THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SUPERINTENDENT-SCHOOL BOARD

RELATIONS AND THE POLITICAL FRAME OF ORGANIZATIONAL

ANALYSIS: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

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by

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And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my awesome wife and partner Karol. You are my friend and a great transcriber, especially at the last minute. Without your constant support and strength, I would not be where I am today. We have been through a great deal, and I love you even more because of it. I only wish you happiness. To my son Nick, you are my world, and I am so proud of you. This dissertation is a symbol of hard work and perseverance. Sorry for the many days and nights in which my academic or professional careers have taken time from us. Thank you for understanding. I love you.

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ABSTRACT

The study of superintendent-school board relationships is a worthwhile endeavor from a practitioner's point of view and is important for the success of a school district. The conceptual framework consisted of features and ideas related to organizational leadership theory and the political view taken from the literature reviewed. The alliance building-negotiation tactics, power/influence within an organization, and superintendent turnover associated with the dissatisfaction theory were featured concepts in the chapters leading up to the research methods. Four focus group interviews with three to six board members from four school districts were conducted, as well as individual interviews with six current superintendents. The superintendents are current and former employees of the four represented districts. From the interview data, connections were made with most of the key conceptual features, and four themes were formulated: interpersonal relations, cultural awareness, communication skills, and management accountability. Management accountability generalizes from the areas of fiscal, personnel, and legal. There were some interesting points to consider in this study, but the development of interpersonal attributes are vital. Being aware and becoming part of the local community, as well as improving communication skills and knowledge of expectations and compliance issues related to management, is essential. Communication skills include listening and gathering of information. These are all considerations for graduate school programs preparing future school leaders. More studies are needed to further explore the superintendent-school board relationships in a variety of different ways to gather data that is of quality and quantity. This will continue to add to the existing literature and reinforce ideas associated with improved relations and long tenure as a school superintendent.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As the changes at the federal and state levels create a different paradigm at the local level, attitudes and behaviors of superintendents and school board members also change. For one, superintendents view the legislative mandates as major barriers to giving full attention to student learning, staff development, and school improvement (Peterson et al., 2009). Moreover, there have been recent indications that negative attitudes towards the realities of the position have caused the applicant pool for superintendents in recent years to become smaller. Gibbs (2008) asserted that the number of people qualified to be a superintendent or principal is as low as ever before, which complicates an already difficult situation. Truslow and Coleman (2005) pointed out the problem of short tenures by superintendents caused by different approaches to conflict and a lack of consistency between perceptions of school board members and superintendents. If school board members and superintendents are not consistent and parallel in goals and expectations, problems will exist. In order to be successful as a school leader, the superintendent must find a way to make the relationship with his or her school board members work through knowledge of various skills and competencies that relate to politics, communication, decision-making, and other considerations

Going from the federal and state intrusions to the problems of congruency and perceptions of school leaders and school board members, the establishment of an effective relationship between these stakeholders has never been more important. That makes this research a contribution to the existing literature in the identification of key skills and characteristics of superintendents that can help improve relations, inform

graduate schools of necessary competencies, and prepare future leaders to successfully work with school boards and increase the chances of a long tenure. After all, school improvement requires quality superintendent preparation as a key component (Petersen, Fusarelli, & Kowalski, 2008). At least having the ability to identify signs that the relationship is not going well can only be helpful in a school leader's mission to effect positive change and make decisions based on what is best for kids while attempting to survive the political arena. Other closely related topics that were addressed and showed up in this inquiry included board accountability (Berry & Howell, 2008), causes of turnover (Alsbury, 2008; Hoyle, 2007), inadequate preparation (Fusarelli, 2006), and perceptions (Canales et al., 2008; Jefferies, 2009; Richard & Kruse, 2008). The study of organizational politics, as discussed by Bolman and Deal (2008), Bush (2003), and Yukl (2002), also provided key features to the research and associated discussions.

Problem Statement

The increase in expectations and accountability at the federal level has had an effect on everyone in public education. Educational reform legislation passed by the federal government, including the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Crum & Hellman, 2009), has resulted in more requirements and responsibilities at the state level and is enforced through the threat of decreased funding. As Malen (2003) pointed out, that equates to a loss of local control for individual school districts. Sunderman (2010) also reinforced the influence that occurs when the role of federal and state government in education increases, in relation to structures, governance, privatization, and changes at the local level. While reform can be a positive thing, it adds a great deal of pressure to the administrative positions in school districts (Stover, 2010). NCLB also affects local

decision-making (Crum & Hellman, 2009) and the perception of how leadership should be structured and how agendas need to change (Anderson, 2009). It should be expected that the trend of accountability, government intrusion, and bad legislation will continue into the future, adding more pressure and more political considerations to the superintendent position. The superintendent profession has always been in an incessant condition of change and development, requiring adaptive skills. Those in this position play a key role in the makeup of a school district and the success of that school district (Peterson & Klotz, 1999).

The problem the research attempted to identify or reinforce is the reality that superintendents often find themselves in difficult relationships with school boards, which can sometimes result in an unexpected non-renewal (Hoyle, 2007). Other factors, such as recent decreased revenues and increased standards at the state and federal levels (Malen, 2003), tend to make these relationships even more complicated and volatile. There is also a recent trend of reduced numbers of candidates for superintendent positions due to unknown factors (Davis, 2010).

<center>*Research Purpose*</center>

The overarching purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore the political dynamics embedded within superintendent-school board relations and superintendent longevity at school districts in the state of Missouri. This inquiry attempted to increase understanding of what skills and characteristics are needed by school superintendents to effectively work with school board members, and how those skills relate to the political view of organizational analysis and political leadership theory. The researcher intended to explore the factors considered by board members when voting

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on whether or not to retain the superintendent. Another objective of the study was to explore the perceptions of school board members, in relation to expected leadership styles and characteristics of the school superintendent, as well as the political skills necessary to ensure longevity. õA gradual transformation occurs in which the school leader moves away from seeing political forces as obstructions to progress and toward visualizing political forces as integral stakeholders in the local educational process whose contributions are essential in the quest to achieve organizational objectivesö (Farmer, 2009, p. 32). Whether one views politics positively, negatively, or with a sense of apathy matters very little. Politics and the managing of political situations is an inevitable responsibility of any organizational leader, including the school superintendent.

There was also an analysis of perceptions of current and former superintendents regarding skills and characteristics they deem as important to effective superintendent-school board relationships that ensure a longer tenure. The superintendents were asked what factors create a situation in which one is not retained in their position. Finally, the study helped gain insights on these relationships in terms of decision-making, communication, and other necessary political competencies. The hope is that the research helped fill a gap in the existing studies concerning superintendent-school board relations; it also contributed to leadership and organizational theory. It provided important feedback to current and future leaders about necessary competencies for the superintendent position.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What skills and characteristics do school board members believe are essential for a school superintendent to be successful and to maintain good relations with the school board?

2. What decision-making skills do school board members expect superintendents to possess in order to be successful and maintain a good relationship?

3. What communication skills do school board members expect superintendents to possess in order to be successful and maintain a good relationship?

4. What factors do school board members consider when voting on whether to retain/employ a superintendent or terminate employment?

5. What competencies do school superintendents describe as important in their relationship with school boards and the probability of a long tenure in one school district?

6. What decision-making skills do superintendents associate with maintaining a good relationship with school board members?

7. What communication skills do superintendents associate with maintaining a good relationship with school board members?

8. What factors do superintendents convey as important in remaining at any district voluntarily?

Conceptual Framework

Currently, the political atmosphere that includes heightened accountability and required student testing improvement increases the probability that the relationship between school boards and superintendents will become harmful to district governance due to increased negativity (Moody, 2011). It is vital that school board members and superintendents encourage productive relationships in order to help develop

organizational cultures that press forward valuable teaching and learning practices that increase student growth. Additionally, recent and future pressures that school leaders will experience are connected with political topics that include alliance building/negotiation, conflict, and use of power (Bush, 2003). A key part of this study was an examination into the perceptions of school board members and superintendents as to what characteristics a school leader should display, which should reinforce and display competencies to include in superintendent preparation programs. Another important consideration is student academic performance as it relates to leadership. What superintendents perceive can be different than the perceptions of individual board members, as the readings highlighted. The research inquiry also highlighted perceptions of both superintendents and board members and how the perceptions can change due to a number of variables, including board turnover (Alsbury, 2008) and even gender (Mountford & Brunner, 2010).

School boards and superintendents face many pressures in the future (Stover, 2010); therefore, it is imperative that they work together in the best interests of their school districts. Public school leaders must be prepared to establish positive board relations because of increased state and federal standards that have impacted the functioning of local school boards (Malen, 2003), as well as the decision-making process at each district (Crum & Hellman, 2009). Conversely, Trevino (2008) surveyed a group of superintendents who indicated that there are greater challenges in their positions than political issues. The findings showed that the hiring of excellent teachers, funding issues, and pedagogy issues were more demanding. However, as a school superintendent with over nine years of experience, this researcher would argue that the issues noted as more taxing in this particular study are all related to politics. In fact, as the area of inquiry has

evolved, it has become apparent that political theory and related concepts were used to guide and inform the research.

Alliance Building and Negotiation

In order to build healthy alliances, one must first come to the realization that school boards are one of many interest groups that have an agenda from which they often operate. Bush (2003) effectively related the features of political models to the educational setting, which included group activity and the interests of various groups. A school board certainly represents a key interest group in this study that also interconnects with other political features, including conflict, goals, negotiation, and influence (Bush, 2003). These political suppositions also relate to various themes discussed in the existing literature concerning superintendent and school board relationships. Some of these prevailing themes are accountability of school boards (Berry & Howell, 2008), superintendent turnover (Hoyle, 2007), and decision making (Crum & Hellman, 2009). Furthermore, several themes are interchangeable with political features emphasized by Bolman and Deal (2008), such as the building of alliances, varying beliefs, allocation of scarce resources, conflict, and negotiation. These concepts, as expected, emerged during the study of what actually defines a situation in which a superintendent stays at one district for a significant number of years to accomplish meaningful change, according to the perceptions of both school board members and superintendents who work with those board members. In other words, the focus groups conveyed factors that are prevalent in an effective superintendent-school board relationship, as well as expected leadership styles or skills.

Another concept focused on and encountered in this inquiry was negotiation. If a negotiator takes a value creator approach, that means he or she will attempt, through cooperation and creativity, to find a win-win solution (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This sets up an environment of empowerment at all levels of an organization, producing more power and influence that can be used for future negotiations (Kanter, 2005). As one can see, the study involved political concepts and themes that are interconnected and can be stretched into even more specific ideas and recommendations.

Power

The power that a school leader has accumulated has several related features: influence, authority, decision-making, communication, and empowerment. These all relate to the political suppositions and the need to foster a relationship with the school board that is transparent and marked with continual communication. In addition, the above mentioned themes and political features can be extrapolated even further into more specific characteristics. For example, the concept of power is central to all political models and can be discussed in terms of deciding outcomes and influencing behavior (Bush, 2003). From the distinction between authority and influence comes an explanation of power sources in school districts. The sources of power in school districts are positional power, authority of expertise, personal power, control of rewards, coercive power, and control of resources. Also, superintendents are in a position to effect change and modify behaviors through decisions (2003). Of course, as Jefferies (2009) conveyed, influencing school board actions is quite different than an attempt to influence peers or subordinates. This type of influence involves becoming more acquainted with the board

through communication, concentrated preparation, respectful interactions, the establishment of alliances, and the maintenance of emotions (2009).

Turnover and the Dissatisfaction Theory

While it is true that past researchers have investigated turnover, general conclusions are difficult to find. According to Grissom and Andersen (2012), there really is not agreement on whether turnover is a real problem in the first place. In addition, most research has not delved in deep enough to prove any significant conclusions or to eliminate other rationalizations for why superintendents leave the position. The dissatisfaction theory that started with Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) and continued with Alsbury (2008) and Grissom and Andersen (2012) related quite simply to superintendent turnover. Over time, stakeholders become disenchanted with the performance of the school district until it builds into a political situation in which board members are voted out of office and replaced with new members who, consequently, replace the superintendent. That means the theory states that board turnover will result in superintendent turnover. Research is not conclusive on this, though.

The dissatisfaction theory, if applicable, only produces one forecast about superintendent turnover, which is that exiting board members will result in a higher rate of superintendents leaving their positions (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). Two major glitches exist with this assertion. Superintendents leave for a variety of reasons that do not allow application of this theory, especially when there is continuity in the school board (2012). Furthermore, the predicted turnover is inadequate if it does not result in a quantifiable change, such as increased student achievement. As Alsbury (2008) concluded, õIndeed, the dissatisfaction theory becomes irrelevant to the practitioner if it

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succeeds in demonstrating that the public has the ability to change their school board and superintendent, but that new leadership does not result in any change in their school districtö (p.206). Whether or not this theory becomes applicable to the research will depend upon board demographics, including experience, as well as the specific situation of that district.

Design and Methods

This research was a phenomenological study encompassing the use of focus groups, individual interviews, and observations. The intent of this investigation, in accordance to the stated research questions, was to identify and reinforce the factors, leadership styles, preferred characteristics, and political skills necessary for survival in the superintendent position and an increased possibility of a long tenure. The focus groups were represented by three member groups from school boards at three Missouri school districts. A fourth focus group was represented by six board members during their open session. The three board members at the three focus groups staying with that number were the longest tenured members. The individual interviews were conducted with the four superintendents whose school boards are participating in the focus groups, as well as two former superintendents from two of the four school districts. One regular board meeting was observed at each of the four school districts represented

An analysis of focus group and individual interviews took place based on the longevity of superintendents at four school districts. The plan was to select two school boards that have a superintendent who has been in that district for ten or more years. Two more school boards represented districts that have a history of short tenures for superintendents. A history of short tenure was defined by a district that has employed

four or more superintendents in a ten year period. If more information was needed to approach better saturation of data, the researcher would have considered the possibility of adding groups to the data collection.

The four focus groups were interviewed using a set of open-ended interview questions that gathered data to help answer the research questions. The current and former superintendents from the four respective school districts were interviewed with similar questions to make comparisons with answers given by the focus groups. These focus groups are considered by the researcher to be homogeneous based on experience working with school boards and the fact that these people have commonality. Moreover, the information being gathered reinforced common interest of the subjects, making the situation appropriate to accomplish the goal of homogeneity (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The sample population, or interview subjects, was selected from school boards at Missouri districts in the South Central Region.

With three focus groups with three participants in each group, as well as one six-member focus group, four current superintendents, and two former superintendents; that results in a total of twenty-one participants in this study. Three members in each group is certainly not an idyllic focus group size (Krueger & Casey, 2000); however, this allowed board members to participate without forming a quorum, which would require an official meeting. As stated, one school board chose to have all six members attending a regular board meeting participate in the interview during the meeting. Recruiting was not difficult and participants in the smaller groups were more at ease. The identification of four school boards was accomplished with districts in proximity to the researcher with board members willing to participate, located in the South Central area of the state of

Missouri. The standard practice of using pseudonyms was followed in order to protect confidentiality, and only general demographic information was included. Some district details were given, but these were limited. An informed consent form (Appendix A) was distributed to all participants before the interviews were conducted. This form included the researcher's contact information, as well as the contact information of the supervising professor. The researcher made the interviews with both school board members and superintendents as informal as possible, which included casual conversations and reassurances of anonymity. No initial meeting before the formal interview was necessary, although there were several phone and e-mail conversations leading up to the actual interviews. The conversations had more to do with logistics and setting up an ideal date and time for all involved to meet, whether before or after a meeting, or some other time.

Considering data collection strategies, all focus group interviews and individual interviews were audio taped. The interview data came from transcriptions from the audio recordings; field notes were also taken. The board meeting observations were not audio recorded, but notes were taken and copies of agendas were made. As would be expected in qualitative research, the researcher fulfilled the primary task of collecting and interpreting data (Creswell, 2007). Any biases or preconceptions held by the researcher were conveyed, as well as any experience working with school board members and superintendents.

The analysis of data followed the procedures outlined by Creswell (2007) in dealing with interview transcriptions and other qualitative data. Every line was analyzed in order to find significant statements and patterns of various themes from these statements. From the themes and their resulting categories, meanings and interpretations

were generated. This gave a full investigation into the opinions, perceptions, and expectations of participants. Comparisons were made between each of the focus groups, including an investigation into whether there are significant differences in the responses from the school board members representing a board which has a recent history of terminating employment with superintendents in short time spans. Additionally, comparisons were made between board member responses and superintendent responses. In regard to the former superintendents interviewed, the researcher attempted to determine, through questioning and conversation, whether the decision to leave the position was voluntary or not. Of course, careful attention was given to ascertain whether the assertions from the political frame of organizational theory were addressed in any way. Conversely, other thoughts and ideas from these focus group discussions reinforced other theories and ideas.

Significance of the Research for Leadership Practice

There remains a need for more research related to school board-superintendent relations and the characteristics and political skills needed to enjoy a long and successful tenure as a school superintendent. This type of information can help prepare future leaders and show how perceptions and expectations can influence the outcomes of this important relationship. While there are existing studies that primarily look at superintendent and board member perceptions and relationships through surveys and other quantitative data, there are only a handful of meaningful qualitative research studies that reveal the mindset of these individuals, in regard to what works and what results in sustained rapport and a productive relationship. As hoped, this study led to tangent issues and related theories beyond the political spectrum, which generated more discussion,

more prescribed guidelines, and specific actions to take based on those guidelines. This research is an addition to the theories emphasized in organizational and educational leadership analysis, further developing the political frame, as well as other related ideas and opinions. This adds to a continual investigation into leadership theory that creates new practices and reinforces current practices.

This researcher also believes that data can be utilized in graduate programs in selecting competencies and establishing course requirements for principals studying to become superintendents. Aspiring principals and other educational leadership and management positions can benefit from this information, too. Bush (2003) effectively pointed out the need to utilize theoretical findings into actual practice. In some cases, graduate programs fail to establish this link by not giving enough specific strategies for improving the leadership practice. It is the hope of this researcher that the results of this study will generate and reinforce key theoretical assumptions, especially the political frame of organizational analysis. Forming positive alliances is one of the features of the political view (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Therefore, it is important for educational administration programs to show an ability to prepare future school leaders for working with school board members and forming these ideal alliances in order to accomplish school-wide improvement goals. Naturally, there were many political features and connections that, again, add to the research and increase the knowledge base for our next generation of school leaders.

Awareness of how rapidly a local school board can change represents another reason for studying these relationships. If a superintendent plans to be a change agent, he or she should know how school boards interact and how they perceive the roles and

responsibilities of the superintendent. There also has to be an understanding of adaptive behaviors as necessary responses to unavoidable change that requires a complete awareness of the political concepts and main features, including coalitions with varying interests, scarce resources, conflict, power or influence, and negotiation through effective communication to reach wise decisions (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Otherwise, significant and positive change will be more difficult to achieve. õViewed from the political frame, politics is the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interestsö (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p.190). The key word is realistic; politics is a reality in any organization, including schools.

This awareness increases the probability of longer tenure, meaning fewer turnovers and more continuity of leadership. While it is extremely difficult to establish a direct correlation between superintendent longevity and student achievement (Alsbury, 2008), there is a prevailing ideology that better relations between school board members and superintendents will result in a more positive school climate, which can only assist with educational reform and improved test scores. Thus, the relationships among superintendents, the board president, other board members, and even the community can be complicated and is definitely applicable to future school leaders. Researching these vital relationships has enhanced a leaderøs ability to create a school atmosphere that emphasizes student learning, improves communication, decreases staff turnover, and improves public perception of the school district. Furthermore, a change agent usually needs a significant amount of time to satisfy all goals and objectives. Time becomes an enemy if a superintendent does not utilize ideas and proceed through a decision-making

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process that always considers the political ramifications and related obstacles that can be barriers to needed enhancements and modifications to a particular school district.

Definitions of Key Terms

While the last 25 years of the previous century certainly contained an abundance of school reform initiatives, the studies of superintendents and school boards have been limited (Trevino et al., 2008). The changing roles and responsibilities of superintendents and school boards, due to reform efforts, make defining these roles more problematic (Hoyle, 2007). This section attempted to provide definitions for and clarity about terms contained within this research inquiry.

History of long-term superintendent. In this study, this refers to a school district with a superintendent who has been employed for 10 or more consecutive years.

History of short-term superintendents. This refers to a school district that has employed three or more superintendents in a 10 year period.

Local School Board. The local school board is made up of elected patrons who reside in that district and who hire superintendents, approve budgets, discuss/approve contracts, define local curricular standards, and enable the daily processes of the district (Berry & Howell, 2008). Missouri school boards are made up of seven members, elected for three year terms.

Politics or Political Models. In order to explain what is meant by the term *politics* in conjunction with interview questions and explanations to participants, this was defined in the context of the educational setting. Politics is the process of a school district in which policies and decisions are formulated through negotiations. Coalitions are formed between interest groups to achieve shared goals, which results in conflict and use of

influence to reach a conclusion (Bush, 2003). All interactions between stakeholders are considered.

RPDC Region. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education assigns each school district to one of nine regions. These regions serve as professional development boundaries, as well as boundaries for state level support and other public educational activities. Each region is served by a Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC). Along with Kansas City and St. Louis regions, the state has Northwest, Northeast, Southwest, Southeast, South Central, Central, and Heart of America regions. In this study, boards interviewed came from the South Central region (2015).

School board president. The school board president is the member of the local school board elected by the other board members to be the õí head of the group that does the hiring and firingö (Kopelowitz, 2009, p.2). This person tends to direct the proceedings of the local school board meetings, which are generally held once per month on designated days.

Superintendent. The school superintendent is the Chief Executive Officer, or CEO, of the school district. He or she is hired to help conduct board business and direct daily district operations (Moody, 2011).

Superintendent Turnover. The superintendent turnover in this study is simply the exiting of the position for any reason. Turnover can be political or apolitical (Alsbury, 2008); however, efforts will be made to differentiate between the two types. As expected, political turnover has a negative connotation. Interview questions will highlight necessary skills and characteristics for superintendents to avoid a forced turnover (termination or resignation).

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Summary

Increased federal accountability standards and a response to a need for educational reform, combined with state expectations, creates more pressure for school leaders and less local control by school boards. Adding more pressure through reforms disguised as accountability standards and constant attacks on public education from powerful political forces creates confusion, uncertainty, and more strain on the superintendent-school board relationship (Jeffries, 2009). From the view of this researcher, relationships that were already considered unpredictable by fellow peers are now more stressful and important at the same time. This is made more complex due to recent economic concerns, a seemingly smaller pool of superintendent applicants, changing perceptions, and the inevitable continued evolution of political dynamics and issues to concern oneself with in present times. This political pressure comes from all levels: local, state, and federal. The problem to address and formulate research questions from remains the fact that many superintendents are not proactive when dealing with politics and related features of superintendent-school board relationships (Hoyle, 2007). There is certainly some indication that improved relations brings about positive change, or at least a sustained level of productivity. This research will examine the ideas and perceptions of school board members from four school districts, as well as current and former superintendents.

Understanding what board members and superintendents are thinking, in relation to necessary skills and characteristics, can help school leaders establish and foster future relationships (Pardini & Lewis, 2003). Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to analyze the political aspects of these relationships with data gathered from

interview questions that focused on political suppositions, as well as the related concept of decision-making. Both school board members and superintendents participated, and all data was examined to find significant statements to establish patterns and themes for discussion and learning. Positive and productive relationships can go a long way towards enhancing school climate, improving educational services, shortening board meetings, and making needed change an easier process, thus improving the conditions for real school improvement. Informed leadership requires investigations such as this in order to learn from others based on experiences related to superintendent longevity that can be compared and utilized to acquire better understanding.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review was to first provide a critical examination of various sources that relate to the political perspective, which represents one of the organizational leadership models. The next purpose was to show, through additional readings, how the political perspective corresponds directly with the relationship between the school superintendent and the local school board. Simply put, articles related to school boards and their relationship with superintendents were utilized to show connections and applicability to the political models. The review of related literature also exhibited a need for further research due to limited qualitative studies in existence. Looking ahead, political theory and related concepts were used to guide and inform the research, which investigated superintendent-school board relationships and factors that result in long tenure for school leaders. The chosen sources for this literature review highlighted key areas connected to the political models that are important to educational leadership, making them pertinent to the researcher's current position as a school superintendent. õViewed from the political frame, politics is the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interestsö (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p.190). This is especially true considering the difficult economic times school districts have endured during recent years. When the general area of inquiry is school boards and their relationships with superintendents in making decisions, the political view fits quite well.

With that said, it should be noted that the political perspective represents one frame of reference for leaders, and school board-superintendent relationships likely also

require a consideration of multiple viewpoints. Various decisions and problems require a complete look at each given situation and various options available, which usually involves contemplating more than one view. For this inquiry, however, the political perspective was the focus. The review of literature begins with an introduction to the political models, primarily in educational settings with a focus on superintendent-school board relations, through a discussion of five chosen areas, or political suppositions. Those five areas are as follows: (a) awareness of environment and resources, (b) coalitions, (c) influence and power, (d) negotiation, and I decision-making. The sources in this section include the books titled *Reframing Organizations* (Bolman & Deal, 2008) and *Educational Leadership and Management* (Bush, 2003). These two books served as the groundwork of the political frame and related concepts, and they also represent the researcher's initial exposure to the study of major features in his doctoral program. Sections from the book titled *Classics of Organizational Theory* (Shafritz, Ott & Jang, 2005) were also used, as well as other various readings.

The next section presents additional themes that further exemplify features and concerns directly connected to the relationship between superintendents and board members. This section further illustrates the connection between the political models and school board-superintendent relationships by focusing on superintendent turnover, accountability of school boards, conflict, demographics, and gender in politics. These areas bring into the discussion more ideas linked to board member perceptions, mentoring, decision-making, leadership/graduate preparation programs, board elections, board training, the effect on boards and superintendents from demographics, political strategies, changing roles, and trust building, to name a few.

The third section of the literature review explores previous methods used by past researchers, which conveyed the general viewpoint that more literature is necessary to reinforce ideas, exhibit more variety of data, and give more information about this essential relationship between school boards and superintendents. The previous methods included surveys and case studies, and almost every source and research study that explored school board-superintendent relationships conveyed a need for more studies with a variety of qualitative and quantitative data to more fully explore this important relationship. This section also drew attention to some of the survey instruments that have been utilized in previous studies.

The conclusion to this literature review attempted to connect all the political suppositions and themes together, summarize the political concepts expected to come about in the research interviews, give some critical evaluative information about the sources reviewed, and segue into the next chapter concerning methods and methodology of the proposed research. While this review of the literature was not totally exhaustive, it certainly showed the connection between the political frame and the relationship between superintendents and school boards. It also presented several authors and researchers who have looked at this topic extensively and have had an impact on the research area by expressing concerns future educational leaders will likely encounter.

Political Models and Superintendent-School Board Relations

Awareness of Environment and Resources

Awareness of one's environment and resources brings in the political assumptions and features that help guide and inform the overall research that looked to study the relationship between superintendents and their respective school boards. Awareness

refs to the ability to understand political aspects and see things from a political view, which includes the fact that politics is inevitable. A leader has to concede this and be willing to manage it in order to benefit. Bush (2003) pointed out the main characteristics to look for within the political models, starting with the various subgroups interacting within an organization. Of course, other components to be aware of are varying interests among and between these subgroups, which tend to create competition and conflict. Bush (2003) went on to discuss the ideas that define political models, which are areas to be conscious of and ready to address when necessary. This agrees with Bolman and Deal (2008), in respect to the suppositions that outline the political frame, which help heighten awareness. In fact, there is strong agreement among these sources, as far as the main features and aspects to be aware of when looking at a situation or decision from the political view. In addition, both sources agree that a cynical view of politics represents a severe hazard for individuals and organizations pursuing effectiveness (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Bush, 2003). Therefore, leaders considering politics as a necessary element to overall improvement and developing skills to better deal with and maneuver the certain organizational politics would be better served in the long term.

The main suppositions that summarize the political frame, as Bolman and Deal (2008) convey, are interconnected and are represented, directly or indirectly, throughout this literature review, along with related features. They include the existence of alliances made up of individuals and interest groups within an organization, long term differences in opinions and beliefs among the members of each coalition, decision-making based mainly on the distribution of limited assets within an organization, the conflict and power struggles that come naturally with these limited assets and differences in viewpoints, and

the final organizational determinations or settlements that spring from compromise and bargaining concessions between competing interest groups and coalitions. These suppositions and their related features resurfaced several times throughout this review of related literature and are key components to the actual research through focus group interviews and other qualitative data.

Awareness also includes knowledge of the political environment and those involved. Blase (1991) conveyed the need for leaders to be aware of the political landscape in school districts by showing the strategies teachers employ to cope with ineffective school administrators, such as avoidance, conformity, confrontation, and several other influential or self-protective behaviors. These micro political strategies, or defense mechanisms, were effective at exhibiting behaviors that occur when a school leader is viewed negatively because of a lack of awareness or an inability to communicate effectively and exhibit characteristics associated with fairness, collaboration, flexibility, and support. Hoyle (2007) agreed that there are cautionary signs to be conscience of and that graduate programs need to instill in future superintendents, especially those related to morale among staff members and administrative teams and the perceptions of board members and community members. There needs to be improvement and heightened awareness for strategies related to understanding the political environment and effectively addressing key interpersonal relationships, which can be accomplished through role playing or situational activities and increased interpersonal communication. Furthermore, when charting the political landscape, a leader determines communication lines, identifies the characters and their influence, examines the chances for utilizing internal and external actors, and foresees reactions from those who disagree (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Once the

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surroundings are more transparent, one can utilize the other key political attributes: setting the agenda, networking to form alliances, and compromising to reach goals and solve problems through shared decision-making.

Additionally, the political surroundings can also be affected by historical relevance or whether a district is urban or rural. Farmer (2009) believed that managing rural politics can be more forceful and concerted and requires leaders to be confident in their political abilities. Start with a spirited environment with competing interests and a unique culture and add in financial constraints unique to rural districts, and one will likely experience politically charged situations. This makes being proactive about forging coalitions and understanding the environment even more vital, as well as maintaining clear communication and including patrons in any collaborative efforts. Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, and Reeves (2012) advanced the study of rural context leadership traits previously studied by examining seven superintendents whose districts had shown student test score increases despite these leaders facing socioeconomic challenges, rural contextual difficulties, a large list of job responsibilities, and the absence of a private life in general. The seven successful leaders viewed these challenges as opportunities and were consistent in their leadership behaviors. These behaviors included establishing/communicating goals, positive conflict, removal of poor staff members, and teamwork. Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, and Slate (2008) completed a rural study that reinforced the many stressors faced by administrators in rural districts and reiterated the need to be proactive in solving problems and relieving stress. The study also pointed to the history of school leadership and how responsibilities are assigned, which is affected by a rural setting. Accordingly, Moody (2011) believed it was important for

superintendents to also have a full understanding of the past development of the superintendent position and the evolution of the current school boards from earlier school committees starting during the 1600s in Massachusetts. The power struggles between school boards and superintendents can be traced back to the first notable sign of this position during the 1800s due to the inevitable conflicts over operational duties, as well as increased uncertainty and ever increasing responsibilities. Varying perceptions of the superintendent roles among school leaders and board members creates more tension in this relationship. Moreover, these perceptions can influence a superintendent's relationship with a school board in a positive or negative fashion.

As Richard and Kruse (2008) conveyed, "Foundational to the discussion of school board and superintendent relations is the understanding of the ways in which school board members perceive a superintendent's behaviors and actions" (p.9). A school leader should continually ask, in relation to board member perceptions, if there are major contradictions between what board members consider to be ideal behaviors of the superintendent and actual behaviors of the superintendent that are expected. If there are contradictions, one should investigate what variables create this inconsistency. In other words, what forms these perceptions? Petersen, Fusarelli, and Kowalski (2008) established that varying perceptions can also exist in the area of superintendent preparation and the ongoing debate concerning administrative certification requirements. In this study, most respondents were positive about their preparation. Handling political situations was the area with the lowest level of agreement, in terms of being fully prepared for this aspect of the position. Moffet (2011) showed that, when investigating perceptions of superintendents and school board presidents, they generally agree that,

while improving student achievement is the most important priority for school leaders, directly tying state testing to evaluations is not seen as practical or necessary. Working together to create a culture of performance and improvement was seen as generally more important, and this agreement could represent a positive sign for the future, in terms of productive superintendent-school board relationships. Pardini and Lewis (2003) also exhibited some positive trends when examining perceptions of superintendents and school boards; however, a survey cited in the article showed that 71% of superintendents thought the position of superintendent was in a state of crisis. In addition, 93% of the same respondents thought they had an effective association with the school board in which collaboration existed. These responses seem to be contradictory and tend to complicate an already complex relationship.

Another area that a leader must have heightened awareness to would be the increased accountability and related attempts to tie district restructuring to student state test scores. Stover (2010) pointed to an example of this in a law in California that requires school boards to re-organize schools that have low test scores if parents order it. There have even been attempts in some states to take power away from school boards when it comes to hiring and firing decisions (2010). These examples confirm that school board members need to be more active in educational debates and legislative issues, and it is the duty of the superintendents to inform and guide board members in these endeavors. After all, school districts are part of a multifaceted policy network in which there are several interest groups that rarely agree on anything except that improvement is needed (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The *No Child Left Behind Act* is another example of government intrusion in which testing and accountability are stressed. õMeasure how

well schools are doing, reward the winners, and penalize the losersö (p.239). Setting up and continuing lines of informal communication are important when assessing the political environment and establishing organizational goals (Bush, 2003). Even a leader who is well known nationwide and is not hesitant to make needed changes should communicate effectively with board members and other interest groups. Fossey (2011) illustrated this through a case study from a Texas school district in which a superintendent, even though there was considerable improvement in student skill attainment, encountered conflict with board members that resulted in a contract buyout.

Awareness also relates to a continual, updated knowledge of local politics and past turnover of the superintendent position one has decided to obtain. When studying a possible relationship between board member/superintendent turnover and student test scores, Alsbury (2008) reinforced the necessity of understanding and continually learning the political surroundings. When a connection was established between board member turnover and student performance in smaller districts, it was found that decreased scores were more likely to occur if the turnover was for political reasons. That means the connection might be a symptom of a politically charged environment rather than a cause, which the superintendent should be familiar with and prepared to solve. Political turnover could definitely damage school climate. At the same time, there is increasing evidence in more contemporary sources that there is a direct relationship between the length of service of the superintendent and the achievement level of students (Leon, 2010) when the superintendent utilizes and sustains leadership behaviors that focus on academic goal-setting through collaborative efforts with staff members, principals, community members, and board members (Waters & Marzano, 2006). This confirms the need for awareness,

which involves learning about and listening to board members and other stakeholders (Alsbury, 2008). An article written by Fusarelli (2006) also strengthened the idea of awareness by detailing the failures of a superintendent at a school district already known for high turnover. This showed a need to begin the emphasis on awareness before the first job interview. One must know exactly what situations might exist; therefore, careful initial research followed by a thoughtful study of political relationships should take place (Fusarelli, 2006). An organizational leader, in order to accomplish specific goals, shows an awareness of all political elements, which helps him predict the amount of conflict to expect (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Of course, the nature and scope of conflict is also determined by the amount of resources available in organizations. Therefore, awareness of resource availability is also important to school leaders and administrators.

Another area to be fully aware of, the allocation of limited resources, remains one of the most important political factors for a manager in an organization, according to Bolman and Deal (2008). Also, resource availability dictates how conspicuous the elements of politics will be; a manager notices politics more when times are tough or more competitive. Kanter (2005) discussed resources in terms of a leader's use of power and the sharing of power. "Access to resources and information and the ability to act quickly make it possible to accomplish more and to pass on more resources and information to subordinates" (p. 342). Another direct influencer to district resources is the seemingly endless unfunded mandates from legislators at the state and federal levels. Stover (2010) believed that school boards should not let mandates distract from the need for school boards to set goals for improvement and attempt to attain those goals in an assertive fashion. He also reinforced the need for board members to lobby and

communicate with politicians, especially if a mandate is unreasonable or unaffordable. One can also view limited resources from a context of problem solving and adequate communication. Kameniar, Imtoual, and Bradley (2008) demonstrated what can occur when there are limited resources. Limited resources, coupled with a lack of communication and ineffective management, complicated the situation further. Asking questions about resource appropriateness and soliciting input from those affected helps avoid unnecessary conflict and a new set of problems created by a failure to be aware and proactive (2008). Awareness directly relates to and determines a leader's ability to be proactive rather than reactive when solving problems and making important decisions, depending on which of the three types of problems exist. Once awareness increases, in relation to the political landscape and allocation of resources, one can then work on building coalitions, the next area of review.

Coalitions

Coalitions of various individuals and teams shape organizations, including school districts. These alliances have disparities in ideas, concerns, and conceptions of what is real; and these disparities help create conflict (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Bush, 2003). At the same time, coalitions form when individuals come together with common interests. õA coalition forms because of interconnections among its members: they need one another, even though their interests may only partly overlapö (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p.196). Despite the many ways to define organizational politics, Pfeffer (2005) stated that most agree that politics includes a variety of players and groups who compete for power and limited resources. These players have different needs, values, opinions, and viewpoints that can change, depending on changing circumstances. Working together toward the

same goal can benefit all involved by forming an alliance. Moody (2011) believed that superintendents and school board members should perceive themselves as a collective team with common goals if they truly want a trusting relationship. Capable and effective governance should be characterized by an association that includes trust and collaboration. Jefferies (2009) asserted that establishing and maintaining trust with board members can be a time-consuming process. They must get to know the superintendent in order to trust him or her, and any deception will result in lost trust and ineffectual communication. This should include informal interactions. Leon (2008) concurred that collaboration with stakeholders, including board members, was essential in forming goals that focus on teaching and learning. In order to see real gains in student achievement through improved leadership, there also should be school board support for established academic goals. By aligning this important coalition in a way in which there are clearly established expectations with an overriding purpose of student achievement, the superintendent can establish leadership teams that include the building principals. These teams, or coalitions, have the responsibility and authority for establishing the best ways to meet those established goals. Forming alliances with people who will efficiently and effectively complete the organizational goals is a strategic benefit (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Consequently, as Waters and Marzano (2006) declared, there is a perception that many superintendents, board members, and central office personnel are a large part of the problem and often oppose positive changes in education. They waste resources and have priorities other than student achievement. Bureaucracy, especially at the local level, can stifle progress. However, research findings conclude that school leaders can effect

positive change when they deal with specific tasks and duties efficiently and with a focus on student learning. Kopelowitz (2009) asserted this was especially true if the superintendent established a good working relationship with the board president, who often yields a great deal of influence over the other board members. This relationship building could include educating the board president on relevant issues, debating or engaging in meaningful discussions around school improvement and board policy, and showing a willingness to learn from the board president in other areas, including business planning or the specific community the superintendent works in. In addition, the disparities in ideas, concerns, and conceptions mentioned earlier can change, thus changing the coalitions. Bush (2003) reiterated that the coalitions are formed through subgroups and various interest groups. These varying interests can be private or based on organizational commitments, and these interests are usually pursued successfully through these alliances. Farmer (2009), when discussing interest groups in a rural setting, concluded that these coalitions are often more extreme and surprisingly powerful compared to interest groups even at the state and federal levels. This is especially true when the financial conditions of a rural district worsen to the point in which more coalitions are formed based on economic interests as opposed to student academic goals that require difficult decisions and tough conversations for school leaders to consider. This, in turn, can put the superintendent at odds with some coalitions unless goal-setting is collaborative and communication is active (Forner, et al, 2012).

Whether the varying interests and views are from booster clubs, parent-teacher groups, parents from specific activity groups, split groups within the school district, groups formed based on beliefs associated with legislative issues, socioeconomic groups,

or religious groups, the superintendent has the difficult task of balancing all these interests while still establishing collaborative goals (Farmer, 2009). School board members often represent these various groups; therefore, to not take all coalitions seriously is a recipe for failure and can lead to removal from the school leadership position. Fossey (2011) illustrated the end result when a school leader alienates oneself from any interest groups, even when positive change has taken place. This situation also exemplified the quagmire that can occur when there is a split school board and the arrival of new board members and new interest groups who often have an agenda that could include the ending of a superintendent's tenure and a financial buyout that is costly to the district. Larson (1997) showed how a changing environment, as well as changing circumstances, also results in new outside coalitions forming. The case study also showed that societal problems create outside coalitions that result in more concentrated effort, increased conflict, loss of overall control, and increased chaos. If a situation gets to the point where the media is involved, it has reached a politically intense level (Larson, 1997). The school board as an interest group can also change in how it views district and leader effectiveness based on evolving media exposure and consequential changes in attitudes and perceptions of stakeholders (Berry & Howell, 2008).

Fusarelli (2006) also explained that seeing stakeholders and staff members as part of the problem does little to establish a good working relationship with various alliances and board members and creates more division, thus more coalitions. Reform efforts must be based on mutually agreed upon goals, requiring a collaborative, open-minded attitude from the superintendent. Unfortunately, the major differences between interest groups also lead to fragmented goals and a lack of organizational unity. That explains why, in

the political models, goals are vague at best, especially in larger school districts (Bush, 2003). The negativity associated with the formation of coalitions is also conveyed by Blase (1991) when he identified coalitions as a strategy of teachers to deal with a principal with poor attributes. Teachers with poor administrators tend to use coalitions more for protection, and these coalitions are made up of fellow teachers who communicate the majority sentiment in order to attempt to influence decisions (Blase, 1991). Similarly, Yukl (2002) referred to õcoalition tacticsö (p.163-164), in which groups attempt to influence decisions through support. These tactics are directed towards a person to create motivation to agree on a policy or proposal, or to initiate an undertaking supported by the coalition. One approach is to use a supervisor of the õtarget personö (p.163), while another approach is to utilize past references by others to increase influence. This only works if the endorsement originates from those respected or liked by the one the coalition is attempting to affect.

Coalitions can be valuable or ineffectual, depending on what the proposed change entails, meaning that they typically work for getting support for a policy or innovation but are less reliable for enhancing performance or performing tasks (Yukl, 2002). Coalitions are also formed with support staff members, as well as with members of the surrounding communities. This often results in teachers and other staff members communicating to influential patrons to affect perceptions and convey opinions. Consequently, coalitions are often viewed in a negative light, especially by administrators who feel the political strategies are deceitful or inappropriate. The positive side is that heightened conflict can result in necessary change, identification of perceptions, and communication of varying points of view (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The inevitable

presence of micro politics in an organization, with the presence of many coalitions, aligns best with the transactional leadership model, which emphasizes a relationship centered on exchanges of resources in order to get desired behaviors (Bush, 2003). Moreover, Yukl (2002) referred to this idea as õsocial exchange theoryö (p. 154), and expanded it to include psychological benefits that come about from successful change and innovations. A leader earns credits by solving difficult problems and exhibiting initiative that results in added commitment and loyalty. However, Bush (2003) pointed out that this can be short term and not as attractive as transformational leadership, which strives for gaining commitment from employees based on a vision of the organization and the related virtues. Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, and Reeves (2012) showed that having a vision and communicated goals for school improvement also makes it more possible for the superintendent to build support with school board members, especially when communication is straight forward and personal, or informal, in nature with board members and other stakeholders.

Crum and Hellman (2009) agreed that informal communication plays a significant role in reform efforts and legislative mandates that require school board decision-making and change initiatives for all board members to be fully aware of when meeting formally. Unfortunately for some superintendents who have not established a trusting relationship with board members, many decisions are based on information gathered from various individuals and interest groups, including both certified staff members and support staff members. Too often this does not include input from the superintendent. Banicki and Pacha (2011) conveyed this problem when addressing closed sessions in board meetings and reinforcing the need for trust-building between board members and superintendents.

It was also clear that involving various coalitions when initiating change efforts establishes transparency, builds more trust, and limits closed session conversations that are better served staying in open session. It is also vital that the superintendent engages the staff as a respected coalition; otherwise, the change process will be slowed or halted. Additionally, further problems with staff members can be created. Blase (1991) felt strongly that any change should include removal of the ineffective administrator or at least a review of communication methods or other possible solutions to the problem of poor school climate. Crum and Hellman (2009) added that working with the school board includes actions outside the realm of formal meetings. This is due to the observation that informal discussions and information-gathering takes place before any formal meetings proceed. Moreover, school leaders should note that coalitions are an effective way for individuals within a group to have a collective voice, thus increasing power and influence (French & Raven, 2005). Of course, any prescription for change is difficult to impossible if there are no members of the alliance or no coalition members with some degree of power or influence, the next area to examine when looking at a connection between the political models and superintendent-board member relations.

Influence and Power

First and foremost, a school leader needs to ascertain where the power lies in a school district and how to utilize that influence to achieve goals. A title means little when it comes to actual power and influence, and a true leader in any organization must identify the power players inside and outside an organization (Mintzberg, 2005). Every district is different and requires a focused examination. Alsbury (2008) insisted that community influence is dependent upon the amount and regularity of involvement from

patrons in the decision-making process, and some research suggests that stakeholders, including parents, have a small amount or no influence over school district policies and functions. Contrary to this assertion, Farmer (2009) described some coalition groups as being more powerful than expected in the educational arena and able to influence board decisions. Pardini and Lewis (2003) pointed to urban districts as also having a large number of political influencers that dictate the leadership blueprint.

This leadership blueprint could require a realization by the superintendent, as Fusarelli (2006) conveyed, that there are limits to a leader's authority, bringing on a further need to address various alliances and influencers. These realities make certain leadership practices important to develop, including the formation of coalitions. An understanding of other viewpoints, the use of honest communication, the inclusion of stakeholders in goal-setting, and the building of more alliances are useful behaviors in attaining goals, minimizing negativity, and enhancing awareness. These leadership behaviors, along with keeping close to those likely to oppose needed change efforts, will also help a superintendent gain more influence and power. Bolman and Deal (2008) highlighted these behaviors when attending to the political frame as it associates with diverse organizations, including educational institutions. Yukl (2002) wrote, "Influence is the essence of leadership" (p. 141). Influence can be discussed in terms of building coalitions and networks, as previously asserted, or through the sources of power, and influence depends on a leader's power in contrast to other organizational members. Kopelowitz (2009) reacted to the need for understanding power relationships by focusing on the board president, who generally has the most power and influence on any respective school board. It is essential for gaining more influence that the superintendent

comes to a mutually respected partnership with the president that is characterized by defined roles and expectations, shared responsibility, and genuine rapport. Bolman and Deal (2008) defined the power brokers in organizations in a specific fashion. Those political players who have the capacity to influence are referred to as authorities and partisans. These adversaries/opponents create a balance between initiating or receiving control and initiating or receiving influence.

The next related feature of power and influence in politics that certainly applies to school districts is the identification and definition of various power sources, or types of power. Any proposed change or policy initiative is determined by the power sources within each coalition, and it is through power that individuals influence group decisions (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Legitimate, expert, and referent power are sources of power within an organization that superintendents should recognize. Legitimate power, the right to influence others, may be bestowed upon an individual; however, the power is only as effective as its perceived authority (French & Raven, 2005). Expert power is the power wielded by an individual or group because they have a greater professional knowledge. Referent power is power that drives an individual to conform to the beliefs or values of an individual or group. Individuals who are higher up in the organization may have more legitimate power; however, referent or expert power may have more impact on a given decision. The sources of power can be broken down into external and internal influencers. Mintzberg (2005) identified eleven influencers, five external and six internal. Internal influencers consist of full time staff members, those in administrative roles, and anyone else in the organization who defines expectations and communicates goals. External influences include those power players outside the organization who attempt to

alter behavior or push an agenda. Fossey (2011) showed this through a case study concerning a superintendent in San Antonio in which external influencers were quite evident, including business leaders and related groups, parent groups, local politicians, attorneys, community groups, minority groups, etc. The last influencer within the organization that Mintzberg (2005) identified is the set of shared beliefs in that organization, which also related to the cultural perspective of organizations and leadership theory. This reinforces the assertions associated with awareness of the political playing field.

Fenn and Mixon (2011) conveyed the opinion that the principal responsibility of the school superintendent is to persuade all stakeholders to work together for needed change. In order to accomplish this, one must identify sources of influence that can be utilized, as well as any power held by outside interests. Bush (2003) identified sources of power and influence in the specific context of school districts and clearly stated that power is a principle element of all political models, and power is the capability of deciding outcomes and influencing behavior. There was distinction established between authority and influence, which evolved into an explanation of six forms of power in schools. The sources of power in school districts are positional power, authority of expertise, personal power, control of rewards, coercive power, and control of resources. While other sources are conveyed, these are considered the most vital. When looking at these origins of power, one can conclude that school leaders have ample reserves of influence. Because of this, administrators are in a position to bring about change and modify behaviors of subordinates through their decisions (Bush, 2003). This is especially true if, as Yukl (2002) stated, the leader has charismatic traits that create heightened

commitment from those who want to be seen in a positive way. õCharismatic leaders

create a sense of urgency that requires greater effort by subordinates to meet high

expectationsö (p. 243). Those working under these leaders are often motivated by a need

to gain approval and a fear of the leader being disappointed (Yukl, 2002). Fenn and

Mixon (2011) referred to this power as õidealized influenceö (p.7) and, once again, listed

it as a leadership behavior associated with transformational leadership.

Expanding on the use of power, Kanter (2005) asserted that those with power

benefit from sharing power because sharing power can expand power. That means that

sharing power presents another avenue for building, sustaining, or creating more

sustained influence. Also, when workers assist in giving a powerless manager more

power, everyone benefits. Kanter (2005) also contended that powerful people must be

well connected. These connections must include peers (individuals who are on the same

organizational level), sponsors (those on a higher organizational level), and subordinates

(those on a lower organizational level). Despite empowerment being more connected

with collegial models, it is an important consideration when approaching the negotiation

process. Empowerment, as Bolman and Deal (2008) pointed out, includes encouraging

participation, defining roles more broadly, and developing effective teams. Anderson

(2009) revealed that participatory leadership often fails because leaders are reluctant to

give up or delegate power. That ignores the benefits of authentic participation, when

implemented correctly and taken seriously through real commitment.

Along with identifying power sources and influence both externally and

internally, a superintendent also must become adept at yielding influence in a

constructive fashion in order to make decisions and effect change that is best for that

individual district and the students within that district. French and Raven (2005) thoroughly discussed the relationship between influence, power, and change. Power is gauged by the highest possible influence a person may choose to exercise. Influence is the use of power to create change. Therefore, as French and Raven (2005) stated later, õí influence is kinetic power, just as power is potential influenceö (p.312). There are variables to consider when determining how to act when attempting to influence, including reactions of those affected and the sources of power that affect the application of influence. Fusarelli (2006) added that there are limits to any superintendentøs influence, which is varied, depending on the specific circumstances and state of authority at any given school district. Fossey (2011) expanded this further by adding that the limited authority a school leader possesses can be altered significantly through changing circumstances and additional interest groups combined with an underestimation of the persistence of power brokers and the influence they apply that can often counteract any positive outcomes enjoyed previously. Overall, the influence of the superintendent, or change agent, results in a resultant force that can be positive or negative. A positive force is one that counteracts any opposing forces, which results in the intended change being established. A negative force means the oppositeô the goal or change did not occur or there was a negative reaction (French & Raven, 2005). The difference between successful or unsuccessful change often relates to the approaches taken and the players involved in any situation that warrants influence. Jeffries (2009) approached the subject from the perspective of an experienced eight year school board veteran. It is clear that influencing school board actions is somewhat different than an attempt to influence peers or subordinates. The article gives sound advice that included getting to know the board and

what it does, being prepared, showing respect, maintaining a check on emotions, and creating alliances (Jeffries, 2009). When investigating superintendent turnover, Grissom and Anderson (2012) concluded that superintendents who have moved up to the position from within the school district generally have more influence and constancy in their position. The problem with this additional influence is this could mean a tradeoff in some respect, in relation to the absence of needed reform due to a leader maintaining the status quo. Once a leader makes the conscience decision to stress innovation and restructuring and fully understands how to influence change, the next step is to apply this understanding. That brings us to the next conceptô negotiation.

Negotiation

Negotiation, as Bolman and Deal (2008) conveyed, is prevalent and indispensable within the political view. One negotiates in order to reach goals and arrive at group decisions, while negotiation presents a valuable avenue for reaching compromise among conflicting beliefs. Part of this process continues to be the ability to build partnerships and persuade people through communication, including communication with school board members. Richard and Kruse (2008) stressed that communication should be well-timed, regular, and conscientious to the desires and expected school district outcomes of board members and the respective superintendent. This is especially true with new board members. Instead of emulating the communication style of another superintendent, one should be genuine and forthright in all conversations in order to present a real picture of oneself and ensure a perception characterized by credibility, honesty, and humility. In fact, as Crum and Hellman (2009) pointed out, school boards generally depend on staff members to recognize significant issues or problems that need board action. These issues

have to be presented in a fashion that provides a prescription for solving any perceived problems within the district. If a superintendent is viewed as arrogant and uncompromising and fails to continually communicate with both board members and staff members, this can result in a biased situation that is not conducive to negotiation. Fossey (2011) exemplified this through the perceptions and changing of attitudes from some interest group members due to a superintendent being viewed as conceited, uncompromising, and uncaring. Accordingly, Hoyle (2007) emphasized the need for administrators to improve in the area of interpersonal relationships in order to establish good relations and increase the possibility of effective negotiations through improved communication.

Interpersonal skill attainment is vital to successful superintendent-school board relationships and is helpful with communication effectiveness, which enhances ongoing and future negotiations. The need to initiate interpersonal communication skills to enhance negotiation is fulfilled when utilizing a transformational leadership style, or at least elements of this style of leadership. Fenn and Mixon (2011) conveyed that this leadership style makes it possible to build consensus on a district's vision of success and what image stakeholders would like to portray. Negotiating a mission statement and formulating specific action steps to meet the stated goals would not be as likely if one lacks interpersonal skills. Referring to this as resonant leadership, Kopelowitz (2009) expressed the advantages for a leader who can relate to others in a way that motivates subordinates. Making true connections with staff members at an emotional level will result in more successful relationships and improved performance in all areas of the school district. Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, and Reeves (2012) noted that educational reform

efforts require support that is built through informal, straight forward conversations that focus on student success and skill attainment. These communications will involve board members, community members, teachers, and students if looking for maximum effect and a higher probability of success. A superintendent must be perceived as reachable and amicable while keeping the conversations tied to student achievement. Visibility and a willingness to listen can only improve interpersonal relations with various stakeholders, including board members. Farmer (2009) also recommended that forceful informal communication be implemented by a superintendent in order to minimize negativity when making a decision and identify common views associated with student outcomes.

Finding desired outcomes or solutions shared by stakeholders at the beginning of the negotiation process is effective at producing common views even when it seems there are none shared. Bolman and Deal (2008) agreed that part of the negotiation process includes identifying common interests, even when one or both sides of a conflict may initially appear uncompromising and void of commonalities. Vigorous communication in various settings and with various personalities in order to be proactive is always present when a politically competent leader is in attendance at a school district. If superintendents and school board members, as Moody (2011) surmised, plan to work together collaboratively as a team and build trust, communication must be continual and should include discussions about expectations and operational protocol in order to recognize common ground and attempt to close the gap on points of dissention. Pardini and Lewis (2003) agreed that communicating a vision for academic achievement that intertwines with the goals and overall mission of the district is essential. This communication involves organizing support through staffing decisions, collaboration, a realistic

assessment of all programs, a focus on classroom tactics, and participation by school board members. Of course, working with a school board can be a constant negotiation. As Pardini and Lewis (2003) affirmed, "Other superintendents see negotiating the political complexities of a school board as part of the job" (p.6). Leadership, therefore, has to be calculated, deliberate, and adapted to local politics. Not being in tune with changing circumstances will result in the formation of major barriers to any negotiations.

Barriers to negotiation have to be identified in order to fully reach organizational goals and avoid unnecessary conflict that is not productive. One barrier can be misinformation, or a lack of information. Moody (2011) pointed out that board members receive much of their knowledge of what transpires in a school from the superintendent, support staff working with the superintendent, other staff members, irate community members or taxpayers, intrusive legislators, and the media. Since many of these sources engage with board members when there is a complaint or conflict, board members may only obtain partial or inaccurate information. Farmer (2009) stated that a superintendent can be conveying information about mandated policies or legal issues and still have conflict created due to individual viewpoints and false interpretations based on varying opinions and the changing of information as it is discussed within the community. A superintendent has to proceed with this certainty in mind. Furthermore, creating policy is complex, with varying interests being debated in groups and as individuals during informal exchanges. Since goals are also constantly evolving or changing, evaluating policies can be troublesome (Bush, 2003). This possible barrier to negotiations, as well as the assumption that the structure of an organization surfaces as a result of the negotiation process, makes it imperative for school leaders to actively participate in continual

bargaining with all coalitions. Fossey (2011) established that changing conditions,

including new board members elected and the creation of new coalitions, means that the

negotiation route has also changed. Of course, the district goals should be agreed upon

with input from various stakeholders. Davis (2010) believed that the goals of a district,

as well as the characteristics of the superintendent, should be solicited from patrons,

parents, staff members, and students in order to get a complete picture of expectations

and shared ideas that make the negotiation process a much smoother development into

the future no matter how controversial of an issue or conflict might arise once the

superintendent is hired and installed into the position.

   School leaders must negotiate to accomplish individual and district goals based on

their values and interests and realized through responsible use of power (Bush, 2003).

That assumption produces another consideration when negotiating; a manager decides

whether to take the value creator or the value claimer approach (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

õValue creators believe that successful negotiators must be inventive and cooperative in

searching for a win-win solution. Value claimers see ÷win-winøas naively optimistic. For

them, bargaining is a hard, tough process in which you have to do what it takes to win as

much as you canö (p.221). Both approaches can work well under the right circumstances.

However, there are risks to the second approach, especially if one has to work with those

manipulated, making future negotiations more difficult. Fossey (2011) displayed what

can occur when negotiations are negative or forced through intimidation or unusual

circumstances, resulting in a contract buyout and horrible public relations, as well as

other harmful outcomes. Conversely, Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, and Reeves (2012)

concluded that one of the leadership practices that were present at successful rural

districts is a tough approach representative of the value claimer philosophy, in respect to a strong stance during collective bargaining negotiations with teacher unions. This hard line approach included freezing salary schedules, reductions in benefits, contracting services, and stopping negotiations because of a stalemate. Despite this assertion, honest and open negotiations appear to be the preference in a majority of cases, and the following tactics can be used: differentiate problems from staff members, emphasize goals over viewpoints, create options for mutual gain, and establish agreeable standards for fair negotiations. Overall, the creating value method also sets up an environment that is conducive to the idea of empowerment (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Decision-making

Decision-making is directly or indirectly connected to all major characteristics of political models, including the features covered and displayed through the review of literature to this point. Decision-making is also significant to the relationships between superintendents and school boards. Bush (2003) stated that decisions are made through the negotiation process; and, when the decisions are a result of several phases, this produces more chances for interest groups to utilize influence on the final outcome. Banicki and Pacha (2011) believed the school superintendent is responsible for constructing, assisting, and endorsing a team concept when making district decisions. The school board is responsible for communicating clearly defined expectations to the superintendent that are practical and adaptable. Farmer (2009) also believed in shared decision-making in a rural school setting that includes all interest groups, coalitions, and patrons of the district. This is especially true when assets are inadequate, forcing more complicated decisions that must be made. Despite these tough decisions, Forner, Bierlein-

Palmer, and Reeves (2012) discovered that all decisions, including financial ones, should coincide with existing efforts to enhance student intellectual aptitude. After all, innovation and practical decisions are often formulated due to budget concerns and the need to fully utilize resources and faculty. Pardini and Lewis (2003) also discussed collaborative decision-making in school districts, which was also characterized through a common vision of goals to be attained, involvement of informed board members, autonomy given to the superintendent to determine courses of action, creativity and flexibility of staff members, continual communication, and transparency. Bolman and Deal (2008) reiterated the importance of interest groups bargaining for consensus on decisions by utilizing power and influence, which is often affected by several variables, including limited resources and changing legislative or social conditions.

Consequently, Fusarelli (2006) asserted that decision-making characterized as dictatorial and uncompromising will eventually result in unproductive conflict that, if left unresolved, could represent the beginning of the end of a superintendent's tenure at a respective school district. At the same time, while school governance has become more complicated with decisions spread out to various staff members and building committees, many school boards attempt to micromanage school functions to the point of making school reform efforts more difficult. Many superintendents would be in favor of limiting the decisions that can be made by a school board. Adding to the pessimism, there are varying perceptions between superintendents and board members on what key competencies should be attained by school leaders (Peterson & Klotz, 1999). In fact, while diverse sources list a multitude of roles and responsibilities associated with the superintendent position, many of those competencies center on decision-making. That

reinforces the need for clear expectations continually communicated and updated by the school board. Moody (2011) reinforced the necessity of superintendents and board members to communicate roles and expectations as early as possible because, when board members strive to take a more vigorous position in the operations of a school district than a superintendent is comfortable with, conflicts and problems will take place sooner or later. This is counterproductive to reform and change efforts. Banicki and Pacha (2011) expanded these essential leader behaviors to include transparency of all change efforts, community involvement, removal of non-essential policies and barriers to improvement, avoidance of unproductive competition that does not focus on student learning, and limits to negativity. Advice or constructive criticism is for prescribed improvement, not to humiliate or reprimand a staff member. This applies to interactions between any stakeholders, but is especially true for superintendents working with school board members and school staff members.

The political models also place a lot of emphasis on the influence of external forces and changing conditions on school district decisions (Bush, 2003). This review of literature that is addressing superintendent-school board relations has also shown how evolving circumstances and financial crises can affect decision-making. Malen (2003) investigated the influence state legislation has on decision-making at the local level. While there are conflicting views on how much districts are affected, most would agree that decisions are impacted by legislative influence at the state level, especially in the area of student testing. Increased testing accountability means modified instructional practices, new positions, and more cost. It also affects decisions about career and views of a schoolsøpurpose and stated goals. Crum and Hellman (2009) examined the external

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influence that the No Child Left Behind federal legislation has on school board decision-making. They found that most issues that require decisions come directly from staff members, and many decisions are made informally away from scheduled meetings. This stressed the importance of presentation, informal interaction with board members, and necessary communication attached to all board decisions. This sometimes capricious relationship that is continually affected by both political and societal influences requires a team approach that is characterized by constant communication and collaboration that stresses student learning (Moody, 2011).

Speaking of school board and superintendent decision-making, the most important decision a school board makes is the hiring or firing of a superintendent, which should also be transparent and collaborative (Davis, 2010). Of course, let us not forget that superintendents can sometimes have a difficult decision as to whether they should stay or not, especially if the relationship with the board or community has turned south or other opportunities exist (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). Another important reason that a superintendent must include board members in the decision-making process is because, as Hoyle (2007) showed, only a few poorly received decisions can adversely affect perceptions. Eventually, poor perceptions affect a superintendentøs evaluation, which leads to non-renewal. This thorough examination of two superintendents from similar districts and educational backgrounds illustrated that, despite the similarities, one superintendentøs contract is not renewed after five years of service, despite efforts to initiate positive change. This creates obvious concerns for present and future school leaders.

Grissom and Anderson (2012) expanded these concerns when stating that, in their study, the subjective assessments given to superintendents by board members are more predictive of future problems and conflicts than the overall performance of students and the district as a whole. Therefore, other factors will determine the effectiveness of this vital relationship. The primary causes of negative superintendent-school board relations appear to be poor handling of interpersonal relationships and a lack of awareness of the political dynamics of that school district. It also could be affected by the relationship and perception of the board president, which is someone the superintendent has to work well and directly with to ensure a positive relationship with the board as a whole (Kopelowitz, 2009). This all relates to building alliances, enhancing informal communication, surveying the political environment, and keeping your enemies close. These are all features of the political view (Bush, 2003). Another cause of a deteriorating relationship with a school board and a respective community could be how conflicts and problems are approached by the superintendent. The action taken by any leader in any organization requires a diagnosis of what type of problem is being encountered, which, in turn, determines the form of authority to implement. The three types of problemsô tame, wicked, or criticalô call for one of three authority forms, which are management, leadership, and command (Grint, 2005). Leadership, the form that is needed for wicked problems, includes the asking of good questions in order to put the problems in context and fully analyze the predicament. Grint (2005) defined a wicked problem as one that is elaborate, without clear solutions. There are no correct or incorrect answers.

Not having a definitive answer or solution to a perceived dilemma can sometimes mean a decision should be based on improving a situation instead of attempting to solve

an unsolvable problem. Sometimes a non-decision with more questioning is far better than making a decision that creates more problems. Given the political view, this can be difficult to accomplish, particularly when a school board expects action taken immediately by the superintendent, which often is followed by that same school board placing full culpability on the superintendent when some change initiative does not go well or, once again, creates more unforeseen problems or conflicts. This again reinforces the need for continual communication and collaborative decision-making, as well as competencies that relate to being aware of natural feelings and emotions while still reacting appropriately and professionally to these feelings and emotions. Self-motivation, empathy, and management of other's emotions will also assist in building consensus and reaching mutually-agreed upon goals (Kopelowitz, 2009). If collaboration and communication is non-existent, as is a sense of being proactive rather than reactive to situations, the superintendent has a real chance of becoming a turnover statistic, something to avoid if one truly wants to serve a district well and make a difference in the lives of students.

Superintendent-School Board Relations: Central and Related Themes and Ideas
Superintendent and School Board Turnover

The avoidance of increased turnover of superintendents in contemporary society is the central problem being explored in this research study and has a great deal to do with the handling of local politics. While several sources agreed that turnover of superintendents is a problem that exists, there seemed to be some disagreement as to the scope of the problem and what factors lead to the process of a school district replacing a superintendent. First, the average length of service for all public school superintendents,

according to Pardini and Lewis (2003), is approximately seven years. Grissom and Andersen (2012) conveyed that the accepted notion of the contemporary superintendent as a persistent traveler due to conflicts with school boards as depicted in media reports from bigger urban districts in this country may not be representative of rural or suburban districts, which embody the vast majority of districts. These reports may not even characterize the average metropolitan districts. The research did verify that 45% of superintendents studied left their positions within three years (2012). Alsbury (2008) discovered that 74% of superintendents in his study left the position within eight years; Pardini and Lewis (2003) surveyed over two thousand school board presidents, of which 64.2% stated a turnover of at least three superintendents in the past ten years. Peterson and Klotz (1999) concluded that superintendents in the twenty largest districts, on average, stayed between two and three years, while all superintendents combined stayed an average of a little more than six years. No matter what conclusions exist, turnover does occur at varying rates in all types of districts. Why do superintendents leave?

The research to that question reveals a frequently mentioned theory associated with superintendent-school board relations. While there are several theories related to school governance and its relationship to local politics, according to Alsbury (2008), there is a single theory that addresses the possible relationship between stakeholders and the turnover of school board and superintendent positions: the dissatisfaction theory. This theory, introduced by Iannaccone and Lutz (1970), contends that, once the citizens of a district become disenchanted with the current situation enough, there is an increase in voter numbers and resulting turnover on the local school board. Fossey (2011) illustrated the changes that can proceed after a single school board election with only two new

members. The changing dynamics caused by unrest and the electing of new board members eventually evolves to a situation in which the superintendent is removed, or at least there is a higher probability that a change will occur, especially when there is unproductive conflict (Fusarelli, 2006). New board members can see the superintendent as a good place to start when making dramatic changes. Conversely, when patrons are content and absent at the polls, districts often see a period of little turnover. These periods are temporary and are followed by segments of increased political activity characterized by more challengers running for open spots and touting the need for change due to general displeasure in the community (Alsbury, 2008). The dissatisfaction theory, which contends that discontentment within a community can take some time to build up enough to result in school board and superintendent turnover, only explains increased rates of superintendent turnover that resulted from board member turnover. The theory does not speak to turnover that occurs while there is stability with a district's governance (Grissom and Anderson, 2012).

Informal observations will create a perception that turnover does, in fact, occur regularly when there is not school board turnover as a factor. Some surveys have suggested, however, that a majority of turnover situations involve broken relations between superintendents and board members, crammed schedules, and stressful situations (Pardini & Lewis, 2003). The relationships established with board members, as Petersen, Fusarelli, and Kowalski (2008) pointed out, represents one of five areas that beginner superintendents felt was lacking in their formal training. The other areas were educational politics, district finance, school law, and negotiating with teachers' unions, which can all affect turnover numbers when neglected or not treated with some sense of cognitive

ability. On the contrary, Trevino, Braley, Brown, and Slate (2008) explained that matters related to politics or governance were the least of concern among superintendents studied. Other challenges, such as personnel issues, finance problems, socioeconomics, change initiatives, and federal legislation, are considered more problematic. Richard and Kruse (2008) focused on board perceptions of the superintendentøs performance and effectiveness. The strongest finding was that board members with more experience had a more positive perception due to better understanding of the responsibilities involved. Superintendents with more experience were also viewed more positively. Board members want positive outcomes, and they also want a superintendent that creates productive, affirmative relationships. Otherwise, the term will be short-lived (Pardini & Lewis, 2003).

Of course, once the superintendent is replaced, this can also result in a lack of continuity, a halt to needed school reform, and a backlash throughout the entire school district, which can theoretically affect staff morale and student performance (Pardini & Lewis, 2003). When addressing organizational turnover, Bolman and Deal (2008) communicated the need to keep good people because of the resulting expenses from turnover, including training new people and bearing in mind that performance and effectiveness will be negatively affected. Other costs include contract buyouts, an extensive search for a replacement being conducted, and the political costs of firing an administrator who is popular with the community, staff, and student body (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). Superintendent turnover has also been cited as having a causal relationship with student achievement. Waters and Marzano (2006) found that superintendent longevity has a helpful effect on learner scholastic performance. Moffet

(2012) agreed that there is a direct correlation between achievement and superintendent longevity, provided that superintendents perform their responsibilities successfully. School boards must employ leaders who place emphasis on academics and also support positive change efforts. Alsbury (2008) discovered that, while there was no statistically significant correlation between the turnover rate of superintendents and student achievement as a whole, there was a noteworthy relationship between these variables in districts with an enrollment of five hundred or fewer students. Pardini and Lewis (2003) also asserted that, in high-performing schools, board members and superintendents exhibited more focus on student learning, superintendents were allowed to lead, and the relationship between the two are characterized by clear expectations and continual communication. Leon (2008) further reinforced the belief that superintendent tenure has a positive effect on student aptitude, as long as the superintendent provides leadership. School experts have noticed that superintendents and school boards are vital to sustained improvement efforts and enhanced academic performance (Moody, 2011).

The possible benefit of superintendent turnover, of course, is better leadership or a better understanding of the current conditions and the situation of that specific district. School boards have to consider both the costs and benefits of a turnover decision (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). After all, a lack of continuity in leadership can be catastrophic. At the same time, the slowing of a school transformation agenda and hampered change efforts can be avoided through shared decision-making and broad-based leadership. An ideal outcome would be more feasible when additional superintendents see the school board political process as a necessary route for bargaining change initiatives focused on academic improvement and student learning (Pardini &

Lewis, 2003). Leadership stability is important, but Fossey (2011) illustrated a situation in which positive change had taken place; however, the political upheaval required a change in superintendent regardless of any previous accomplishments. While it is clear that both superintendents and board members understand the importance of student performance and a vision of continual school improvement (Moffet, 2011), conditions can change rapidly; and the stability once enjoyed can be destroyed by an unwillingness or inability to be proactive and analyze a situation accurately and subjectively (Kelleher, 2006) to ensure the right fit.

There are many variables that can influence the fit between a district and the superintendent, and these variables can certainly influence the superintendent's decision of whether or not to stay based on his or her own assessment of the costs and benefits (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). These influencers include the work situation or environment, geographic location, specific problems that exist at a particular district, salary, status or additional opportunities, the age and background of the superintendent, and student socioeconomics. In fact, a candidate for a superintendent job should research the prospective district before interviewing or accepting the position because some situations could be untenable. There can be political and cultural considerations to evaluate (Kelleher, 2006). Some of these considerations could involve individual board members, a lack of transparency, the expectations of board members, and no past history of oversight or accountability. Peterson and Klotz (1999) listed several causes of frequent superintendent turnover, which included political problems caused by displeased patrons, dissatisfied boards because solutions or results do not come quickly enough, incomplete or ineffective superintendent preparation/training, more attractive opportunities, ethnic

conflicts, loss of local control in policy-making, and unclear expectations. Hoyle (2007) reinforced the fact that the superintendent position is a political one, and being astute at reading situations and people is vital to avoiding termination of employment. Informal communication skills, interpersonal relationships, and a working knowledge of when to listen carefully are all political skills. It comes down to dealing with people. One must relate to a variety of personalities, adapt to changing conditions, and continually communicate with all stakeholders.

Accountability of School Boards

The increased accountability that school boards are experiencing in recent times is a new phenomenon that represents a paradigm shift for many board members. As Moody (2011) pointed out, this historical relationship has become more complex with the passage of time. School boards have often ruled districts with little to no limits to their influence; therefore, any increased accountability is minimal at best and met with strong resistance because of the general opinion that local control of districts should stay intact. Furthermore, when district accountability increases, that does not necessarily translate to increased accountability for board members. Berry and Howell (2008) conducted a study a couple of years after the No Child Left Behind legislation was passed. While there was some evidence that student state test performance had an effect on board elections during the year 2000 in South Carolina, the subsequent elections in 2002 and 2004 showed that this effect virtually disappeared. Therefore, there is no evidence that accountability processes affect board elections, which means voters do not generally oust board members when school performance is low. There are signs that this is changing, and

school boards are feeling amplified pressure and a more negative view in contemporary times.

Richardson (2009) displayed a level of disgust over the ineptitude of many school boards, including the neglecting of important issues related to student knowledge attainment. This increases the probability of more lost local control, and the contemporary idea of having mayoral control over school districts, especially in larger urban districts, will become more popular. Stover (2010) uncovered other possible threats to the traditional school board, including legislative attempts to reduce the power a school board can yield, making it more difficult to employ and terminate superintendents. Proposed bills have produced possible legislation that would consider term limits, member size reductions, ethics violations, and parent trigger laws that affect school board influence. In addition, as Farmer (2009) conveyed, there is also a trend towards more privatization of schools, which relates to school choice, or voucher, programs. This author also communicates the idea of contracting instructional services much like other services are contracted, such as transportation and food service. Pardini and Lewis (2003) also mentioned the trend towards mayoral control and other governance situations in various locations. Other changes introduced that relate to governance included site-based administration, the formation of charter schools, programs dedicated to school choice, districts becoming integrated with local government, and the hiring of leaders with no educational background. Of course, as Fusarelli (2006) exemplified, hiring someone outside the educational realm does not ensure success and can backfire.

While Alsbury (2008) confirmed the inclination towards eradicating school boards, he believed that governance is necessary to our democracy and the maintaining of

independence. It is also important to sustained restructuring efforts. Moreover, the two things that boards have in their favor are the traditional belief that school should be locally managed and the view that school boards can be and have been successful in bringing necessary change (Stover, 2010). Superior governance, as Moody (2011) surmised, includes effective communication between board members and teamwork. Teamwork also relates to accountability based on the conclusion that, õMembers of high performing teams hold themselves collectively accountableö (Bolman & Deal, 2008). These teams place emphasis on group goals over individual preferences, and the assigned leader helps the team stay focused. Pardini and Lewis (2003) agreed that boards need help being persuaded that the focus should be on student academic attainment and success. Also, successful districts with high test scores, in most cases, have quality school boards. In summary, it requires hard work; and the ability to lead, the establishment of communication, and the presence of interpersonal skills are required for more possible success (Fusarelli, 2006). A related problem that one will likely encounter is deciphering between a collaborated decision based on established goals and a politically motivated decision based on self-interest and power. The latter conclusion would be considered inappropriate, but the assertion that there are political elements to any important partnership is a reasonable view (Bush, 2003). For example, a school board, whether it functions as a team or not, represents an interest group and sometimes a coalition when functioning as prescribed. Despite the various challenges and difficult processes, Stover (2010) expressed the belief that school boards are here to stay and can play a key role in the continual goal of school reform and sustained improvement efforts.

Conflict for Change

Another central theme related to both superintendent-school board relations and the political frame of organizational theory is conflict. Bolman and Deal (2008) and Bush (2003) emphasized the pervasiveness of conflict in organizations when exploring the political perspective. Amid an assortment of interest groups with varying levels of influence competing for limited funds, conflict is inevitable and very much the focal point in everyday functions and change initiatives in a school district. As Bolman and Deal (2008) stated, õChange invariably creates conflictö (p.385). This is natural and manageable through negotiation. Conflict also surfaces due to politically emotional topics that tend to influence interests and opinions. This can happen even when continual, clear communication exists. Consensus is often difficult to achieve; it requires a leader who is proactive, communicative, proficient at building coalitions, and focused on attainable goals (Farmer, 2009). The treatment of conflict and the capacity to resolve conflicting issues can be viewed from several perspectives. School leaders should self-evaluate the level of competency and attempt to gauge other staff membersøanalysis of this political expertise (Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, & Slate, 2008). The ability to resolve conflicts helps determine if conflict within a school district is worthwhile or destructive.

Conflict can exist in productive and non-productive ways. Unproductive conflict occurs when negative feelings are suppressed and eventually erupt. Fossey (2011) illustrated the result of building anxiety created from change reforms perceived to be too extensive, as well as other factors producing strife among teachers. These factors included the superintendentøs wage increase one year as compared to teacher wage increases, teacher union troubles, increasing media reports due to more and more

dissatisfaction among teachers, poor planning of some improvement efforts, and unsuccessful restructuring. Bolman and Deal (2008) also showed that some conflict should be avoided or at least managed, including conflict between individuals in a group. Interpersonal conflict can inhibit growth and squander time. This reinforces why Hoyle (2007) emphasized interpersonal communication when discussing superintendent tenure. A superintendent's handling of conflict affects the relationship with the school board and definitely affects tenure. On the contrary, Alsbury (2008) suggested that many superintendents favor avoiding conflict instead of resolving issues, especially if they were promoted from within the district and want to preserve their position as opposed to improving student success through necessary change. Of course, as Grissom and Anderson (2012) concluded, ineffective management of conflict and the presence of only unproductive conflict between board members and between board members and the superintendent can certainly determine a superintendent's choice of staying or a school board's overall assessment of the superintendent. Moreover, when the conflicts between board members and the superintendent spread to other stakeholders or lack any focus, the situation becomes even more contentious and chaotic (Fusarelli, 2006).

Productive conflict exists because a group sees diversity and various opinions as an advantage. This results in fruitful dialogue that generates new ideas and encourages creativity. New ideas inspire new innovative approaches; therefore, conflict handled properly is a benefit to an organization (Bolman and Deal, 2008). In order to maintain productive conflict, school superintendents and school board members should establish expected procedures and be aware of the inherent complexities of this relationship and historical significance. After all, this alliance is vital for overall strong educational

programs (Moody, 2011). It can also be helpful if the superintendent and board members include staff members when identifying problems and being proactive in transforming petty differences into productive conflict (Crum & Hellman, 2009). The more stakeholders and patrons are involved in utilizing conflict effectively, the more positive change will result from the overall discussions and plans of action. Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, and Reeves (2012) agreed that conflict can be useful, and any strong instructional leader will take on conflict as a necessary element of a quality program constantly looking for ways to improve. This includes the removal of teachers and administrators who are not team players or do not exemplify professionalism and a willingness to explore ways of enhancing student learning. Constructive conflict in the areas of student educational success and staff evaluations can also create a culture of improvement provided criticism is constructive and transparent, and there is follow up strategies and action plans (Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012).

Gender in Politics

As many sources conveyed, gender is a leader characteristic that could possibly affect superintendent employment, or turnover, together with superintendent selection processes utilized by various school boards. While other demographics (district size, geographic location, rural vs. urban, candidate experience, and educational level) were briefly discussed in a few sources (Alsbury, 2008; Trevino, Braley, Brown, & Slate, 2008; Richard & Kruse, 2008; Grissom & Anderson, 2012), the one demographic factor that was considered more frequently in the sources reviewed was gender. In this area of discussion, every source consistently agreed that the superintendent position represents a male-dominated paradigm. Lemasters and Roach (2012) pointed out that, in 1992, 72%

of educators were female while 13.2% of superintendents were female. By 2010, the

percentage of female superintendents had risen to 24.1%, which is still a low percentage.

Newton (2006) reiterated the low representation by stating that female staff members

make up approximately 65% of educational workforce, while holding 14% of

superintendent positions. In a study conducted by Haar, Raskin, and Robicheau (2009)

one state, between 2002 and 2005, actually showed a decline in the number of female

superintendents even while there were slight gains nationally. Bush (2003) pointed out

this almost cliché understanding that leadership positions are primarily held by males,

and the disparity seems to be even worse in other countries. In China, as an example, few

females even hold principal positions. In one particular province in China, there were

zero principals in eighty-nine districts located in three counties (Bush, 2003). As Bolman

and Deal (2008) simply stated, õThe implicit, taken-for-granted assumption was that

leadership is a male activityö (p.351). While progress has been made in many industries,

women must break away from these stereotypes and old assumptions about leadership.

Before breaking away from old assumptions, one might ask the question õWhy?ö

One answer was offered by Newton (2006) when discussing vacancy announcements.

These announcements often emphasize secondary principal experience,

political/managerial skills, budgeting, and facilities. These are all stereotypically male

characteristics. More emphasis on all major roles of the position would be helpful, such

as the need for instructional leaders, change agents, and interpersonal experts. Bolman

and Deal (2008) listed several reasons why women are discouraged from pursuing higher

leadership positions in school districts and other industries. There is the problem with

stereotypes that link management with masculinity, as well as the differing outlooks that

people have concerning women trying to balance being strong and forceful while maintaining femininity. These societal misconceptions can lead to discrimination, which, coupled with additional barriers to success that male counterparts do not have to address, can discourage individuals from taking the leap into administrative roles.

Bush (2003) also conveyed these problems while also interjecting the fact that emphasis on chain of command and influence over instructional issues makes this disparity even worse because the focus is not on the general strengths that women bring to this position. Other factors noted included hiring practices by Board members, fewer opportunities to network, false perceptions, and women coming into leadership positions later in their careers, which results in less experience when seeking another position. Simply put, women are sometimes more difficult to locate when searching for an ideal candidate (Lemasters & Roach, 2012).

While Newton (2006) agreed that past norms, expected roles, stereotypes, and misconceptions play a role; he also felt that political skills are needed even more now, so this is an area that must be developed as much as curricular and instructional areas. These skills include building coalitions and negotiating the utilization of resources. While it may be generally plausible to state that women leaders have better interpersonal skills and sometimes lack in political skills, the existing research is vague at best. There is evidence that the differences are not as clear as some may thing. In fact, some research suggests there are more similarities than differences between women and men in comparable positions. Where there are differences found, they are not significant, and the differences are often because women score better on tools that measure leadership skills (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Many other contradictions were found in several sources.

Alsbury (2008) surmised that female superintendents are not any more likely than male superintendents to take positions in smaller districts, which suggests that gender is not a factor in leaving a position, which relates to turnover. Another contradiction was found in a recent study that refutes the claim that there is a shortage of female applicants for the superintendent position. The low numbers have more to do with a male-dominated culture in which gender bias exists, as well as the pathway to leadership coming too often from the high school principal position rather than the elementary principal position (Lemasters & Roach, 2012). Subsequently, this trend of relatively small numbers of female school leaders needs to be reversed through dissemination of information, a re-evaluation of the hiring process, emphasis on training and mentoring, and the end of gender discrimination.

How can this be reversed? Brunner and Kim (2010) asserted that, if discrimination against women were eliminated, this would eventually result in a larger candidate pool that will evolve into a surplus of possible applicants, increasing the overall quality of applicants. Lemasters and Roach (2012) agreed that discrimination based on gender bias is a real problem, and they emphasized female candidates overcoming this through increased networking with a focus on learning how to relate better with males through language use and being provided more informal opportunities to engage with other superintendents. Obviously, mentoring is important, as well as developing a strong self-concept. Furthermore, female superintendents should not be reluctant to assume responsibility for the inevitable political leadership role they must assume, which means utilizing all the various strategies in order to build consensus and bargain with competing interests (Newton, 2006). Along with the suggestions already mentioned for eliminating

gender bias, Harr, Raskin, and Robicheau (2009) felt there were other actions that would help eradicate the gender gap in the number of superintendent positions. First, there should be a set of gender neutral standards for leadership positions established by professional organizations to be used as a model by districts. It is also imperative that search consultants, school boards, and other participants in the selection process to assess the skills needed in this age of accountability and assess skills that correspond with implementing educational reform. Administrators, board members, and other stakeholders need to do a much better job of recognizing talented women within their districts (2009).

Richard and Kruse (2008) also reinforced the need for assessing the overall situation, especially since the gender of individual board members can affect decision-making and perceptions. Female board members generally have higher expectations for superintendents in the area of interpersonal skills and often rate superintendents lower than their male counterparts. The percentage of female board members is higher than that of female superintendents, so any superintendent of any gender should be prepared to seek clarity from individual board members about what they perceive as important to that position. Mountford and Brunner (2010) reiterated the possible effect gender plays on school board decision-making and possible overall influence. Female members stress relations with stakeholders more, while male members are generally more task-oriented.

According to Katz (2009), the time for more women to enter the superintendent position is now. Despite the fact that one must be careful to assess the situation, including possible risks, women are generally better prepared to be superintendents and instructional leaders. In general, women have a better work ethic, they already lead

households, they have high aptitude in curriculum development and instructional considerations, they are better than men at collaboration and teamwork, and they have stronger communication skills. They build relationships needed to affect change. Bolman and Deal (2008) also conveyed the upward trend of women in various leadership roles and the slow change in attitudes about strong female leaders. Haar, Raskin, and Robicheau (2009) agreed that women have expertise in curriculum and instruction; they embrace change and are more willing to initiate improvement efforts; they have better interpersonal skills, and they place importance on employee empowerment.

As Brunner and Kim (2010) expressed, many women are ready for the challenges of the superintendency and can establish and maintain collaboration more effectively, meaning they display transformational leadership more frequently. Women have the advanced knowledge necessary, the ideal experience necessary, and the correct attitude in which their goals and aspirations have more to do with personal integrity and making decisions based on student needs. Lemasters and Roach (2012) believed that the increased focus on student learning and academics in this age of accountability should make superintendent positions more attractive to women. At the same time, this should make female candidates more attractive to prospective employers, as long as individuals are not sabotaged by new male board members or male subordinates. Simply stated, women are generally more ethical than men (2012). Women also generally go into administration to improve student learning, not to gain prestige or status (Newton, 2006). By breaking down inaccurate stereotypes and taking on the system, current women educational leaders are opening future opportunities for women and taking worthwhile chances that will assist in educational improvement (Katz, 2009).

Previous Methods Used

Limited Number of Studies

The existing literature dealing with school boards is limited and mostly informational. Moreover, there are few studies that encompass the topic of superintendent-school board relationships, including more contemporary literature. Crum and Hellman (2009) concluded that the dynamics and characteristics of a school board help determine decision-making behaviors, but verification through similar studies is missing. Hoyle (2007) agreed that, due to the complexities of educational leadership, the number of research studies should never decrease if future administrators are to be prepared to thrive in an ever-changing political environment. This often emotionally-charged environment also exists in rural districts, intensified by a lack of resources and competing interests. This reinforces the need to continue studies that will help prepare potential school leaders (Farmer, 2009). Moreover, Grissom and Anderson (2012) stated that any prospective research concerning superintendent turnover should expand on their findings relating biased job assessments with turnover to include an investigation as to whether district performance outcomes are connected to superintendent turnover. An approach could be utilized to anticipate for any impending paradox that may arise if that relationship does exist. This study was a response to the limited number of studies that exist on this topic (2012).

Surveys

Surveys appeared to be the most popular research instrument when it comes to studying leadership behaviors and related topics, such as turnover, decision-making, and accountability. There are several leadership surveys available, most of which identify a

superintendentøs leadership style or ability to adapt to situations. The Leadership

Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) was implemented by Richard and Kruse

(2008) to explore the subject of school board perceptions of ideal leadership behaviors

and how that influences the superintendentøs ability to be effectual. This represented a

rare examination of the effects that sex, didactic rank, and amount of practice have on

board perceptions of leader effectiveness. Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, and Slate (2008) also

utilized the LBDQ when studying school leadership behaviors of combination

superintendents-principals. Trevino et al (2008) used a survey created for their study that

included six parts. Each part dealt with challenges that superintendents face, including

political, budgetary, and personnel challenges.

Several researchers employed the use of survey data with demographic

information and other variables to test qualitative data with quantitative data. Grissom

and Anderson (2012) made use of survey data, as well as administrative data and news

sources to study superintendent turnover. Earlier studies, such as Peterson and Klotz

(1999) gave survey questionnaires to both superintendents and board presidents to gauge

perceptions of leadership effectiveness by way of comparison. Moffett (2011) also

surveyed superintendents and board presidents concerning superintendent appraisals and

student aptitude. Fenn and Mixon (2011) used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire

to assess superintendentsøapplication of transformational leadership behaviors, which

were tested with a Pearson correlation analysis using several variables. Alsbury (2008)

also utilized Pearson Chi Square to test significance between survey data about turnover

and variables that include turnover rates, student test scores, poverty levels, and the size

of each district. Other sources utilizing superintendent surveys from this literature review

include Petersen, Fusarelli, and Kowalski (2008); Banicki and Pacha (2011); and Berry and Howell (2008), who studied survey results, board election results, and student test scores.

Case Study

While a limited number of qualitative studies exist that focus on the superintendent-school board relationship, Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, and Reeves (2012) completed a multiple case study design that gathered interview information from seven different superintendents in order to assess leadership behaviors. Fusarelli (2006) facilitated a case study that examined a situation in which a non-educator was employed as a school superintendent. The case study contributed to a discussion about conflict resolution and decision-making. School board decision-making was the main focus of the case study conducted by Crum and Hellman (2009), which developed findings through video tapes of meetings and recorded minutes that were tested for significance with demographic considerations. Hoyle (2007) dealt with a case study examination of two successful superintendents whose tenures ended quite differently so as to investigate school leadership preparation. Fossey (2011) wrote a historical case study based on events in a Texas school district, in relation to school politics, board relations, staff relations, conflict, and turnover.

Other Methods

Many literature sources were more historical and extensively reviewed literature with little to no actual research. One example of this was Moody (2011). Other sources simple recapitulated, or blended, findings from past studies. These types of meta-analysis were written by Pardini and Lewis (2003), Waters and Marzano (2006), and Leon (2008).

Overall, the various sources provided worthwhile information that should fit nicely with the overall research to be conducted in this qualitative study. As previously mentioned several times, the number of thorough research inquiries into the school board and superintendent relationship is limited. At the same time, this is an area that is starting to get more attention, as evidenced by more case studies and blended findings appearing in the last few years, as conveyed in this review of the related literature.

Summary

The political models of organizational leadership analysis, in the context of the relationship between school boards and superintendents, are applicable to the study of superintendent tenure. This includes an awareness of the political assumptions and how they apply, as well as the interest groups that help determine the political landscape and a possible course of action. Politics can be affected by many various agendas, the type of district (rural or urban), historical perspectives, school board expectations, federal intrusion, and resource availability. A superintendent must carefully explore each political supposition to apply knowledge effectively.

Coalitions exist in all organizations, including school districts. The school board represents one coalition of many that the superintendent will collaborate with and attempt to balance various interests with. Communication plays a key role in determining whether coalitions are positive or not.

The next political consideration is power. Understanding where power and influence exist and how to utilize that for positive change can be problematic. Knowing how to utilize influence depends on the individual circumstances, as well as the relationship between the superintendent and school board members.

Once power and influence are determined, one can apply this understanding to negotiate for change or to accomplish shared goals. Communication is key to this, as well as interpersonal relations, perceptions, and shared decision-making. Of course, decision-making connects to other political characteristics and relationship considerations.

The most important decision a school board makes is the hiring of a superintendent. There appeared to be varying conclusions in the literature as to the scope of the problem of superintendent turnover. Sources did agree that the relationship with school boards affects turnover, and this relationship has several variables to consider, most of which are covered by the political models. This includes inevitable conflict.

The last political consideration addressed was gender. The gender of superintendents and board members can affect these relationships. Many sources addressed statistics, in relation to percentages of women in the superintendent position. Factors for this were addressed somewhat, including career pathways and discrimination.

The previous studies focused on superintendent and school board relations are limited and include mostly surveys, many of which were leadership inventory surveys. Some sources were historical or primarily reviewed literature. There were case studies that dealt with situations involving superintendent employment and politics.

The introduction and literature review identified a conceptual framework and relevant research that support more inquiry into superintendent-school board relationships and the connection to the political models and superintendent turnover. Provided in Chapter Three is an explanation of the methodology. The findings of the research study are presented in Chapter Four. Concluding in Chapter Five is the inquiry with a discussion of the interview data results, study limitations, and recommendations.

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CHAPTER THREE

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Due to the direct effect board members have on the change process, the

relationship between school boards and superintendents is very important. A school board

can be a collaborative governing body or a barrier to improvement efforts. When initially

looking at the sources related to school boards and superintendents, the effect of

legislative control was noticed first, in relation to board decision-making. In fact, board

decision-making was a common theme in a few of the studies, including the article about

decision making being affected by the *No Child Left Behind* legislation (Crum &

Hellman, 2009). Recent legislative intrusion, including NCLB, has changed decision

making and communication processes, making school board studies more necessary and

relevant (2009).

This chapter begins by restating the purposes of the study, as well as the research

questions to be addressed. That will be followed by a section that gives an explanation of

the research design, including the approach, methods, and rationale. This is followed by

sections concerning the sample population to be studied and sampling procedures.

After information is conveyed about the design and sample selection, the focus

turned to the gathering and analysis of data. Once all data were acquired, an analysis

commenced that follows sound qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). From this analysis

there were themes, patterns, and concepts discussed and utilized in order to draw

conclusions and make connections. Comparisons between focus group responses and

superintendent responses were made to gather more data information. Next was a section

on strategies for addressing quality control issues and assurance of reliability. The inquiry

concluded with a presentation of probable study limitations and a summary. The purpose

of this study was to explore the political dynamics entrenched within relationships between superintendents and school board members. By furthering knowledge of these relationships, the researcher hoped to reinforce concepts and add to leadership theory, in addition to enhancing graduate course objectives and assisting future leaders in surviving their positions in order to continue enjoying a rewarding career in public education.

Research Questions

Based on the overarching purpose of this study, the following research questions are addressed in this research study:

1. What skills and characteristics do school board members believe are essential for a school superintendent to be successful and to maintain good relations with the school board?

2. What decision-making skills do school board members expect superintendents to possess in order to be successful and maintain a good relationship?

3. What communication skills do school board members expect superintendents to possess in order to be successful and maintain a good relationship?

4. What factors do school board members consider when voting on whether to retain/employ a superintendent or terminate employment?

5. What competencies do school superintendents describe as important in their relationship with school boards and the probability of a long tenure in one school district?

6. What decision-making skills do superintendents associate with maintaining a good relationship with school board members?

7. What communication skills do superintendents associate with maintaining a good relationship with school board members?

8. What factors do superintendents convey as important in remaining at any district voluntarily?

Research Question 1

The rationale of the first research question was to explore general and specific thoughts surrounding what board members believe are the skills and attributes needed by superintendents to meet their expectations. Initial thoughts of individuals were probed through appropriate interview questions. Further examination determined if some of the discussion and responses to interview questions related directly or indirectly to political theory. Follow up questions were available based on possible initial responses or a need to gather more information due to reluctance or heightened modesty. Along with a possible unwillingness of subjects to participate fully with the discussion, there could be a need for more saturation of data. The first research question acted as a catalyst to the other research questions. Focus group questions #3, #4, and #8 helped inform the answer to this research question.

Research Questions 2 and 3

These next two research questions expanded the conversation to consider fully what expectations are present that relate directly to decision-making skills and communication skills. The interview questions solicited responses related to the two areas. Once again, the plan was to also formulate possible follow up interview questions related to the discussion. Other data sources assisted in this inquiry, including observations and informal conversations. Research Question 2 was answered using focus group questions #9, #10, #11, #12, #13, #14, and #15. Research Question 3 was answered using focus group questions #16, #17, #18, #19, and #20.

Research Question 4

The next research question attempted to determine opinions of board members related to what factors determine how they vote when making employment decisions concerning the superintendent. The goal of this research question was to establish what issues could create a situation in which board members vote not to retain a superintendent for employment. Conversely, the inquiry also pinpointed some features, traits, and conditions that must exist so as to increase the likelihood that employment will continue. Research Question 4 was answered using focus group questions #5, #6, and #7.

Research Question 5, 6, 7, and 8

The remaining research questions were answered through individual interviews with the four superintendents whose school boards will participate in the focus group interviews, as well as two former superintendents from two of the districts whose school boards are being interviewed. The intention was to compare the assertions of board members with the opinions of superintendents, in relation to essential attributes and characteristics. The discussion also addressed what conditions the superintendents think should exist to sustain a solid and productive relationship with board members. Obstacles or threats to this relationship were also conveyed. The individual superintendent interview questions answered Research Questions 6-8 while also connecting back to the other questions concerning school board perceptions.

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Research Design

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Approach

This qualitative research included focus groups, individual superintendent interviews, board minutes, and observations. The researcher chose to implement a

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phenomenological research design to investigate the perceived factors and political aspects of the superintendent-school board relationship. A phenomenological approach was suitable because, when studying these relationships, it is important to understand several participantsø mutual experiences (Creswell, 2007). By displaying these individual experiences, one can gain better understanding and develop new practices or policies to enhance the relationship. A superintendent-school board relationship is one that is perceived or understood cognitively through the views of those involved. These perceived relationships represented a phenomenon that directly relates to superintendent tenure. Therefore, this fell under the scope of a phenomenological study in which perceptions and perspectives of involved actors are explored to gather information about experiences that can develop deeper understanding through the establishment of themes (2007).

Political theory and related concepts were also used to guide and inform the research. As stated previously, the major concepts of the political frame of organizational analysis represented essential elements of the superintendent-school board relationship (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Bush, 2003). The intent of this investigation was to identify and reinforce the factors, leadership styles, preferred characteristics, and political skills necessary for survival in the superintendent position and an increased possibility of a long tenure. This study was a good first step in a full investigation into these vital relationships in school districts of all sizes, demographics, and locations.

Methods

The four focus groups were questioned through the use of open-ended interview questions that attempted to extrapolate the political concepts and related features relevant

to the superintendent-school board relationship. Any perceptions, expectations, arguments, or ideas generated produced meaningful data. The six superintendents were interviewed with similar questions with the intention that comparisons could be made. Other data sources included board minutes and observations of meetings. Informal conversations were also utilized; however, no follow up interviews with either superintendents or individual school board members were necessary. The school districts these participants represented were all districts from the South Central region of Missouri, as they are identified by the Missouri Association of School Administrators (2015). There are other requirements that are discussed later in this section pertaining to population selection and sampling.

Rationale

The interview transcriptions were utilized to produce relevant themes and make comparisons between the responses of the board members and superintendents of each school district, which also encouraged a comparison between the two districts with long-tenured superintendents and the two districts with the recent history of replacing superintendent at a high rate. These themes and comparisons were discussed in the context of the political frame of organization theory, in relation to whether the suppositions of the political view are conveyed through the focus group discussions. The board minutes and observations were useful for generating supplementary discussion topics and reinforcing some ideas related to superintendent-board relationships in terms of how the board members and superintendents interact. Themes were generated from the data sources; of course, the majority of relevant data were produced from the focus group interviews and individual interviews.

Addressing the research questions and proceeding through a qualitative study that focuses on the phenomenon of school board-superintendent relations gave further insights to current and future school leaders and can certainly help graduate programs select meaningful course competencies. Consequently, superintendents can increase longevity. Longevity equates to more continuity and improved effectiveness. In addition, if one intends to be a change agent for a school district, more knowledge about the concepts and features of political leadership models and resulting behaviors can facilitate that process. Political assumptions included knowledge relevant to board member interactions and perceptions (Bush, 2003). Any rigorous study in this area can be applicable and certainly important, particularly when existing research is limited and superintendents must address diverse issues and a wide variety of personalities. The school board-superintendent relationship is essential to school improvement efforts and necessary change processes; therefore, it is important to study the dynamics of this relationship.

Population and Sample

The selection of focus groups included criteria based on the longevity of superintendents and a history of low superintendent tenure at selected school districts. The goal was to include two school boards that have a superintendent who has been in that district for ten or more years. Two more school boards were selected based on a recent history of short tenures for superintendents. A record of short tenure was defined as a district that has employed four or more superintendents in a ten year period. The utilization of more focus groups was considered but not utilized. The use of four focus groups met the ideal number, and the focus groups were homogeneous (Krueger &

Casey, 2000), meaning the participants were from the same general geographic location and have similar experiences or duties associated with the respective school districts.

The research sample was selected from a population of superintendents and board members from K-12 Missouri school districts. The districts came from the South Central RPDC region (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015). There were four focus groups, three of which consisted of three members from respective seven-member school boards. One focus group consisted of six members. There were four superintendents who work for those boards. When adding the two former superintendents, the total number of participants was 21 people. The standard practice of using pseudonyms was followed in order to protect confidentiality (Krueger & Casey, 2000). By choosing two districts that have long tenured superintendents and two districts that tended to have a higher turnover rate, comparisons were made between what competencies or characteristics are present or missing. The school districts to be utilized for this study met all stated criteria.

School Board A represented a fully accredited district in the south central region of Missouri that has an enrollment of over 850 students. The superintendent has been in the district for 18 years, all as the school superintendent. The superintendent is particularly familiar with board members, having gone to the same school as each of them. The superintendent is an alumnus of the district. He worked for a K-8 district as a superintendent/principal before returning to the district he attended and graduated from as a youth. He has earned a doctoral degree. There are seven male board members, and there has been very little turnover the last 10 years, with only one different member. The district employs between 70 and 80 certified staff members. The bookkeeper has been at

the district for almost 10 years, and two other central office employees have fewer than five years of experience. The assessed valuation was just under $40,000,000. There are two building principals for elementary and junior high/high school levels. One principal has over 25 years of experience. On their most recent MSIP 5 Annual Performance Reports, they have increased their percentage each year, which means the district has maintained good state test scores in recent years (DESE, 2015).

School Board B represented a fully accredited district in the south central area of Missouri. This district has an enrollment of under 300 students. The superintendent has been at the district for eight years, nearly two years as superintendent. This superintendent was the elementary principal prior to taking the superintendent position, and this person has military experience, too. The superintendent who works for School Board B has worked for one other district previously as a teacher. This district has had four superintendents in a 10 year period. While there has been some board turnover at this district, the superintendent knows the members well, and has very good rapport with them. The school board was made up of six male members and one female member. There has been turnover the last 10 years, most of which occurred before the previous superintendent was non-renewed. There are three new members from the last 10 years. The superintendent secretary/bookkeeper has been at the district for less than two years. The district employs approximately 30 certified staff members, and the assessed valuation was approximately $22,000,000. There are two principals, and one who has been employed at the district for over 20 years. The MSIP 5 APR percentage has gone up and down in the last three years and shows no consistency. Social Studies scores are hurting the overall APR (DESE, 2015). The former superintendent interviewed has been

at his current position for five years. He was forced to resign at this district. He has his doctorate degree and now works in the west central region of the state.

School Board C represented a fully accredited district in the south central region of Missouri. The student population is around 250 students. The current superintendent was in the third year in that position, and this person has worked previously at one other district as a teacher. This district has had five new superintendents in the last 10 years. They have approximately 30 certified staff members. The assessed valuation was over $30,500,000. The board secretary has been there 14 years. The only building principal there has almost completed a fifth year. The school board consisted of five male members and two female members. There has been some turnover, most of which happened after a superintendent was non-renewed and a subsequent lawsuit. That superintendent, who has her specialist degree, was interviewed for this study. She resigned her positon over five years ago and did not work again as an administrator until one year ago. She currently works in the northeast region of the state. 12 individuals ran for the three open school board spots the year after this situation, resulting in two new members. The MSIP 5 APR slightly decreased by less than two percentage points. This was mostly due to their attendance falling below 90% in the previous school year. All other achievement data, besides a slight decrease in Science scores, showed improvement or was maintained at previous levels (DESE, 2015).

School Board D represented a fully accredited district in the south central region of Missouri. The student population was over 400 students. The current superintendent was in his 25th year in the district, 12 as the superintendent. This superintendent also is an alumnus of the district and knows the board members quite well. There are only two new

board members during the last 10 years. This superintendent has not worked at any other district. The assessed valuation is approximately $19,000,000. The board secretary has been there for three years. The board is made up of all male members. The MSIP 5 APR has been maintained above 90% the last three years (DESE, 2015). There are two principals, and both have been in the district for over 10 years.

All four districts are predominately Caucasian (student population and school board), and all four would be considered rural, farming communities. School Boards A and D represented districts with long-tenured superintendents, and School Boards B and C represented districts with a recent history of short superintendent tenures. Nothing apparent about any of these four districts would affect the relationship between the respective school board and their employed superintendent.

Sampling Procedures

The sampling procedure in this study was appropriate for a case study looking at multiple focus groups over time in which data are collected through interviews and observations. Since specific parameters were set, purposeful sampling was utilized (Creswell, 2007). Four school boards were selected, as well as corresponding current and former superintendents. Discussions took place based on the data subjectsø understanding and experience as school board members and superintendents. All districts of the school boards selected were public school districts from Missouri. Since all participants who were interviewed have experience with the phenomenon of superintendent-school board relations and the political dynamics associated with the relationship, criterion sampling seemed appropriate (Creswell, 2007), when a phenomenological design was being employed.

Along with sampling procedure considerations, there was an attempt to increase the usefulness and validity of the population sample for this inquiry by choosing individuals from school boards with the longest number of years served on the board. This increased the number of years of experience on the school board focus groups. The researcher is confident that all focus group participants have served at least one three year term. School Boards B and C did have one difference from the other two school boards that sparked a little interest, which is that these particular boards have female board members while School Boards A and D have only male board members. Only one female board member participated in the study, which was Focus Group Member 2b. All but one superintendent in this study were male in gender. Former Superintendent C is female. Other than that variance, these districts have more similarities than differences, in terms of accessible information.

Data Collection

All qualitative data was collected according to guidelines expressed by Creswell (2007) and Mertens (2005). Data were collected from individuals who are familiar with the experience of superintendent-school board relations. Multiple interviews took place with 21 individuals. The researcher followed appropriate interview procedures. After establishing a sample, the researcher conducted both individual and focus group interviews. Adequate recording equipment was used, an interview protocol with the interview questions was created, pilot testing was completed, and every detail was organized (Creswell, 2007). Data represented the participantsø experiences and perceptions of what influences or affects the phenomenon of superintendent-school board relationships. An attempt was also made to take minimal field notes that are somewhat

descriptive and noted major points made during the interview (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). This section next conveys the procedures for collecting data, followed by a discussion concerning ethics and protection of participants.

Data Collection Procedures

In regard to data collection procedures, there were two primary methods. First, there were focus group interviews with four school boards, three comprised of three members and one with six members. Second, there were one-on-one interviews with school superintendents who have worked with the school boards, both past and present. There were no follow-up interviews with superintendents or individual board members. Questions focused on skills and expectations associated with the school board-superintendent relationship. Political concepts as they apply to the perceptions and views of the superintendents and school board members were considered carefully and discussed with participants. Of course, questions about communication and decision-making were also addressed in the context of relations and political dynamics. Questions included what these people think are the characteristics of leadership vital for a superintendent, what expectations are for dealing with the political elements that exist, and what factors help define a successful relationship that ensures longevity. All interview data came in the form of transcriptions from audio recordings and some field notes. Board minutes and meeting agendas were observed and reviewed. Observations of board meetings were not recorded; some field notes were taken.

Human Subjects Protection and Other Ethical Concerns

All expectations when dealing with human subjects mandated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), including interview protocol, were respected and followed (see

Appendix xx). Along with IRB approval, informed consent forms were implemented into the process. Before each interview, all participants were given the informed consent form to read. All participants had the opportunity to withdraw from the interview at any time. With permission, all interviews were audio taped; and, upon request, the recording could have been discontinued. That never happened. It was conveyed to each subject that every part of this study is voluntary and can be ended at any time. Pseudonyms were also utilized throughout the study to protect confidentiality of data sources as much as humanly possible.

As Pritchard (2002) conveyed, qualitative research leads to a higher chance of ethical difficulties, especially when interacting with the study participants. When studying superintendent-school board relationships in the realm of focus groups, it was important to remain outside the actions and behavior of the school boards and their superintendents. The problem was the difference in behavior caused by the presence of an interviewer and whether that would negatively affect my findings or, even worse, the normal functioning of those school boards. There was a concerted effort to remain unbiased since the researcher is a practicing superintendent with strong opinions about school boards and working with board members, as well as leadership styles of superintendents.

As far as gathering qualitative data, working with these adults was far less of an ethical challenge than studying students and even teachers, in relation to consent and absence of pressure to participate. The researcher received consent, maintained confidentiality, and kept communication at a high level in order to keep the research professional and organized. The researcher attempted to put participants at ease through

informal conversations to set a positive mood, if possible. Despite these efforts, gleaning information from board members was more difficult than from fellow superintendents, so the approach to every interview, including informal conversations and first impressions reached in initial correspondences and meetings, determined the quantity and quality of data from each group and individual. Some board members repeated information more often and focused more on tangential information. The superintendents generally stayed on topic and kept answers brief.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis procedures followed guidelines stated by Creswell (2007) in dealing with interview transcriptions and other qualitative data. Every line of each transcription was studied to find significant statements and highlight existing patterns or themes. All statements were coded into thematic categories (Creswell, 2007). Meanings and interpretations were generated from the themes and their resulting categories. From these categories came a better understanding of the phenomenon of superintendent-school board relationships. The political concepts, as well as the concepts of decision-making and communication, acted as springboards for further discussions and more reinforcement of the links between the prevailing themes found and the conceptual framework generated from the existing literature. Furthermore, by examining multiple views, the post positivist paradigm was utilized (Creswell, 2007). Multiple views were recorded and were affected by a multitude of variables. These variables included number of years on the board, reasons for running for a school board position, and the amount of influence each board member has within that school board, which certainly affected all board member responses and quite possibly the superintendent individual responses.

With data this unpredictable, it was a difficult task to predict responses and generate themes. Luckily, honest and carefully considered responses were generated that produced useful findings, fruitful conclusions, and helpful recommendations.

The process of identifying connected themes within the data collected from various interviews assisted in giving a full description of the phenomenon and developing meaning that leads to increased knowledge (Creswell, 2007). Data from participants was analyzed for specific themes, which were formulated into larger ideas and details to draw conclusions and make connections with the reviewed literature. This is referred to as analysis of themes (Creswell, 2007). The descriptions of how individuals personally relate to superintendent-school board relationships, discussions related to their experiences, identification of related processes, and a summation of the significant findings gained from the research resulted in specific recommendations. Recommendations were produced for present and future leaders, as well as graduate school department heads in charge of formulating competencies and syllabus objectives for leadership courses designed for school superintendents.

Strategies to Address Issues of Quality

Quality assurance for trustworthiness and dependability occurred through validation strategies that include an audit trail, member checks, and external audits. The audit trail consisted of pre-interview discussions and idea development, interview transcriptions, the list of significant statements, and grouping data into meaning units. Member checks were conducted with participants, which consisted of providing a transcript to each individual and each focus group for review and to check for accuracy/correctness. The external audit included the sharing of interview protocol with

the advisor and pilot testing to further check for quality. Once data were analyzed and themes formulated, feedback was invaluable for reinforcing and checking validity of the themes. Reviewing procedures, considering various feedbacks, and analyzing every step of the research process also assisted in the maintaining of a quality study that is both dependable and trustworthy.

Researcher Bias

The use of the above strategies allowed the researcher to remove as much bias as possible while grouping statements into thematic clusters. This study included persons unknown to the researcher, and little previous knowledge was known about any participant or school district. At the same time, any preconceived opinions about superintendent-school board relations did create some bias that must be acknowledged. The researcher is a 10th year superintendent with strong opinions about school boards, including some negative connotations. The pre-interview discussions that are part of the audit trail and conversations with the program advisor aided in reducing researcher bias. Attempts were made to remain objective and concentrate first on collecting data appropriately, followed by analysis of that data. Another key consideration was remaining open-minded to new ideas and themes generated that are unrelated to political considerations or other expected connections. It would be subjective to only look for key political considerations from organizational and leadership theories.

Study Limitations

There were several limitations to be aware of with this research study. Data were collected from only 15 school board members and six superintendents from only one region of Missouri. The findings provided an accurate depiction of the relationships in

these four districts; however, it is uncertain that similar findings would exist at other school districts in Missouri or around the country. Therefore, the information gathered may not be representative of other districts. Another limitation was the fact that these schools in the study all had a student enrollment of less than 900 students. Superintendent-school board relationships may vary due to variables that could include larger school size. Finally, the focus on political suppositions was a limitation once data were gathered because some themes generated have little to nothing to do with political dynamics. Participantsø perceptions, experiences, backgrounds, preconceived thoughts, and recent conflicts certainly affected responses. These variables produced some unpredictable results and significant statements with corresponding themes. On the contrary, some expected ideas and produced themes made a great deal of sense based on expectations and researcher experiences.

Summary

The superintendent-school board relationship is vital at any school district, in relation to climate, possible improvement to programs and facilities, continuity of the administrative team, and the overall political landscape. After all, school boards make decisions and consider recommendations, which involve a level of communication. While several themes exist in the literature, many directly relate to concepts and features of political leadership and organizational analysis models. A lack of knowledge in this area can affect longevity.

The problem to address was superintendent turnover and poor relations between superintendents and school boards due to a lack of proactivity. The research questions addressed the overall purpose of identifying political elements in the relationship that

affect longevity, while allowing other concepts and frames of reference to be introduced. This qualitative study utilized focus group and individual interviews as the main data sources. The focus groups were made up of three groups consisting of three board members in each group, and one group consisting of six board members. Two districts have superintendents with established experience, while the remaining districts have a topical history of low superintendent tenure. Six superintendents from the corresponding districts were also interviewed. Once interviews were transcribed, transcriptions were analyzed to find significant statements, statements were coded into themes and patterns, and findings were generated, that resulted in specific recommendations for superintendents and graduate programs in educational leadership.

By studying superintendentsø relationships with respective boards of education, the research explored the perceptions and expectations of school boards and superintendents concerning effective leadership and what political skills are necessary for this relationship to thrive. In turn, a better relationship can certainly result in a vastly improved school climate, better staff morale, and increased student learning through better educational programs and services (Fossey, 2011). Once again, this qualitative research studied four school boards as focus groups, as well as former and present superintendents. This analysis involved formal group and individual interviews, along with observations, informal conversations, and board minutes/agendas. From there, the formal problem statement evolved into deeper discussions and further inquiry.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This chapter will start by reviewing the purpose of the study, the research questions explored, and the interview participants and details. The data analysis will be conveyed around the conceptual framework, which will include quotes from the interview transcripts. The framework focused on alliance-building, power, and superintendent turnover. Other possible but generally insignificant findings will be shared, including other factors or variables that could affect a superintendent's tenure at a school district.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the political features contained within superintendent-school board relations and superintendent longevity at school districts in the state of Missouri. This inquiry attempted to increase understanding of what expertise and attributes are needed by school superintendents to work successfully with school board members, and how those skills relate to the political view of organizational analysis and political leadership theory. The researcher explored the factors considered by board members when voting on whether or not to retain the superintendent. Another objective of the study was to explore the perceptions of school board members, in relation to expected characteristics of the school superintendent, as well as the communication and decision-making skills necessary to ensure longevity. This should be connected back to the conceptual ideas of alliance-building and power, as well as ideas from other literature reviewed. Conceptual themes generated will be discussed later in Chapter Five.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What skills and characteristics do school board members believe are essential for a school superintendent to be successful and to maintain good relations with the school board?

2. What decision-making skills do school board members expect superintendents to possess in order to be successful and maintain a good relationship?

3. What communication skills do school board members expect superintendents to possess in order to be successful and maintain a good relationship?

4. What factors do school board members consider when voting on whether to retain/employ a superintendent or terminate employment?

5. What competencies do school superintendents describe as important in their relationship with school boards and the probability of a long tenure in one school district?

6. What decision-making skills do superintendents associate with maintaining a good relationship with school board members?

7. What communication skills do superintendents associate with maintaining a good relationship with school board members?

8. What factors do superintendents convey as important in remaining at any district voluntarily?

The Interview Participants and Details

The participants in this study were school superintendents and school board members. Superintendents participated in individual interviews, and board members

participated in focus group interviews. The participants were selected based on geographic location and criteria determined superintendent turnover data. Two districts were to be ones in which the current superintendent has been employed there for 10 or more years. Two districts were chosen because of a history of turnover, meaning employing four or more superintendents in a 10 year period.

The first focus group interview, with School Board A, took place after their closed session, which was a little after 11:00 p.m. This was on a Thursday night in the superintendentøs office area. When looking to see which three Board members would be interviewed, the answer was clear: all members were to stay, and they were staying in open session. I did not see this as a problem, so the interview proceeded. Answers were rather short and typically started with a response from the board president, followed by whoever wanted to respond. It was fragmented and a bit convoluted, but it worked out satisfactorily. Two members answered slightly more often, but all members of this group participated with a minimum of a few answers each. As stated before, the superintendent was there for this interview. Superintendent A was interviewed the following week on a Monday afternoon in the superintendentøs office. This was much more relaxed than the focus group interview that proceeded. The level of experience dealing with board members was obvious during this interview. It was also obvious that this superintendent knows the school board very well, having attended the same district, as well as working with them for many years.

Both interviews involving School Board A gave a perception of authority and influence that exposed sources of power that include positional, expertise, personal, agenda-based, and even coercive in a minor, more interpersonal fashion. These sources of

power, or influence, also involve these features: preparation, negotiation, communication, empowerment through experience and association, respectful correspondence and decision-making, and alliance-building through familiarity and careful maintaining of emotions. The members and superintendent are respectful of each other, and the rapport is evident by the bluntness of conversations and the steadiness of everything that transpires in the meeting room. Similar observations were also evident with School Board D participants.

The second focus group interview, with School Board B, proceeded more like what was originally planned. This took place on a Thursday late afternoon to early evening before their regularly scheduled school board meeting. Two of the more experienced board members were very relaxed and gave complete answers. The third was a little nervous and seemed to just add a little information or reinforce an idea already stated. Overall, much more data was gleaned from this focus group compared to School Board A focus group. It also felt much more informal and simple. The conversations before, during, and after the interview were productive. There were some other influential groups noted by board members, including specific families in the community, so there is still conflict and uncertainty between the district and community and between board members, namely one board member seemingly in conflict with the rest of them. Superintendent B, who was not present during the focus group interview, was interviewed two weeks later in the early evening on a Thursday. This was a very relaxed interview, and the researcher felt that the response data were useful, current, and covered many topics. Through informal conversations, it was clear which former superintendent had been forced to resign at this district, so it was clear who would be contacted next.

The former superintendent who previously worked for School Board B was interviewed nearly a month later at his current office on a Saturday morning. While there were some hints of sarcasm and regret, this person seemed to take the past situation as a learning experience for the current job. Responses were a little different than the two previous superintendent interviews, and were more specific about what to look for, in relation to a situation where the relationship between a superintendent and board members is becoming increasingly worse. This person had been forced to resign from the previous position, so this was expected. As stated before, this was a situation in which there was school board member turnover due to community dissatisfaction, which resulted in a changed school board dynamic. This was followed a few years later with the forced resignation of a superintendent. The current superintendent was the elementary principal at the time of this employment termination. There have been concerted efforts, especially by the board president, to increase communication and win back community confidence.

The third focus group interview, with School Board C, occurred on a Tuesday evening in the high school library. Three board members made up this focus group, and this was a group that was even more casual than the second one. There was a presence of more slang terms and more repetition in the responses, and the third member kept reaching over to read the questions off my sheet before responding. He wanted to make sure he was clear on what was being asked. Superintendent C, who was not present for the focus group interview, was interviewed that same evening approximately 45 minutes after the conclusion of the focus group interview. The answers were concise and fairly brief. This was also in the high school library. The current situation with the school board seems to be strong, and the communication appears to be a focus area. The former

superintendent, who resigned from the position held when working for School Board C, was more informal in the way responses were given. Valuable insights were relayed, though. Some sarcasm and bitterness was noted; however, much like Former Superintendent B, Former Superintendent C seemed to learn a lot from the past experience and has been more successful in the current position held. The answers to interview questions seem to show that honest and open communication between the superintendent and school board members is needed and being strived for, in relation to increased community input and communication with the school board and district. Cultural concerns, which were evident with all school boards studied, was particularly important with this group. A superintendent is expected to be a charismatic leader with strong speaking and listening skills who can build relationships and be a calming presence in every situation.

The fourth and final focus group interview, with School Board D, was the most difficult to set up, in terms of an agreed upon date, time, and location. The meeting date changed several times. This interview took place in the superintendent¢s office on a Monday evening. The individual interview took place four evenings earlier on a Thursday afternoon at the same location. Both of these interviews were short, compared to the previous two, and did not generate as much data. The focus group participants were more guarded and did not elaborate much at all. Superintendent D, on the other hand, was forceful in the responses and sounded blunt when discussing skills necessary to be successful working with a school board. Once again, this person attended this district during the public school years; therefore, the board members are well known by the superintendent. Accordingly, the board members are obviously comfortable with the

superintendent, evident by their confidence in his ability to complete responsibilities. Once again, it was evident who has the influence in the group, with the board president and superintendent seemingly sustaining a relationship that is productive, familiar, and built on years of experience and going through a variety of experiences.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected were primarily from the interview questions, while some data were produced through observations and informal conversations. The open-ended responses were recorded, transcribed, reviewed, and analyzed for ideas and themes. The themes will be highlighted in Chapter Five.

Background and Reasons for Serving

When asking School Board A about career, education, and years on the board, the responses varied. Careers included self-employed farmers, government employee, sales, banking, and engineering. Educational level was anything from high school up to a Bachelor of Science Degree. Years on the school board spread from four years to 14 years. There has been very little turnover the last 10 years, with only one different member. When asked to elaborate on reasons for running for their first board election, the responses generally focused on being involved and of service to the community and caring about the school.

School Board B members gave more background information. Occupations were rather diverse, with the board president stating he was a minister and counselor, with two college degrees. The other two membersø jobs are office manager and government worker. One has a college degree, and one has a high school education. Two board members have lived in this community their entire life, while the third person has been

here over 20 years. They all wanted to be involved and help students by being on the school board.

School Board C, as was School Board B, was a focus group with members eager to deliver their opinions and assertions about superintendent-school board relationships. Answers were the longest with this group, and the duration of this interview was the longest. One member works for an electric cooperative and has a high school education. The other two participants, also high school graduates, have worked multiple jobs. Member 2c was a hog farmer and now works for Wal-Mart. Member 3c was a machinist and now runs a dairy and beef farm. These board members have been on the board for seven, 24, and six years, respectfully. The member with 24 years is the board president. The reasons for running for a board position included being asked by a retiring member, being involved with kids through the church and extending it to this, and being asked by community members and staff members.

School Board D focus group members, similar to the first focus group interview participants, were brief and to-the-point with their responses. They seemed more guarded than the previous two focus group interviews, and the duration of this interview, with these three participants, was the shortest length of time among the focus group interviews. Two members have college degrees and one has a high school education. One is a mechanical contractor, another is a government employee, and one is a farmer. They have been in this community their entire lives. Two members have been on the board for nine years, and the farmer for 12 years. He is also the board president. They are on the board to be active in the community and school and make decisions.

Hiring Factors and Expected Skills

The focus group members were asked about what factors they should contemplate when making the choice to hire or rehire a superintendent. Three of the School Board A focus group members answered this question. Member 2a replied, õAs far as rehiring, I think the financial end of your district would be probably on top of the list of important duties. And handling your personnel. There is a lot on the financial end that have to be considered.ö Member 3a added that the school budget numbers must be stable, and the superintendent needs to have a õ long term vision.ö Member 1a was concerned with staff member relations. Obviously, the topic of finances was central, as well as relations with personnel. Focus group members from School Board B had much more lengthy answers for this question. Member 1b expressed that this is difficult to answer.

Member 1b stated,

That is very open ended. There is no way I guess to
put an exact thing or an exact something that needs to be put there when
you are hiring a superintendent because you can only get so much
information when you are trying to hire. Things that I personally listen
for is their communication, their ability to handle money, their ability
to work with people, to communicate with them in a way that is coherent
for your whole district not just for what they want or for what the board
wants but as a whole because it is a district. It is not just a one person or
eight person party when we are having our meetings it is looking at
what the district wants. So for me I think the biggest thing is
communication and then the skills with being able to handle budgets
is what I should have said, instead of just money, but budgets. That
way you know they can take us in the right direction.

Member 2b reiterated the need to communicate and be responsible for the financial situation of the district. She also emphasized not taking shortcuts and being an approachable administrator. She concluded by conveying, õGive them help and a little rope without just having to be on top of them.ö She feels it is vital for a superintendent to

be perceived as a leader, not as a dictator. Member 3b agreed with the approachability

aspect of the position, as well as a financial manager and visionary for growth.

Focus group members from School Board C also gave lengthy answers to this

question. Member 1c stated,

> Probably number one for me is experience. Along with availability,
> you know who is available who is not available. Iøm not a real big
> interview person, you know, some people can fake a good interview,
> I want to see realism and I think Iøm a pretty good judge of character
> when it comes to that. Um, you sit there and you watch somebody long
> enough, you have a long enough interview, youøll see what they are really
> capable of. I mean youøll catch them in things that they really donøt think
> they are unless they are an exceptional interviewer. If you have the right
> questions which I think most of the time weøve worked through this several
> times so weøve got a pretty good list of questions that we are comfortable
> with that will bring to light things that weøre looking for and what we
> arenøt looking for. Whether it be a question that we expect answered one
> way and they think they need to answer this way and you know, different
> things like that. Thatøs what I look for.

Member 2c agreed that experience was important. He also mentioned character.

Member 3c also agreed with experience, along with getting along with students and staff

members. He wants to see the superintendent at various activities and involved in the

community. As he put it, õí because I think weøve got to have the community backing

the school, and I think the school needs to back our community.ö

Focus group members from School Board D also answered, and Member 3d

repeated the concern for proper financial management. Member 1d feels many factors are

involved that are dependent upon that specific school districtøs needs. When pressed to

name factors, he replied, õSome to consider are the knowledge of the candidate. Do they

have the skills to handle the particular needs of your district? Can they gain the respect of

your staff and be a leader?ö Member 2d followed this response up by asserting that, õItøs

a fine balance between being the boss and getting things done while still earning respect

from the staff members.ö He wants to know if this person has the qualities as such to lead others; he concluded, õThe superintendent has to communicate well, become acquainted with the culture, and take the necessary actions to improve the district.ö

The board members in these focus groups were also asked to give reasons that would justify not renewing a superintendent in his or her position. While School Board A members indicated that this has not occurred since any of them have been on the school board, Member 2a still answered, õObviously, mismanagement of funds.ö This was the only response since, as stated, the superintendent has been employed at this district longer than any board members have served on the school board. Focus group B, however, had another long response to this question. Member 1b started the responses when he stated,

> To me it all boils down to trust. If you have a superintendent that shows
> that you canøt trust him or her that would be grounds, accountability, back
> to that. You know you want someone to sit in the board that you can depend
> on to tell you the truth at every board meeting. When the board loses faith
> in that person to tell them the truth whether itøs financial accountability or
> issues with students or personnel thatøs when the board loses faith in the
> superintendent. Thatøs when everything goes downhill. For me it goes both
> ways. The board has to respect the superintendent and the superintendent
> has to respect them, but when that superintendent loses accountability with
> the board thatøs when things need to be changed.

Member 2b also had a thorough answer, with an emphasis on rapport. She stated,

> For me a major factor would be fiscal responsibility if the budgets and the
> numbers he is given us are not matching up or they are not where he said we
> would be or if he is messing up there. Lack of rapport with the staff, you
> know if itøs a constant every meeting we have to go over some kind of issue,
> staff related or just not able to get along with other people whether itøs in the
> community or otherwise. Probably a similar issue would be some kind of an
> issue with students. Superintendent doesnøt really have a lot of interaction
> with the students but they need to be able to do that if there comes a point
> and time. So you canøt just sound like kids and just not do it. So there has to
> be a good end. Probably lastly, is to also be able to have a good rapport with
> the community because heøs going to have a lot of interaction that way.

Member 3b did not have a lot to add, but did mention the need for a superintendent to listen to the community, board members, and staff members.

Focus group members from School Board C also responded to the question about not employing a superintendent. Member 1c had this to say:

> Probably the number one would be like was just stated, not getting along with the faculty, um for reasons other than you know simply the faculty not wanting to get along. I think, you know, we are patient enough, we wait long enough, we talked amongst ourselves and we can figure out what faculty members are going to cause trouble. The other one would be a Superintendent that wasnøt doing his job. That wasnøt getting involved in the community, that wasnøt participating in school functions, because Iøm the same way. If they are participating in school functions, if they are in the community, people are going to respect them. If they do not make that attempt to get out there and do these things they are not going to gain the respect of the people or the community, or they are going to lose the respect of the board in my opinion.

Member 2c agreed and also surmised that the superintendent has to gather facts and not make up information to suit a situation. This person should care about the school, community, and students. He concluded, õThere again, it goes back to character, honesty, being upfront, outgoing, which is always positive, and communicating.ö Member 3c felt leadership was a big issue. He also restated more on community. He responded,

> I think leadership is a big issue for me. I think he needs to be a leader and not rely on everybody else to do his job and I think being involved in this community is something I require for the fact is because the community is looking to the board to be responsible enough to hire someone who thinks of the safety of our kids, the education of our kids, and that makes good decisions for our kids.

Typical of School Board D focus group members, the responses to what justifies terminating the employment of a superintendent were brief. Member 1d offered, õIf the person lacks leadership or necessary skills required to run the district, it is time to go.ö

Member 2d and 3d simply stated that making financial mistakes or not being a part of the community would also justify not rehiring the superintendent.

Next, focus group members were asked about the skills and characteristics that they believed a superintendent must possess. School Board A focus group members' brief replies showed that this group feels that interpersonal skills, trustworthiness, and morality are important. Integrity and honesty were also revealed. As expected, Member 1b of the School Board B members had a strong response for this question. He indicated,

> I think a personal opinion of mine is I think that before superintendent
> or principal they need to be in the classroom because if you have never
> been in the classroom you don't have any idea. Um, so it makes it a struggle
> for a non-classroom administrator to understand what a classroom person
> goes through on a daily basis to make everything happen. Um then go
> back and overlap some of the things, leadership my theory is if I want
> somebody to do something I have to be willing to do it myself. I don't
> want to ask you to do something that I'm not willing to step up to the
> plate and do with you or before you to show you that I can make this
> happen and I think it's very important and when you do that I believe it
> helps your staff to be more motivated when you're willing to stand there
> side by side with them. Now that to me is not saying that you need to micro
> manage to do that, I think also that a superintendent needs to be willing to
> leave his office, let the other administrators do their jobs and go out and try
> to find funding. If you have to make a trip to Jeff City, go to Jeff city, sit
> with the legislators, whatever to help your district be able to do what needs
> to be done and I think sometimes superintendents get caught up in the
> everyday stuff thinking they have to be within the buildings and so I think
> that is something that a superintendent needs to look at really strongly, is get
> out there, get in the public, go find some money, go find something that will
> help the district and I think it will make a big difference. So leadership goes
> from there.

Member 2b added the fact that the superintendent has to take on many roles and responsibilities, which could include a variety of unexpected tasks. She also agreed with Member 1b's assertion that superintendents should have classroom experience. She said this can only help with staff relations. That, in turn, makes needed changes easier to

accomplish because there is more buy-in. Member 3b agreed, then added, "I think that the ultimate responsibility of a superintendent is to have a positive flow for the school and administration because it trickles down to everybody." He feels this person should exemplify energy and positive thinking.

Member 1c of School Board C repeated the feeling that experience is vital, especially when dealing with finances. He also discussed interpersonal skills when dealing with problems, and proclaimed the opinion that, if the superintendent is taking care of responsibilities, board members will not be hearing from parents and faculty much. The superintendent should also help the building principals without micromanaging and be there for them to communicate with and to. Member 2c repeated the concepts of trust and honesty, as well as the need for factual information. Member 3c highlighted the significance of collaboration with staff members, support of staff members, community communication, and management of finances. School Board D members also considered this question about necessary skills. Member 1d declared, "A strong leader is a must. They need to be able to handle whatever is thrown at them with a steady mindset. The skill set must be assessed to meet the district needs of your district and its students." Member 2d talked about communication skills, which included listening attributes and providing information to all stakeholders. He also said, "Also, how do you come off to the people in the community? You have to fit in with everyone to a certain extent." Member 3d simply stated, "You have to be viewed as a leader and as someone who takes care of problems." Next, participants were asked about the decision-making process.

Decision-making

There were a few questions concerning decision-making, which included decisions about budget cuts, influential groups involved, getting input from other patrons, and the process of making decisions. School Board A members conceded that cuts had been made, including elimination of Industrial Arts classes and the gifted program. They also cut down on maintenance projects and delayed salary increases. The only influential group noted was booster club. Member 2a stated, õI feel all the patrons have some influence.ö When it comes to getting input from stakeholders, Member 4a pointed out, õOur superintendent encourages parents and community members to work through the chain-of-command.ö That was reiterated by several members, and Member 2a simply said, õCommunication. That is the main thing, whether formal in meetings or informal at ball games.ö As far as the process of decision-making, only one member responded to that question. Member 2a simply stated, õThere is a good deal of time spent, depending on the decision to be made. There is lots of discussion.ö

School Board B members were similar in the ideas expressed, even though a bit wordier. Member 1b mentioned salary freezes but was mostly confident that fiscal responsibility has not been a problem at this district, so no cuts have been made. Member 2b concurred with Member 1b when she replied,

> I feel as we are a small school district. We will watch every penny
> that we spend. We donøt step out on a limb much and our monies
> if they donøt flow in they affect us greatly. See there has been a
> couple years where we had to freeze salaries. Morale just kind of
> stayed the same seemed like. Then you know when we did give
> back the raises people seemed like they worked a little happier.
> To me I think keeping people on planned steps keeps your staff
> happier which makes everything go around better.ö

Member 3b mentioned the current governor holding funds and repeated some of the same ideas already expressed, including delaying salary increases and closely watching expenses. In relation to the question about local influences, the school foundation was noted by the first member. Member 2b said, õBesides certain family influences, or the booster club, I canøt think of any offhand.ö The third member had nothing to add. They did talk somewhat about sports-related conflicts, a recent conflict with another board member, a bus route disagreement, and the lack of academic concerns from patrons. When it was asked what the process was for making decisions, there was a lot of data. Member 1b started,

> Speaking from a board presidentøs perspective I feel like one
> of the bigger issues that we have just dealt with is determining
> who our designees would be. Uh in our hiring process, we have
> dealt with others but that is the most recent. For myself, I spent
> over two hours on the phone with a lawyer to make sure that I
> had all the polices, the laws down to where we could make
> a decision as a whole because thatøs what a board is as a whole.
> Itøs not just me and itøs not just the vice president but it is a whole
> that makes that decision, but before that decision can be made you
> have to have full disclosure of the information that youøre looking at
> and itøs hard to make a decision if you donøt have that. Thatøs why
> as the board president if we have an issue of this caliber I want to
> make sure that all of the board members are informed and know
> exactly what the policy is, they know what the law is and then we
> can make as a whole an informed decision and can move forward
> with that. Not everybody is happy but as a whole we try to work
> together and I feel like in this particular decision we worked as a
> whole. We worked as a body giving our administration directive on
> hiring which gave us a greater voice and thatøs just one and Iøll let
> you add to that.

And Member 2b added,

> Basically we have the process that I feel like we go through is we
> discuss things, sometimes an hour or two at a time. Um everybody
> is free to voice their opinion, bring up issues or questions they might
> have. I know in the recent past few months we tabled a hiring decision
> twice before we actually made the hire, just because people had issues

with it. So yeah everybody has a voice. I feel like everybody listens
to everybody else and may not always agree, but that's why there is
seven of us instead, you know. I feel like for the most part we're
respectful of each other's opinions and I don't think there is
anyone on the board that really has any qualms about speaking up
if they've got a problem. In almost all of our discussions when we are
trying to make a decision about an issue, um the majority of us are
always the forefront in our mind is what is best for these kids and
what is going to benefit these kids the most. Not that we are not
concerned about the staff but really my opinion is that the kids and
their needs are what needs to come first and that's what we're
here trying to promote is their learning and education. So as long as
we keep that in mind, really it's hard to make a wrong decision
because you've got the right thing in mind in the end."

Member 3b also felt that seven members, along with two or three administrators, should

meet and discuss a topic several times until a decision is reached. While some might not

be happy, they support the decision and move on with respect. That word was

emphasized. As stated, "I have to be able to respect them and carry on with life or they

respect me and vice versa. Respect to me is the key word there. You know it needs to go

for everybody."

School Board C members discussed a multitude of budget cuts made in recent

years, including personnel cuts, not buying school buses, schedule and course offering

changes, student groups cutting firewood for the bus barn, and other adjustments made.

When discussing influential groups, Member 1c began with the local churches and the

need to communicate with them. He added, "We want their input, their involvement and

so we always focus on what we are hearing from that direction." Member 2c followed

with this reply,

One group probably would be the business leaders in here
because without those sponsorships of different school affiliated
sports, um FFA, I mean they support them and we listen to them.
You know, to a reasonable amount we will listen to them and take
their ideas to heart, I mean, they've been there. Like was said,

they've been there, they have more knowledge, more wisdom
on these things than we do as seven, eight, nine, six year board
members. They've been there, they've seen this for the last
30 to 40 years. Another group would be our faculty, which I don't
think boards in the past so much has let faculty come to them as
long as they follow the chain of command. That was one of the
big things whenever I started was the faculty did not trust the board.
They had not trusted the board for quite some time apparently and
that was one thing that we really harped on was you can come
talk to us. We are not going to turn you away. We may tell you to
go talk to the administration first, but we'll listen to you.

Member 3c agreed with this referring to "leaders in our community" and taking it farther

to say that wise elders should be consulted. He also repeated the need to involve the

churches. As far as conflicts, the situation with the past superintendent was discussed,

including the lawsuit and later outcomes. Member 1c, the board president, referred to a

time period when he first started as a board member. He said,

Yeah, the superintendent issue that we had when I first started
that created a lot of conflict between us and everybody in the
community. They wanted us to do this, you know, we listened
to them but ultimately we made our own decision. They might
have thought that they influenced us to a certain extent, which
they probably, possibly did somewhat, but the guys that are on
the school board, they're very strong willed. I mean, every one
of us are, you know, we all make our own decisions. There is
nobody going to sway us one way or the other. So as far as being
able to politic us, we look at the facts, we want to know the facts,
we ain't gonna listen to somebody that we know is talking out their
hind end, you know, or has been known to make up stories. We're
not going to listen to that, and we know who it is, but as far as being
real problems, we had some issues with a few teachers, but it was
dealt with. I mean they seen that we wasn't going to cave like
some in the past. We supported our administration and they saw
that, they let it ride, they let it go.

Member 2c added that decisions have to be made that keep the district stable, and choices

are based on " the greater good of each and every one." Member 3c mentioned local

politics in the context of non-renewing a teacher's contract. He ended by stating, "You

can¢t be afraid to stand up for what¢s right because you gotta make the decisions for

what¢s best for the kids, what¢s best for the faculty, and you know, we have to be there to

see that everybody is a game player to make these kids what we can make out of them.ö

When relaying information concerning sharing input and decision-making with the

public, Member 1c started by admitting the board, at one time, did not get input. After

much time and efforts made, which included several board members being replaced, this

situation improved. It was apparent that Member 1c feels getting input on any school

district issue, is relatively easy now. Member 2c elaborated about a time when he was too

approachable and become a negative presence in the high school building. He went on to

state,

> This created a situation, in which I was banned from the
> building during certain times. We created some issues at our
> board meetings for a while. I think just being open-minded
> and available wherever you are at. They will find you if they
> need to talk or have questions. For the most part our board,
> especially now, is where people are comfortable talking to
> us, and they know we are going to be honest with them. If we
> don¢t agree, we are going to tell them we don¢t agree, and this
> is why. The respect factor, if they know we are approachable
> and will listen to them.

Member 3c had a response that included the word õcommunityö five times. He replied,

> I think our superintendent needs to also know what the parents
> need, and kinda have what they have in their heart and what they
> expect because he is leading their kids. I think another important
> deal is to bring our community and let our community tour our
> school and get a first bird¢s eye view of things we have to correct.
> And what we need to spend our money on because you¢ll have the
> community back you if you make the community feel like this is their
> school they are the taxpayers and the school belongs to them. By
> getting the community involved in what¢s going on at the school,
> is a big player.

Finally, when asked about the decision-making process as a whole, Member 1c discussed directives being set up, in relation to hiring a superintendent or passing a bond issue. He was focused on the forming and following of a plan when taking action. Member 2c took this even further when he stated,

> There is the beauty of having seven board members too. The interaction we have at our meetings, developing a plan of action, comes through the honesty that each board member brings to the table. We're throwing out our concerns, we're interacting with the community, planning out the concerns of the community, and together, when we get together then we're sharing this and it's developing a plan at that time. I'd say it's follow through and be up front about it. The opinion that comes up may be total opposite of yours, but the interaction we have at the table connects the way you start seeing others."

Member 3c felt that all board members interact well together, communicate continually, and take their responsibilities seriously. Even when faced with tough decisions, he said, "We all leave the board meeting happy; everybody gets along when we leave at night." Member 1c interjected that respect is a major determining factor in their success as a school board, as well as staying open-minded and honest. The other members agreed.

School Board D members, as was consistent in the entire interview, was brief in their answers. On the subject of budget cuts, the first member stated, "We are a fiscally sound school with good leadership. Out situation is unique, and we have been able to adjust accordingly. We also have a good relationship with the community and have a good sense of community overall." Once again, delaying projects and freezing salaries was pointed to, as was cutting some positions and staff members doing more than in previous years. The only conflict mentioned had to do with coaching complaints, and the third member offered, "Our superintendent does a good job of solving problems before they become problems." When asked about getting input from various stakeholders,

Member 2d discussed surveys previously sent out to parents and community members, while Member 3d stated that everyone is comfortable with their superintendent. If an issue is brought to anyone's attention, he informs the superintendent. When the inquiry about decision-making took place, the response from Member 1d was that, "We follow the board policies as defined by state guidelines." Member 2d discussed spending time to make a decision, saying it might take two or three months. Member 3d put it this way:

> The superintendent communicates options to us, and we thoroughly discuss all options and possible repercussions before making a final decision. We sometimes have disagreements, but we leave all on the same page, supporting the board decision.

Political Skills Expected

When asked about any political skills the superintendent should possess, School Board A members brought up M.S.B.A. (Missouri School Boards Association), along with school law, finances, personnel, legislations, and communication. Member 6a responded, "The superintendent is a politician and must interact with patrons." Member 1b asserted that state politics can be utilized to get extra funding. He stated,

> To get them because there is people that want to get on board and help their district but if you never ask and if you start down here with the congressmen, they have no idea what happens in this district unless you go to them and say hey we have a need, is there any funding there. Can you guide us in a direction toward funding? I can elude back to a former superintendent that we had that spent ninety-nine percent of his time in Jeff City and I promise you when he came home he had money, he had a free meal, he had something that he brought back to this district. Every trip he made he brought something back. It might have been tools, money, something. He brought something back that he had got while he was there. So you have to ask, you have to put that need out there.

School Board C members reiterated some earlier thoughts when asked about political

skills, including the need to have open and honest communication and a trusting

relationship. Member 1c replied,

> Well the honesty part comes in. He has to be honest
> with the school board. We have to have that because
> we're not here every day. The faculty sees it and that's
> one reason why we want to be able to talk to our faculty.
> We want to know if he's telling us everything. We want
> to know if he or she is telling us things that we need to
> know or we think we should know to make the best decisions.
> We are not going to see every day operations of this school,
> it's going to be through the grapevine and we want that
> grapevine to be pretty stout. We want it to be supported,
> we don't want it to be a rumor mill. We want honest
> people that we know we can trust to tell us these things.
> Um, as far as the politicians, I think he should be in contact
> with the state, if possible, the federal level guys. You know,
> not just ringing their phone every other day or every other week,
> but every month or so get in contact with them. See what
> they've got up their sleeve, see what, you know, give them ideas.
> Tell them what we're thinking as a board, as a faculty, as a
> staff. Tell them what we're needing, what we do need or what
> we are expecting from him. Let him know that we are
> supporting something that he is or we don't support what he's
> doing. But I think he has to be straight up honest with him and
> tell him what we're thinking.

School board D members were also asked about politics. Member 1d conveyed that

awareness is important, in relation to district-affecting decisions and working with

influential people to help stay informed. Member 2d named communication and

transparency as political skills. The third member contributed the belief that the

superintendent should be informed about, and share with the stakeholders, any legislative

information. Any recent changes in legislation should be conveyed to teachers, support

staff members, community members, parents, and, most importantly, school board

members.

Communication

The last several questions dealt with communication with board members and other patrons, as well as related skills the superintendent should acquire. School Board A members are confident that the superintendent at their district communicates well, which includes monthly meetings and special meetings, when necessary. Member 3a cited the board policy updates that must be approved sometimes. Member 5a mentioned budget updates occurring several times each fiscal year. Finally, Member 1a answered, õBesides meeting formally every month, he meets with the Board President and Vice President more than monthly. Thatøs a good thing.ö Members 6a and 2a both agreed that transparency is important. Member 2a thought the board does a good job of conveying expectations to the superintendent. Members feel comfortable bringing anything up they feel is worthy. Reasons for communicating directly include legal matters, personnel issues, student discipline, and anything that board members do not want to be surprised with. Member 2a talked about listening skills, from which Member 5a added, õListening and patience both.ö Member 1a stated that expectations should be clear both ways.

Member 1b also stated a need to make expectations clear in order to make informed decisions. He also evolved the discussion to include how a superintendent communicates directives. As he said,

> I would also expect the superintendent to be able to ask someone to
> do something instead of telling them. Uh, I donøt work very well under
> the impression that you are going to tell me all the time, but if you ask
> me to do something I will bend over backwards to work with you and
> to do my best, give you one hundred ten percent. You tell me to do
> something, youøre going to get about twenty percent and I think that is
> the way with a lot of your staff. If you can ask them in a nice way and I
> understand as a superintendent there has to be some accountability, there
> has to be some, um goals or some things set forth that someone has to
> follow but I still believe that if you ask them to do that instead of telling,

make them feel like that you're driving them instead of leading them. Leadership is so important.

The other two members focused on two-way communication between board members and the superintendent. All members seem to agree that various forms of communication can be effective, including the use of social media, text messages, or e-mail. Direct communication is sometimes preferred, and informal conversations are expected. They also feel that communication with legislators is a must. As Member 3b replied,

As far as you've got legislators and congressmen here, I would love to see the superintendents put more emphasis on those folks than what they do. I'd like to see them develop friendships with them, or however you would say that professional, would you call that professional courtesy because if you watch the legislators and congressmen who controls your money flow into your school districts and they need to know that if they mess with $25,000 of a small school district's money that they are messing with lots of kid's lives, lots of kid's education. You know, with a school district like ours, 20 to 25,000 is a big hit. When they break the numbers down in the state to two percent or one percent it affects our school district greatly. I think a superintendent could convey that to these folks that you know what it has drastic effects on this kind of school district. That's really all I had to add.

Member 1c thought the action of sending informational update text messages periodically was a great idea that was started recently. If there is a serious issue, a phone call is expected. In order to answer community member questions and respond to comments, input from the superintendent must be continual. Member 3c not only felt that communication should be continual and timely, he believes the board being friends makes it work better. When talking about getting information before hearing it from the rumor mill, he stated, "That's a big plus and by the board being tight and getting along and communicating with each other, I think that's a big plus for us."

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Honesty, respect, directness, sincerity were all ideas specified when discussing communication. After citing reasons to communicate immediately, such as active shooter situations and staff discipline, the board deliberated about enhancing communication. This, in short, came down to cultural awareness and interpersonal skills. Being visible and relating to all groups, or coalitions, is a reality. Utilizing the local newspaper and meeting people at various businesses was also conveyed. Two members clearly stated that becoming part of the community is essential. Member 1c said, "He needs to be the same as us." Member 3c reiterated, "I think that it's very important that he becomes one of us and we all work with each other and know how each other thinks." Working with other schools and other superintendents was another idea presented, in relation to communication.

School Board D members also expect direct communication that is accurate and timely. Member 2d added, "A superintendent can convey information through texting, phone calls, or even e-mail. However, we believe in face-to-face conversations with the superintendent, which is what he also prefers. We simply don't want any major surprises." Board members expressed that everyone is comfortable contacting the superintendent by phone at any time. As Member 2d stated, "We feel we know this person well and trust him with this school district." These members also expect him to be easy to approach and always available. Once again, cultural awareness was part of the discussion. Member 3d responded to the question about enhancing communication by saying, "Immersing oneself into the community and culture will make people feel you are one of us." Member 2d mentioned charisma and trustworthiness as helpful attributes, helping with perceptions. Caring about kids and the community should be one sincere

and realistic perception. Member 1d indicated a real need for clear, open-minded communication, in which all views are considered. The superintendent, after listening to options and views, can then support a position or decision as the school's spokesperson. Member 3d concluded the discussion by replying, "Be able to listen, talk, follow through on promises, and set attainable goals. If you do what you say you will do, gaining respect and influence happens naturally."

Superintendent Interviews- Challenges

The six superintendents were asked questions similar in content to the focus group interviews. After a few questions about educational background, interests, and reasons for becoming a superintendent, the questions turned to the challenges of the position. Superintendent A chose to point out that every day has new challenges, but important considerations have to be the hiring of good people and managing the budget effectively. As he stated, hiring capable adults can be difficult. His answer goes on to discuss superintendent evaluations and carrying out board policy. Superintendent B cited inherited financial issues as a challenge when first entering the position. He then went on to touch on some past issues he had to solve. He added,

> Board cohesion at first was a big one because of the past two
> Superintendents had issues with the board and the board had issues
> with them and certain members. So there was a lot of disjointed
> activity going on both in and out of the board meetings. I thought
> a major challenge was to try and get everybody on the same page,
> so that we could all go the same direction and achieve some things
> which we have been able to do the past couple of years.

He also briefly talked about a couple of influential families he has had to address, in terms of power struggles and board cohesion. Former Superintendent B only mentioned decreased funding causing fewer staff members. Everyday difficulties and being in a

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position to be expected to have answers were also cited. Superintendent C responded,

õFollowing up on bogus complaints, or addressing opinions presented as facts. Finances

can be a challenge, as can difficult personalities. Personnel conflicts, appealed discipline

decisions, compliance paperwork, and every dayøs new adventures can make this position

quite exciting sometimes.ö Former Superintendent C answered this question in the

context of opportunities, but ended by stating that õPersonalities and misguided plans can

be major barriers to doing whatøs right.ö Superintendent D wanted to list challenges

based on government intrusion, financial crises, and board interactions. Providing health

insurance and keeping technology updated were specific challenges conveyed.

Superintendent Interviews- Politics

Next, specific political skills were solicited from the superintendents during the

interviews. Superintendent A began with a response focused on morality. He said,

> Prayer in every aspect. Thatøs political, thatøs academic, thatøs personnel,
> thatøs safety, thatøs food service, thatøs transportation, thatøs every situation.
> As they come each day or looking at the whole picture. When you have a
> prayerful board and administrative team and faculty, give credit where credit
> is due, youøre going to be okay. The district is going to be okay and thatøs
> the bottom line without being cheesy. If you donøt have that I donøt think
> any of itøs going to work. If you have that, all of itøs going to work.

He then discussed being a good listener and arriving at team decisions. He also conveyed

a disdain for political correctness. He wants to keep politics out of the district, but

realizes he has to work with political entities. As he stated,

> My, you know, politics has a life of its own and thatøs my opinion,
> politics is what is and has a life of its own depending on the individuals
> playing a game. I donøt get involved with politics, I donøt think politics
> has a place in school business because school business is all about
> peopleí .we have a mayor, city council, they are very supportive of the
> school, we are very supportive of our community. We have churches,
> we have civic groups, we have a fire department, and we have a police
> department.

He later added,

> The board of education, as individual board members they have no
> power. When that board comes together they have power as a board
> of education. So, whoever the mayor is or whoever is the police chief,
> or fire chief, or head of the rotary club, community betterment group
> or organization, we are going to do our best to work with each one
> of these individuals as we would somebody calling up today and
> wanting to use the facility. They are all treated the same way.
> They are all supported the same way. So, I've had to tell individuals
> that thought they had authority and a lot of money in the bank that,
> no we can't use that. No, your kids are counted absent when they
> are not here. No is not a fun thing to say, but basically as far as
> politics, it has a lot to do with the school and it has nothing to do
> with the school. It's all about relationships, who you're serving.

Superintendent B was more accepting of politics, and explained the need to be aware of

the families used to yielding power. He emphasized doing the right thing for kids and

letting that speak for itself. He also bases decisions on policy and procedures, which has

minimized any possible fallout. As far as political skills, he countered,

> Well communication is one thing. You have to be able to communicate.
> I have always felt like if I couldn't convince somebody that I was right,
> and maybe I wasn't, that's not always the case, because some people,
> you know, they don't listen. But you have to be able to communicate,
> to explain to people why you are doing what you're doing and what the
> ramifications are if you don't do what you're doing. Then I would say
> the second thing is your core beliefs have to be concrete. There are
> certain things you can not violate and you have to let people know there
> are things you are not going to violate. Because there are certain standards
> you're not going to walk away from and I think those two things are
> crucial because once people find out, or you tell them what you think
> and you are not changing just cause they don't like it. I think those two
> skills will overcome a lot of other adversity you might get in otherwise.

Former Superintendent B was brief but forceful with his response. He stated, "The

obstacles that exist often relate to hidden agendas or dealing with two-faced people.

Some individuals having too much influence in a community, or patrons not grasping

what I am trying to accomplish, can be rather frustrating." This very much sounds like a

breakdown of communication existed, at best. A feeling of almost superiority was sensed here. He goes on to say that the political skills needed include being fully aware of the õlocal situationö and the õí power players, agendas, past conflicts, expectations from various groups, and the clientele. He also specifically pointed out communication skills as a necessity, as well as interpersonal skills. He also indicated, õYou have to be able to fit in with the community and listen to other points-of-view. Donøt get caught up in making changes without understanding ramifications, especially when others donøt understand where you are coming from.ö He conveyed regret for not realizing how deep grudges can go, even when based on very few decisions. He showed learning when he said, õI now know to have a closer relationship with the board president, as well as all board members. I know now that informal conversations are as important, if not more important, than formal processes.ö This part of the questioning was a lesson on a situation that resulted in unemployment in this position.

Superintendent C, when asked about political considerations, cited people running for board positions based on petty reasons, such as going after a coach. He stated that a former superintendent can be a problem, especially when they give advice to staff members. Many variables affect the superintendent position, as he stated. õEverything from test scores to staff conflicts to parental noise to poor school board decisions can all mess with this position.ö Superintendent C included communication skills as necessary for political aptitude, as well as being approachable and respected. After briefly talking about a specific problem with complaints about a volleyball coach, he went on to say, õA superintendent has to know what he or she is getting into. In other words, what is the existing political circumstances, what has created this backdrop? Being proactive and

solving problems before they become problems is a worthwhile skill, too.ö He also

chatted about the rumor mill and being aware of topics being circulated. The last part of

this section of the interview ended with him saying,

> Like it or not, politics at all levels is part of the position. You have to
> adapt to it at each level, if you want to accomplish anything worthwhile.
> At the federal level, it is more about compliance, whether that is
> compliance in federal programs, special education, or financial
> obligations. At the state level, it is more about state testing and
> accountability. At the local level, it is making sure I have a positive
> relationship with the seven individuals on the school board, who are
> my bosses and determine my employment fate each January. Politics
> can be used to make changes by building relationships that lead to
> partnerships, utilizing those partnerships to convey shared goals, and
> taking action steps to benefit students or the district.

Former Superintendent C had a much dissimilar response than the others. She

started, when asked about political obstacles, or considerations, by saying, õObstacles?

People worried about topics that are relatively unimportant, in regard to being related to

kids and their needs.ö She then admitted that finding common ground was necessary, as

well as ascertaining who the influential people are in a district. As she stated, õFind out

who is pulling the strings and be direct, honest, and proactive in dealing with them.ö In

relation to political skills, she also answered in a different direction. She responded,

> õIøm sure, when you interview other people, you hear words like
> communication, and organization. Nope. It comes down more to
> adaptability, mindfulness, and culpability. You are in control over
> what you value and what motivates your actions. Should these
> actions and leadership behaviors correspond with the wishes and
> common goals of the school board? Oh yeah. Thatøs why it is
> important to get a good read on each member so you can make it
> through rough waters unscathed. Be extremely transparent and open
> while still maintaining diplomacy. It can be a crazy balance.ö

She also conversed about a current conflict with a board member who does not like her

high school principal. She furthered the discussion by suggesting that it is wise to know

all sides of any situation, including an awareness of the small groups that can create more complicated circumstances. Local politics is a reality, and avoidance rarely works. As she put it, õSometimes there has to be bartering for what both sides want and how it can work out best for students. Other times, the goals are unrealistic or not with good intentions, which is when things break down, conflicts occur, and grudges are created.ö This leads to a situation that is unsustainable.

Superintendent D did not have much to say about politics. When asked about political considerations and obstacles, he simply indicated, õMost of the time it is simply on a day-to-day basis and it comes from board members.ö After being asked about necessary political skills, he replied, õPlain and simple, you must be a people person and be able to communicate with all types of people.ö He goes on to state, after being pressed about local politics, õI knew what I was getting into. If youøre around the school business very long prior to becoming an administrator, you should be aware. If not, you are naïve or have had your head in the sand.ö He went on to assert that politics are unavoidable, and then ended, õThe challenges and successes of the district or your own employment depends on your ability to communicate.ö

Superintendent Interviews- Nonrenewal Reasons and Expected Skills

Next, superintendents were asked about the reasons a superintendent would not be re-employed with a district and what skills and attributes are necessary to decrease the chance of this occurring. Superintendent A once again, cited morality, as well as understood roles and responsibilities. He said,

> Contract not being renewed should be just for a couple two or three things. One is immorality, immoral decisions. Another would be, there should be set expectations, established expectations on what the Superintendentøs role and responsibility is. Superintendent should know

what their role is and their responsibility is. That should be established
and agreed upon in the board policy and the superintendent should know
what they're going to be evaluated on.

He then talked about the board's roles and responsibilities, which the superintendent has

to help establish and teach to the board members. Having good people on the board helps,

as he added, and being respectful and honest. When asked about other skills needed in the

superintendent position, he was able to combine communication skills, work ethic, and

morality. He responded,

> Be willing to listen and be a good listener. Uh, exhibit a strong work
> ethic, exhibit genuine care for everybody, that's students, that's faculty,
> that's patrons. Stand for what's right even when you are going to take it
> on the chin and you've got to stand alone. At the top of that should have
> been prayerful, and basically those skills if you are using them you are
> going to get better at them, and if you're not it's going to show pretty
> quick. All of that takes care of itself.

Superintendent B does not feel being non-renewed, as a superintendent, is always

avoidable. It depends on the real reasons it happened. He feels, if you follow policy and

do what you think is best for students, you should not have any issues. However, some

circumstances are inevitable. As he replied,

> There was a time though when different people were in charge of the
> board that if you didn't tow the line and do, you know, do as they
> personally requested and they had enough authority in the board to get
> four votes to have your contract not renewed. In that case your choice
> would be, violate your principles and keep your job, or stick to your
> principles and go elsewhere and I don't see that as being avoidable.
> If you've got your principles and you're going to stick to them then
> that's simply not avoidable."

Going on to necessary skills, Superintendent B, once again, cited communication to all

stakeholders, especially board members and the community. He also mentioned integrity

because, once you are dishonest with someone, you have lost respect. He then went on to stress a need to be aware of the financial situation of the district and have a õgood business senseö and character. He specified, õIf you possess a good character, youøre honest and forthright and you communicate and youøre good with numbers, youøre going to be able to be here long enough to overcome any shortcomings that you may have.ö

Former Superintendent B agreed that termination of employment, as a school superintendent, is not always avoidable. He responded,

> There are several reasons, or paths, that can lead to non-renewal. Not staying on top of budgetary concerns is one. You canøt survive if a balanced budget is not maintained. Making enemies based on personality conflicts or a difference of opinion can be the beginning of the end, too. Board turnover can be a factor, as well. When you make changes, even when necessary, you will make enemies. After so long, this could mean more issues with oneøs relationship with the school board, which, in turn, affects evaluations. I personally donøt think it is always avoidable, so you have to see the writing on the wall, letting you know it is time to move on.

In relation to skills and attributes, he thought, as did the other participants, that communication skills were to be included. Other characteristics were included. He specified,

> Awareness of surroundings, communication skills, which means speaking and listening, Integrity, honesty, and respecting all ideas. People skills are a must, since you deal with a wide variety of personalities. You have to almost assimilate to the school and community culture to help increase the chances for success. Any attributes associated with making personal connections are worthy to this discussion.

Superintendent C, after identifying cultural awareness in the context of both the community and the school district, pointed out the need to work with the bookkeeper and, as he put it, õ keep the financial situation of the school district as viable as humanly

possible.ö He also felt that non-renewal could be unavoidable in some situations. He also

pointed out the importance of interpersonal skills. As he responded,

> Thinking you are all that is another problem. You never want to be
> perceived as overly confident or cocky to board members or community
> members. Not considering other ideas and opinions is also a good way
> to get sideways with the school board. Being in a situation that ends in
> non-renewal can happen to anyone, no matter what you do. I hear of this
> happening every year to someone. It is a difficult career choice because
> of the aspects of the job that are too unpredictable.

The skills, or characteristics, Superintendent C highlighted were empathy, courage,

strong work ethic, organized, and common sense. He ended this questioning by replying,

õDonøt take things personally; itøs business.ö

Former Superintendent C also feels that employment termination is sometimes

unavoidable, but was realistic and optimistic at the same time. She retorted,

> Not anticipating enemies made or earned. Not understanding how
> alliances are formed and utilized. No, sometimes a situation is
> unavoidable and is likely meant to happen. New opportunities are often
> disguised as tragedies. Deal with it and move on, especially if you feel
> you did everything you could to make it work. You have to have
> adaptive skills and the ability to be realistic.

Skills needed in the position include an understanding that a superintendent is dealing

with seven personalities who are õí prone to the same drama and nonsense as any group

of people working together.ö Continual communication can prevent some negativity and

help one get to a quicker solution. She ended by stating, õTry to fit in without being a

fake about it.ö

Superintendent D feels most non-renewals are a result of poor interpersonal skills.

He insisted, õMost people are competent or at least can do the work necessary to be a

superintendent. I think most contract non-renewals that I am aware of stem from

personality conflicts, not getting along with others, or not being kind or compassionate.ö

When asked about necessary skills, he responded with,

> There are several that come to mind. Communication.
> Organization. Flexibility. Thick skin. Kind. Loyal. Common
> sense. I would emphasize that one. Responsible. Honest. Last
> would be hard working or able to get the job done.

Communication Questions

There were questions asked during the individual interviews that dealt with

communication. Some answers were repetitive and redundant due to the fact that the

participants tended to bring up communication skills and related concepts before any

questions about communication proceeded. All superintendents seemed to agree that part

of communicating with board members is acquiring factual, relevant information to

convey to board members, in order for school boards to make informed decisions.

Superintendent A talked about communicating expectations and going in the same

direction. He also mentioned approachability, meeting the board president ahead of

meetings, sending board packets, and being direct and honest. He also talked extensively

about arriving at decisions through collaboration. As he stated, õVery, very, very seldom

am I or anybody else going to have to make a recommendation that we are a lone wolf or

odd man out.ö He also elaborated more on roles and responsibilities.

Superintendent B was thorough in his response concerning ways to communicate,

and he introduced ideas related to interpersonal skills. He answered,

> I send out e-mails when something comes up, to all the board
> members so that they all know if something may or may not affect
> them. I have an e-mail group. If itøs really something that I think
> somebodyøs going to be on the phone with them or on their case
> then I call every one of them and give them the same information
> at the same time. Um, for the board president, we talk a couple times
> a month about things that might need to be on the board agenda

and why. So that we can make sure that the agenda is appropriate
when we get to the board. I try to give them the information that
they ask for in their board packet. You know, first it was way too
much, then it was way too little. So I'm trying to communicate with
them through that but I also see them at games, I see them everywhere
I go and I don't talk business unless they want to bring up business.
I just talk to them to get to know them on a personal basis because
I think you need to have a personal relationship with your board as
well as a business relationship.

He followed up with a discussion on making sure the school board acts as one body, not

seven individuals. This means communicating with the board as such.

Former Superintendent B believes in establishing two-way communication and

constantly monitoring it for problems. As he stated, õWhile I feel that my door is always

open to anyone, including board members, a superintendent can't assume anything.ö

Board updates, texting, face-to-face conversations, and phone calls are all available.

Being transparent is imperative, as is allowing feedback and collaboration.

Superintendent C first made the point that communication should be frequent and

direct. He conveyed, õI make it a point to greet them anytime I see them at school or

community events or activities.ö He also stated that the board members do not hesitate to

contact him with questions. Making the members informed through the gathering of

information was noted; policies need to be discussed sometimes, too. Former

Superintendent C added that multiple communication processes can be utilized, including

texting. She detailed, õI make phone calls, send text messages, send board packets, and

approach members at ballgames. I expect them to be blunt and open with me. If they

don't like a policy or practice I enforce or follow, they need to change it. I have thick

skin; just tell me your thoughts.ö This correlated to ideas presented by Superintendent B.

She went on to explain that her current board members expect to be informed before any

decisions, solutions, or changes are acted upon. Board members want to know all

possible options. Superintendent D, on the other hand, believes in only communicating in

person. Unless it is an emergency situation, he prefers not to deal with e-mails or texts.

He also rarely sends out mailings. As far as decisions, he gets input from principals and

other staff members sometimes.

Additional Advice

The interviews with superintendents ended with each participant being asked if

they had anything to add, in relation to helping a superintendent being successful working

with school board members. Superintendent A talked, once again, about knowing roles

and responsibilities, as well as carrying out policies. Making sure board members are

involved with decisions was also repeated. He ended the interview by saying,

> Being available and approachable just like you know, a good teacher
> is going to be approachable to the kids and the parents. A good building
> principal is going to be approachable to the kids, the parents, the faculty,
> the teachers, the bus drivers, patrons, same for the Superintendent and it's
> going to be the same for board members. That's with each other. I mean,
> I need to be all those things to every board member and hopefully they
> will extend those courtesies to me.

Superintendent B gave some heartfelt advice about realizing that everyone can contribute

and be important to the school district. As he responded,

> Um, I don't know that it's a competency but I feel like a Superintendent
> needs to recognize the value of all members of the board as well as the
> community, because they all have value. Whether one makes $200,000
> a year or one makes $20,000 a year, it's not their value. So, I think
> recognizing the value of human beings on your board and that they have
> something positive they can add if you just figure out how to get to it,
> I think that's key because board members can be kind of like kids.
> As soon as they see that they're making a positive difference and that
> they are being listened to and their ideas matter you begin to have a
> really good board member at that point. You know, because it doesn't
> matter what their background is, how old they are or anything else.

They all need to be able to bring the same thing to the table which is, they're here to do a policy, set budget, and take care of every one of those kids that walk through the door every day. So I think that's key, let them know everything that they bring to the table has value. That may be negative value, but it's got value so they need to be careful about what they bring. But I also know that everybody has positive value they can bring if you just find a way to help them feel their nitch.

Former Superintendent B let me know that there is a difference between how we view ourselves and how others view us. Be aware of this. Also, as he put it,

Always be supportive and helpful to all staff members, especially the teaching staff. They have a great deal of influence. Be a leader, not a politician. Make decisions based on what's best for kids and stand by your decisions. At the same time, be able to explain your decisions to patrons. It comes down to sustained effective communication.

He ended the interview by reviewing competencies he feels are vital. He insisted, "Once again, honesty, bluntness, humility, and a caring attitude. Don't let your ego be your undoing." Superintendent C responded with a reinforcement to get to know the community and district "as quickly as possible." He also thought it important to have people on whom you can rely for feedback about the community. He even mentioned the need to have fun and not take everything too seriously. Build relationships and work with everyone. He concluded by offering this advice, "Avoid sarcasm or blanket statements when conversing with staff members. Show diplomacy even in the most difficult of scenarios. Don't come off as all-knowing or uncompromising to others."

Former Superintendent C was also receptive to cultural awareness. As she asserted, "Try to understand where people are coming from, even if you don't agree with them. Make shared decisions based on getting input from all affected. Get to know board members and staff members on a somewhat personal level. Converse with them

whenever possible and always give them your time.ö This interview came to a close with statements about having fun and doing what is right. She stated, õEnjoy the rollercoaster ride, even though it can get bumpy at times. Seriously, just focus on doing whatøs best for kids and the district. Things will work out.ö Superintendent D agreed with the argument that one must be aware of the community. In fact, that was the reason given for trying to usually hire locally. As he put it, õYou need a deep understanding of the local economic conditions, family histories, values, and such. It makes a whole lot of difference. I think it helps if they view you as ÷one of themøö He ended by telling the researcher that a superintendent should not have a huge self-image. Also, do not give demands and show integrity.

Missing Concepts

Something that is not mentioned in this interview data was any allusion to any specific legislative initiative, past or present. Nothing about No Child Left Behind; nothing about Common Core or loss of local control; nothing about accountability from test scores or decisions affected by lower student achievement. Besides a few references to keeping informed on legislative concerns or trying to get grants at the state or federal levels, there was nothing related to recent and future pressures that affect superintendent-school board relationships. Generally, based on this research and observations, school board members concern themselves more with finances, compliance, leadership, facility improvements, and communicating in a positive way to all stakeholders, keeping in mind cultural subtleties and community norms, than with these state and national crisis items. They also see the superintendent as more of a CEO, finance director, personnel manager,

and civic leader all rolled into one. The building principals are more inclined to be questioned about test scores or student performance.

Another concept absent is the dissatisfaction theory. While School Board B obviously has had political upheaval that started with board turnover and later evolved into a situation in which the superintendent was forced to resign, this is still inadequate. This is due to no quantifiable evidence that shows there was change included, in relation to some indicator, such as student performance, teacher turnover, or something else not examined in this study. All other conceptual assumptions and related features previously introduced, were uncovered in the interview data: power and influence, alliance building/negotiation, and decision-making.

Summary

Chapter Four first conveyed the process of narrowing down a list of school districts in order to select participants for this study, consisting of school board members and superintendents. The interview data were collected from four school board focus groups and six superintendents. The interview questions, primarily developed from the eight research questions, covered background information/service on the school board, expected skills and characteristics of a superintendent, communication between the superintendent and various groups, reasons to hire or not hire a superintendent, decision-making, and other open topics. There was also mention of expected conceptual ideas missing from the interview data.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings and analysis generated from the interview data, there is much to discuss, including what areas and learning experiences should be emphasized in graduate degree programs preparing educators to be future administrators, particularly the role of superintendent. Current superintendents can be given more tools to utilize in their quest for school improvement and continual prescriptions for student success, which will not occur if there is tension between the superintendent and school board members. This chapter will also analyze the research questions answered in this study. The discussion in this chapter will also include the four themes resulting from the analysis of the interview data. They will be shared and explained, including differences in superintendent interview data compared to the school board focus group interview data. The discussion of themes will be followed by implications for practicing superintendents, limitations and assumptions of the study, recommendations for further study, and conclusions. First we will review the conceptual framework from Chapter One, which focused on alliance-building and negotiation, power within the relationship, and turnover related to the dissatisfaction theory.

Conceptual Framework

The current political atmosphere, including heightened accountability and required improvement in student achievement, can certainly add pressure to the relationship between school boards and superintendents (Moody, 2011). It is essential that school board members and superintendents build productive, transparent relationships. This is why the term transparency appeared several times in the interview

data. These relationships involve the political features of alliance building, negotiation, conflict, and power (Bush, 2003). A fundamental part of this study was a consideration of the insights of school board members and superintendents as to what behaviors and skills a school leader should exemplify. Another important consideration is perception. In other words, the difference between personal perceptions and those held by individual board members, as the readings highlighted. The research inquiry also highlighted perceptions of both superintendents and board members and how the perceptions can change.

Alliance Building and Negotiation

In order to form strong alliances, a superintendent must come to an understanding that school boards represent interest groups that have an agenda from which they operate. Bush (2003) related the features of political models to the educational setting, which included group activity and the interests of various groups. While there were other power groups named in this research data; including teachers, support staff, influential families, churches, business leaders, elders, booster clubs, and civic groups; a school board certainly represents the key interest group in this study. A prevailing theme in this study, interpersonal relations, is essential in building alliances, as is cultural awareness. This includes the school culture, especially the teaching staff. Time and time again, interview participants mentioned getting along with the teachers or the staff members. Members from every focus group stated this as important; this was the case when discussing hiring decisions, expected skills, decision-making, and communication. Member 1a talked about staff relations, Member 3c pointed out getting along with teachers and staff several times. Member 1b made it clear that staff members not trusting the superintendent was a reason to non-renew a person. Member 2b focused on rapport with the staff, and every member

of School Board C cited not getting along with staff as a reason to not hire a school leader. Both former superintendents also agreed with this concept, in no small part from their previous experiences. Superintendent A also talked a great deal about relationships with teachers and other school groups. While other groups (church, families, businesses, support staff, community members, etc.) connect with the school board in a multitude of ways, the teaching staff has a special association.

The superintendent and school board members, in the course of doing business, reinforce and demonstrate other political characteristics/considerations, including conflict, goals, negotiation, and influence (2003). These political assumptions also relate to themes discussed in the existing literature concerning superintendent and school board relationships. Some of these prevailing themes are accountability of school boards (Berry & Howell, 2008), superintendent turnover (Hoyle, 2007), and decision making (Crum & Hellman, 2009). All of these ideas were addressed in the interview data, at least to a certain extent. In the area of board accountability, Superintendent A emphasized roles and responsibilities of both superintendents and school board members. Of course, he felt the superintendent was responsible for keeping this straight through communication. There was some discussion about decision-making, which related to communication, budget cuts, getting complete information, following policies, and community involvement.

Furthermore, several themes are interchangeable with political features emphasized by Bolman and Deal (2008), such as the varying beliefs, conflict, awareness, interpersonal relationships, and negotiation. These concepts, as expected, emerged during the study of what actually defines a situation in which a superintendent stays at one

district for a significant number of years to accomplish meaningful change, according to the perceptions of both school board members and superintendents who work with those board members. In other words, the focus groups conveyed factors that are prevalent in an effective superintendent-school board relationship, as well as expected leadership styles or skills.

Another concept focused on and encountered in this inquiry was negotiation. If a negotiator takes a value creator approach, that means he or she will attempt, through cooperation and creativity, to find a win-win solution (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This sets up an environment of empowerment at all levels of an organization, producing more power and influence that can be used for future negotiations (Kanter, 2005). As one can see, the study involved political concepts and themes that are interconnected and can be stretched into even more specific ideas and recommendations. To be an effective negotiator, a superintendent, based on interview data, must have a knowledge of the community and school district. He or she also should continuously practice using communication skills, which means both listening and conveying information; this also relates to interpersonal skills. These skills, as pointed out many times in the interviews, include being approachable, available, trustworthy, liked, respected, honest, direct, transparent, confident, and accurate, all rolled into one.

Power

The power that a school leader has accumulated has several related features: influence, authority, decision-making, communication, and empowerment. These all relate to the political suppositions and the need to foster a relationship with the school board that is transparent and marked with continual communication. This was reinforced

many times. In fact, transparency was named by both former superintendents, as well as three focus group members. Trustworthiness was also mentioned several times. In relation to communication, this concept was discussed thoroughly before any communication questions were even asked. Communication was related to necessary skills, decision-making, local politics, mapping the political environment, and management.

The concept of power is central to all political models and can be discussed in terms of deciding outcomes and influencing behavior (Bush, 2003). From the distinction between authority and influence comes an explanation of power sources in school districts. The sources of power in school districts are positional power, authority of expertise, personal power, control of rewards, coercive power, and control of resources. Both long term superintendents obviously possess personal power and positional power. Charisma, as mentioned in one superintendent interview, is helpful and related to interpersonal skills. Also, superintendents are in a position to effect change and modify behaviors through decisions (2003). Of course, as Jefferies (2009) conveyed, influencing school board actions is quite different than an attempt to influence peers or subordinates. This type of influence involves becoming more acquainted with the board through communication, concentrated preparation, respectful interactions, the establishment of alliances, and the maintenance of emotions (2009).

Turnover and the Dissatisfaction Theory

While it is true that past researchers have investigated turnover, significant conclusions are problematic to find. Grissom and Andersen (2012) asserted that there really is not agreement on superintendent turnover being a real problem. Most research

has not delved in deep enough to prove any significant conclusions or to eliminate other rationalizations for why superintendents leave the position. The dissatisfaction theory that started with Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) and continued with Alsbury (2008) and Grissom and Andersen (2012) related quite simply to superintendent turnover. According to the theory, stakeholders become dissatisfied with the school district to the point in which board members are voted out of office and replaced with new members who, subsequently, replace the superintendent. The theory states that board turnover will result in superintendent turnover. While both School Board B and C experienced some board turnover that corresponded with superintendents being replaced, the theory does not hold up due to no evidence of changing conditions of the school district. School Board B members concluded that communication is better, and productivity of the school board is better. That cannot be substantiated through this research. Furthermore, each situation was different. School Board B experienced turnover before replacing several superintendents, making it close to a situation representative of the theory. School Board C, on the other hand, experienced board turnover after superintendent turnover. A law suit after a superintendent resignation, poor communication, and uncontrolled rumors resulted in twelve people running for three open school board positions. Two new members joined the board after the election, which was approximately three years ago.

The dissatisfaction theory only creates one prediction about superintendent turnover, which is that departing board members will mean a higher rate of superintendents leaving their positions (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). Two key anomalies exist with this claim. Superintendents leave for a variety of reasons that do not allow application of this theory, especially when there is continuity in the school board (2012).

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Furthermore, the predicted turnover, once again, is inadequate if it does not result in a quantifiable change, such as increased student achievement. As Alsbury (2008) concluded, õIndeed, the dissatisfaction theory becomes irrelevant to the practitioner if it succeeds in demonstrating that the public has the ability to change their school board and superintendent, but that new leadership does not result in any change in their school districtö (p.206). While it adds to the discussion, more data are needed for this to apply.

Discussion

Setting up the Interviews

Generating a list of possible participants based on the criteria set up was rather simple. I looked at salary listings for superintendents over the last ten years to create two distinct lists. One list of districts who have had one superintendent employed for ten or more years was made, followed by a list of districts with multiple superintendents over a ten year period. Specifically, this was to be districts with four or more superintendents employed in that ten year period. From the two lists, the researcher looked at districts in the south central region of Missouri, for geographic convenience. The next step was to make contacts, which was done through e-mail messages and phone calls.

As superintendents and school boards were contacted, it became obvious that this process was going to be more complicated than expected. First, getting both superintendents and school board members to agree to being interviewed was the first challenge. I expected some resistance to participate from school boards and superintendents at districts with more of a history of superintendent turnover. That really turned out to not be the case. Whether for specific reasons or by chance, there was much more resistance from districts contacted that have long tenured superintendents. With

respect to districts with long term superintendents, I contacted seven district superintendents before I was able to set up interviews with two focus groups and their superintendents. Superintendents at these districts were protective of their boards and careful to be more in control of the process of getting permission, scheduling, and the conditions. For the two focus groups from districts with long tenured superintendents, the superintendents were present during the interview. Furthermore, one of those focus groups seemed to expect all six members present to participate, even though every correspondence sent stated three participants. By conducting the interview during the open meeting, the interview is part of their public record in the board minutes. Furthermore, it did make the interview more difficult to facilitate. Despite more participants, more data were not collected in this interview compared with the other three focus group interviews.

In respect to the two groups from districts with higher turnover, the conditions were much different. In both cases, three board members were interviewed while the superintendent waited in another room. When contacting districts with more turnover, the first superintendent/school board declined. After that, the next two contacts were successful. In fact, on one occasion, the board president of one district contacted me before the superintendent did, and he was anxious to be interviewed. It was obvious that these two school board focus groups, despite the turnover history, were more than willing to take part in the research. These groups were more forthcoming with information during the interview. It should be noted, through informal conversations, that School Board C experienced school board member turnover, with two new members. This occurred after the situation with the fired superintendent and lawsuit. School Board B, on the other

hand, first experienced school board turnover, with three new members. There was then added pressure to communicate better with the community, along with the expectation of the superintendent doing the same. This situation illustrates the Dissatisfaction theory (Alsbury, 2008; Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970) conveyed in Chapter One and in the literature review. Obviously, the changing conditions locally, along with the unproductive conflict that resulted in a superintendentøs employment being terminated, certainly changed the decision-making process at this district. Decisions had to become more collaborative-based, relate more to student outcomes and district concerns, and increase awareness of interest groups that require more communication and negotiation. If one were to ask these members if necessary positive change has resulted from the process gone through due to turnover in both the school board and superintendent position, they would all agree that it has occurred.

The next challenge was the logistics of securing dates and times that would work for all participants. This was true with the focus groups due to the fact that school board members have varied schedules, occupations, and activities. Three of the four focus group interviews took place the same evening as a regularly scheduled board meeting. Two took place before the meeting; one took place after the conclusion of the board meeting. The superintendent interviews were rather simple to schedule, and the researcher worked around the participantsø schedules. All six individual interviews took place during the school day, generally in the afternoon. While the reactions and career situations were quite mixed, all superintendents who agreed to be interviewed were willing to answer questions fully and were cooperative. Most answers were fairly concise and useful to the research.

Discussion of Research Questions

The interview data were effective at answering the research questions formulated and covered via the interview questions. The first four questions were answered during the focus group interviews with board members. The next four questions were answered during the individual interviews with the six superintendents. All eight questions highlighted factors related to superintendent tenure, as well as skills associated with decision-making and communication.

Research Question One- Expected Essential Skills

In order to be successful and maintain a good relationship with school board members, there were several attributes conveyed in the focus group interviews. Board members strongly believed that the skills and characteristics should include financial expertise, interpersonal qualities, trustworthiness, strong moral character, honesty, cultural awareness, solid work ethic, recent experience in the classroom as a teacher, ability to get along with others, and ability to promote healthy working relationships in an environment that encourages positive change.

The focus group members strongly agreed that a knowledge of the community and becoming a part of that community are important considerations. That included the ideas of work ethic and showing sincere effort. Of course, due to several comments alluding to fitting in and being part of the community, cultural awareness was a theme derived from the coding process; and this awareness applies to the makeup of the board and how they interact. One part of the interview with School Board A was illustrative of this, when the board member used what Bolman and Deal (2008) would call organizational specialized language. Member 6a replied, õItøs important that we keep the

cat in the right direction.ö This was referred to again later. Also, the term õslush fundö was used when members were talking with the superintendent during the meeting about budgeting. Only a superintendent with a great deal of experience working with these individuals can have the frank conversations blended with humor while making important decisions for the district. This brings in discussions indicative of the symbolic frame Bolman and Deal (2008) point to, as well as the cultural model of educational leadership in school districts (Bush, 2003). One cultural leadership model was introduced first by Superintendent A, who talked at length about moral behaviors and virtues. He also used the term õprayer-fulö several times. This model was followed up and repeated by Member 2c and 3c with several responses indicating an expectation of high morals and virtuous behavior. Bush wrote, õThe leadership model most closely linked to organizational culture is that of moral leadership. This model assumes that the critical focus of leadership ought to be on the values, beliefs, and ethics of leaders themselvesö (2003, p.170). The expected knowledge of the cultural and political landscape, which Hoyle (2007) warned school leaders about, was evident throughout the interviews. This author also conveyed that a few decisions and lack of tact can easily result in termination of employment. He also emphasized interpersonal skills, one of the other themes derived from the interview data (2007).

Interpersonal skills was a theme of the interview data results because there were several remarks indicating that the ability to get along with individuals and various groups is an expectation and is strongly linked to cultural awareness. To relate with people and exhibit interpersonal skills, one must be acquainted with those people and groups, which includes understanding their views, their goals, and their diverse ideas and

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concerns that will lead to conflict (Yukl, 2002). Furthermore, having a skill for striking up conversations and engaging people will make the superintendent position much easier to handle. Crum and Hellman (2009) advised school leaders that informal communication is significant and must not be taken for granted. When School Board B members expressed an expectation that the superintendent have classroom experience, it was also indirectly related to interpersonal skills because public education is a people business, and those with teaching experience know what teachers go through every day. They have the experience dealing with a variety of personalities and conflicts. Hoyle (2007) made it clear that the presence of interpersonal relationship skills will increase the probability of effective negotiation, which includes a superintendent being hired.

This discussion about cultural awareness is also reminiscent of the ideas expressed by Farmer (2009) concerning the uniqueness of rural district politics, which included the contention that coalitions are more powerful than expected. This was reinforced by the interview data. School Board B members have dealt with strong coalitions made up of family members, as well as dealing with internal strife in the coalition known as the school board. While other participants mentioned governmental groups, booster club groups, and retired administrators and board members, the one coalition that obviously has a lot of influence with board members is the teachers and community members, which includes parents. That is the main focus for board members, in relation to the groups that the superintendent is expected to have good relations with, no matter what conflicts and problems may occur. The focus group members also seemed to reach a consensus that the superintendent and board members should be a collective team that works together in a productive fashion (Moody, 2011). It has taken a while for

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School Board B to get there, for that district has had everything described by Fossey (2011) when explaining the turmoil in San Antonio. School Board B had a divided board and a superintendent under pressure who was forced to resign. The only item missing was media attention. Small districts tend to keep these things as quiet as possible. These situations are not usually considered big news outside the communities they occur in.

However, all coalitions should be taken seriously (Fossey, 2011). Therefore, in small rural districts, the coalitions to worry the most about are school board, teachers, support staff, and community. Any other community groups, as Farmer (2009) relayed, will likely include board members. These groups can change over time, including subgroups, due to conflicts and structural changes (Bush, 2003). Teachers, as a coalition, should also be taken seriously. Micropolitical strategies can and will take place if teachers begin to become disgruntled (Blasé, 1991). A superintendent must engage staff members as a respected coalition or the climate will suffer (Crum & Hellman, 2009). Once again, a school leader has to identify and consider all power players and know the types of influencers, which include a communityøs or an organizationøs set of shared beliefs, or culture (Mintzberg, 2005).

Research Question Two- School Board Decision Making

In relation to decision-making skills, some of the same ones are considered important, including honesty and trustworthiness in making a well-informed recommendation that includes options and possible effects. The superintendent must build rapport with board members, and this can be accomplished by establishing trust through transparency (Banicki & Pacha, 2011). Limiting surprises and even cutting down on closed session items can help do that. Chain-of-command was one idea brought up in

the context of reactions to a decision and how to address concerns. Getting input from the community was also a key aspect of this area of questioning, with one group taking it further by stating input should be solicited from more experienced community members. Consulting legal assistance was also discussed somewhat, as well as a superintendent making sure there is a complete release of evidence before a school board decision is made. In other words, make sure all options are considered. Banicki and Pacha (2011) also believed in the team concept when making decisions, as did Pardini and Lewis (2003), in relation to sustained collaboration. Furthermore, consider what the needs of students are when making that determination. As the board president of School Board B asserted, there are more important groups than the school board, including the teaching staff, support staff, students, parents, etc. School Board C members were in favor of always having respectful dialogue that includes a plan of action. This requires continual communication.

Research Question Three- Expected Communication

The communication skills expected by board members, according to the interview data, are listening skills, making expectation clear, patience, and ability to know when to utilize special board meetings. Superintendents have to be able to communicate at all levels of government; local, state, and federal; and with all stakeholders. Board members expect true, accurate information. As Richard and Kruse (2008) explained, communication with board members and other interest groups must be well-timed, regular, and meticulous. Establishing this effective communication is a constant challenge, especially with new board members. The perception of board members should be that communication is genuine and forthright, and that the superintendent is credible

and honest (2008). Showing humility is a wise behavior, too. Once again, it is also extremely helpful to include the community in communication, especially when trying to regain trust, as was the case with School Board B and C. Any actions or changes should be conveyed throughout the community in order to help cut down on rumors. Superintendents should also be conscience about sending text messages or e-mail messages to periodically inform board members. Of course, phone calls are expected if there is a serious issue, or the superintendent want to warn members of possible conflicts or surprises. As long as communication is honest and straight forward, any situation can be worked through. As Bolman and Deal (2008) surmised, communication in any organization should be vigorous, be present in various settings, be continual, and include expectations. After all, as Board D members pointed out, surprises are what board members want to avoid, and every member should feel comfortable interacting with other members and the superintendent. Simply put, successful superintendents are clear and direct communicators. They are also good listeners that show an open mind and communicate with sound intentions and transparency.

Research Question Four- Hiring Factors

All the factors described above, in the areas of proven characteristics, communication skills, and decision-making skills, make up a large part of what board members consider when making the decision to re-hire or non-renew a superintendent. To review, the themes extrapolated from the interview data organize the hiring factors quite well. Board members expect candidates to possess interpersonal skills, which also means being able to relate to others and get along with others that you work with or work for. Board members certainly want school leaders to have communication skills. These

were highlighted and discussed in responses to questions not primarily concerned with communication. All participants agreed that it is important to effectively convey information, listen intently to any interest groups, and establish a perception of professionalism and leadership. Non-verbal cues, paying attention to surroundings to find communication opportunities, and formulating plans for real action will gain the school leader more trust and respect. Cultural awareness is another factor that relates to interpersonal skills in the realization that one must know who the communication should be directed to and for what reasons. The superintendent, according to the data, also needs to be well acquainted with the financial situation of the district, as well as any issues related to compliance, legislation, discipline, facilities, etc.

Research Question Five- Essential Skills Conveyed by Superintendents

When looking at what superintendents think about these considerations, it was clear that there was agreement with some of the assertions coming from board members. Moffett (2011) showed through his research that the perceptions of superintendents and board members are generally in agreement, in respect to competencies and skills needed. Superintendents pointed to being moral and exhibiting values, having a work ethic, being a good listener, knowing roles and responsibilities, keeping finances in order, being aware of surroundings, having interpersonal skills, enjoying what you do, and establishing a positive image. This was not too far away from where the board members were coming from in this study. There was also agreement that knowledge of the school and community cultures and an ability to relate to various people were essential, as well as being proactive about every situation and when working with every individual. You

have to get to know people on a personal level and understand where they are coming from, even if you do not agree with them on an issue or decision.

Research Question Six- Superintendent Decision Making Process

In the area of decision-making, the superintendents confirmed that their position requires researching information to ensure board members have a complete picture before making decisions or formal approvals. Superintendent A also maintained that a team decision is always better because you get more information, alternate ideas are considered, and you are not stuck by yourself if something does not work out. He also stated that a superintendent should not take it personally if a recommendation is not followed. That is part of the responsibility. Of course, this wise advice corresponds with Kanter (2005) in the idea that sharing power will expand a person's power. Maybe this is what Superintendent D was thinking when talking about letting board members win battles. Regardless, sharing influence and decision-making duties will empower staff members and board members, which increases personal power (French & Raven, 2005). All superintendents seemed to agree that decisions should be made based on the students' needs, the district's needs, and the community's needs.

Research Question Seven- Communication Skills Conveyed by Superintendents

Communication skills were also discussed by the superintendents. The first participant focused on communicating expectations when asked about this topic. He wants all communication to be straight forward and direct. Superintendent B discussed communication in the context of persuasion. He believes that, if he cannot convince someone or a group of people to think the way he does, perhaps he is wrong. The ability to admit when one is wrong or to be willing to change a position based on new

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information is a feature of good listening skills. Communication often occurs more with the board president, which was expressed by several superintendents. Kopelowitz (2009) conveyed the idea that the board president usually has more influence and power than other members. This person should work with the superintendent to define roles, share responsibility, and maintain rapport (2009). This can only help the overall relationship with all board members. Former Superintendent B expressed a need to make sure communication is going two ways and is productive, and the other former superintendent was also direct on this response, saying that being honest and open is the way to go. Superintendent D only deals with face-to-face communication or phone calls. He feels that there are no problems with interpretation this way. Most would agree that having multiple ways to contact board members is not a bad thing and increases communication and makes the superintendent more available.

Research Question Eight- Staying Employed

The superintendents had a wide variety of responses when asked about what factors create a situation in which a superintendent is not re-hired. Both superintendents who left these districts agreed that sometimes non-renewal is unavoidable, as did Superintendent B. Former Superintendent C remarked about not always being able to figure out who your enemies are until it's too late. A superintendent must understand when and why alliances form, but sometimes it is time to seek employment elsewhere. New opportunities are waiting sometimes. She also felt that it helps to get to know people personally and try to consider their view, even if you don't agree. Former Superintendent B agreed that maintaining a positive relationship with board members is a must, but it can be counteracted by other staff members. He also pointed out the significance of

perception and how that can be a school leader's undoing. They all agreed that sustained communication should exist.

Conceptual Themes

Through the course of extrapolating meaning statements into categorical groups, four major thematic divisions developed. The four themes are interpersonal relationships, communication skills, cultural awareness, and management accountability. These themes were extracted from useful data acquired from direct interviews conducted with focus group participants made up of current school board members and individual participants made up of current and former superintendents. These themes and categories begin to assist researchers in better understanding the relationship between the superintendent and his or her seven bosses, the school board. Understanding and considering these four themes and related features only improves relations and increases chances for continued employment as a school superintendent. These themes are also interconnected and dependent upon each other, meaning only focusing on one would be incomplete and not as thorough of an examination into this all-important relationship. Interpersonal skills are not complete without communication abilities, and relating to people is more difficult without an awareness of culture, both in a school and a community. Management accountability can be broken down into three categories. The first, fiscal management, was mentioned the most often. The others are personnel management and legislative management, which were also discussed and named by participants.

Interpersonal Relationships

This theme may be the most important concerning superintendent-school board relations due to the fact that a person who lacks in this area can be in a situation in which

perceptions are negative, and this may simply be a misinterpretation of a person's personality or even their real intentions. There were many responses that covered or inquired about interpersonal relations with staff members, including teachers. There were also several references to sustaining good relations with community members. When asked what factors to consider when hiring a superintendent, Member 1a replied, "Does he or she get along with other staff members?" This same thinking was repeated many times. With phrases such as "people skills" and quotes referring to team decision-making, it was obvious interpersonal skills are highly involved in this inquiry. In order to be viewed as a leader and show an ability to get others to follow you, there must be interpersonal skills present. As Member 2d stated, "It's a fine balance between being the boss and getting things done while still earning respect from the staff members. Is this a person others want to follow?" This brings about the conceptual ideas of coalition building and negotiation with various interest groups, including staff members. The idea of varying beliefs when negotiating was also introduced, especially when focus group members talked about moving forward even when there are disagreements on a decision.

There were also many references to being a person who is available and easy to approach. That also related to interpersonal skills. Honesty, trust, respect, rapport, core beliefs, faith, conflict resolution, and problem-solving all involve interpersonal relationships. The former superintendents, when discussing negative circumstances surrounding a superintendent's relationship with board members, mentioned the need to establish good relations and be proactive about personalities one must deal with, as did their future replacements. Superintendent C summed this up simply when he stated, "At the local level, it is making sure I have a positive relationship with the seven individuals

on the school board, who are my bosses and determine my employment fate each January.ö This underpins the concept of power and influence and understanding who has it and how to utilize it. Respectful interactions and empowering behaviors are all features of interpersonal relations and, thus influencers. Superintendent D simply replied, ðPlain and simple, you must be a people person and be able to communicate with all types of people.ö That same superintendent also gave advice about not having a huge ego or giving ultimatums to staff members, which are counter-productive to the idea of having good interpersonal skills for this position. Of course, this cannot be accomplished without close attention to the next theme: communication skills.

Communication Skills

The second theme, communication skills, was the most prevalent topic mentioned consistently in every interview conducted. Some of this was due to several questions specifically asking about communication skills. However, communication skills were brought up by almost every participant before any questions were asked concerning the subject. Only Former Superintendent C failed to mention communication skills until specifically asked about it in Question 11. Member 6a mentioned communication when answering the question about recent conflicts, as was the case with Member 5a when asked about political skills. Superintendent A brought up listening skills early in the interview and mentioned communication several more times when elaborating on the roles and responsibilities of both superintendents and school board members. School Board B members felt communication was an extremely important factor when considering the hiring of a superintendent. Member 2b stated, ðNumber one I look for the ability to communicate.ö This thinking was reiterated several times, especially by School

Board C members. When discussing reasons to non-renew, a lack of listening skills was cited by Member 3b. Being attentive to the board members would seem to be a given, but this appeared to be a major factor with the fate of both former superintendents, given the emphasis in both focus group interviews and individual interviews. It is no surprise that communication would be injected into any conversation concerning superintendent-school board relationships, especially when this topic relates to several pieces of the conceptual framework of this study, including power and influence, negotiating conflict, and making decisions, including the decision to hire a superintendent.

Of course, once the interview questions turned to the topic of communication, the subject increased dramatically. Group A talked about monthly meetings, informal conversations, updates to policies and budgets, personnel matters, and even legal matters when expanding on the idea of necessary communication. Related skills espoused included speaking and listening, making expectations clear, and patience. Of course, they contended that respect is a needed component to make communication work. Transparency and truthfulness was a repeated contention as well. Superintendent A, when responding to communication questions, said that there a comfort level has to be established with board members, which takes time and effort. He segued this into a discussion about making team decisions so a superintendent is not stuck being blamed for a decision that does not work out. Focus Group B was adamant that communication include 100% accurate information. Only giving partial information can be just as damaging as not being accurate, and this group, as well as Group A, seemed to agree that the superintendent and board president communicate more often, especially before a school board meeting. Therefore, that relationship has to be characterized by continual

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communication that is honest, respectful, and proactive. Timely correspondence must exist. The member of School Board B also expressed a need for the superintendent to get out of the office sometimes to communicate with business leaders and legislators. They mentioned getting with legislators to find grants a couple of times. Former Superintendent B gave advice about never assuming that communication is two-way or getting through to the intended targets. As he stated, õWhile I feel that my door is always open to anyone, including board members, a superintendent canøt assume anything. You have to make sure communication goes two ways. Weekly board updates, text messages, informal conversations at events and activities, and transparent dialogue at formal meetings are vital.ö Of course, communicating with stakeholders can be much easier if you have a grasp on the power players, the makeup of the community, and the traditions expressed by those you intend to lead as a superintendent. This brings us to the next theme to discuss, cultural awareness. This pertains to both the community and school, in relation to cultural considerations and strategies for assimilating to the surroundings one works in and around.

Cultural Awareness

Cultural Awareness, the third theme produced through this analysis, was especially prevalent among the focus group interviews and the interviews with the two former superintendents, who learned the hard way how important it is to consider the cultural environment and conditions you are working under as a school leader. Whether it is identifying influential groups, becoming acquainted with previous conflicts and related situations, establishing school board expectations, or familiarizing yourself with the beliefs of those you work with, not considering a school culture and a community culture

when making decisions and communicating goals would be a major mistake on the part of any superintendent. Superintendent A pointed out the various groups that the school district must sustain good relations with, which includes the local chamber of commerce, local city council, church groups, community betterment groups, rotary club, police department, or any other community group. Two focus groups mentioned the rumor mill in their district, which also relates to the culture of the district. As Member 2b surmised, having good rapport with all patrons includes understanding their points-of-view and listening to them, which is more easily done by getting to know their differences, which are sometimes cultural.

Being more connected to the community is another cultural idea expressed, and this sometimes relates to the values that mean a great deal to the people in a community. One example of this is work ethic, which was mentioned a few times directly and indirectly in the interviews. Superintendent A first mentioned work ethic when asked about required skills and attributes. Similarly, Member C illustrated this concept by stating, õI think that the superintendent, at least in small districts, has to be able to wear numerous hats. On short notice they may have to drive a bus, they may have to take over basketball practice for an afternoon, might have to help the custodian out in some way. Itøs just in a small school district they have to be able to and willing to able and willing to do a lot of different I mean Iøve known of our superintendent stepping in when we couldnøt find a sub for a class.ö Superintendent C also mentioned the phrase work ethic, which was followed up with acknowledgment of the necessary step of getting to know the public you are serving. This could not have been reinforced any more than Focus Group Member 3c. The word õcommunityö is present in his responses for thirteen

different questions out of the eighteen questions asked in that particular interview. While

some questions solicited responses that would make sense to have this term, which

overwhelmingly shows what is important to an average school board, which is a sense of

community and the cultural underpinnings that come with that. School Board B members

talked at great length about culture and having a knowledge of the community. Member

2b, on reasons to not re-hire, stated are õlack of rapport with the staffí .ö and õí good

rapport with the communityí .ö as valid reasons for a superintendent to find different

employment.

Management Accountability

All this makes one thing perfectly clear: it is hard to fully determine what defines

accountability for a school superintendent. Along with the above themes and factors, a

school leader has several specific accountability areas to contend with on a day-to-day

basis. The finances or budget or financial concerns or budgetary items or whatever you

want to call the fiscal responsibility that was introduced many times. Every focus group

of board members called it by name. As Member 3a simply put, õThe budget needs to be

balanced. A long term vision.ö Contrary to that, Superintendent A confessed that finance

and legal issues are the two areas he dislikes most, especially since he must monitor these

areas so closely. In fact, he believes that should be a major portion of a superintendentøs

evaluation. Roles and responsibilities of both superintendent and board members are

mentioned several times in his responses. His board members are confident in his ability

to do that, according to the members interviewed. Both Members 1b and 2b indicate the

importance of financial management in answers concerning the decision to hire someone.

Superintendent B conveyed the fact that he dealt with auditor issues from the beginning

of his tenure in the position. It took time to sort through those problems, but he said they are now in a better situation. Finances are mentioned in every interview conducted in this research.

Other Considerations

There were a few other ideas and reflections to consider from the interview data. First, it should be noted that both districts selected for having one superintendent for ten or more years consisted of all male board members. While there is not enough data to make a definite conclusion, this was an interesting point, especially considering that both superintendents attended the school districts they are employed with currently. They know the board members very well, something that is difficult to replicate as a beginning superintendent considered an õoutsiderö, so to speak. These focus groups were also much more guarded in their responses and appeared to not want to be participating. These groups conversed a great deal more before and after the interviews took place. The two focus groups from school boards with a history of high turnover were much more forthcoming to the point of being almost too wordy. The members were more than willing to converse before, during, and after the interviews. This almost seemed to be contradictory to what was expected. I believe it is because these groups have gone through a lot, in relation to re-establishing rapport with the community and increasing communication. They are more communicative because of this transformation, and they also appear to be happy with their current superintendents. The more quiet groups may exhibit a cultural consideration. Of course, people react differently to being interviewed, especially when being audio-taped. Despite this, useful information was gained from all participants in this study.

Implications for Practice

Regardless of what various sources say, the superintendent and school board must work together. Any insights into preserving a productive relationship is worthwhile. For practitioners in public education, this research has many implications. If an emphasis on interpersonal relationships had been placed in graduate programs in the past, this could have resulted in better outcomes for many former superintendents. Moreover, superintendents who learned these lessons in a much more difficult way could have been spared the complications associated with losing a position and having to find another opening and another place to live. While some things probably happen for a good reason, including future opportunities, many negative situations could have been avoided. This research implies that a successful superintendent must possess certain key skills strongly associated with interpersonal relations, community awareness, and related communication skills. Most superintendents are cognizant to the fact that the school budget is an area that has to be handled correctly if a superintendent plans to stay in a position. However, many individuals do not realize the importance of being adept at informal conversations, listening attentively, reading nonverbal clues, following through on requests, resolving conflicts, and a list of other interpersonal skills. People also need to understand the school and community cultures. Of course, effective communication skills assist a superintendent in both understanding culture and modeling and strengthening interpersonal skills.

The problem studied here was concerned with superintendents being unprepared for dealing with school board politics and changing board dynamics, which can result in poor relations. The first recommendation to express to the reader reiterates what Fusarelli

(2006) was clear about, which is that a candidate for superintendent had better know exactly what he or she is getting into, in regard to a new school district, school board, staff, and community. Do your research, which includes checking old board minutes, looking at the turnover history of that district, and interviewing people. If there has been turnover recently, investigate why it allegedly happened and to whom. Thoroughly investigate all sides. During the interview, ask questions similar to some of the interview questions, including expectations and expected skills. Also research the community where the district is located, including chamber of commerce meetings, city council meetings, police reports, teacher turnover, etc. Talk with people who have worked there and who have attended the district, if possible.

Once a position is accepted, it is time to get to know more than just names. Research the history of that community, start frequenting places you know the rumor mill thrives in, which might be cafes, coffee shops, convenience stores, restaurants, community centers, or anywhere you can start conversations and get a feel for various perceptions and points-of-view. Start analyzing the political situation, as well as the circumstances present in the community. This might include socioeconomic information, entertainment or lack thereof, and the dynamics of surrounding communities and other conference schools. Of course, you do this while still realizing that people can be very unpredictable. Part of this continual research includes the need for the superintendent to understand the relationships between individual board members. How friendly are they to one another? Are there past or current conflicts to be aware of? How good are the interpersonal relationships between these people? Do they communicate well together? By understanding the individual board members and how they interact with each other

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will assist the superintendent in being proactive about possible disagreements, as well as how each person reacts to various situations and to each other.

As a school superintendent, one should look at the overall situation continually, knowing fully that there is always a real possibility that you may be leaving again in a few years. That could make certain personal decisions, including investments and activities, a little different to approach. Keep in mind that all the legislative and financial pressures and accountability programs described in Chapter One are not generally the real reasons a superintendent loses a position. These pressures are utilized as excuses by school board members to rid themselves of someone they simply do not like or have serious issues with. That is another reason to constantly monitor the relationship with board members and try to improve the relations, if possible.

A superintendent should learn board dynamics and become acquainted with board members personally in order to foster good relations and gain respect and trust with all members. At the same time, being cognizant of these relations will also give you clues to when a relationship with a school board is getting bad and may be going to a downward spiral. This is usually evident when conversations become less positive, when decisions and actions are being questioned more often and with more intensity, and when board decisions are starting to be more split. A few splits here and there are fine, but a pattern of 4-3 or 3-4 votes should be a red flag. Also, a decrease in informal conversations could be an indicator of impending issues. While it is certainly correct to attempt to fix a bad situation, there comes a time when it is not getting better, and it is time to make a decision about leaving. This can be tricky, knowing when the time has come. Superintendents will definitely find out when they have waited too long.

Along with analyzing the school board and community, a superintendent should understand staff dynamics, too. Become aware of past conflicts and problems. Try to get anonymous feedback from staff members, asking them for district strengths, weaknesses, and areas to improve. One can get valuable opinions and considerations from this exercise. When dealing with employees, superintendents should communicate expectations, provide needed resources, give recognition and praise frequently, show a caring attitude, ask for opinions, make the goals and mission of the district clear to everyone, discuss progress towards those goals, and provide professional development opportunities. Most importantly, practice interpersonal exchanges constantly. Interpersonal skills include speaking and listening effectively, having a positive appearance, making eye contact, smiling on occasion, starting informal conversations about topics they find interesting, shaking hands, and celebrating birthdays and other events. It also means creating informal opportunities to communicate, such as inviting someone to lunch.

The next piece of advice is to be knowledgeable in this position and proactive about possible conflicts or problems. School budgets and finances were mentioned many times, especially by board members. As Superintendent A repeated several times, know your roles and responsibilities. Superintendents should spend more time on their areas of weakness and strive to improve. Attend workshops, contact colleagues, and get help when necessary. Membership in associations, such as MSBA or MASA, is smart because these organizations provide many services that can help in many areas, whether it is finance issues, compliance issues, facility issues, or whatever. Superintendents have to practice communication skills and make time for people.

The last recommendation relates to graduate programs at colleges and universities that prepare future school leaders. If future leaders are to be effectively prepared for the superintendent position, these programs must spend more time on competencies that are both worthwhile and helpful in getting and keeping a position. Students in these programs should know what to look for, in relation to school board dynamics, staff dynamics, and community considerations. Also, specific skills need to be identified and developed. This means more role-playing activities related to situations in which a problem or situation must be solved or a solution has to be found. Awareness of possible symptoms of poor relations should be examined and learned. The areas of interpersonal relations, communication skills, cultural awareness, and superintendent accountability would be a good start for designing programs that assist future leaders in understanding the pitfalls of the position and ways to be proactive about a multitude of issues and circumstances. Activities, such as attending several different board meetings, interviewing current superintendents and board members, or completing case studies aimed at predicting outcomes, can be helpful, as well. Peterson, Fusarelli, and Kowalski (2008) questioned the effectiveness of graduate programs that are supposed to prepare educators to be superintendents. These programs should be analyzed for effectiveness, and course objectives should be reviewed and modified as needed. Also, along with preparation programs, there should be a review of the leadership standards that are currently taught to examine their effectiveness (Hoyle, 2007).

Limitations

There were several limitations with this research study, as described earlier. Data were collected from only 15 school board members in four focus groups and six

superintendents in individual interviews. The districts selected were from only one region

of Missouri, the south central. These were also all small, rural districts. While the

findings provided a portrayal of the relationships in these four districts, it is uncertain that

similar findings would exist at other school districts in Missouri or around the country.

Therefore, the information gathered may not be representative of other districts. The

focus on political suppositions was a limitation once data were gathered because some

themes generated have little to nothing to do with political dynamics. Cultural

considerations were actually as prevalent. Furthermore, the conceptual framework was

too in depth and expanded to be satisfied by this study. Participants øperceptions,

experiences, backgrounds, preconceived thoughts, and recent conflicts certainly affected

responses. These variables did produce results and significant statements with

corresponding themes that made a great deal of sense based on researcher experiences,

especially in the areas of interpersonal relations and cultural awareness.

Another possible limitation was the data collection method. Interviewing

participants may not be the best method for this type of study, especially when audio-

taping did create some uneasiness, especially among school board members. A survey

and/or questionnaire could have gathered more data while keeping people relaxed.

Perhaps focusing on just superintendents and board presidents would have also gleaned

more information with less hesitation and fear. This also relates to the researcherøs recent

experience with a former school board, resulting in a resignation. This could have

affected the school districts I contacted and likely affected some responses, in relation to

refusals to participate. If any participant is acquainted with the situation, this could affect

the responses to interview questions to a certain degree. With superintendents, they are

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more aware of superintendent turnover, so their responses would not be affected as significantly.

Recommendations for Further Study

This research showed a need for further research studies to be conducted to continue an examination of superintendent-school board relationships. Superintendents are often unprepared or unaware of the school board dynamics that can cause turnover or at least poor relations, making it much more difficult to make needed changes. Simply put, poor relations between superintendents and board members is a barrier to improvement. Most administrators and other central office personnel, despite Leon (2010) depicting them as villains, have good intentions and want what is best for the students. More insight into establishing good relations and increasing a superintendent's chances of sustaining employment is always needed and of value to all stakeholders. As stated previously, more in depth investigations into situations that end poorly for superintendents can only assist future leaders who plan to take on this position. After identifying school boards and superintendents that meet the criteria of sustained employment or a history of turnover, studies can commence that give opportunities for participants to report specific attributes, complications, and mistakes made that further explain each situation.

Surveys and questionnaires can be effective at gathering an extensive amount of information in a less stressful way. Identifying districts with a history of continued superintendent tenure or a history of superintendent turnover is rather simple. From there a great deal of information can be gathered through online surveys or questionnaires delivered either in person or by electronic means. Responses from superintendents in

various situations can be gathered, as well as responses from school board presidents, school board vice presidents, school board members, former school board members, former superintendents, business leaders, community members, various school staff member groups, parents, and even students. Comparisons can then be made.

Completing a case study investigation over one specific occurrence or one phenomenon could produce more findings, too. Focusing on school board presidents or vice presidents could be another approach, or superintendent-teacher relations can be examined to see if there is a connection to relationships with board members. Superintendents from these districts could be further investigated, in relation to demographics, educational level, personality traits, etc. Controversial events or indirect causes of conflict at school districts or within school boards could be studied, as well. Any way to gather additional information about the many variables involved with these relationships should be considered. A case study could also investigate how various relationships are formed, including between school board members; this could help superintendents understand more how to overcome potential relationship issues.

Along with gathering more data through surveys, questionnaires, and case studies, future research studies could take a deeper look into school board members. Along with school board turnover, one could look at the attributes and skills board members should possess in order to make the relationship with the superintendent more productive. This study was more focused on superintendent behaviors, which is the norm when looking at previous studies and sources that examine the superintendent-school board relationship. More should be done to look at school board member behaviors, which often get largely ignored from a research perspective. After all, when a district has a high rate of

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superintendent turnover, individual board members could be the common denominator that should be more closely studied to fully account for all variables that affect the relationship. An entire study could be done just looking at the board minutes at districts, comparing the minutes at districts with high turnover compared to board minutes at districts with a long-tenured superintendent. This could glean more useful data, including the decision-making process of that particular district. More research should also be completed, in relation to school board turnover and how this can change the overall dynamics of a school board, including how board members relate to one another. Any continuation of research studies can only increase the understanding of how changing conditions can affect the relationship between the superintendent and the school board. More findings result in more recommendations for fostering good rapport with members.

Conclusions

In an attempt to increase an understanding about superintendent-school board relationships, this phenomenological research study was utilized to explore the political dynamics embedded within these important relationships, as well as any other consideration produced from the interview data. This inquiry increased overall understanding of what skills and characteristics are needed by school superintendents to effectively work with school board members, and how those skills relate to the conceptual framework conceived from the political perspective of organizational analysis, as well as the related literature. The researcher explored the factors considered by board members when voting on whether or not to retain the superintendent. Another objective of the study was to explore the perceptions of school board members, in relation to expected skills and characteristics of the school superintendent, as well as the

political skills necessary to ensure longevity. This analysis produced interview responses, which resulted in four major themes: interpersonal relations, communication skills, cultural awareness, and superintendent accountability. Many related attributes and features develop from a look at interpersonal relations, including a superintendent's ability to be respected and followed. Communication skills, which directly relate to the other three themes, was a prevailing theme agreed upon by all participants, whether board members or superintendents. It includes listening and keeping board members informed. Superintendent accountability sends a realistic message that, no matter what happens in a school district, good or bad, the superintendent will receive too much credit or too much blame. He is the go to person for public relations, staff relations, and board relations. Even if bad results occur because of poor board member or staff member decisions, the blame is more than likely to fall on one person, the superintendent. That is the reason he or she must be directly involved with all school functions, programs, policies, conflicts, problems, successes, and outcomes. That is all part of local politics. Whether one views politics positively, negatively, or indifferently, politics and the managing of political situations is an inevitable responsibility of any school superintendent.

There was also an analysis of perceptions of current and former superintendents regarding skills and characteristics they believe are important to effective superintendent-school board relationships. The superintendents were asked what factors create a non-renewal situation. The results reinforced many ideas produced from the focus group interviews. This study helped gain insights on these relationships in terms of decision-making, communication, and other important skills and factors. The research should have helped fill a gap in the existing studies concerning superintendent-school board relations.

These interviews also contributed to leadership and organizational theory. They provided important feedback to current and future leaders about necessary competencies for the superintendent position. After all, the purpose of any study is to synthesize theory with practice for useful results. As Bush (2003) simply stated, ŏThis combination of theory and practice enables the leader to acquire the overview required for strategic managementö (p. 196). In order to plan strategies for improvement, theory can inform practice; therefore, we are still seeking a more complete overview.

Summary

The interview data answered all research questions, which focused on the perceptions of superintendent and school board members, in relation to factors for rehiring the position, skills and attributes expected, decision-making skills, and communication skills. Specifics were included for all questions explored. Furthermore, four themes were derived from the data: interpersonal skills, cultural awareness, communication skills, and management accountability. From these themes, advice can be conveyed about enhancing each area and realizing the connection between each theme. Moreover, recommendations for graduate programs preparing future leaders can be formulated from the data. Most importantly, current and future school leaders can focus on skills, conceptual themes, and expected characteristics and knowledge derived from this study to assist in improving and stressing behaviors that will increase the likelihood of a long tenure in one district. One can also look for signs that the relationship is not going well.

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Identification of Researcher: This research is being conducted by Rick Stark, a graduate student with the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri-Columbia. E-mail address is starkr@sville.k12.mo.us, and cell number is (816) 547-6966.

Purpose: The purpose of this research study is to explore the political dynamics embedded within superintendent-school board relations and superintendent tenure at school districts in the state of Missouri.

Request for Participation: Your voluntary participation in the group or individual interviews is appreciated. By participating in the interview, we assume that you give informed consent and understand the conditions, risks, and safeguards as described in this form.

1. Your participation is voluntary. You can exit from the interview at any time.

2. There is no more than minimal risk to individuals who participate than in everyday life, and efforts will be made to keep the identities of respondents confidential. Names will never be conveyed in this study. No school district will be identified.

3. Questions about the study, including any risk to you, may be addressed to the researcher at the phone number or e-mail address listed above. You may also contact the graduate supervisor, Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, at (816) 405-9306. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at (573) 882-3181.

4. You must be at least 18 years of age and hold the title of school board member, school superintendent, or former superintendent in this study.

Description of Research Method: This study involves Focus Group Interviews and Individual Interviews. The interview discussions will focus on school board-superintendent relations. This inquiry will attempt to increase understanding of what skills and characteristics are needed by school superintendents to effectively work with school board members.

Procedures: These interviews will provide information to be analyzed for significant statements and general themes to be conveyed in the findings. All confidential information associated with project participants will be kept locked up until the research study is complete and destroyed once all doctoral requirements have been met. No comments made will be attributed to anyone specific, and pseudonyms will be utilized. All interviews will be audio recorded, unless you prefer to have the interview conducted without recording. If you agree to have the interview recorded, you have the right to request the recorder be stopped at any time. The interview can be ended at any time.

Appendix B

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about your background, including your profession and education?

2. How many years have each of you served on the school board?

3. What factors did you consider when making the decision to run for school board election the first time? Why did you consider those factors? Have your reasons for being on the school board changed? Why?

4. What surprises or unexpected responsibilities have you encountered as a board member? How have you handled these surprises?

5. What factors should you consider when voting on hiring a superintendent? Why?

6. What reasons would justify making the decision to not re-hire the superintendent?

7. Has this board non-renewed a superintendent or encouraged a superintendent to resign in the last ten years? What were the circumstances?

8. What skills and characteristics must a superintendent possess? Why are these important? Are there other leadership attributes that should be obvious?

9. During financially challenging times the last several years, what budget cuts have been made at this district? How was the community involved in this process, in relation to prioritizing what possible cuts to consider? What was the reaction from various stakeholders? Why do you think this happened?

10. Are there any specific groups or individuals in this district or community, besides the school board, that possess a significant amount of influence in this school district? What made you identify these groups or individuals? How is this influence utilized?

11. Are you aware of any recent school district conflicts or problems that relate to local politics? Please explain.

12. Are there any skills or characteristics the superintendent should possess that relate to politics? What should the superintendent be doing at the local, state, and federal levels of educational politics?

13. What is the school board's process for making decisions? Please identify a recent board decision and the process followed to arrive at a decision.

14. How does the district get input from parents, students, staff members, and community members about various issues, problems, and decisions? What role should the superintendent perform in this endeavor?

15. Are various stakeholders, including parents and community members, included in any decisions made in this district? Why or why not?

16. What ways do you expect a superintendent to communicate with the school board? How often should this occur?

17. How do you communicate your expectations to the superintendent?

18. What reasons should a superintendent communicate to board members?

19. Are there any actions the superintendent should take to enhance communication with board members, parents, students, staff members, business leaders, community members, state legislators, Congressmen, etc.?

20. What communication skills do you expect from the superintendent?

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Superintendents

1. Can you tell me background information, including your education and interests?

2. Why did you decide to become a superintendent? Is it what you expected? Why or why not?

3. What challenges do you deal with (or have dealt with) in the superintendent position?

4. What political obstacles, or considerations, do you feel affect your position?

5. Are there specific political skills that a superintendent must possess or acquire in order to be successful? Are you aware of any recent school district conflicts or problems that relate to local politics? Please explain.

6. Is there anything about local politics that you wish you were aware of before accepting your first superintendent position?

7. Do you see politics as a means to an end or something to avoid or adapt to? Can you elaborate? How can politics be utilized to make needed changes?

8. What has been your personal experience working with school board members?

9. Are there any specific groups or individuals in this district, or your previous district, who yield a significant amount of influence/power in this district? What made you identify those groups or individuals? How is that influence utilized?

10. What reasons do you believe would result in a superintendent not having a contract renewed? Is it always avoidable? Why or why not?

11. What skills and characteristics must a superintendent possess? Why are these important? Are there personal and professional attributes that should be acquired?

12. What ways do you communicate with school board members? How do you expect board members to communicate expectations to you?

13. What is your process for making a decision or making a recommendation for a board decision? Please identify a recent board decision and the process followed to arrive at a decision, including your recommendation.

14. What have you learned, in your personal experiences, about superintendent-school board relationships?

15. Is there anything you would like to add, in relation to how superintendents can increase their chances for sustained employment in one school district? How does one ensure longevity in this position, or at least increase the probability?

16. Are there other competencies a superintendent should possess in order to sustain a good relationship with school board members?

Appendix D

Participation Request Letters

Jane Doe, Superintendent
XYZ School District
1234 Insert Street
Anywhere, Missouri 64000

June 1, 2016

Dear Dr. Doe:

I∅m writing this letter to request participation in a research study that I will be conducting that will investigate the relationship between superintendents and their respective school boards. The overall purpose of this research study is to explore the political dynamics embedded within superintendent-school board relations and superintendent longevity at school districts in the state of Missouri. This inquiry will attempt to increase understanding of what skills and characteristics are needed by school superintendents to effectively work with school board members, and how those skills relate to the political view of organizational analysis and political leadership theory.

This study will include individual interviews with superintendents, as well as focus group interviews. Four total school districts in the Southwest or South Central areas of Missouri will be asked to participate in this study. Those districts will be chosen based on one of two criteria. Two districts will represent ones with superintendents who have been in their current positions for ten or more years. Two districts will be chosen based on the hiring of four or more superintendents in a ten year period. For each of the four districts that agree to participate, three board members with the largest number of years on the school board will make up the focus group for each district. The individual interviews will be with current superintendents of the participating districts, as well as superintendents who previously worked for those districts. The interviews will be audio-taped, if allowed; and participants are free to discontinue involvement at any time. I am requesting an interview with you as the superintendent and an interview with the three board members on your school board who have the most experience. An informed consent form has been included with this letter for your review, as well as for board members to review. Copies of this consent form will also be provided prior to the interview. Pseudonyms will be used for participants and school districts in this study. No names of any participants or districts will be included in this study. Furthermore, any hard copy or electronic data collected will be stored in a secure location. Of course, participants will have access to interview transcripts, as well as the finished project, including any findings.

I also included a letter to forward to board members, which asks for their participation and covers the study information. This can be forwarded by hard copy or electronically,

whichever is preferred. I appreciate any assistance in communicating with board members.

Please contact me at your convenience to discuss participation in this research study as part of my graduation requirements for completing my Doctoral program at the University of Missouri-Columbia. My e-mail address is starkr@sville.k12.mo.us, and my cell number is 816-547-6966. My dissertation advisor, Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, can be reached at 816-405-9306 or hutchinson@ucmo.edu. I will follow up with a phone call in the next few days to answer any questions and hopefully set up a day, time, and location that is convenient for everyone. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Rick A. Stark

XYZ School Board Member
1234 Insert Street
Anywhere, Missouri 64000

June 3, 2016

Dear XYZ School Board Member:

You are being asked to participate in a research study being conducted that will attempt to gather information about what skills are needed by superintendents in order to successfully work with school boards. The reason for requesting your participation is because you are one of three board members at your district who has the most experience, in years, on the school board. Three board members from four school districts will make up focus groups that will be interviewed. Along with focus group interviews, current and former superintendents will also be interviewed individually. The interviews will be audio-taped, if allowed; and participants are free to discontinue involvement at any time. Notes will also be taken to help ensure accuracy of data.

The four school districts selected will all be located in Southwest or South Central Missouri, and the districts will meet specific criteria. Two districts employ superintendents who have been in their current positions for ten or more years. Two districts will be chosen based on the hiring of four or more superintendents in a ten year period. An informed consent form has been included with this letter for your review. Copies of this consent form will also be provided prior to the interview. Pseudonyms will be used for participants and school districts in this study. No names of any participants or districts will be included in this study. Furthermore, any hard copy or electronic data collected will be stored in a secure location. Of course, participants will have access to interview transcripts, as well as the finished project, including any findings.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding this research study as part of my graduation requirements for completing my doctoral program. My e-mail address is starkr@sville.k12.mo.us, and my cell number is 816-547-6966. My dissertation advisor, Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, can be reached at 816-405-9306 or hutchinson@ucmo.edu. I will contact your superintendent in the next few days to answer any questions and hopefully set up a day, time, and location that is convenient for everyone. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Rick A. Stark

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VITA

Rick A. Stark was born May 26, 1967 in Kansas City, Kansas. Rick is the son of Glenn and Joyce Stark and brother to Jason Stark and the late Rusty Stark. Rick's family moved to Joplin, MO between Rick's Kindergarten and 1st grade years in school. Rick attended Irving Elementary School, South Junior High School, and Parkwood High School in Joplin, Mo, graduating in 1985. Rick and his wife Karol have one son, Nickolas. They reside in Eunice, MO.

Rick received his Bachelor of Arts Degree and a Bachelor of Science Degree in English Education at Missouri State University in 1993. At Missouri State University in Springfield, MO, Rick received his Master of Science Degree in Educational Leadership (1999). He earned his Specialist in Education Degree in Superintendency from William Woods University in 2005. Rick joined the Doctoral program of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2009, completing all coursework and comprehensive exams in 2011. This program works in cooperation with the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, and is a statewide program.

Rick began his teaching career at Van-Far R-1 School District in Vandalia, MO, where he taught junior high Communication Arts classes for two years. He also taught at McDonald County High School for four years and Archie R-5 for one year. Rick began his administrative career at Hume R-8 School District as a K-12 principal before returning to Archie to take the high school principal position for six years. Rick has worked as a school superintendent for nearly ten years, four years at Ballard R-2 and five years at Jasper R-5. He is currently in his first year at Summersville R-2 School District.

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