of stress in an administrative position; however how stress is managed can have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the leader and the success of the organization (Queen & Queen, 2004). Many superintendents still find the job exhilarating and challenging, and many who leave the job actually come back. They cite reasons such as wanting to work in a job that offers opportunities to change the direction of children's lives, alter the behavior of an organization, and expand the possibilities of whole communities (Houston, 2001). Patterson (2000) noted that the superintendency is not just a job, but a lifestyle filled with important professional and personal accomplishments. It is an opportunity to do difficult and valuable work and to overcome challenges. Through professional reflection, many long time superintendents have been able to deal with hard questions and come up with the answers, thus contributing to their decision to stay in their career field (Kearns & Harvey, 2001). Although stress is a part of the administrator's job, understanding stress and how to cope with it is an important part of this discussion.

Coping with Stress—In General

Under normal circumstances, people should be able to find new balances and responses in their reactions to new situations (Queen & Queen, 2004). Stress is not necessarily a negative phenomenon and it would therefore be a mistake to concentrate only on its pathological effects. A moderate level of stress can be an important

motivational factor and can be instrumental in achieving a dynamic adaptation to new situations (Lyles, 2005).

If health is considered as a dynamic equilibrium, stress is part of it (Lyles, 2005). There is no health without interaction with other people and with the environment. Only excesses of stress are pathological (Lyles, 2005). Some stress is therefore normal and necessary, at work and outside it. But if stress is intense, continuous or repeated, if a person is unable to cope, or if support is lacking, stress then becomes a negative phenomenon which can lead to physical illness and psychological disorders (Lyles, 2005). In a work context, it often results in inadequate adaptation to situations and people and failure to perform at an optimal level. Work related stress is defined by the *Occupation Health Safety Organization* (2006) as "...the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury" (p.1).

Stress, according to Buhler (1993), Queen and Queen (2004), and Brock and Grady (2002), is the body's non-specific response to stressors in the environment. Lyles (2005) concurred and reported stress is the mental and physical wear and tear that we experience as we live our lives. In no more than hundredth of a millisecond, the individual prepares themselves for fight or flight. This reaction evokes a series of complex autonomic and endocrine changes that provide much of our ability to survive. Lehrer and Woolfolk (1993) and Demerouti, et.al (2001) agreed that prolonged reaction beyond the emergency stage results in a chronic state of over tension of the body's

system, which is directly linked to disease states, i.e. hypertension, high blood cholesterol, and obesity.

Therefore, according to Brock and Grady (2002), Buhler (1993), Lyles (2005), and Queen and Queen (2004) not all tension is necessarily bad or unhealthy. The negative or unhealthy stress is referred to as distress and the stress that is considered positive and healthy is known as eustress. The body's response to stress is similar in both distress and eustress. The heart rate and perspiration increases, but with eustress the effects are temporary. Lyles (2005) purported when the body is under distress, adverse effects are produced in the body because of the repeated sounding of the physiological stress alarms. When the body perceives a threat, a fire alarm is pulled in our system.

The same stimulus may result in good stress for one person and bad stress for another. Buhler (1993) provided the example of waiting until the night before a deadline to complete a major project or assignment. One individual may consider this a great motivator because they believe they work and perform better under pressure. Impending deadlines may produce traumatic results in another individual because of a tendency to panic under pressure. Each individual handles stress differently and every person has a different threshold (Brock & Grady, 2002; Buhler, 1993; Queen & Queen, 2004).

Lyles (2005) noted, "Understand your body's response to stress and you will know how to navigate any of life's storms" (p. 3). Stress is a natural part of life and will be induced in both good and bad situations. Lyles (2005) agreed stress is the stimulus for action and growth. Individuals with too little stress may not put their best foot forward or perform to their potential. On the other hand, too much stress can lead to a loss of focus and lack of efficiency and the inability to be effective as a leader (Brock & Grady, 2002;

Crampton, Hodge, Mishra, & Price, 1995). Brock and Grady and Lyles concurred, the major difference between eustress and distress is the damaging effects to the body. The body's emergency system is easily triggered by a threat and must be regulated, or problems related to overall health will continue to increase throughout life. When the fire alarm is constantly activated day after day, week after week, a person is living in a chronic state of tenseness (Lyles).

Coping is essentially the way people manage those life conditions that are stressful. Stress and coping can be considered to be reciprocals of each other (Lyles, 2005). When the coping behavior is effective, the level of stress tends to be low or on the decline. However, if the individual has ineffective coping skills, there is a tendency for stress to be high or continue to increase (Lazarus, 1999; Queen & Queen, 2004). Greenburg (1980) and Lyles discussed the use of Large Muscle Activity (LMA) as potentially the most effective coping technique available. The urge to fight or flee are primary sub-conscious reactions to stress and are characterized by acceleration of the heart, mobilization of sugar from the liver, a rise of blood pressure, and other physiological reactions. Both of those urges require LMA; therefore by preparing the body to move, it should move (Lyles, 2005). LMA such as walking, running, or exercising is the natural way of allowing the body to respond to the stressor, and that in effect is the quickest way to lower stress and the accompanying physiological symptoms. In short, if you are exercising and moving on a regular basis, you are training your body how to handle eustress. If your physiological pathways are set for eustress, then it will be easier for your body to handle distress (Lyles, 2005). Stress in general is directly related to how well the occupational stress is managed.

Occupational Stress

The theory that every disease is conditioned by a specific and clearly defined cause was formulated in the late 1800s by a German pathologist, Rudolph Virchow (Lyles, 2005). Selye (1976), Lyles and Queen and Queen (2004) translated this cause effect relationship to workplace stress. They hypothesized that a wide variety of workplace stressors and their interactions could lead to patterns of functionality changes in organs and organ systems. Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001) concurred that the negative effects of workplace stress need to be identified to prevent causing disease, accelerating the course of disease, and triggering disease symptoms. Of equal importance is the need to identify and promote positive system components that contribute to the promotion of health and well-being (Levi, 2001; Queen & Queen, 2004).

While the impact of workplace stress varies from one person to the next, mounting evidence shows that stress can cause some very specific adverse health effects (Lyles, 2005). Selye (1976) and Lyles explained signs and symptoms of occupational stress that can be categorized into physical or psychological. Some physical signs are migraine headaches, ulcers, heart attacks, high blood pressure, anxiety and sleeplessness. Also, some psychological symptoms include changes in temperament, irritability, lack of concentration, and becoming overly argumentative. There can also be a tendency to be late or absent from work for unexplained reasons. Typically these symptoms are seen by the co-workers before they are recognized by the stressed individual (Armitage, 1998; Queen & Queen, 2004).

In some extreme cases, stress may lead to various forms of paranoia (Fisher, 1997; Lyles, 2005). It is characterized by fear of a chronic nature based on real events.

On the other hand, passivity can be fatal and will lead to more helplessness. Fisher and Lyle's recommendation is to rationalize work toward those goals. This is one of the most productive methods of taking hold and directing a positive path for stress management (Queen & Queen, 2004).

Burnout is the long-term effect of unresolved occupational stress (Brock & Grady, 2002; Demerouti et al, 2001; Zemke, 1991). A 1991 report based on a questionnaire of 600 full-time employees conducted by *Northwestern National Life Insurance Company* found the following: One in three American workers say that job stress is the single greatest stress in their lives. Seventy percent of workers said job stress lowers their productivity and results in frequent health ailments. Burnout was highest in companies that cut employee benefits, changed ownership, or required frequent overtime (Zemke, 1991).

Individuals must, to some extent, find methods for dealing with stress in their own way. There is a tendency toward similarities in methods used to increase the ability to cope with stress. Crampton, Hodge, Mishra and Price (1995) and Lyles (2005) identified techniques that received the highest level of agreement in a study of school administrators. Techniques identified included healthy attitudes, proper nutrition, exercise, relaxation/sleeping/taking breaks, meeting the source of stress head on, set limit/goals/priorities, increase qualifications/skills, and building a strong family life. However, only seventeen percent of the respondents felt the responsibility for stress management lies with the individual rather than the organization (Crampton, et al, 2005).

Travers (2001) reported that the concepts of teaching and stress are closely synonymous. Traditionally researchers have had difficulty obtaining information on

teacher stress because the reporting of stress is often related to a sign of weakness in the teaching profession (Queen & Queen, 2004). Various reports suggest that thirty to ninety percent of teachers report a high level of stress (Educational Research Service, 1998). Borg and Riding (1993) and Queen and Queen (2004) stated teacher burnout is an extreme reaction to stress, which raises additional concerns relating to the adverse affect on the learning environment and student achievement. Travers (2001) agreed and discussed the role that personality plays on teacher stress. The term “de-stressors” was introduced as stress reducers that include collegial support, praise, and recognition (Domenech, 1996). Thus the importance of organizational stress management interventions was presented as an area of need for additional study.

Additionally, Wolfe (1986) explained the first step in developing stress management programs is to develop or acquire educational materials designed to increase the general understanding of workplace stress and how it can affect both job performance and employee health. Lyles (2005) agreed information of this nature is critical for upper level decision-makers so they may decide to what level they are willing to support stress management education for their employees. Brock and Grady (2002) and Wolfe, (1986) went on to say the next step is to examine the needs of the organization against the needs of the individual teacher in developing stress reduction and stress management programs. A primary barrier is a management paradigm in which pressure or stress is valued as a motivator. Executive commitment to stress reduction and management is critical. Without this level of support, the programs are doomed from the start (Travers, 2001). Moreover, stress can be felt at all levels of the workplace, but the corporate executives and school superintendents have even more pressures (Brock & Grady, 2002).

Stress—Corporate Executives and School Superintendents

According to Marino (1997) the mark of a great CEO is how they cope with and manage stress. He offered signs and signals of stress including restlessness, irritability, prolonged fatigue, difficulty concentrating, lack of interest in recreation, anxiety, excessive work hours, taking excessive work home, increased smoking and or drinking, and loss of perspective. Lyles (2005) agreed and offered the following advice: stay healthy, eat nutritiously, exercise, find work you enjoy, lead instead of manage, prioritize, listen and learn, communicate clearly, be flexible and manage change (p. 18). Marino (1997) and Lyles (2005) concurred not all stress is bad; it can force positive change, and is the basic ingredient of competition. The key is to recognize the right balance of stress and stress management skills needed to perform optimally.

Common myths regarding school superintendent stress are that all stress is harmful, that stress should be avoided, that the higher up in the organization, the greater stress, that stress is a male dominated phenomenon, that superintendents experience excessive stress, and that there is only one right way to cope with stress (Gates & Gmelch, 1998). The realities, according to Gates and Gmelch (1998) and Lyles (2005) are that some stress is positive and necessary. Stress is a way of life and is an important step in rising to the challenges of a leadership position. On the other hand, occupational stress can lead to loss of job satisfaction and ultimately looking for other work (Brock & Grady, 2002).

However, as a result of occupational stress, a number of superintendents are choosing to leave the superintendency for lesser positions within the school system while some are choosing to leave the position entirely (Brock & Grady, 2002; Glass et al,

2000). In many cases these are the most talented and passionate superintendents in the business of education. The reasons for the exodus include deterioration of physical health, excessive politics, over tasking, and the separation of children from education (Brock & Grady, 2002; Lyles, 2005). More often than not the departure is a consequence of shattered vision (Brock & Grady, 2002; Gmelch, 1996). Ultimately the outcome causes a declining pool of qualified applicants for superintendent positions across the country (Nussbaum, 2007; Public Agenda 2001).

Summary

The review of literature began with an explanation of the pressures created in meeting current leadership challenges in the position of superintendent and how it has resulted in a diminished pool of individuals willing to enter, or remain in the superintendent positions (Nussbaum, 2007; Public Agenda 2001; Queen & Queen, 2004). The phenomenon can be attributed to occupational stressors. The research indicated that superintendents have cited stress as a primary reason for leaving the position or avoiding it as a career altogether (Nussbaum, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2004; Wallace, 2003). Stress related to mental and physical illness among superintendents has been identified within the research literature (Brock & Grady, 2002; Lyles, 2005). This has resulted in low numbers of superintendent applicants for high stressful jobs and early retirements among superintendents already in the profession (Hammond, Muffs, & Sciascia, 2001). Also the issue of gender and how female and male superintendents dealt with stress was examined. The research on the issue of gender was inconclusive.

Next the review of literature examined the need for professional development as it relates to stress and coping mechanisms. The administrative leader is faced with

increasing demands which leads to the need for self development programs to assist them in managing the inevitable occupational stressors they will face (Queen & Queen, 2004). Walsh (1999) argued there is a profound relationship between self/personal development and finding meaning in one's work. The success of the organization can be directly related to the leader's self-development (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Briskin, 1996). The research was void of any possible professional development programs that the organization could implement to help the superintendent position with the inevitable doom of stress.

Finally, the review of literature provided a review of stress and coping in general including definitions of stress, symptoms, consequences, and recommendations on how to cope with stress (Lyles, 2005). Occupational stress was reviewed as to the specific nature of job related stress and the coping mechanisms used to deal with occupational stress (Lyles, 2005). Corporate executives and school superintendents deal with similar issues relating to stress and coping (Queen & Queen, 2004). The research did not reveal a strategy for superintendents to assess their stress level or provide a model in which to handle burnout for school leaders.

The literature reviewed each of the four strands of stress and suggested a need for the study of occupational stress experienced and the coping mechanisms used to deal with stress for superintendents (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2004). Identification of stressors and coping techniques for this group could help make the superintendent position a more positive experience and ultimately recruit and retain more candidates.

Since stress and coping are considered key determinants of health and life quality, stress-coping research has important theoretical and practical implications (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000a). Examining the ways in which people cope with stress in their lives can help facilitate understanding of the processes and mechanisms by which coping strategies counteract the negative impact of stress on health and well-being (Somerfield & McCrae, 2000). This knowledge could also be useful in the development of effective health-related policies and programs to prevent stress-induced illnesses, reduce health service costs, and promote population health (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000b).

Thus, a necessity exists to determine strategies that can help those who are currently employed as superintendents to have a more successful experience as it relates to managing stress. The information from this study can be useful for those preparing for the superintendency as well as those who currently hold the position. “By shedding greater light on the sources of stress, it may help superintendents build bridges over the barrier of stress” (Gmelch, 1996, p. 32).

In Chapter Three, a description of the research design and methodology utilized in this study is presented. The design, a mixed design is described. Data collection and instrumentation are explained, along with the resulting methods of data analysis. Included in Chapter Four is the presentation of the data and analyses of the findings. In Chapter Five, the results of the study are summarized and implications for further research are presented.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The challenges faced by school superintendents have soared in recent years. The research indicated the demands and pressures are caused by lack of funding for state legislated mandates such as NCLB, competing community and school groups, politics and bureaucracy, and the public's perceived dissatisfaction with school performance, to name a few (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner 2000). All these stressors lead to high turnover and a decreasing pool of qualified candidates (Educational Research Service, 1998; Forderaro, 2006; Nussbaum, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2004). Unexamined, heretofore, have been specific stressors, coping mechanisms, and strategies used by superintendents to manage occupational stress. Therefore, this study was undertaken to explore the job related occupational stressors and coping mechanisms as perceived by the public school superintendents in the state of Missouri. The researcher examined superintendent work related stressors, coping mechanisms, the issue of gender and how it is related to coping mechanisms and strategies used to maintain balance in the superintendents personal and professional life. The inquiry will also attempt to determine if there was a relationship between the type of stressor and the type of coping mechanism utilized by the selected population. Additionally, the investigation was also used to determine if a stress management model could be constructed that might assist superintendents and people in leadership roles manage their stress.

In Chapter Three the rationale for the study's design and methodology is presented. Essential design elements were selected to address the query how do

administrators cope with the daily occupational stressors? An initial review of the study's problems and purposes provided background for the stated research questions. Following this information the study population and sampling procedures are detailed and grounded in established research techniques. Procedures employed for data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis are specified in sufficient detail to strengthen analysis and facilitate replication.

Problems and Purposes Overview

Increased accountability standards and ever changing demands placed on today's school administrators have created the distinct need for a stress management model to facilitate quality leadership (Brock & Grady, 2002; Demerouti et al, 2001; Queen & Queen, 2004). The role of stress is thought by many researchers to be a major contributor to the high turnover and burnout rates of school superintendent positions (Bjork, Keedy, Rhinehart, & Winter, 2002; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000; Educational Research Service, 1998; Forderaro, 2006; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Nussbaum, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2004).

The purpose of this study was to investigate in what ways and to what degree, if any, school superintendents perceive stress and what, if any, coping mechanisms were engaged. This study focused on qualities of coping mechanisms and their effectiveness. Underscored throughout the study is the need for effective stress management skills, professional development geared towards developing a stress model, and creating a positive school culture. Moreover, the researcher sought to identify any significant differences between the coping mechanisms utilized by female and male leaders.

Research Questions

Research and information gained from a synthesis of related literature (Bjork, Keedy, Rhinehart, & Winter, 2002; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000; Demerouti et al, 2001; Educational Research Service, 1998; Farkas, Johnson, & Duffet, 2003; Forderaro, 2006; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Johnson, 2002; Nussbaum, 2007; Public Agenda 2001; Queen & Queen, 2004) helped formulate research questions and guided this study.

The researcher attempted to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the frequencies of common occupational stressors as perceived by superintendents?
2. Are there differences in occupational stressors between female superintendents and male superintendents?
3. What are the frequencies of the type of coping mechanisms deployed as perceived by superintendents, (Exercise/Nutrition, Getting away/Time off, Artificial means, Relaxation techniques, Mentoring/guidance from peers) and what type of coping mechanism is most effective as perceived by superintendents?
4. Do male and female superintendents differ in the type of coping mechanism they utilize?
5. What are the strategies employed by school district personnel to assist the superintendents in managing occupational stress?
6. What support did school district personnel provide to enhance the effectiveness of coping mechanisms utilized by superintendents to manage occupational stressors?

Population and Sample

The population included 531 superintendents of PK-12 school districts, and K-8 school districts. Superintendents within the study were selected for participation in this study based upon two distinct criteria; geographical and gender.

To assist in achieving a purposeful sampling, a multi-tiered criteria process was carefully devised. The first criterion was geographical in nature, as the researcher divided the state of Missouri into suburban, urban, and rural. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) articulated the importance of sampling the population for the purpose of research and generalizability.

Further criteria were then applied in order to stratify for improved, purposeful sampling. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), “Stratification ensures that the sample is representative” and reflects what the research is intended to study (p. 486). Once the researcher identified 531 school districts throughout the state of Missouri and stratified for suburban, urban, and rural, the researcher applied additional criteria of gender consideration. Gender was identified for the purpose of distinguishing between possible differences in stress and coping mechanism characteristics based on gender.

Upon development of the sample for the current study, the researcher cross referenced the sample schools with information from the Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis (OSED) to ensure a representative sample of the state of Missouri. The researcher adopted the records of stratification from the public office of OSED. The additional technique of representative sampling was utilized during the collection of data for research analysis. Representative sampling is applied in order to accomplish generalizability, which increases the “degree to which a sample represents the population

of interest” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 109). Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) concluded that whenever representative sampling is used “generalization is made more plausible if data are presented to show that the sample is representative of the intended population on at least some relevant variables” (p. 110). The steps of selecting the representative sample improved stratification and allowed the researcher to survey a sample of schools (urban, suburban, and rural) that was representative of the population. For example, if the population was 50% rural, 25% urban and 25% suburban, the researcher’s representative sample would be 50% rural, 25% urban, and 25% suburban. Table 1 below shows the relationship between the population and sample by comparing the percentage and number of schools in each of the three categories.

Table 1

Population and Sample of Schools by Percentage and Number

Type of School	Population		Sample	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Urban	17	3	5	3
Suburban	74	14	10	14
Rural	440	83	365	83

Note: N=531

While the targeted audience for this research study was primarily intended for the educational community, it is believed, however, that the research contained throughout this study should prove valuable to leaders within a wide range of public and private

organizations. The tenets of stress management and leadership are based on positive characteristics which should prove strengthening to the leadership of any organization.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Data Collection Process

Upon receiving approval from the Human Subject Protection Review Committee (Appendix D), the researcher ensured the confidentiality of the information obtained through the study and included written informed consent details into the web-based survey for those superintendents willing to participate in the study.

Three ethical guidelines were followed to protect the human subjects of research involved this study. Protection of participants from harm, assurance of the confidentiality and security of research data, and avoidance of deceiving subjects involved in the research (Creswell, 2003; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) were addressed. All participants were instructed by completing the on-line survey, informed consent is implied. The consent forms described their rights to voluntarily participate in the study, to withdraw from participation at any time, to ask questions, and to have confidentiality respected throughout the research project (Creswell). These consent forms met with the approval of the Institutional Review Board of the University of Missouri, Columbia (Appendix D).

Instrumentation

A survey instrument, *Superintendent Stress and Coping Mechanisms (SSCM)* (Appendix A), was created for this study to determine the extent of stressors on superintendents and what coping mechanisms are utilized and how effective the coping mechanisms are. Survey statements were based on common stressors as found in the literature review. While developing the review of related literature the researcher was

able to identify several important constructs that aided in the process of developing the survey items and open ended questions. The survey instrument is a compilation of the most often identified stressors from previous studies covering stress in the superintendency, including Farkas et al. (2003), Glass et al. (2000), and Richardson (1998). The survey was designed to include a comprehensive list of stress-related events as the centerpiece of the survey instrument. While ideas from several study instruments were used to create this instrument, no specific wording was used from either of these two studies.

380 surveys were electronically distributed throughout the state of Missouri. A written statement was included in the survey informing the superintendents that by completing the survey, they were implying their consent. All participant surveys were completed through the internet using the survey builder website Survey Monkey. A Likert scale, which is a scale "...with a number of points that provide ordinal scale measurement," (Wiersma, 2000, p. 171) was used to represent the responses collected from superintendents. Lack of participation is one of the concerns with on-line surveys (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). For this reason, the researcher developed a timely survey to consist of a 30-item likert scale which was designed to ascertain superintendent's perceptions of occupational stressors. The survey also consisted of a 30-item scale created to assess the leader's perceptions of the coping mechanisms utilized for each occupational stressor. There were 5 categories of coping mechanisms utilized (1) Exercise/Nutrition Program, (2) Getting away/Time off from work, (3) Artificial means, i.e. stimulants or prescription drugs, (4) Relaxation techniques, i.e. controlled breathing, yoga, (5) Mentoring/Guidance from peers. Both surveys utilized the likert-type

scale as part of the instrument's design, employing a scale of 1 to 4, 1 representing never bothers me to 4 representing frequently bothers me. Using a likert-type scale provides for a closed-ended response, while reducing the possibility for ambiguity (Dunn-Rankin, Knezek, Wallace, & Zhang, 2004; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The final phase of the survey questioned how effective was the coping mechanism utilized for each occupational stressor. This phase also utilized a likert scale of 1 to 4, 1 representing not effective at all to 4 representing very effective.

The survey was pilot tested and retested with a group of superintendents. The participants of the pilot test were provided with instructions on how to complete the surveys and also were asked to provide feedback about the instrument: instrument design, appearance of the survey, ease of use, clarity of directions, ease of comprehension and the length of the survey. Participants were asked to complete the surveys a second time within a period of one week to establish the reliability of the scores. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) reliability "refers to the consistency of the scores obtained—how consistent they are for each individual from one administration of an instrument to another and from one set of items to another" (p. 165). Additionally, feedback was used to revise the surveys. This feedback helped the researcher confirm the validity of the surveys (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

Data collection continued with qualitative follow up. Four open ended questions were asked of each participant. The rich descriptions provided by the qualitative process (Merriam, 1998) offered new insights and helped with data triangulation gained through qualitative measures. These new insights developed as the researcher coded the data and analyzed it for common themes. Frankel and Wallen (2003) referred to this analysis as

the “continual reworking of data with emphasis on patterns” (p. 542), while Merriam (1998) stressed coding as a manner in which to “keep track of your thoughts, musings, speculations, and hunches as you engage in analysis” (p. 165). Quantitative and qualitative data analysis helped the researcher draw important conclusions about how common occupational stressors affected coping mechanisms needed to maintain balance.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this explanatory mixed-method design study was to determine superintendent perceptions of the frequency of occupational stressors as well as the superintendent perceptions of what, if any, coping mechanisms were most often utilized. Although research indicated that occupational stress is not a new construct, the general perceptions were incidents of occupational stress are on the rise (Farkas et al., 2003; Glass et al., 2000). The research that had been conducted tended to focus on types of common stressors in the superintendent, rather than the types of coping mechanisms, and what, if any, strategies were employed by the school district to assist leaders with stress management skills. Two phases of data analysis were chosen to describe numerical/statistical findings and descriptive data.

The data from the *Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey* (SCMS) (see Appendix A) derived from selected district superintendents were collected, tabulated, and analyzed. For research questions one, two, three, and four data were entered into the SAS statistical package, to obtain detailed analysis of survey data.

Quantitative Analysis

The following statistical methods were utilized to address each research question.

Research Question 1. In the attempt to ascertain the frequencies of the occupational stressors as perceived by superintendents, a frequency distribution was utilized. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) stated, “To make any sense out of data, we must put it into some sort of order” (p. 201).

Research Question 2. In order to distinguish differences between the occupational stressors as perceived by genders, an independent samples t-test for uncorrelated means was calculated. The total mean score from all of the stressors combined was statistically analyzed for difference in gender. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) defined *t*-test as “a parametric statistical test used to see whether a difference between the means of two samples is significant” (p. 241). The *t*-test was therefore used to determine the level of significance, if any, between male and female occupational stressors combined. The level of significance was determined at $p < .05$.

Research Question 3. In the determination of the most often utilized coping mechanism and their effectiveness as perceived by superintendents a frequency distribution was utilized. For the second part of question three in determining the effectiveness of the coping mechanism, a one-way ANOVA was utilized to compare the effectiveness of the categories of coping mechanisms. The mean effectiveness ratings of each category of coping mechanism was calculated, then the ANOVA was used to determine if there is a significance difference in effectiveness among the categories. The level of significance was determined at $p < .05$.

Research Question 4. The high mean score was utilized in determining the most frequently used type of coping mechanism. Then, the chi-square test of independence was utilized to determine if there was a relationship between the two categorical variables;

type of coping mechanism and gender. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) reported using the chi-square test was necessary when comparing categorical data. The level of significance was determined at $p < .05$.

Qualitative Analysis

The following qualitative approach was employed to address research questions five and six:

Research Questions 5 and 6. The qualitative approach of additional open-ended questions on the *SSCM* survey was utilized to determine the strategies employed by the School district to assist superintendents in managing stress. The use of qualitative data contributed to the triangulation of the data and the rich description contained within this study.

Included in the qualitative data were written comments from the surveys. The data gradually evolved into patterns which allowed the researcher to analyze the resulting information in each category (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Merriam, 1998). These patterns were used to provide support and substance to the quantitative statistical analyses. Patterns were reviewed through the framework of the research questions and narrative descriptions were utilized to portray the findings and interpretations regarding the effectiveness of the professional development and preparatory programs in developing stress management coping skills for superintendents. Triangulation of data was used to validate the findings (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998).

The Researcher's Biases and Assumptions

One underlying assumption made by the researcher was the notion that many superintendents simply do not know how and have not been given adequate training on how to properly manage occupational stressors. It is assumed that individuals in leadership positions have acquired these skills over the years, but the research indicates that the leaders are not properly trained on how to deal with stress and maintain balance within their personal lives. This is based upon research and personal experience of knowing several people who hold superintendent positions. A second underlying assumption is that today's school districts are aware of the high level of stress and are not including professional development programs or preparatory curriculum addressing stress and coping mechanisms management. The research supported the notion that there is a need for this kind of training. Again, this assumption is derived from research and personal experience with colleagues in the position of leadership.

Summary

Presented in Chapter Three was the information related to the design and methodology used to carry out this investigation of stress and coping in the superintendency. A rationale was provided for the use of an explanatory mixed design research method. The population and sample were described, as well as data collection and instrumentation. The two-phased data analysis was articulated, as well as the researcher's biases and assumptions. Within Chapter Four, the data analysis and research findings are presented. Concluded within Chapter Five is a

discussion of the research findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

The intent of this study was to add to the body of knowledge concerning how superintendents in the state of Missouri perceive their occupational stress. The study also intended to identify what coping mechanisms superintendents utilize to manage the inevitable stress and how effective the coping skills were perceived and to see if gender played a role in how they dealt with stress. Previous research clearly identified the common occupational stressors which were directly related to high turnover in the superintendent position (Bjork, Keedy, Rhinehart, & Winter, 2002; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000; Educational Research Service, 1998; Forderaro, 2006; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Nussbaum, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2004). However, little research was available that revealed how superintendents manage occupational stress and what strategies the school district employed to assist the administrative leaders with stress management (Brock & Grady, 2002; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2004).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine what are the common stressors affecting superintendents in the state of Missouri. Secondly, to discover what coping mechanisms are commonly utilized by the superintendent and the effectiveness of the coping mechanism. Thirdly, to identify what, if any, professional development practices were offered through the school district to assist the superintendent with occupational stress management. And finally, the study investigated differences of coping skills between male and female superintendents.

Prior to the initiation of the data collection process, the researcher sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Missouri granted research authorization (see Appendix D). In order to collect the necessary data for this research project, superintendents from the 531 school districts in the state of Missouri were surveyed. The representative sample population for this research study consisted of practicing public school superintendents, 3 %(5) Urban school district, 14 %(10) Suburban school district, 83 %(365) Rural school district in the state of Missouri.

Frequency distributions were utilized to ascertain the frequencies of occupational stressors as perceived by the superintendents. Independent-samples *t*-tests for uncorrelated means were conducted to determine the differences that might exist between the occupational stressors as perceived by genders. In determining the most often utilized coping mechanism and their effectiveness a frequency distribution was utilized. A one-way ANOVA was used to compare the effectiveness of categories of coping mechanisms. Once the mean effectiveness rating of each category of coping mechanism was calculated, the ANOVA was used to determine if there is a significant difference in the effectiveness of the categories. The high mean score was utilized to determine the most frequently used coping mechanism, the chi-square test of independence was utilized to determine if there was a relationship between the two categorical variables type of coping mechanism and gender. A 0.05 significance level was established for all statistical tests conducted.

The survey included four qualitative follow-up questions, in order to triangulate the comprehensive data collected throughout the study. Follow-up open ended questions were also employed in order to provide a rich, thick description to the quantitative results

achieved. The researcher carefully coded each transcript for specific comments which related to the framework of the research questions regarding the effectiveness of the professional development and support provided to help superintendents develop stress management coping skills. The coded patterns that evolved in responses added depth and substance to the quantitative data collected by means of surveys conducted.

The data were analyzed in an endeavor to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the frequencies of common occupational stressors as perceived by superintendents?
2. Are there differences in occupational stressors between female superintendents and male superintendents?
3. What are the frequencies of the type of coping mechanisms deployed as perceived by superintendents (Exercise/Nutrition, Getting away/Time off, Artificial means, Relaxation techniques, Mentoring/guidance from peers) and what type of coping mechanism is most effective as perceived by superintendents?
4. Do male and female superintendents differ in the type of coping mechanism they utilize?
5. What are the strategies employed by school district personnel to assist the superintendents in managing occupational stress?
6. What support did school district personnel provide to enhance the effectiveness of coping mechanisms utilized by superintendents to manage occupational stressors?

The following research hypotheses have been evaluated to offer response to the stated research questions:

Ho1: There is no frequency difference in the common occupational stressors as perceived by superintendents.

Ho2: There is no statistically significant difference between the perceived occupational stressors as perceived by gender.

Ho3: There is no relationship between the frequency of coping mechanism (Exercise/Nutrition, Getting away/Time off, Artificial means, Relaxation techniques, Mentoring/guidance from peers) as perceived by gender, nor is there significant difference in the type of coping mechanism utilized by gender.

Ho4: There is no significant difference in the type of coping mechanism utilized by gender.

Contained in this chapter is a summary of the data analysis, population and sample, collection instruments, data gathering methods for each research question, and findings. The findings were organized to first address the four quantitative research questions, and then the two qualitative questions. For the first four research questions, tables were provided to help interpret the frequencies of common stressors, gender differences in occupational stressors, frequencies of common coping mechanisms and their effectiveness, and gender differences in coping mechanisms. For the two qualitative questions, figures were also included to help the reader conceptualize the emerging themes through a synthesis of the strategies employed by school district personnel to assist leaders with occupational stress and support offered to address coping mechanisms utilized by superintendents.

Data Analysis

Population and Sample

The population for this study included all superintendents, kindergarten through twelfth grade from 531 public school districts in the state of Missouri. Of the 531 public school superintendents in the state, 380 superintendents were included; the population sample was 3% urban and 14% suburban, 83% rural.

The representative sample included 5 superintendents from urban school districts, and 10 superintendents from suburban school districts, and 85 superintendents from rural school districts. Of the 380 surveys sent out, 100 surveys were returned for a return rate of 26 percent. After the initial email request, 52 superintendents responded and completed the survey. An additional 38 surveys were completed upon a second request and 10 additional surveys were completed after a final request was issued. A total of 100 superintendents responded to the survey; however, 7 respondents did not complete the survey, presumably due to a flaw in the on-line survey software. One superintendent communicated having difficulty with the electronic survey due to software issues. The 93 who successfully completed the survey were able to do so without software complications. Presumably, the 7 who did not complete the survey had difficulty with the software and simply exited the survey.

Data Collection Instruments

Superintendent Stress and Coping Mechanism Survey (SSCM)

All respondents completed the *SSCM Survey*. The multiple-choice and short answer survey was created for this study to determine the extent of stressors on superintendents and what coping mechanisms are utilized and how effective the coping

mechanisms are. The open-ended qualitative questions were designed to collect information on the kinds of support, if any, provided by the school district in dealing with superintendent occupational stress and coping mechanisms. The qualitative data was designed to provide insight and rich descriptions (Merriam, 1998) of the school districts support in the arena of stress management for the administrative leader. The survey instrument was a compilation of common stressors from previous studies investigating stress in the superintendency; including Farkas et al. (2003), Glass et al. (2000), and Richardson (1998). The survey was also modified for ease of administration. Four open-ended items were added to help inform the qualitative portion of the study.

Research Questions: Analysis of Data

Responses to the *Superintendent Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey (SSCM)* collected from the superintendents of the 93 school districts in the state of Missouri included in the study were carefully entered into the SAS statistical package. Research questions one and two were analyzed using a frequency distribution and independent samples *t*-test for uncorrelated means. Statistical significance was determined at the .05 level of confidence. Research questions three and four data were analyzed using Chi-square and one-way ANOVA. Research questions five and six were analyzed using qualitative analysis from the four open-ended questions listed on the *SSCM* survey.

Research Question 1. What are the frequencies of common occupational stressors as perceived by superintendents?

Research question one addressed the occupational stressors identified by superintendents in the state of Missouri. Responding superintendents were asked to rate

each of the listed occupational stressors according to the extent each stressor has been experienced. Respondents rated each stressor on a 4-point likert scale; the rating 4 = frequently bothers me, 3 = occasionally bothers me, 2 = rarely bothers me, 1= never bothers me, and N/A = not applicable. A frequency distribution was utilized to determine the frequencies of common stressors as perceived by superintendents. Represented in Table 2 are the frequencies and percentages for occupational stressors identified and rated as perceived by superintendents of school districts in the state of Missouri. The two highest perceived stressors were (1) complying with state and federal mandates without getting the necessary resource and (2) preparing and allocating budget resources.

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of Selected Occupational Stressors (N=93)

Stressor	Rating									
	Frequent		Occasionally		Rarely		Never		N/A	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Federal/State mandates	41	46	31	35	13	15	4	5	0	
Allocating budget	34	38	36	40	15	17	5	6	0	
High expectations on myself	27	30	34	38	23	36	6	7	0	
Politics and Bureaucracy	24	27	42	47	20	22	4	4	0	
Decisions that affect others	20	22	52	57	16	18	3	3	0	
Meeting social expectations	18	20	34	37	29	2	10	11	0	
Gaining financial support	17	9	42	47	26	29	4	5	0	
Demands of board members	16	17	32	34	37	40	7	8	1	1

Table 2—Continued

Stressor	Rating									
	Frequent		Occasionally		Rarely		Never		N/A	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Activities outside work hours	13	15	42	47	27	31	6	7	1	1
Too much responsibility	9	10	22	24	30	33	25	28	5	5
Coordinating multiple tasks	7	8	38	42	37	41	8	9	0	
Deadlines for reports	7	8	36	40	39	43	7	8	1	1
Trying to gain public support	7	8	46	51	30	33	7	8	0	
Pressure for job performance	7	8	33	36	39	44	11	12	1	1
Resolve conflicts	6	7	47	52	33	37	4	4	0	
Work frequently interrupted	6	7	41	45	33	36	10	11	1	1
Interrupted frequently	6	7	48	51	36	39	3	3	0	
Speaking in front of groups	5	6	15	18	35	39	35	39	0	
Resolving differences	4	4	27	30	43	48	14	16	2	2
Evaluating staff members	4	4	47	52	28	31	11	12	0	
Writing/answering emails	4	4	24	26	47	52	16	18	0	
Staff understanding my goals	3	3	39	42	37	40	12	13	0	
Having too little authority	3	3	17	19	38	42	25	28	7	8
Too many meetings	3	3	29	32	40	44	17	19	1	1
Having what I need	3	3	23	25	4	5	18	19	7	8
Student discipline	2	2	23	26	50	56	12	13	3	3
Unclear responsibilities	2	2	11	12	40	44	33	37	4	4
Not being fully qualified	1	1	12	13	37	40	37	40	5	5
Not enough is expected	1	1	4	4	20	21	51	54	18	19

Superintendents in the state of Missouri identified (1) *complying with state and federal mandates without getting necessary resources* and (2) *preparing and allocating budget resources* as the two most commonly identified occupational stressors. The findings show greater than 80% of the respondents were *frequently to occasionally* bothered by the stressor of complying with state and federal mandates, based on a subscale of 1-4, (1) *frequently bothers me*, (4) *never bothers me*. Additionally, 78% of the superintendents reported high stress from preparing and allocating budget resources. The occupational stressor with the lowest frequency rating was *feeling not enough is expected of me by my board*. The frequency rated 30 out of 30, with a percent frequency of 1%.

Research Question 2. Are there differences in occupational stressors between female and male superintendents?

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate differences between the occupational stressors as perceived by gender. The mean score from the total stressors combined was statistically analyzed. The independent samples *t*-test showed no significant difference between male and female superintendents in overall stress scores, $t(91) = -1.16, p = .2506$. Displayed in Table 3 are the descriptive statistics for this comparison between male and female superintendents.

Table 3

Overall total stress mean for both male and female.

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Female	17	3.5102	.4671	.0536
Male	76	3.8121	.5084	.1233

Note. The average subscale numbers shown above reflect the scores received on Likert-type items that ranged from a 1 (never bothers me) to a 4 (frequently bothers me).

Research Question 3. What are the frequencies of the type of coping mechanisms reported by superintendents (Exercise/Nutrition, Getting Away/Time off, Artificial means, Relaxation techniques, Mentoring/guidance from peers) and what type of coping mechanism is most effective?

A frequency distribution was utilized to determine the most often utilized coping mechanism (Table 4). For the second part of question three in determining the effectiveness of the coping mechanism, a one-way ANOVA was utilized to compare the effectiveness of the categories of coping strategies (Table 5). The mean effectiveness ratings of each category of coping mechanism was calculated, then the ANOVA was used to determine if there is a significance difference in effectiveness of categories. The level of significance was determined at $p < .05$.

Displayed in Table 4 are the mean scores of most frequently used coping mechanism and the mean effectiveness score of each coping mechanism. Of the five coping strategies, *exercise* was used most frequently with a 41.49 % frequency score. The coping mechanism that was rated the most effective was *exercise* with a mean score of 3.31. The data demonstrate that *getting away* was rated the second highest utilized

coping mechanism with a frequency of 30.85 and a mean effectiveness score of 2.98. The next highest frequency was *mentoring*, with a score of 22.34 and a mean effectiveness score of 3.06. The coping strategies of *relaxing*, and *artificial means* were the two least utilized coping mechanisms by superintendents. It is interesting to note that although *relaxing* was not a common coping strategy utilized, the mean score for effectiveness was 3.15, demonstrating that *relaxing* was rated the second most effective means for coping strategies. Triangulation of the qualitative data supported these results. Only two superintendents commented on alcohol use and stated (1) “I have found that I cherish time off. I also use alcohol more frequently than I did before I was a superintendent”. (2) “Time away with other superintendents at meetings reduces stress and increases my beer consumption”!

Table 4

Often utilized coping mechanism.

Coping Mechanism	Combined Freq %	Effectiveness Mean (Combined)	Std. Dev
Artificial	1.06	2.78	.46272
Exercise	41.49	3.31	.80729
Get Away	30.85	2.98	.72386
Mentor	22.34	3.06	.68127
Relaxing	3.15	3.15	.61298

Note. The average subscale numbers shown above reflect the scores received on Likert-type items that ranged from a 1 (not effective at all) to a 4 (very effective).

The Duncan Post Hoc method was used to compare means on the effectiveness of the coping mechanisms. As shown in Table 5, *exercise* was rated as most effective, significantly higher than the other categories of coping mechanism. Similarly, the Post Hoc test showed that *artificial* coping strategy was rated as least effective, significantly lower than the other categories of coping mechanisms. The other three coping mechanisms, *relaxing*, *mentoring*, and *getting away* were not as differentiated. The data indicates these coping strategies are similar in effectiveness, with no significance, except that mentoring was rated as more effective than getting away.

Table 5

ANOVA Post Hoc Duncan Grouping: Mean effectiveness

Coping Mechanism	Mean	Grouping
Exercise	3.31	A
Relaxing	3.16	B
Mentor	3.06	B C
Getting Away	2.99	C
Artificial	2.78	D

Note. ($N=93$). The average subscale numbers shown above reflect the scores received on Likert-type items that ranged from a 1 (not effective at all) to a 4 (very effective).

Research Question 4. Do male and female superintendents differ in the type of the coping mechanism they utilize?

The chi-square test of independence was utilized to determine if there was a relationship between the two categorical variables type of coping mechanism and gender. The level of significance was determined at $p<.05$. Displayed in Table 6 is a summary frequency for the coping strategies in relationship to gender. The chi-square test of

independence showed that males and females differed significantly in the coping mechanism most often utilized, $\chi^2 (N=89, 4) = 105.69, p < .0001$ or Chi Square, $p < .0001$. Male superintendents chose *getting away* 40% of the time as their coping strategy for occupational stress, while females chose *exercise* 34% of the time as their coping strategy for occupational stress. It is interesting to note that although male superintendents utilize *getting away* most often as their means to cope with stress, men reported the overall most effective way to cope was *exercise* with an overall mean score of 3.31. Female superintendents chose *exercise* as the most effective coping strategy 34% of the time. Very closely rated as the second most effective coping mechanism for female superintendents was *mentoring/guidance from peers*, with a 32 % frequency.

Table 6

Frequency of Coping Mechanism

	Male	Female	
Coping Mechanism	% Frequency	% Frequency	Mean effectiveness
Artificial	3.54	1.84	2.78
Exercise	28.50	34.02	3.31
Get Away	39.67	17.70	2.98
Mentor	22.29	32.18	3.06
Relaxing	6.00	14.25	3.15

Note. (N=93). The average subscale numbers shown above reflect the scores received on Likert-type items that ranged from a 1 (not effective at all) to a 4 (very effective).

Research Question 5. What are the strategies employed by school district personnel to assist the superintendents in managing occupational stress?

The researcher utilized the qualitative questions from the *SSCM* survey to answer research question five. The open ended questions included (1) Describe any strategies the school district employs to address stress and the superintendency? Also, qualitative question (4) was included: Are there any comments you would like to add in reference to this study on occupational stress and coping mechanisms in the superintendency.

As the researcher sought to find patterns and themes among the transcripts of written comments on the *SSCM* survey, several strategies emerged from the survey comments relating to how the school district assist the superintendents with occupational stress. The themes were: *no known strategies*, *getting away*, *support from school board*, *professional development*, *mentoring*, and *wellness programs*. Reflections on the role of gender were also addressed in relation to stress in the superintendency.

No known strategies. Comments provided by superintendents were very decisive and unanimously stated school districts do not employ any strategies that they know of. Of the 61 respondents, 34 stated *no known strategies*, yielding a 56% rating. A few superintendents boldly stated, "...it even seems that some board members try to add stress, not relieve stress." Another stated, "The school district—none. Anything that is done I do personally". The superintendent that summarized the majority of responses stated, "The school district has no strategies to address stress. If you plan to milk cows, you can also plan on getting up early. Stress is part of the job. It is the individual who must deal with the stress".

Getting away. Another theme that emerged from the study was *taking time to get away*. More than a third of the respondents reported the strategy the school district offers that best suites dealing with stress is taking time for yourself; such as vacation time. A

superintendent stated, "...board does support and encourages taking vacation days and getting a break from daily routine/pressures. Also wellness programs that include exercise are in place". A contrasting statement from a superintendent was, "I think all of us look forward to retiring and not having to answer to federal and state mandates, unreasonable parents, unmotivated staff members, and parents that are more interested in extracurricular activities than education". Another stated, "The best remedy is to get out and retire as soon as you can"!

It is interesting to note that while some respondents mentioned time away as support, they were unable to follow through with taking time off, "The superintendent gets 3 weeks vacation. I have not been able to take a single day off this year". Another leader stated, "The board has told me to take time for myself. But, I find that difficult to do".

Support from school board. Superintendents expressed support from school board as a strategy employed by the school district to address stress. Based on survey written comments, superintendents demonstrated a strong belief that communication and relationships with the board is important in creating a stress free environment. One superintendent responded, "My board encourages me to take care of myself first and does not micromanage my professional development choices or days out of the office. They are very supportive of my health". Conversely another respondent stated, "Most stress of the superintendency is caused by micro management of the school board. Allowing superintendents to exercise their authority within policy would relieve much of the issue". To summarize the theme of school board support, one respondent stated, "There are no specific strategies, I happen to be in an excellent work environment with well

qualified administrators, teachers and support staff augmented by a board that works well together and allows me to do the job necessary to attain the goals of the district”. Another respondent stated simply, “Nothing formal from the district. The relationship with the board is dependent on the individuals elected”.

Professional development/Mentoring. The less common themes reported as strategies provided by the school district to address stress were professional development, mentoring, and wellness programs. Of the 64 comments collected, only five superintendents mentioned professional development as a strategy offered by the school district, one survey comment stated, “They do allow me to attend professional meetings, which is good because at those meetings, I can network with colleagues to discuss current concerns (stressors)”. Conversely, another superintendent stated, “There is no plan to deal with stress at the district level. I deal with things on my own”.

Wellness programs. Approximately 5 survey respondents mentioned the health and nutrition challenges and wellness programs offered in their school district. The programs were available to all the staff and one superintendent stated, “We have a wellness program that provides resources for stress management to all staff”. A contrasting comment stated, “None. I fight health issues due to stress. The job doesn’t allow me to exercise, etc”.

Gender. The majority of the survey respondents believed gender was irrelevant in reference to their ability to manage occupational stress. One superintendent stated, “I’m a superintendent, I deal with it. It has little to do with gender”. Conversely, many respondents were unsure if gender has anything to do with managing occupational stressors, one male superintendent observed, “I have no idea although it is possible that

being a male has made gaining acceptance as an authority figure easier”. One female stated, “I have to think like a man and not personalize or internalize situations (takes practice)”. Other comments that triangulated the data were, “The superintendency would be an almost impossible occupation for a woman without a very supportive spouse”. And, “I receive a lot of pressure from my husband over the demands put on my time. This causes friction in the marriage. Again, I find ways to cope on my own”.

Reported in Table 7 is a summary of the male and female trends that emerged from the survey responses.

Table 7

Synthesis of emerging trends for gender difference and occupational stress

Emerging Trends for Gender Difference	
Males	Females
Inability to express being stressed	Inability to express being stressed
See big picture	Multi-taskers
Tend to make decisions quicker	Nurturer by nature
Less emotional	Family pressures
Challenge to manage women	Stereo typing: male dominated field

In summary, it is interesting to note that while men believed they were unable to express being stressed it was because of pride, one male superintendent stated, “I don’t feel I can tell anyone that I am stressed which I guess is a male *thing*”. While woman believed they could not express being stressed due to a sign of weakness as a female administrator. A female superintendent commented, “It would be presumptive on my part to assume how men handle their stressors. I feel that I can not show stress because it

would be seen as a sign of weakness in a female administrator”. Also, noted is that both male and woman believed they are able to solve problems in the most sufficient manner; males because they are able to keep the emotion out of it, and woman because they can use emotion to build relationships with parents, students and staff members. One male superintendent commented, “...being a woman is often very helpful when discussing parenting issues, emotional situations with parents or students, and maintaining strong, positive relationships with fellow staff members”. Similarly, yet conversely one female superintendent wrote, “I feel that woman are multi-taskers by nature, so this helps them to be able to address occupational stress. I also feel, on the other hand, that we are nurturers by nature, and this leads to occupational stress because we want to *take care* of everyone. Two-edged sword, so to speak”.

Research Question 6. What support did the school district provide to enhance the effectiveness of coping mechanisms utilized by superintendents to manage occupational stress?

The researcher utilized the qualitative questions from the *SSCM* survey to answer research question six. The open ended questions included (2) Explain what kinds of support you receive from the school district to assist you with coping mechanisms for occupational stressors? Also, qualitative question (4) Are there any comments you would like to add in reference to this study on occupational stress and coping mechanisms in the superintendency.

Of the 59 comments collected from qualitative research question number two, greater than 50% (31) respondents reported *no support*, 27% (16) respondents reported school board support, and 11% (12) reported *time away*. The least form of support

reported was *professional development*, yielding 8% (5) comments. Research question 4 added to the triangulation of the data, there were several responses (14) commenting on *how* they manage stress. A superintendent summarized by saying, “The superintendency is a very stressful position. Individuals must be able to handle these pressures and work toward continuous improvement”. A visual representation of the results is offered in Table 8.

Table 8

Synthesis of Qualitative Data received on School District Support for effectiveness of coping mechanisms.

<p style="text-align: center;">Emerging Theme for Coping Mechanism Effectiveness:</p> <p>Provide support through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ No known support➤ Strong support from numerous individual board members.➤ Flexibility to take time away from work when needed➤ Opportunities for teamwork, i.e. leadership teams, professional conferences in order to network.➤ Wellness programs, i.e. health challenges for the entire staff.
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In summary the data showed contrast in how the school district provided coping strategy support to the superintendents. *Professional development* was mentioned by a superintendent, “Being able to collaborate with professionals in like positions in the best stress relief for me”. Yet, most respondents said no support was given, a superintendent stated, “None, you either can handle the job or you’re out”. A respondent corroborates both themes and stated, “During the 19 years as an administrator, there have been a few years that the stress has been extreme and most of the time, the attendance of meetings

with other administrators have served to help most often, even though stress or even negative things were not discussed”.

Null hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were evaluated in an effort to answer the aforementioned research questions.

Ho1: There is no frequency difference in the common occupational stressors as perceived by superintendents.

Based upon the analysis and the research data presented in Table 2, this hypothesis is rejected. Of the thirty common stressors listed, the two common stressors with the highest frequency score are (1) *complying with state, federal mandates* and (2) *preparing and allocating budgets*. *Complying with state, federal mandates* was yielded the highest frequency rating of 46%. The stressor that yielded the lowest frequency rating was, *feeling not enough is expected of me by my board*, with a frequency rating of 1%.

Ho2: There is no statistically significant difference between the perceived occupational stressors as perceived by gender.

Based on the analysis of the data presented in Table 3 this hypothesis was accepted. There were no significant difference in the perceived occupational stressors as perceived by male and female superintendents: level of significance was determined at $p < .05$. The common occupational stressors as perceived by gender yielded a value $p = .2506$. Superintendent gender had no affect on the frequency of perceived occupational stressors.

Ho3: There is no relationship between the frequency of coping mechanism (Exercise/Nutrition, Getting away/Time off, Artificial means, Relaxation techniques, Mentoring/guidance from peers) as perceived by gender, nor is there significant difference in the type of coping mechanism utilized by gender.

Based upon the analysis and the research data as presented in Table 6, this hypothesis is rejected. Significant gender difference was found between most frequently utilized coping mechanism and effectiveness of coping mechanism based on superintendents perceptions.

Ho4: There is no significant difference in the type of coping mechanism utilized by gender.

Based upon the analysis and the research data as presented in Table 5 and Table 6, this hypothesis is rejected. Significant gender difference was found between types of coping mechanism most often utilized by superintendents.

Summary

Presented in Chapter Four was a description of the data collection process, a description of the data collection instruments used, *Superintendent Stress and Coping Mechanism Survey* and a description of the follow-up qualitative questions used. A representative sample of 93 superintendents completed the survey. An analysis of the data revealed significant differences between types of coping mechanisms utilized by gender and their effectiveness. In addition, there were significant differences identified in responses to questions regarding how the school board personnel support the superintendent with stress management.

Analysis of the data collected from the *Superintendent Stress and Coping Mechanism Survey* and follow-up comments from the four open ended questions provided findings for the research questions. From the data, it was revealed that the two highest perceived stressors were (1) *complying with state and federal mandates without getting the necessary resource* and (2) *preparing and allocating budget resources*. The least frequency of stress as perceived superintendents was *feeling not enough is expected of me by my board*.

The independent samples *t*-test showed no significant difference between male and female superintendents in overall stress scores. Mean scores of most frequently used coping mechanism and the mean effectiveness score by gender showed a level of significance. The data revealed *exercise* as significantly most effective. Similarly, the Post Hoc test showed significant difference in the *Artificial Coping Mechanism* as least effective. The chi-square test of independence showed that males and females differed significantly in the coping mechanism most often utilized. The coping mechanism that males chose most frequently was *getting away*, while females chose *exercise*. Several strategies emerged from the survey comments relating to how the school district assists the superintendents with occupational stress. The themes were; *no known strategies, getting away, support from school board, professional development, and mentoring, and wellness programs*. The role of gender as it relates to stress in the superintendency showed similarities in the fear of admitting stress by both genders. The qualitative data also demonstrated that emotion as strength for females because they are able build relationships and dissolve conflict. Males reported emotion as a different form of strength, reporting their ability to keep emotion out of disciplinary situations helped to

solve conflict. Data gathered through the open ended questions provided triangulation to support these findings and supplied descriptive information to answer the qualitative research questions.

In Chapter Five, an overview of the design and procedures employed for this study are described. A discussion of the findings of the study with limitations and design control are included. In addition, implications for practice and recommendations for further research are presented.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The researcher sought to add to the body of knowledge concerning how superintendents in the state of Missouri perceive their occupational stress. The study also intended to identify what coping mechanisms male and female superintendents utilize to manage the inevitable stress and how effective their coping skills are. Also, the intent of the study sought to identify what, if any, strategies were employed by the school district to assist the superintendent. Previous research clearly identified the common occupational stressors which were directly related to high turnover in the superintendent position (Bjork, Keedy, Rhinehart, & Winter, 2002; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000; Educational Research Service, 1998; Forderaro, 2006; Nussbaum, 2007; State Policy & Compendium, 2001; Queen & Queen, 2004). However, little research was available that revealed how male and female superintendents manage occupational stress and what strategies the school district employs to assist the administrative leaders with stress management (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate in what ways and to what degree, if any, school superintendents perceive stress and what, if any, coping mechanisms were engaged. This study focused on qualities of coping mechanisms and their effectiveness. Underscored throughout the study is the need for effective stress management skills, professional development geared towards developing a stress model, and creating a

positive school culture. Moreover, the researcher sought to identify any significant differences between the coping mechanisms utilized by female and male leaders.

The major question for this study was: What is the perceived effectiveness of coping mechanisms utilized by male and female superintendents and how does the school district provide support? The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What are the frequencies of common occupational stressors as perceived by superintendents?
2. Are there differences in occupational stressors between female superintendents and male superintendents?
3. What are the frequencies of the type of coping mechanisms deployed as perceived by superintendents, (Exercise/Nutrition, Getting away/Time off, Artificial means, Relaxation techniques, Mentoring/guidance from peers) and what type of coping mechanism is most effective as perceived by superintendents?
4. Do male and female superintendents differ in the type of coping mechanism they utilize?
5. What are the strategies employed by school district personnel to assist the superintendents in managing occupational stress?
6. What support did school district personnel provide to enhance the effectiveness of coping mechanisms utilized by superintendents to manage occupational stressors?

Design and Procedures

A mixed-methods research design was chosen for this study to utilize “qualitative data to enrich and explain the quantitative results in the words of the participants” (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 34). Two data collection methods were employed. Phase one involved a quantitative questionnaire distributed to a representative sample of superintendents in the state of Missouri. The *SSCM* survey questionnaire was developed by the researcher and pilot tested and retested by administrators. Results were used to analyze the test as a whole as well as individual survey questions for reliability. Two questions were removed after pilot testing and retesting, resulting in a 30-question survey where superintendents rated the common stressors, coping mechanisms, and their effectiveness. Four optional open-ended questions were included at the end of the survey to allow respondents to add comments regarding their experiences as it relates to stress and the superintendency. Each survey took less than fifteen minutes to complete. Data were analyzed using SAS to calculate frequencies and to determine if there were significant differences between the types of coping mechanism and their effectiveness. *t*-test for independent means were conducted to determine differences between male and female superintendents in overall stress scores (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Mean scores of most frequently used coping mechanism and the mean effectiveness were examined to determine significance. The chi-square test of independence was used to show frequency of coping mechanisms utilized by males and females.

Phase two of the investigation involved four open ended questions on the survey. Data were gathered to identify strategies employed by the school district to assist superintendents with occupational stressors. Superintendents were also asked to identify

the type of support they receive from the school district to assist with coping mechanisms. Finally, participants were asked how, if at all, gender affected their ability to manage stress. Themes were reviewed through the framework of the research questions and narrative descriptions were utilized to portray the findings and interpretations of the effectiveness of coping mechanisms.

Findings of the Study

A total of 93 superintendents participated in the study by completing and returning usable *Superintendent Stress and Coping Mechanism Surveys*. The data from the surveys identified no significant differences between overall stressors for male vs. females. Thirty common stressors relating to the superintendent position were examined according to perceptions identified on the survey instrument. While there were no significant differences between the overall stressors by gender, data indicated the two highest stressors for the executive leader are (1) *complying with state and federal mandates without getting the necessary resource* and (2) *preparing and allocating budget resources*. Mean scores were averaged within the *Frequently Bothers Me* (4) range and *Never Bothers Me* (1) range on all stressors. The lowest stressor as perceived by superintendents was *not feeling enough is expected of me by my board members*. Data from the surveys identified a significant difference between type of coping mechanism and effectiveness by gender. Five common coping mechanisms relating to occupational stress were examined according to perceptions identified on by the participants. Mean scores were averaged between the five coping mechanisms, (1) Exercise/Nutrition, (2) Getting away/Time off, (3) Artificial means, i.e. stimulants or prescription drugs, (4) Relaxations techniques, i.e. controlled breathing, yoga, and (5) Mentoring/Guidance from

peers. The data displayed males utilizing *time away* most frequently, while females utilized *exercise* most frequently as a coping mechanism. The data demonstrated *exercise* as the most effective coping mechanism for both genders. Data gathered through the comments from four open-ended questions provided triangulation to support these findings.

Research questions one through six addressed stress and coping mechanism as related to occupational stressors and gender. Research one focused on emphasizing frequencies of common occupational stressors. The data showed that, for (1) *complying with state and federal mandates* and (2) *budget allocating as the highest stressors*, more than half of the superintendents rated the stressors as of the common stressors listed as *frequently bothers me* to *occasionally bothers me* (based on a subcale of 1-4, 1 never bothers me to 4 frequently bothers me). Yet, the majority of superintendents had no known knowledge of strategies the school district offered to help them cope with the stress.

Research question two centered on the differences in occupational stressors between female and male superintendents, a better understanding of how gender manage their stress could help to overcome barriers to successful leadership. Data from the qualitative and quantitative supported the theory that male and female superintendents have different ways in handling occupational stressors. Survey data indicated the need to set stress management skills as a priority for the leadership position. Qualitative results identified the need to better understand how gender affects stress in the superintendency.

Research questions three and four were directed toward determining the most commonly utilized coping mechanisms and it's effectiveness for gender. This area clearly

showed both gender found *exercise* as the most effective way to manage occupational stress; however males utilized *getting away* more frequently. The comments from the survey triangulated these findings but showed lack of understanding of how gender affected coping skills. Interestingly, both genders believed that admitting stress was a bad thing. Men believed it was a topic that was unspeakable. Woman felt it would be a sign of weakness for the leadership position they were in. It is important to provide professional development programs that address and define occupational stress and coping skills geared toward gender, which could help the superintendent learn to balance work and home life.

Research questions five and six concentrated on creating a culture of learning by focusing on professional development for the administrative leader as it relates to stress management. The descriptive information was gathered with the written comments from the survey to answer research questions five and six. Research question five and six examined effective strategies employed by the school district and their support on enhancing coping mechanisms. The major theme that arose from the superintendents surveyed indicated they were *not aware* of any strategies the school district has in place to improve their own professional practice as it relates to stress management. Other themes were, *time away*, *school board support*, *professional development/mentoring*, and *wellness programs*. There seemed to be many opportunities to gain additional knowledge for their professional growth. However, the professional opportunities were not directed towards stress management skills. The key was being able to *take time* for yourself, and look for opportunities that allowed the superintendents to mentor each other, and talk about the stressful issues. Superintendents could benefit by learning to balance stress and

effective coping mechanisms. Keeping stress at bay through professional development will only promote professional growth. In discussing professional development, few superintendents made the connection between the importance of learning about stress and how to manage stress more effectively. The research also indicated the need to strengthen relations between the superintendents and the school board (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2004). Further research is needed in this area.

Discussion of the Findings

One purpose of research employing mixed-method design was to “measure trends, prevalence, and outcomes and at the same time examine meaning, content, and process” (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 175). This type of research helped the readers make sense of the data and understand the findings, making research accessible for practitioners and enhancing the ability to utilize the findings to impact actual practices already in place (Creswell & Clark). The data described in this research provided insight into the ways in which identifying stress and coping mechanisms impact the development of leadership skills in superintendents. In this section, links between the study’s findings and pertinent research were made to explicitly help the reader understand the importance of effective stress management skills.

Finding 1

Occupational stressors for superintendents included in this study are common within the state of Missouri. As superintendents develop leadership skills and take on increasing responsibility it is important for the district to provide the leaders with instructional methods to help cope with the stress. Research questions one examined 30 common occupational stressors for superintendents. Over half of the superintendents

indicated (1) *frequently bothers me* to (2) *occasionally bothers me* on greater than 50% of the stressors identified on the *SSCM* survey. Therefore, this finding supports the need for help from the central office administrative staff, such as that described by the 2007 mid-decade study of the state of the superintendency (Glass & Franceschini 2007),

Few executive leadership positions are free from stress. The same can be said for the superintendency. The decades covered by the 10-year studies show increasing levels of reported stress. Levels of *very great stress* are highest in smaller districts. This could be due to superintendents initially learning their way in the profession with little help from the central office administrative staff (p.47).

Data from this investigation indicated participation in stress management programs is minimal, at best. The school districts did not have structured programs in place to assist struggling superintendents to make the connection between superintendent stress and the importance of learning how to manage stress. Superintendents are left on their own to figure out ways to deal with the daily stressors of the job. Stress management skills for superintendents leading today's schools could have a positive impact on attracting qualified candidates and keeping them in the position (Howley et al, 2002; Nussbaum, 2007; Public Agenda 2001). Stress management programs hold promise to bring about needed changes to those currently holding leadership positions as they express their needs and concerns of occupational stressors.

Finding 2

The quantitative data showed there were no gender difference for overall stressors between superintendents, with a mean stress score of 3.8 for males and 3.5 for females. Similar gender perceptions were reflected in the overall stressor scores. However,

data from the qualitative and quantitative survey questions supported that male and female superintendents have different ways of handling occupational stressors.

There were parallels and contrasts in how the different genders perceived their coping skills. A contrasting theme that arose was *emotion*. Males believed lack of emotion was advantageous in dealing with difficult situations, while females believed having emotion was advantageous and helped to understand difficult situations better. A parallel between gender was *not wanting to admit being stressed*. Males believed personal *pride* stopped them from admitting they were stressed and females believed it would be a sign of *weakness* by admitting being stressed. Clearly, there are barriers in the perception of stress as it relates to gender. Stress management education as it relates to gender is needed through professional development programs, which will help administrators, become more successful in dealing with occupational stressors and ultimately enhance the organization.

Finding 3

One of the keys to effective stress management programs is ensuring the executive leaders understand which strategies work and knowing appropriate coping strategies are available (Lyle, 2005). The data demonstrated that both genders found *exercise* as the most effective means to cope with occupational stress. However, only a few school districts had wellness programs in place to help their leaders be successful with managing their stress. The qualitative data indicated the importance of having exercise equipment in the building through comments written on the surveys. The data showed males chose *getting away/time off* as their preference to manage occupational stressors although they rated *exercise* as the most effective coping strategy. Females

chose *exercise* most frequently, which would support the need to have the exercise equipment in the building. The research comments reported family pressures as a barrier to females finding ways to manage the occupational stressors.

The second most effective strategy to manage occupational stress was *getting away/time off*. However, there were inconsistencies in the superintendents' ability to take advantage of the vacation time allotted. The lack of opportunities to take time off during the school year was documented through the qualitative data collected. Comments of the desire to take time off from work were mentioned in the data, but the inability to do so due to overwhelming work load was prevalent. Although some superintendents described the school board as supportive of *taking time off*, equal number of comments described the lack of support they received from their board. The general consensus was that the board makes the difference. Including the school board in stress management programs would be beneficial to the school district. Experiencing the professional development together could prove invaluable to increasing effective communication between the superintendent and the school board members, which would ultimately improve the learning culture.

Finding 4

Data from research question five indicated professional development opportunities were one of the least offered methods of assisting superintendents in improving stress management skills. Data from the survey comments thus provided triangulation for this finding as professional development was identified by only five out of 59 survey comments as one of the methods school districts utilize as an effective way to enhance their skills in stress management and coping mechanisms. Research from the

literature review supported the importance of understanding stress and learning ways to reduce superintendent stress (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Glass and Franceschini further stated, “The important challenge facing superintendents is learning how to handle personal stress in a positive and constructive manner without passing it on to their staff. Intellectually understanding that stress is a normal condition of the position is just as important as finding personal coping mechanisms to reduce its negative effects.”

Not all stress is negative; however accumulated stress over periods of time can affect behavior, judgment, and performance. Few professional development opportunities are available to allow superintendents to learn coping skills to fit their needs and enhance their leadership capabilities.

Implications for Practice

The study’s findings have direct implications on superintendents, school district personnel, students, families of superintendents, family of students, and school climate. Four research implications for practice were identified and described in the paragraphs below.

One of the most critical aspects of being an effective leader is ensuring you have the skill set and knowledge to function optimally in the school environment. Suggestions from participants in existing superintendent positions indicated occupational stressors were at high levels, but the school district had done little to include stress management skills in preparatory programs. Gender was also an important factor when determining how gender played a role in coping mechanisms and how effective the coping strategy was. Although this was identified as an important factor, the comments shared by the

participants indicated a lack of knowledge as to how gender difference is associated with stress management skills.

Participants also indicated the importance of having a supportive school board. The superintendent must have confidence that the board is there to help, not to add stress to the job. Opinions differed with the ability to get away or take time off. Many superintendents indicated they received the support in order to get rejuvenated. Yet, others believed the overwhelming workload would only put them further behind. There were a few superintendents who indicated professional development opportunities, but the majority reported they received *no known* benefits offered by the school district personnel in which to learn stress management and/or coping strategies.

Superintendents need training and networking opportunities of their own to be able to share what is working within their organization and what is not working. These training sessions could be facilitated through the superintendent associations, the Regional Professional Development Centers, or the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Superintendents working in the state of Missouri received some professional development training prior to being placed in the superintendency. This training should be examined for content to determine whether superintendents are receiving the support they need to be effective in their roles. Stress management programs hold promise to bring about needed changes if to those currently holding leadership positions as they express their needs and concerns of occupational stressors.

According to the data analyzed for this research, *exercise* seemed to have a positive affect on the superintendents' ability to deal with occupational stress. Yet, the health challenges and wellness programs throughout the districts were minimal, with no

standardization in place. Wellness programs should be examined to determine how similar opportunities could be created throughout the district to allow for similar stress management results. Districts might work cooperatively to pool resources and develop wellness programs where administrators from schools in a close geographic area could work together and encourage one another to participate. Ultimately, building mentoring opportunities and gaining support from the school district to more effectively manage the occupational stressors of the superintendency.

Finally, university personnel need to make changes in their leadership preparatory programs to reflect the needs of today's superintendent with increasing responsibilities. The managerial-style leadership of the past is often ineffective in bringing about improved student learning. Superintendents must have the instructional background to be able to lead more effectively through the occupational stressors of the position. Many professional development programs have not adapted to the changing needs of today's and future administrators (Glass and Franceschini, 2007).

Limitations and Design Control

Like any other study, there were several limitations that need to be acknowledged to identify potential weaknesses. Steps were taken to minimize the effects of these limitations through supervision and guidance from experienced researchers throughout this study. The following limitations related to this study were identified by the researcher:

1. The study was limited to superintendents from the state of Missouri. The researcher assumed the sample chosen for this study was representative of superintendents throughout the Midwestern state. .

2. Participation in the study was limited to the superintendents who consented to voluntary participation.
3. It was assumed that superintendents based their responses on their own personal and professional experiences.
4. It was assumed that superintendents were forthright in their responses and correctly interpreted the questions as intended.
5. Researcher bias was controlled through triangulation of survey data and qualitative questions and questionnaires and supporting policy documents.

The mixed methods sequential explanatory design consists of two distinct phases: quantitative and qualitative (Creswell & Clark, 2007). In this design, the researcher first collected and analyzed the quantitative data. From this data, semi-structured, open-ended questions are written to use in the second phase. The second phase consisted of the researcher conducting qualitative research and analyzing the data to help explain or expand concepts obtained in the first phase. The rationale for this design is that the qualitative data and the subsequent analysis provided a general understanding of the research problem. The qualitative data analyses refined and explained the statistical results by exploring participants' views in more depth (Creswell & Clark).

Recommendations for Future Research

Training administrative leaders is essential to enhance their ability to effectively lead schools of tomorrow through the reform efforts necessary to meet state and federal accountability standards. Effective stress management programs must be developed or enhanced to provide the appropriate preparation for new and current leaders. This research should be replicated after the professional development programs directed

towards teaching stress management and coping skills to superintendents have been in place for several years and improvements have been made based on feedback from the participants, their respective school districts, and any outside sources with information to impact program effectiveness.

Few stress management programs are currently in place within school districts across the state. Research should be conducted to analyze professional development programs with positive results. Questions should be raised to determine the characteristics of effective programs. Identification of effective characteristics should then lead to examine how these programs could be replicated on a larger scale across the state.

This research was restricted to one Midwestern state. Would research conducted involving multiple states have the same results? Are there some states across the country with existing stress management programs in place that are effective? Research should be conducted to determine where effective programs are located in other states. Identification of effective programs should also lead to replications as stated in the previous paragraph.

Further research should also be conducted to compare actual school board relations from schools where superintendents have completed various types of stress management programs. Would comparisons of climate assessment data within school districts determine the effectiveness of stress management programs from a different standpoint? Our schools exist in a data-driven world—how do we examine this data to determine effectiveness?

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate in what ways and to what degree, if any, school superintendents perceive stress and what, if any, coping mechanisms were engaged. This study focused on qualities of coping mechanisms and their effectiveness. Underscored throughout the study is the need for effective stress management skills, professional development geared towards developing a stress model, and creating a positive school culture. Moreover, the researcher sought to identify any significant differences between the frequency of stressors by gender and coping mechanisms utilized by female and male leaders.

No significant differences were found between the frequencies of overall stressors by gender. Although no significant differences were found, the data indicated high levels of occupational stress in the superintendency. The school district personnel provided *no known* support to superintendents in developing stress management skills. Data from the interviews provided rich narrative descriptions to substantiate the findings from the survey.

Coping strategies were examined to determine effectiveness and included gender difference. The data revealed gender difference in the coping mechanism utilized and effectiveness of the coping strategy. Most of the superintendents identified *exercise* and *getting away* as one of the most frequently utilized strategies; *exercise* was most effective for both genders. The most ineffective strategy was identified as *artificial means*, while superintendents reported mentoring or communication with fellow superintendents helpful in managing occupational stress. Another concern was the need for a supportive school board. The support from central office staff to assist superintendents with stress

management skills was minimal. In addition, superintendents identified lack of understanding for gender difference and superintendent stress. Professional development was mentioned the least by superintendents as the one of strategies in place to help them develop coping skills to manage occupational stress. Other themes that were identified by one or more participants is the need for wellness programs. Study indicated exercise as the most frequently used coping strategy and the most effective, yet just a handful of districts had wellness programs in place.

The study's findings raise concern that many of our superintendents are entering the field without the proper preparation for understanding the implications of stress. Support for these district leaders is critical in light of the accountability standards enacted by our state and federal policy-makers. Effective stress management programs should be in place to assist executive leaders as they begin to create and sustain learning communities. There is need for improvement in supporting superintendents with occupational stressors. Current district leaders and policy-makers must not ignore this issue. Our superintendents must be supported and encouraged as they grow into the administrative leaders of the future.

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Appendix A
Survey Instrument

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

1. Biographical Background

1. I am currently serving as:

- Superintendent of Schools
- Assistant Superintendent
- Other (Describe)

Other (please specify)

2. I have held this position for:

- Less than 5 years
- 6-15 years
- >15 years

3. How old are you?

- Under 35
- 35-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- Over 65

4. Gender

- Male
- Female

5. What is the student enrollment of your district?

- Fewer than 1,000
- 1,000-4,999
- 5,000-9,999
- Greater than 10,000

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

2. Common Stressors

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Being interrupted frequently by telephone calls, complaining parents

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

3. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Supervising and coordinating multiple tasks, i.e. overwhelming responsibilities

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

4. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Feeling staff members don't understand my goals and expectations

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

5. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Feeling that I am not fully qualified to handle my job, i.e. lack of professional development

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

6. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Knowing that I cannot get information needed to carry out my job properly

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

7. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Thinking that I will not be able to satisfy the conflicting demands of board members, i.e. too much nit-picking, not enough time, too many hurdles

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

8. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Feeling not enough is expected of me by board members

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

9. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Trying to resolve differences between/among board members

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

10. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Having my work frequently interrupted by staff members and parents with issues

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

11. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Imposing excessively high expectations on myself

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

12. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Feeling pressure for better job performance

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

13. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Writing/answering emails, and other communication

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

14. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Speaking in front of groups

 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

15. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Attempting to meet social expectations of the school and home

 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

16. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Politics and Bureaucracy of the Public School System, i.e.having to work around the system to get things done

 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

17. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4= Frequently bothers me
- 3= Occasionally bothers me
- 2= Rarely bothers me
- 1= Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Having to make decisions that affect the lives of individual people that I know (colleagues, staff members, students)

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

18. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4= Frequently bothers me
- 3= Occasionally bothers me
- 2= Rarely bothers me
- 1= Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Feeling I have to participate in school activities outside of normal working hours at the expense of my personal time

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

19. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4= Frequently bothers me
- 3= Occasionally bothers me
- 2= Rarely bothers me
- 1= Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Feeling I have too much responsibility delegated to me by the school board and not enough autonomy to carry out the tasks

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

20. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Trying to resolve parent/school conflicts

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

21. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Preparing and allocating budget resources, i.e. receiving state and federal mandates without getting the resources necessary to fulfill them

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

22. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Feeling I have too little authority to carry out responsibilities assigned to me, i.e. lack of control

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

23. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Handling student discipline problems

4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

24. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Evaluating staff members performance, i.e. having the freedom to remove ineffective teachers or to reward outstanding one due to tenure issues

4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

25. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Feeling I have an overwhelming workload, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal work day

4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

26. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Complying with state, federal mandates without getting the resources necessary to fulfill them, i.e. insufficient funding

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

27. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Being unclear of what the scope and responsibilities of my job are, i.e. lack of feedback on job performance

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

28. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Feeling meetings take up too much time of my day

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

29. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Trying to meet time deadlines for reports and other paper work, feeling the workload is overwhelming

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

30. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Trying to gain public approval/support for school programs

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

31. Common Stressor

School administrators have identified the following work related situations as common sources of stress. Please respond to the following statements concerning occupational stressors by indicating which response best describes how you feel in reference to the specific stressor identified:

- 4=Frequently bothers me
- 3=Occasionally bothers me
- 2=Rarely bothers me
- 1=Never bothers me
- N/A

1. Trying to gain financial support for school programs, both mandatory and non-mandatory

- 4 3 2 1 N/A

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

32. Coping Mechanisms

Coping Mechanisms can be identified as any strategy an individual uses to help manage the daily stressors of their life. Please choose the category which best describes the coping mechanism you most often utilize for each stressor identified.

- 1=Exercise/Nutrition Program
- 2=Getting away/Time off from work
- 3=Artificial means, i.e. stimulants or prescription drugs
- 4=Relaxation techniques, i.e. controlled breathing, yoga
- 5=Mentoring/Guidance from peers

1. Choose the coping mechanism that best describes how you deal with this stress

- 1=Exercise/Nutrition Program
- 2=Getting away/Time off from work
- 3=Artificial means, i.e. stimulants or prescription drugs
- 4=Relaxation techniques, i.e. controlled breathing, yoga
- 5=Mentoring/Guidance from peers

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

33. Effectiveness of Coping Technique

Please measure the effectiveness of how well the coping mechanism is working for you using the following scale:

- 1 Not effective at all
- 2 Very little effective
- 3 Somewhat effective
- 4 Very effective

1. How effective is the coping mechanism you've selected for this stress?

- 1 Not effective at all
- 2 Very little effective
- 3 Somewhat effective
- 4 Very effective

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey

34. Qualitative Questions

In this section the researcher would like to hear your comments related to stress and the occupational stressors of the superintendency. Please answer the following open-ended questions to the best of your ability.

Describe any strategies the school district employs to address stress and the superintendency?

Explain what kinds of support you receive from the school district in dealing with the occupational stressors?

Please explain how gender affected your ability to manage the occupational stressors?

Are there any comments you would like to add in reference to this study on occupational stress and coping mechanisms in the superintendency?

Appendix B

Superintendent or IRB Information Letter

I am a doctoral student at the University of Missouri-Columbia and am currently completing my dissertation entitled, "Implications of Stress and Coping Mechanisms in the Superintendency." As part of the research study, 380 superintendents from all over the state are being surveyed on-line regarding perceived stress, coping mechanism, and professional development.

The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The superintendent from the geographic and gender specific requirements that were chosen will complete the survey. By completing the survey informed consent is being given.

I am writing to seek your permission to conduct the surveys in your district, providing the superintendents voluntarily agree to participate. Would you please take a moment to sign the attached form, so that I may seek your involvement?

Confidentiality of the school and superintendent will be protected throughout the study. Neither school nor superintendent will be identified in reporting results. While I do hope that you will take time to participate within your district, participation is voluntary. Participants may withdraw at any time without penalty. Individual responses to the survey are confidential. Only aggregate data will be reported in the study results. Your signature on the attached form indicates your informed consent to participate in the study. You may fax the signed informed consent form to me at the FAX number listed below and keep the original signed copy for your records.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me at home (660) 473-2507, my office (660) 687-1199, or nita.hawk@whiteman.af.mil or nita_hawk@yahoo.com. You may also contact my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Barbara N. Martin, at 660-543-8823 or bmartin@ucm.edu. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Sincerely,

Nita Hawk
Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri-Columbia

FAX (660) 687-3874

Appendix C

Informed Consent – Superintendent/IRB

I, (Name _____), (District _____), (Date ___/___/___) consent to participate in this research project. I understand this is an on-line survey and by completing the survey, informed consent is given. I have read and understand the following:

PROJECT BACKGROUND: This project involves gathering data through a survey investigating the superintendent occupational stress, coping mechanisms, and professional development. The data will be collected for analysis and may be published. You must be at least 21 years of age to participate.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship, if any, that occupational stress and coping mechanisms have on each other. Also, to determine if male and female deal with stress differently and finally if there is a relationship to professional development deployed by the school system and coping mechanisms utilized.

VOLUNTARY: The survey is voluntary. Participants may refuse to answer any question or choose to withdraw from participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled.

WHAT DO YOU DO? Sign this consent form and fax a copy to me at the FAX number below, thereby acknowledging your participation to be involved in completing the survey.

BENEFITS: Your participation in this research project will enrich the information base. A clearer understanding of how superintendents manage the inevitable occupational stress of the leadership position. The findings could help superintendents understand how effective coping mechanisms serve to help create balance and professional success.

RISKS: This project does not involve any risks greater than those encountered in everyday life.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your confidentiality will be maintained in that a participant's name will not appear on the survey or in the published study itself. A code number may be assigned so that responses may be grouped for statistical analysis. The data will only be reported in aggregate form.

INJURY: It is not the policy of the University of Missouri to compensate human subjects in the event the research results in injury. The University of Missouri does have medical, professional and general liability self-insurance coverage for any injury caused by the negligence of its faculty and staff. Within the limitations of the laws of the State of Missouri, the University of Missouri will also provide facilities and medical attention to subjects who suffer injuries while participating in the research projects of the University of Missouri. In the event you suffered injury as the result of participating in this research project, you are to immediately contact the Campus Institutional Review Board Compliance Officer at (573) 882-9585 and the Risk Management Officer at (573) 882-3735 to review the matter and provide you further information. This statement is not to be construed as an admission of liability.

Thank you for your assistance in providing current information regarding the possible relationship between occupational stressors and coping mechanisms employed by the superintendent. Your efforts are greatly appreciated. If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact me at home (660) 473-2507, work (660) 687-1199, or nita.hawk@whiteman.af.mil or nita_hawk@yahoo.com . You may also contact my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Barbara N. Martin, at 660-543-8823 or bmartin@ucmo.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in research, please feel free to contact the Campus Institutional Review Board at (573) 882-9585. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Sincerely,

Nita Hawk

Doctoral Candidate, University of Missouri-Columbia

FAX (660) 687-3874

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Comment Number: 182387 (03-04-2008) Exempt Approval Letter (Jan2008) sent on Mar 04, 2008: To: nita.hawk@whiteman.af.mil, drbabs1952@sbcglobal.net BCC: greeningjm@missouri.edu Subject: Campus IRB Exempt Approval Letter: IRB # 1107717

Dear Investigator:

Your human subject research project entitled ``Implications of Stress and Coping Mechanisms in the Superintendency`` was reviewed and APPROVED as "Exempt" on March 04, 2008 and will expire on March 04, 2009. Research activities approved at this level are eligible for exemption from some federal IRB requirements. Although you will not be required to submit the annual Continuing Review Report, your approval will be contingent upon your agreement to annually submit the "Annual Exempt Research Certification" form to maintain current IRB approval. You must submit the "Annual Exempt Research Certification" form by January 18, 2009 to provide enough time for review and avoid delays in the IRB process. Failure to timely submit the certification form by the deadline will result in automatic expiration of IRB approval. (See form: <http://irb.missouri.edu/eirb/>)

If you wish to revise your activities, you do not need to submit an Amendment Application. You must contact the Campus IRB office for a determination of whether the proposed changes will continue to qualify for exempt status. You will be expected to provide a brief written description of the proposed revisions and how it will impact the risks to subject participants. The Campus IRB will provide a written determination of whether the proposed revisions change from exemption to expedite or full board review status. If the activities no longer qualify for exemption, as a result of the proposed revisions, an expedited or full board IRB application must be submitted to the Campus IRB. The investigator may not proceed with the proposed revisions until IRB approval is granted.

Please be aware that all human subject research activities must receive prior approval by the IRB prior to initiation, regardless of the review level status. If you have any questions regarding the IRB process, do not hesitate to contact the Campus IRB office at (573) 882-9585.

Campus Institutional Review Board

VITA

Nita C. Hawk was born on March 16, 1958, in Lincoln, Nebraska, the daughter of Harold William and Effie May Johnson. She attended the public schools of Lincoln, Nebraska, graduating from Pius X High School in 1977. She received an Associates Degree in Radiological Technology (1980) from St. Luke's School of Radiology, Kansas City, Missouri, a B.S. in Physical Education/Wellness Management (1994), an M.S. in Exercise and Sports Science (1996), both from the University of Central Missouri. As part of the University of Missouri-Columbia statewide cohort program, she completed the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (2008). She has been employed by the United States Air Force, at Whiteman Air Force base since August 1996, and is currently Director of Health Promotions, a position she has held since 2005.

She has two children; Courtney and Drew; one daughter-in-law, Marybeth, and one grandson, Shiloh.