

SUPERINTENDENT PREPARATION FOR THE 21st CENTURY

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This study focused on the perceptions of six superintendents regarding the state of the profession as of 2012, and it reports their thoughts and suggestions as to what preparation is needed by superintendents for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The participating superintendents, who were all members of the Western States Benchmarking Consortium, were employed in six school districts in five states. Data were collected through surveys and telephone interviews.

The findings of this study clearly indicate a lack of cohesion between what superintendents learned in their university professional preparation programs and what they practice in their day to day activities. The superintendents involved in this study tended to favor a hybrid approach – rigorous theoretical insight grounded in real world practice. Since superintendents typically spend a good deal of their time solving challenging problems including funding shortfalls, competition from other educational institutions, and the constant scrutiny of the media; their preparation needs to provide opportunities to develop their leadership skills and solve real world problems in an environment where they can take risks. Mentoring and participation in professional consortiums were recommended as key elements for the preparation of the twenty-first century superintendent. This study contributes to the discussion of how to best prepare school leaders for the current and future demands of superintendency.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Schools of education have a long tradition of preparing teachers, principals, and superintendents for the challenges in educating America's children. Education remains the most significant factor in the social, psychological, and financial development of an individual living in the Western world; it often marks the difference between a life fully lived and a life only dreamed of while opportunities slip past.

While the superintendent of 2012 has many job functions, the main role of a superintendent is leadership. He or she functions as the top executive or overseer of a given school district, including a group of schools affiliated with the public education system. A direct line exists between the superintendent and the school board that he or she serves: A superintendent reports to the local school board, typically a group of officials that have been elected to manage and organize the schools in that particular geographical area. The main responsibility of the superintendent is to make certain that the schools under his or her purview adhere to budgetary constraints and continually provide an effective learning environment for all of the children served by the school district. The superintendent implements the procedures and directives under the auspices of his or her school board; he or she also manages the hiring of the teaching staff for the school district and oversees any disciplinary actions that pertain to the student body. The superintendent works in concert with the school board to map out the educational agenda for the schools and as such, the superintendent becomes the point person for goal setting including test score improvements and new education initiatives. Essentially the superintendent functions as the intermediary between the school board

and the staff of each school the board serves. Principals, teachers, parents, and the community groups affiliated with individual schools within the district interact with the superintendent to apply changes and work toward achieving the school board's agenda. Superintendents typically face multiple challenges, including significant responsibility, extensive public interaction, dwindling resources, and the sense of being "on call" at all times. Finally, the superintendent serves the needs of the board as well as the students and community at large.

The role of the superintendent continues to evolve, largely as a result of the No Child Left Behind legislation (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) and the expansion of the superintendent's purview under this act. Another factor that impacts the needs and skill sets demanded of superintendents includes increasing technology. While it is true that as of 2012, an influx of aspiring superintendents are being trained to lead the next generation of students, the eventualities that the superintendent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to prepare for remain somewhat nebulous. In addition, it remains unclear how the education and professional development needs of superintendents will have to evolve to meet the demands of the role in the near future; technology alone is a moving target, as is the availability of funding. Current superintendents have much to say about how their positions have drastically changed, even during their own tenure. They have even more to say about what changes they foresee and what superintendent preparation of the future should look like. The following study seeks to ascertain the necessary knowledge and skills that aspiring superintendents of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will require in order to fulfill the mandate of the profession and provide the best educational opportunities for the children of the United States.



## Background of the Study

The history of educational administration preparation programs is rather brief. Since the 1950s, state education agencies, universities, and professional associations have collaborated in defining the requirements for administrator licensure (Kowalski, 2005). Consequently, these requirements have influenced the number and content of courses taught in universities. Most principal preparation programs have a common core of management-oriented courses, including courses on personnel, law, school-community relations, and finance that are aligned with principal licensure requirements. Unfortunately, superintendent preparation programs are often characterized as extensions of principal preparation programs, even though the nature of work is qualitatively different (Kowalski and Glass, 2002; Harris, 2009). In addition, superintendent courses and programs of study vary greatly with regard to subject content, degree of difficulty, and practicum or internship experiences (Hoyle et al., 2005).

The majority of superintendents who succeed in their profession demonstrate a valuable and confident communication style; their people skills are well honed, as are their critical thinking and leadership abilities. Self-assurance, energy, personal magnetism, and strength of mind and character also play a pivotal role in the successful navigation of superintendency, as it is a public role that demands leadership. Most school superintendents possess, at minimum, a master's degree; increasingly more are earning doctorates and often enter the position after several years of experience as a teacher or educator. Annual salaries of school superintendents remain low considering the amount of work that the position entails, a situation which may explain the high rate

of turnover in this role (Björk, Keedy & Gurley, 2003). According to data compiled as part of Salaries and Wages Paid Professional and Support Personnel in Public Schools 2010-2011, a 2011 national survey conducted by the Educational Research Survey Company, the median salary for a school superintendent during the school year in 2010 and 2011 was \$161,992 (Herbert, 2011, p. 40). These numbers indicate that school superintendents still earn hundreds of thousands of dollars less than their private sector counterparts. According to Dan Domenech, the executive director of the American Association of School Superintendents (AASA), in some cases a salary greater than \$225,000 may appear in school districts with high student populations – typically “enrollment levels of more than 25,000 students...and an outlier for a salary may be \$300,000 for large city school systems, and there aren't too many of those” (Herbert, 2011, p. 40). Domenech admits that “if we're looking at \$300,000 as the high end, that same person in the private sector leading a company of that magnitude would be making well over one million [dollars]” (Herbert, 2011, p. 40).

The *AASA 2010 Decennial Study of the American Superintendent* (Kowalski, 2011) found that 78.7% of the superintendents they surveyed rated their pre-service academic preparation as “good” or “excellent” (Kowalski, 2011). A vast majority of superintendents – 85% – completed an accredited university program designed to prepare superintendents, and 81.1% of these superintendents rated the credibility of their former professors as “good” or “excellent” (Kowalski, 2011). Such statistics reveal a very favorable case to maintain the status quo for superintendent preparation programs. Almost 95% held a valid state license or endorsement for his or her position, whereas a bit less than half of the superintendents surveyed – 45.3% – indicated that

the doctoral degree was the highest degree attained (Kowalski, 2011). The percentage of superintendents earning doctorates increased from 29% in 1971 to 45% in 2000 (Glass et al., 2000; Hoyle et al, 2005). However, the AASA (Kowalski, 2011) indicates that the number of superintendents with doctoral degrees did not change since the earlier study compiled in the year 2000; the acquisition of the doctorate appeared to relate directly to the size of school district that the superintendent led (Kowalski, 2011). Over 70% of those superintendents responsible for school districts that housed more than 3000 students held a doctoral degree (Kowalski, 2011). A higher percentage of superintendents had earned a master's degree plus additional coursework – 24% – in addition to 22% of the respondents who had earned a specialist degree (Kowalski, 2011). The aforementioned data suggests that the education community and superintendents themselves are placing a higher value on advanced graduate degrees.

For the last 30 years, numerous scholars, associations, policy makers, and reformers have suggested changes in how principals and superintendents should be prepared to assume a leadership role in keeping with national educational reforms. Training current educational leaders, making recommendations in establishing professional standards, and creating venues for professional dialogue and research are the focus of many professional associations including, but not limited to, the following: the National Commission on Excellence in Education Administration (NCEEA); the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA); the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP); the National Commission for the Advancement of Educational Leadership Preparation (NCAELP); the American Association of School Administrators (AASA); the Education Leadership Constituent

Council (ELCC); the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE); the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC); and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA).

Among the plethora of recommendations, consensus exists in the following recommendations for superintendent preparation programs (Hoyle et al., 2005):

- Reflect a coherent and integrated curriculum closely linked to emerging work demands
- Expand their focus from simply acquiring management skills to coupling notions of good management with transformational leadership focused on improving student learning
- Share the responsibility among universities and public schools for preparing aspiring school leaders
- Raise entrance requirements and performance standards to ensure that aspiring administrators will exhibit leadership potential, analytical capacities, and knowledge of learning and teaching
- Adopt more stringent quality controls, which would close programs that do not meet those standards of program quality

### Superintendent Standards

As of 2012, two nationally recognized set of standards articulate the expectations surrounding the role of the school superintendent: these include the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium's standards for chief state school officers, created in 1996, and the American Association of School Administrator's professional standards for the superintendency, created in 1993. This section of the paper discusses both standards and the picture of the superintendent painted in each set of standards.

### Discussion of Standards and Licensing

Many opinions exist, particularly in light of No Child Left Behind (2002), about which set of standards has a stronger connection to the role of the contemporary

superintendent. Cuban (1994) noted that neither set of standards specified the direct responsibility of the superintendent in the realm of the academic performance of students – the key marker of the No Child Left Behind legislation – and omitted an accountability standard for the performance of both teaching staff and principals (Cuban, 1994, as cited in Kowalski, 2005).

Hoyle et al. (2005) suggests that the ISLLC standards for system administrators are limited in both their scope and their skill and knowledge base, even though numerous states require the ISLLC exam for licensure of superintendents. The authors also maintain that the AASA standards have a stronger research base, noting that the National Policy Board for Education Administration (2002) agreed that the ISLLC standards are inadequate for system administrators in several areas: school and district governance, policy development, political strategies, strategic visioning and long-range planning, school finance and financial management, district personnel processes and legalities, educational law, and school facilities (Hoyle et al., 2005).

Kowalski (2005) points to the lack of standardization as a key problem in the profession; standards and requirements for superintendents vary widely from state to state, particularly in the area of licensing. This omission leads to a certain lack of cohesion across the profession leaving it vulnerable to interpretation and manipulation, particularly that of a political nature.

In recent years, researchers understand that the limitations of both sets of standards affect the quality of superintendent training and output. What is expected of superintendents in the United States as of 2012 does not mirror the current challenges they face and does not prepare for the enormous level of accountability that comes with

the role. Very few scholars have devoted research to studying school leaders. Indeed, there are perhaps four authors with a long and recognized history in this field: Naftaly Glasman; Thomas Glass; Paul Houston; and Theodore Kowalski. Houston writes in the foreword of Cooper, Fusarelli, Jackson and Poster's (2002) *The Promises and Perils Facing Today's School Superintendent*, that the pressures facing today's superintendent in this educational climate are "shorter terms in office, pressures to raise students' achievement in the face of high-stakes testing, demands for more shared management, rising costs, and the growth of charter schools in many states" (p. vii). Superintendents are not trained in programs to fully understand the scope and implications of such pressures and to predict those that will come.

#### Statement of the Problem

The problem of the study is to determine the current status of experienced superintendents' perceptions of the knowledge and skills needed for aspiring superintendents in the 21st century. To address this problem, experienced superintendents, who are members of the Western States Benchmarking Consortium (WSBC), were surveyed and interviewed to identify skills and knowledge for the future superintendent.

As with many professions in this digital era, superintendents are no different. The speed of communication, accessibility of information, and advancements in technology impact these changes. With increasing accountability measures and demands from the community at-large, the role of the public school superintendent needs to be re-examined to determine what skills aspiring superintendents will need to develop in order to prepare for the demands of the job.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify effective traits and necessary skills that superintendents of public schools will need to have in the 21st century. This case study analyzes the findings of written survey responses and personal interviews of six superintendents from five different states. The superintendents were selected due to their involvement and commitment to the Western States Benchmarking Consortium. The WSBC is a small group of progressive superintendents of school districts that strive to better the educational system for all students through collaboration and identifying the district's best practices. These six superintendents were surveyed and interviewed individually to determine what they consider to be the necessary skills and traits for future superintendents.

## Research Questions

The study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, what current challenges do superintendents face for which they are not adequately prepared?
2. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, on what areas of educational administration should future superintendents concentrate for job preparation?
3. What skills, knowledge, characteristics and attitudes do experienced superintendents identify as most critical for the success of future superintendents?

4. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, what challenges do not currently exist but have a strong possibility of coming to fruition?

#### Significance of the Study

This study adds to the knowledge base regarding development of school superintendents and provides guidance to developers of superintendent preparation programs. This study is unique in that its goal is to gather data that will meet an immediate need while also impacting future programs. The information gathered is timely and relevant. The data can be used as a basis for a formal program through describing in narrative each superintendent's perspective of the challenges that lie ahead.

#### Limitations and Assumptions

The limitations of this study include:

1. In interview studies, it is often not possible to employ random sampling or even a stratified random sampling. The sample in this study was self-selected because participants were determined based on their association with the WSBC. This self-selection allows the possibility of other variables to affect the outcome. Therefore, manipulation of independent variables does not exist and there is lack of power to randomize. When assignment is not random, a loophole for other variables to emerge is possible (Kerlinger, 1986).

2. The amount and depth of information participants are willing to share cannot be controlled, and the participants may limit the information being asked of them (Seidman, 1998). The degree and amount of information they are able to offer about



themselves, as well as their ability to convey and communicate information about their roles and the needs they experience as a superintendent, may be restrained.

Participants may unconsciously omit information in the course of the interview (Seidman, 1998).

3. This study uses a survey, literature review, and personal interview as the sources of information. Data triangulation as described by Denzin (1978) must occur between three different data sources, which can be compared in order that researchers can discover what concepts the data sources have in common. These three data sources, the survey, the structured interview, and literature on the necessary skills, functions, role, and responsibilities of the superintendent are compared.

#### Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study, the following terms would be used operationally with these definitions:

*Certifications* – Licensure or accreditation needed to be an educator in most states.

*No Child Left Behind* – A United States Act of Congress passed in 2002, concerning the education of children in public schools. It was originally proposed by the administration of President George W. Bush immediately after he took office. NCLB supports standards-based education reform, which is based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education. The Act requires states to develop assessments in basic skills to be given to all students in certain grades, if those states are to receive federal funding for schools.

The Act does not assert a national achievement standard; standards are set by each individual state.

*Preparation programs* – Prepares educators, including superintendents, to earn valid certification in the area of education they choose.

*School* – An institution where instruction is given to students pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

*Superintendency* – The office, post, or jurisdiction of a superintendent.

*Superintendent* – Administrators who coordinate and direct the operation of an institution, organization, or department. In education, the term involves the administrators at the district, city, county, or state level who direct and coordinate the activities of school systems in accordance with school board standards.

*Virtual schooling* – School courses taught entirely or primarily taught through online methods.

### Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 justifies the need for research to establish effective superintendent preparation programs. It also described the purpose of this study and the questions it will address. This research will contribute to the body of knowledge concerning how superintendents are being prepared for the challenges in the 21st century.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review, which includes a brief history of the role of the superintendent. Chapter 2 identifies the need for strong school leaders to replace an aging leadership ending their careers; it also delineates several leadership styles that apply to the superintendent of the 21st century.

Chapter 3 includes a restatement of the research question and definitions of specific terms related to the research question. The research method and design are discussed. Chapter 3 contains a detailed overview of the research design. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study from both the written survey responses and the phone interviews. Chapter 5 summarizes and discusses the results and offers suggestions for future studies.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

While a sizeable amount of literature concerning principal preparation programs has accumulated within the past two decades, remarkably little has been written specifically about the preparation of superintendents. Cooper and Fusarelli (2002) suggests that the shortage of solid studies can be blamed on the tendency to lump principal and superintendent preparation programs together, the failure to distinguish the differences between the two positions while designing studies and conducting the research, and a persistent lack of agreement among researchers on what elements of education administration to apply. The evolution of the superintendent position must be examined carefully to fully understand how superintendents become prepared for the position; only after adequate scholarship has been created will it become apparent if such preparation is adequate for the needs of the superintendent of the 21st century. As of 2012, states are considering either expanding and strengthening superintendents' preparations at one extreme, or the eliminating state certification requirements altogether (Kowalski, 2011).

To envision the superintendent of the future, this literature review examines the history of the superintendency, its current state – including how superintendents are currently being prepared – and the future of the superintendency and schools in general, as seen and interpreted by practicing superintendents from across the country. By closely analyzing case studies involving current superintendents, this paper analyzes

preparation necessary for the superintendent of the 21st century and the changes needed to close the gap in this preparation.

### History of the Superintendency

In 1837, a school board in Buffalo, New York, appointed a “school inspector” to ensure the board that the schools were adhering to the requirements of the state (Kowalski, 2006). This school inspector account is often cited as America’s first official school superintendent. By 1890, superintendents were found in all large cities, although small cities and towns did not begin to hire and utilize the position until the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). In its earliest conception, the position of the school superintendent was clerical — superintendents found themselves with little authority and relegated to completing minute, routine tasks (Andrews & Grogan, 2001; Kowalski, 2006). Gradually, superintendents assumed a more instructional focus. Superintendents were usually found to be supervising and visiting schools and compiling annual reports (Andrews & Grogan, 2001). By the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the role had become associated with business management as well as with instruction. The first training programs for superintendents were primarily concerned with the routine, technical, and business aspects of the position (Andrews & Grogan, 2001). Business principles and industry continued to influence the position through the period following the Second World War. During this time, the superintendent was seen as an expert manager whose main responsibility was to ensure the efficient running of schools. However, after the launch of *Sputnik* and the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) decision, the public became more critical of public education, and the superintendent became a target for dissatisfaction (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

Andrews and Grogan (2001) describe a pamphlet published in 1968 by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) that attempted to define the superintendent position. Superintendents were now responsible for planning and evaluation; organization; management of personnel, business, buildings, and auxiliary services; provision of information and advice to the community; and coordination of the entire school system (p. 13). Instead of expectations to serve the board and to carry out its policies, the superintendent of the 1970s and later became a much more controversial figure in public education. He or she was required to be responsive to a variety of interest groups and stakeholders that often have little in common with each other; in some cases, these groups and stakeholders are in direct opposition. The most conspicuous feature of the position, as was reported from this period, was its politically conflicting nature (Cuban, 1976).

Andrews and Grogan (2001) noted that in the 1980s, the era that ushered in educational reform, the pressure increased on superintendents to respond to criticism that came from all quarters. After the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), not only did citizens offer suggestions and advice to educators, but also many mandates required boards and superintendents to respond (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Andrews & Grogan, 2001; Kowalski, 2005; Orr, 2006). Thus, the role expectations of the superintendency expanded once again to include the capacity to generate broad-based community support for whatever reform efforts were developed in order to increase student achievement (Andrews & Grogan, 2001).

The expectations continued to increase for superintendents moving into the 1990s; however, many were accompanied by a loss of positional power. Superintendents found themselves much more at the mercy of policymakers than ever before. During this decade, state and local bureaucracies gained more control and influence over public education (Kowalski, 2005). At the same time, the charter school movement, privatization of public education services and management, and state or mayoral takeovers of school board functions also contributed to the erosion of superintendents' authority and policymaking leadership (Glass, 1997, as cited in Andrews & Grogan, 2001).

Daniel A. Domenech, the Executive Director of the American Association of School Administrators, describes the current work of superintendents as challenging and increasingly difficult. In Domenech's words:

Now, more than ever, the work portfolio of America's school superintendents is increasingly diverse: they are responsible for student progress and achievement while balancing the diversification of the student and staff populations, the explosion of technology and the digital divide, an expanded set of expectations and involvement from the federal level, the media, and board and community relations, all in the context of an increasingly globalized education system. (Kowalski, 2011, n.p., foreword)

#### Role Conceptualizations of the Superintendent

The role of the superintendent has evolved into one requiring an individual to be politically and professionally savvy. Callahan (1966) contends there are four role conceptualizations that emerged during the twentieth century: teacher-scholar, manager, democratic leader, and applied social scientist. Ten years later, Cuban (1976) agreed with Callahan (1966) but defined the roles during the 1960s and 1970s as: teacher-scholar, administrative chief, and a negotiator-statesman. Kowalski (2005)

agreed with both scholars but added the role of communicator for the superintendent moving into the 21st century.

The first role conception of the superintendent was that of a teacher-scholar (Callahan, 1966; Cuban, 1976; Kowalski, 2005; Kowalski, Peterson & Fusarelli, 2009; Kowalski 2011). District superintendents focused on implementing state curriculum and supervising teachers. Many early superintendents were curriculum writers for their districts and scholars of education. Kowalski (2006) noted that after the Civil War, urban school superintendents typically provided standards of best practice in school administration. These “master teachers” provided the model for rural and less-developed school district superintendents to follow (Callahan, 1962). Superintendents were frequent writers of articles in professional journals, as they shielded themselves from political pressures by being professional instructional leaders. The position was highly respected as that of a teacher-scholar; some superintendents subsequently became professors, college presidents, and in some cases, state superintendents (Peterson & Barnett, 2003).

This conceptualization began to fade as arguments developed over whether the superintendent’s position could improve instruction (Kowalski, 2006). Today, nearly one-third of the states either eliminated the superintendent’s license or allowed alternative routes for obtaining one. The current trend of deregulating licensing is grounded in the belief that a professional educator or teacher-scholar is inconsequential in being an effective superintendent (Broad Foundation & Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003). Kowalski (2005) explained that there was a proclivity among certain critics to promote deregulation of professional preparation for superintendents, particularly in the



area of standards and licensing (p. 25). “Critics who favor deregulating professional preparation usually view licensing as counterproductive...because school administrators work in an extremely visible context...and can now be monitored on the basis of...readily available data” (Hess, 2003, as cited in Kowalski, 2005, p. 25). However, these beliefs reflect a limited view of the profession of superintendent. As Kowalski (2005) explained:

[Deregulation promotes a] bias that principals and superintendents should be treated as political appointees and not as professionals... [a trend that has] unfortunately...appealed to dissatisfied policy makers and community elites. Overall, the trend is toward rescinding requirements for this key position as evidenced by radical policy decisions such as in Tennessee where the only remaining requirement for being a superintendent is a bachelor’s degree.” (p. 25)

As America moved from an agrarian to an industrialized society, schools and districts grew larger, and the role of the superintendent began to diversify into that of a business manager and superintendent of instruction (Cuban, 1976). A debate ensued among scholars about which role was more important. The leading education scholars of the early twentieth century, including but not limited to, Ellwood Cubberly, George Strayer, and Franklin Bobbitt concurred with the political elite that school administrators needed to learn and apply the principles of scientific management (Kowalski, 2006). Opposition came from other politicians, including mayors, city council members, and various political bosses, who feared that superintendents running districts as managers would increase the influence and power of the position and undercut municipal authority (Cronin, 1973). Others thought that a manager-type superintendent would diminish the principle of local control (Glass, 2003, as cited in Kowalski, 2005).

By the end of the twentieth century, the role of the superintendent did indeed oscillate between the roles of teacher-scholar and manager. Thirty-six percent of the

2,262 superintendents that Björk (2000) surveyed indicated that a primary expectation of their school boards was to be a managerial leader. Superintendents are still settling into this role, citing the top three problems they face as lack of adequate financial services, accountability, and compliance with state and federal mandates (Orr, 2006).

Kowalski (2005) noted that the contemporary superintendent must be a statesman and a social scientist. As a statesman, he listened to community groups and petitions local, state, and federal legislatures on behalf of the school district and children in general. Glass et al. (2000) found that 58% of superintendents asserted that community-based interest groups attempted to influence the decisions of the board; while in large school districts – those with 25,000 or more students – 90% of the superintendents surveyed indicated that the influence of interest groups was prevalent (p.23). Thirteen percent of superintendents indicated that the board's primary role expectation for them was to serve as a democratic or political leader (Glass et al., 2000, p. 17). Superintendents also play a role in micro-politics, trying to build or repair the administrator-board relationship (Kowalski, 2005).

Educational administration has not been widely accepted as a discipline of the social sciences despite the scholarship produced by early administrators and professors of administration. Contemporary superintendents must be at the forefront of instructional leadership using sound scholarship to qualify the policies put forth and endorsed (Callahan, 1966; Cuban, 1976; Kowalski, 2005). The notion of superintendent as applied social scientist was influenced by a wide range of factors, including attempts from educational administration programs to gain acceptance by social science

disciplines, understanding school districts as complex systems, and achieving social justice for children (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2005; Kowalski, 2005).

Finally, as a communicator, Björk & Gurley (2005) found that nearly all superintendents – a full 95% – said that they were the board’s primary conduit of information about district and community matters. Superintendents were expected to effectively communicate with a wide range of constituents, subordinates, and colleagues in launching and sustaining district reform initiatives (Kowalski & Keedy, 2005; Kowalski, 2006). A majority of superintendents indicated that they communicated regularly with parents and other community citizens in setting district objectives and priorities, strategic planning, fundraising, and program and curriculum decisions. Modern technologies such as email, social networking, and district websites enhance the quality and quantity of their communication (Kowalski & Keedy, 2005).

#### Current State of the Superintendency

National concern over a possible shortage of superintendents is growing. The *Journal of School Leadership* (2003) dedicated a special issue to the topic “Superintendent Shortage: Reality or Myth,” in which authors provided a focused discussion of the nature and scope of this issue. Glass and Björk (2003) noted that the issue has been misidentified; the authors assert that it was the instability of school boards that cause high superintendent turnover rates. Björk, Keedy, and Gurley (2003) examined trend data from the previous four American Association of School Administrators’ (AASA) 10-year studies and found that the average tenure of superintendents ranged from 5.6 years to the current mean of 6 to 7 years in the period of time between 1971 and 2000 (Björk, Keedy, & Gurley, p. 414). In addition, the

authors note that the superintendent attrition rate has been about 8% since the 1950s (Björk, Keedy, & Gurley, p. 414). Thus, when reports suggested that 80% of superintendents will leave the profession in the next decade, it was the norm rather than the exception.

Kowalski (2003) directly refuted the notion of a widespread claim that a national crisis in the superintendency exists. Using highly credible economic models and 10-year AASA study data, he demonstrated that superintendents' tenure has increased over the past 30 years. Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000) examined recent national data from the *Superintendents' Professional Expectations and Advancement Review Survey* (2000), which agreed with Kowalski (2003), that superintendent tenure has increased to slightly more than seven years.

Despite such empirical findings, a perception exists that a superintendent shortage occurs. Björk and Brunner (2001) concluded that several factors will affect the state of the school superintendent profession in the coming decades: these included increasing board conflict; projected retirements of high school principals – which serve as a pipeline into the superintendency; declining tenure rates; and low quality of applicant pools. All contributed to a perception that the superintendency faced a serious crisis. It is this purported crisis that has helped to recently bring a surge of attention to the challenges of the superintendency and the manner in which those who seek it are being prepared (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000). Most educators and school boards can easily discern those who come to the job prepared or not; researchers conclude that this reality remains one of the principle reasons why the turnover rate of superintendents remains extremely high (Orr, 2006).

Boone (2001) suggested that the burden of preparing superintendents should fall squarely on graduate schools; these institutions must create programs to meet the standards developed by professional associations and states. Such standard-based instruction would answer the decades of criticism of administrator preparation.

McNamara (1997, as cited in Boone, 2001) posed the question “Does graduate training in educational administration improve America’s schools?” and answered with a firm “No,” adding his voice to a chorus of critics (p. 4). In the late 1980s, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (1989) reported that preparation programs had a weak link to the field that they purported to serve. Others have criticized programs for paying too little attention to issues of curriculum, instruction, and learning (Cambron-McCabe, 1993; Murphy, 1993; as cited in Boone). Furthermore, others have criticized the overall organization of graduate programs (McCarthy & Kuh, 1997). In 1998, the American Association of School Administrator’s publication, the *AASA Professor*, a periodical written by and for professors of educational administration, devoted a special edition to a discussion of university-based preparation programs. While no single conclusion was reached, the editors hoped that university professors and practicing administrators “[would] continue the dialog” (1998, p. 1).

Such criticisms have not come from the masses of superintendents themselves. Orr (2006), in a two-year study with superintendent focus-groups from across the country, found that 47% of the 144 superintendents she studied rated their programs as “good,” and 26% as “excellent” (p. 1368). Many reported “their professors, course content, and attention to curriculum, instruction, and assessment issues as strengths in their program” (Orr, 2006, p. 1368). The only criticisms from these superintendents of

their graduate programs were their limited access to technology, inadequate hands-on application, and weak links between content and practice (Orr, 2006).

Michaels and Young (2006) surveyed 80 seasoned public school administrators concerning their formal academic preparation. The exposure to coursework in the history of school leadership and theory was found to be valuable to those surveyed. Another valuable component was the hands on practical understanding found in courses centered around budgeting and school finance. A meaningful piece of preparation programs is having experienced practitioners – those currently holding an administrative post – deliver the content and explain the “politics” of the job. Lastly, this study found that the field-based experience was highly rated. Internships, shadowing skilled practitioners, visiting quality schools, and participating in apprenticeship programs were all mentioned as invaluable.

In Texas, mentoring is required for all first-year or first-year in state superintendents. The specific requirements of the law state that the first-year superintendent spend 36 professional development hours focusing on prescribed standards; meet once per month with a mentor and keep a log of such meetings; that mentors must complete mentor training; and that the first-year superintendent complete these requirements within the first 18 months of employment (Texas Administrative Code §242.25, 2009).

Mentoring is an effective training technique and has shown its merit in the learning of one’s profession. However, for the law to be effective, a greater number of relevant and beneficial educational programs need to be in place both for the mentor and the superintendent seeking to be mentored. An effective program based on real

data from superintendents who have recently completed their first year in the position can help prevent ineffective programs in which people waste or mark time, receive little benefit, and check off a requirement. The experience of the mentoring relationship should result in meaningful, applicable, and relevant learning.

Kowalski, Peterson and Fusarelli (2009) attempted to examine if current superintendent preparations programs are succeeding. He raises attention to a number of concerns: most doctoral programs in educational administration have de facto become preparation programs for superintendents; current research on superintendent preparation programs fail to distinguish between a novice superintendent and a superintendent (with prior experience) who is new to a school district, thus lumping both entities as “new superintendents” (p. 22). Kowalski, Peterson, and Fusarelli (2009) notes that there is currently no national curriculum for superintendent preparation but suggests that minimal standards be in place in order to ensure that superintendents, especially those in small-enrollment districts, have the basic skills required to work in that environment.

#### Current and Future Role Conceptualizations for the Superintendent

When I was superintendent, I used to joke that I had the easiest job in town because everyone knew how to do it better than I did, and all I needed to do was listen and follow their advice. Of course, I could never get the public to speak with one voice, so it wasn't really that easy. (Houston, 2001, p.428)

The above quote highlights one of the key areas of contention affecting the role of the school superintendent in 2012. As a holder of a highly public and transparent office, one of the contemporary school superintendent's most arduous and challenging tasks remains to strike common ground amongst various groups and stakeholders whose interests often lie miles apart. In a society as diverse as the United States, where

members originate from numerous cultural, socioeconomic, political, and religious backgrounds – all of which converge in the nexus point of public education – what serves one group may harm another, and vice versa. In addition, the education of children elicits powerful and vehement emotions on all sides: People as a rule care deeply about the educational opportunities available to their children and are prepared to lobby vigorously to achieve their children’s best educational options. Public education remains a cherished right and privilege of democratic societies; as hard as it is to maintain, people generally feel it engenders a benefit to society as a whole. The role of the school superintendent, therefore, must adhere to and facilitate one of the fundamental tenets of democracy – basic education for all, regardless of status.

The school superintendent of the future, therefore, must be prepared to offer a bipartisan and open arena for public debate; however, he or she must also serve the needs of the school board that he or she represents. Increasingly, communication skills, leadership, political savvy, dexterity, and flexibility among multiple stakeholders become central requirements of the superintendent of the 21st century. He or she needs to understand the importance of the role in the maintenance of democracy. Continued and future financial stresses on the public coffers also require that the superintendent of the 21st century demonstrate skilled financial and business acumen.

#### No Child Left Behind

The first decade of the 21st century ushered in a tremendous onslaught of anxiety concerning the future of schools in the United States, as well as the state of education itself. The drafting of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) changed the idea of schooling from compulsory attendance to compulsory learning. The passage of this act



also fundamentally altered the role of school district administrators and superintendents, including the ways in which that role is created and the expectations that now accompany the role.

[The superintendent's role has changed] from that of a comprehensive manager to an instructional leader...The [No Child Left Behind] law focuses on increasing school accountability by demonstrating adequate student achievement regardless of race or ethnicity, limited English proficiency, or economic status. This new accountability in local schools has several implications that directly apply to school superintendents as instructional leaders. Four critical aspects of No Child Left Behind – accountability, parental choice, resource flexibility, and quality teachers – affect the instructional leadership of the superintendent. (Björk and Gurley, 2005, p. 119)

School leaders, specifically school superintendents, continue to scramble as the paradigm of schooling continues to change on the heels of No Child Left Behind. The accountability demands of the No Child Left Behind Act add “proven results, extensive evaluations and data-driven decision making” to the existing responsibilities of superintendents (Björk and Gurley, 2005, p. 120). The act required compulsory math and reading examinations for students from Grades 3 through 8 every year in each state, and stakes remain high for the superintendents of schools with student populations that do not fare well in this testing. According to Björk and Gurley (2005), the superintendents that oversee districts with “failing schools could lose significant amounts of funding and could also lose active parents, thus making school improvement” that much more challenging to effectively manage and implement (p. 120). On the other side of this equation lie the superintendents who manage school districts that do perform well on the annual tests. These “high-performing schools could see a significant influx of students from failing schools...creating overcrowding in classrooms and numerous strains on district, school and classroom resources,” not to

mention resultant erosion of education and diminished performance due to maxed out resources and teacher burnout (Björk and Gurley, 2005, p. 120).

No Child Left Behind legislature also has a direct impact on the manner in which superintendents “receive, allocate, and maintain funding for programs focused on instruction and learning” (Björk and Gurley, 2005, p. 120). Resource allocation now relates to assessment data, and superintendents must develop entrepreneurial skills in order to maximize student success while keeping costs low (Björk and Gurley, 2005, p. 120). Superintendents must also research and acquire external sources of revenue to “increase the capacity for classroom data collection and program development” (Björk and Gurley, 2005, p. 121). The challenge for superintendents, according to Fusarelli and Fusarelli (2005), indicated that “while...expectations for educational excellence have risen, public support...particularly in the form of increased financing...has not similarly increased, forcing superintendents...to do more with less” (p. 187). This discrepancy means that superintendents now need to develop the ability to parse data in the same manner as that of an “applied social scientist” and to deploy sound scientific research in support of their educational and financial paradigms (Fusarelli and Fusarelli, 2005, p. 188). Since funding now relates directly to scholastic achievement, superintendents of the 21st century require a solid academic background in order that they can “discern quality studies from those that are poorly designed...or advocacy driven from those with limited empirical basis or those utilizing substandard research designs and methods” (Fusarelli and Fusarelli, 2005, p. 188) in order to build a model of scholastic design that supports the sustained achievement of all the children in their district. In addition to an increased need for academic acumen, once the No Child Left

Behind law came into effect, it necessitated superintendents to develop advocacy and promotional skills – in essence, to become the lead marketers for the school districts that they serve. According to Fusarelli and Fusarelli (2005), the No Child Left Behind legislation created this new marketing role for superintendents, for “contemporary superintendents are expected to tap more effectively into local resources to meet the needs of their districts” (p. 188). However, as outlined previously, funding for the realization of the vision set forth by the No Child Left Behind act remained scarce. Thus, superintendents must “assume the role of social activists – engaging the entire community in school reform initiatives. This role is very public and requires superintendents to become actively involved with business and community organizations” (Fusarelli and Fusarelli, 2005, p. 188). Two realities compound the complexity of this new role for superintendents: first, competition for funding was not limited to other school districts; and second, over the years a certain distrust of public education initiatives has accrued in the minds of the community at large (Fusarelli and Fusarelli, 2005). The willingness to fund public education, no questions asked, has been superseded by cynicism. As Fusarelli and Fusarelli (2005) explained, this tough climate required that superintendents “must much more effectively market and sell their product...public schools...to an unprecedented degree” (p. 188). In the past, superintendents simply “asked the community...and state and federal officials...for more resources; today, superintendents must also justify, often in great detail, why those additional resources are needed and exactly how they will be used to benefit all children” (Fusarelli and Fusarelli, 2005, p. 188). Marketing the actual benefit, as opposed to the perceived benefit of public education initiatives for children, therefore

requires that the superintendent of the 21st century possess solid business and marketing acumen, as well as the ability to communicate effectively to large groups which, contrary to the parents and public of the past, require hard data proof that their money has facilitated the improvement of scholastic scores and student achievement. Thus, the superintendent of the 21st century needs to become proficient in the ability to convince funders of the efficacy of the school district's programs, and demonstrate cost effectiveness to parents, community groups, private funders and other external sources of funding.

One of the most important areas of the superintendent's scope of influence is the recruitment and retention of competent teaching staff (Björk and Gurley, 2005). Qualified teachers must be properly certified by the state, successfully complete a licensing test conducted by the state, and adhere to the standards set by the public school charter legislation governed by each state (Björk and Gurley, 2005). Even with the hiring and retention of qualified teachers, the school district may still fail to bring about the necessary scholastic achievement to maintain its standing, and by extension, its competitive edge in the realm of funding. Superintendents bear the brunt of this exponentially growing pressure from national, state, and local communities, all of whom hold them directly accountable for the success or failure of a school district. According to Björk and Gurley (2005), "superintendents must focus on the tasks associated with long term sustained success that begin from improving the quality of the novice teacher, [and] ensuring that teachers already in the classroom have the resources and learning opportunities they need to be most effective" (p. 121). Many superintendents

acknowledge that the training they received did not prepare them for the current demands of the superintendency in light of No Child Left Behind (2002).

One of the main reasons for this dearth in superintendent preparatory work remains the fact that under No Child Left Behind, superintendents now become the authors of the educational vision of an entire school district. Student learning relates directly to learning opportunities; what students learn, in other words, depends entirely on what access their teachers present to them. The teacher, in turn, is part of a larger system, overseen by the superintendent. According to Cohen and Hill (1998), “the capacity to produce worthwhile and substantial learning...is a function of the interaction among elements of the instructional unit, not the sole province of any single element” (p. 5). Thus, the superintendent becomes the owner, as well as the main leader of the instructional unit. He or she must create and maintain “a district-wide vision with measurable goals, implement tangible support systems to support the vision and goals, and monitor progress on these goals” (Peterson and Barnett, 2005, p. 125). The role of the superintendent is articulating the vision of education within his or her district, from setting the curriculum and hiring the teaching staff, to finding the money to maintain the system from year to year. Peterson and Barnett (2005) reported:

Despite the remoteness of their central office from the classrooms in which decisions must ultimately be made; the empirical evidence strongly suggests that given their position within the district organization, superintendents are in the best position to foster the necessary organizational relationships and resources to support and facilitate [this vision]. (p. 125)

Many superintendents begin their careers as teachers and move into the superintendent role after many years in a teaching role; however, according to Kowalski (2006), while “educators view themselves as professionals, most of them work in highly

bureaucratic organizations,” wherein the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the individual, and teacher autonomy regularly gives way to union authority (p. 260).

Superintendents face significant difficulties in this area, as Kowalski explains, because the relationship between the superintendent, the teacher and the union, particularly in light of No Child Left Behind, often elicits conflict (Kowalski, 2006). According to Kowalski (2006):

The role conflict has been intensified in recent years by reform proposals that seek to give teachers greater autonomy and stronger voice in governance... [however] teacher empowerment...is not really compatible with traditional unionism because teachers who participate in making critical decisions actually become school leaders. (p. 260)

As a result, superintendents often find themselves sandwiched between fundamentally conflicting points of view toward education. As Kowalski (2006) explains:

[No Child Left Behind] has generated consequential questions about the role and status of educators in American society. In the absence of major changes, many superintendents continue to face two seemingly contradictory tasks: taking a traditional management disposition toward unions and building the trust and confidence of teachers by treating them as colleagues. (p. 260)

The intermediary role affected by the superintendent of 2012 may regularly encounter opposition from two of the main interest groups it serves: the school board and the teaching staff of the school district, compounded by opposing points of view that often slow down or completely stymie change initiatives. Overcoming this resistance represents no small feat. Change initiatives spawned by No Child Left Behind often meet with resistance, particularly from teachers who feel that superintendents are too remote from the realities of life in the classroom to truly and comprehensively understand what works for students and what fails them completely (Holliday and Clark, 2009).

Resistance occurs, according to Holliday and Clark (2009), because one of the major tenets of the quality reform initiative is to reduce variation in processes and improve overall quality of results. What this means in education is to reduce the major variations in classrooms and improve the overall results of student learning. Teachers often see this as a challenge to innovation, creativity and autonomy. Teachers will describe a quality initiative as trying to make every teacher teach the same thing in the same way at the same time. (p. 64)

While this represents the antithesis of what an effective learning model seeks to achieve, this initial resistant response is commonplace. As Holliday and Clark (2009) explain, superintendents often encounter hardship when they attempt to “communicate the actual intent of a learning model because some of the first steps in a learning model are to establish standards, common goals for learning, common assessments for learning, and common interventions for students” (p. 64). Thus, the superintendent of the 21st century needs to be prepared to function as an effective change agent. This function adds another element to the role, wherein the school superintendent must learn to find the happy medium between the political and financial needs of both the board and the teachers’ union, and of teachers themselves.

### Technology

The world has changed dramatically over the last decade, and the pace of change is likely to intensify. If superintendents are to contribute to the education of our youth for the uncertain future that is roaring toward us, they must lead in a different way than they have in the past (Björk, 2000; Kowalski & Glass, 2002; Kowalski, 2003). The old system has not failed us; it worked well for the era in which it was created. Now, however, is the time to examine our current educational system, specifically the role of the superintendent (Kowalski & Glass, 2002; Kowalski, 2003).

Integrating technology and preparing teachers for the future of schools and

schooling is paramount for most superintendent preparation programs. Online courses, digital curriculum, computerized grade books, chat rooms, blogs, websites, and electronic gaming currently exist and, for the most part, are welcomed by educators who share their students' excitement about the endless possibilities of technology and the future of schools (Björk & Brunner, 2001; Kowalski & Keedy, 2005).

The impact of technology on the role of the superintendent remains multifaceted. The speed of technological change has certain practical ramifications for superintendents; namely, school coffers must be adequate to meet the ever expanding technological needs of students (Kowalski, 2006). This change entails a near constant state of upgrading to the technological infrastructure of school computer labs, for example, which many school districts simply cannot keep pace with given their financial constraints. Increasingly, the education of today must prepare students for the workplace of the future; technology will factor significantly, for obsolete technology in schools will have a direct impact on students abilities to compete in the marketplace once they leave the educational system (Peterson & Barnett, 2005).

Technology also creates a transparency to the superintendent's role that previous generations of superintendents did not encounter (Berge and Clark, 2009). As Kelly (2009) explains, "technological advances have [also] revolutionized the process and choices by which leaders assign meaning and create shared understanding with constituents" (p. 310). Technological prowess, ease and comfort with technology, and openness to the assimilation of technology with the traditional teaching paradigm often links directly to how well a superintendent's leadership skill is perceived in the wider community and amongst potential avenues of funding (Kelly, 2009).



The communication patterns and behaviors of district leaders will be affected in this information-based society. The traditional hierarchical structure of the educational system perpetuates the flow of communication down a chain of command, from one person to another, resulting in a one-way directive exchange, ultimately reducing opportunities for reciprocal influence and information sharing... [thus] leadership in an age of information can be viewed as a change from managing to connecting, communicating, collaborating, and community building. (Kelly, 2009, p. 310)

A direct link now exists between technology and communication; this indelible link creates hitherto unprecedented access to the decision makers involved in public education – the school boards, the state legislators, and the superintendents. As Kelly (2009) explains,

[B]efore electronic communication, superintendents and principals were able to control the direction and amount of personal communication. The infusion of technology in the life of the superintendent has demanded that leadership become interactive. Restricting information, refusing to exchange information, and disregarding the needs of constituents are almost always viewed as unacceptable behavior. (p. 312)

This access means that decisions affecting the school populace must be made rapidly, and they must be able to immediately withstand public and parental scrutiny. Stakeholders have access to superintendent and school board decisions in the time it takes to load a web page or receive an email; thus, decisions need to be properly messaged and superintendents must be prepared for immediate feedback.

“Organizational patterns of communication are changing as a result of the emergence and rapid expansion of electronic communication, and they will affect the thoughts, opinions, and information exchanged among the superintendent, district personnel, school board members, and community” (Kelly, 2009, p. 312). As of 2009, most if not all school districts and educational institutions had public access websites; these portals offer the public a window into the inner workings of their children’s education and

provide “public access to information and an entry point for exchanging information with educators” (Kelly, 2009, p. 312). The transparency that the web creates, in turn engenders an expectation of transparency in all areas, including education. “In an age of information, people's appetite for information and their expectation of communication have increased. Critical are the openness, availability, creativity, and clarity ensuring the accuracy of information received by employees and community” (Kelly, 2009, p. 312).

For the most part, technological advancement, particularly in electronic communications, facilitates the work of the superintendent rather than hinders it (Berge and Clark, 2009). Websites, email access, and the distance learning that technology supports offer multiple solutions to the problems of resource allocation and education that superintendents face on an annual basis. More people can be reached in a single email than through several meetings, and electronic communication utilizes far less resources. Thus, Kelly (2009) asserts that electronic “superintendent communications ... [are]...perceived to resolve more problems and have far more positive implications than negative” (p. 314). However, technology can cause a problem for the superintendent in the area of context; controlling the context in which messages are delivered and comprehended remains a constant challenge. As Kelly (2009) explains,

[While] superintendents acknowledged the ability of electronic communication to enhance the networking capability within the organization...they also realized that the emergence of the Internet and electronic communication brought potentially adverse effects if messages lacked clarity and were misunderstood by the recipient. (p. 315)

This realization is particularly true in the case of emails forwarded between stakeholders lacking a context or interpreting the email in a way that the superintendent did not intend; therefore “regulating the outreach was a limitation of computer-mediated

communication” (Kelly, 2009, p. 315). In certain cases, parents, teaching staff or community groups may rely on electronic messages over face to face communication, for the latter may be much more challenging to arrange, given time and geographic constraints.

As Kelly (2009) asserts, superintendents of the 21st century need to be especially mindful of context in electronic messages. Email remains a static, one-way form of communication with which recipients cannot interact. Therefore, email does not always maintain its essential meaning or purpose as it leaves its original context and travels via email forwarding to other parties. As Kelly (2009) explains,

Superintendents that use email to communicate with stakeholders need to remain aware of the need to be vigilant of the potential network that one message could unintentionally create. One simple straightforward message could conceivably bring in a volume of extraneous interpretations and information. Before the onset of electronic mail, superintendents had the ability to localize communication to interested parties. However, sending one electronic message intended for one person often yield(s)...unanticipated and unintended recipients if it [is]...forwarded to numerous people. (Kelly, 2009, p. 315)

These secondary and tertiary recipients may not understand the original intention of the message and, as a result, erroneously interpret its meaning.

On the whole, however, superintendents of the 21st century need to be prepared to rely more and more on electronic communication “to inform the larger community and invite further connections with stakeholders” due to temporal and geographical constraints (Kelly, 2009, p. 314; Kowalski & Keedy, 2005). Superintendents therefore need to become savvy electronic communicators and learn to apply context to the medium wherever possible (Berge and Clark, 2009; Kelly, 2009). Certainly, most superintendents would agree that “face-to-face interaction...[is]...the preferred mode...[of communication] of these leaders, because it addresses...the complex

process of communication intended to create meaning and shared understanding across various contexts” (Kelly, 2009, p. 314).

While it is true that a one-on-one meeting serves the needs of superintendents more effectively, since this type of communication can directly facilitate questions and answers from stakeholders, this form of interaction is not always possible, especially in large school districts. Therefore, distance technology serves superintendents willing and able to address their constituents via web link, video conference, webinar, or similar methods.

### Online Education

The increasing use of online education or virtual schooling represents another issue that superintendents of the 21st century will encounter regularly during their tenures. A virtual school refers to “any K-12, online learning program offered by an educational organization in which students can earn credit toward graduation or toward promotion to the next grade” (Berge & Clark, 2009, p. 2). Online learning means educational courses delivered through the Internet or using Web-based methods either in real-time synchronously or asynchronously.

Full-time virtual learning avenues have grown exponentially in the past five years. According to Berge and Clark (2009), 44 of the 50 states reported online learning opportunities for K-12 students, and more than half of these 44 reported K-8 options. As little as five years ago, supplemental high school courses were the primary types of K-12 online learning in terms of course enrollments. In 2008, a total of 21 states reported full-time, public virtual schools, most of which were charter schools.

Virtual schools facilitate learning in that they allow students to learn from teachers in any location, not simply from the ones that they have access to in their geographical locations (Sturgeon, 2007). Virtual schools also support home schooling and learning for the children of families who travel extensively (Sturgeon, 2007). Furthermore, virtual schooling allows access to higher level advanced curriculum courses that an individual student's physical school may not offer (Sturgeon, 2007).

Virtual schooling may prove to be a viable method of student retention for school districts struggling to meet the criteria of No Child Left Behind (2002), while maintaining the numbers needed to secure and attract funding.

As Steve Hollingsworth, vice president of K-12 Virtual School Programs explains, Many of the public school districts that use our program find that it enables them to retain pupils who might otherwise leave the district for private or home schooling...By helping them retain students and state funding, the K12 program can actually have a positive effect on district finances. (District Administration, 2005)

Virtual schools also provide an opportunity for rural schools or schools with an extremely limited teaching staff to supplement their curricula without the need to take on the cost of an additional teacher's salary and benefits. Typically, online K-12 programs represent a fraction of the cost of hiring additional teaching staff, which represents an effective cost saving measure for superintendents who oversee cash strapped school districts.

As Berge and Clark (2009) explain, one "key reason for offering a virtual school is to expand school choice. Under No Child Left Behind, K-12 online learning may be offered as a Supplemental Educational Services option or as an alternative public school option" (p. 6). Online and distance learning also helps superintendents "meet the

goal of teaching 21st century technology literacy skills across the curriculum” (Berge and Clark, 2009, p. 6).

The main challenge that school superintendents face when considering supplementing or expanding the curricula of their schools with virtual learning programs is the assessment process. Superintendents need to ascertain the quality of the online program’s offerings and make sure it aligns with and meets the quality standards of his or her district. Cost effectiveness will have no value whatsoever if the program fails to educate the students. Berge and Clark (2009) outline several actions that superintendents can take to ensure the quality of the virtual school program:

Institute performance assessment measures at the beginning of the online learning program. Continually evaluate the program for improvement and accountability purposes. Demonstrate and communicate the success of the program to district stakeholders. (p. 8)

Superintendents also need to consider the loss of student enrollment in traditional school/classrooms and the impact of that loss on school finances.

#### Attrition and Turnover

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) conducted its 2010 decennial study and found that of the nearly 2,000 superintendents surveyed, 51% stated they did not plan to be a superintendent in 2015 (Kowalski, 2011). The large degree of superintendent turnover that the data predicts mirrors the needs of the superintendency over the next decade; analysts fear a shortage (Björk & Brunner, 2001).

According to Björk & Brunner (2001), data indicated that attrition will be a factor in the coming decade, as more than 53% of the respondents had “five years or fewer to work until retirement... [and] 37% had five years to go until retirement” (p. 7). According

to the AASA survey (2010), the “modal superintendent was...between the ages of 56 and 60” (Kowalski, 2010).

High turnover represents another factor that the superintendent of the 21st century will likely encounter – turnover in the superintendent profession itself, as well as turnover in school boards (Kowalski, 2005). Theories abound as to why the rate of turnover remains high in both areas.

Kowalski (2005) points to the accrual of public dissatisfaction: A disease that could be predicted by monitoring changes in socioeconomic and political indicators of a community... [wherein] special interest groups and others intensify efforts to influence policy... [and] incumbent school board members are defeated or choose not to seek another term. Ultimately, the disease causes a turnover in the superintendent’s office and disruption to the school system. (p. 69)

Public education remains a minefield of fractious political and philosophical debate, and the public nature of the superintendent’s role often means that he or she and the affiliated school board become the scapegoats for public dissatisfaction. Often the dissatisfaction centers on student performance – or lack thereof – as representative of a larger problem within the community.

Mellon (2011) points to the example of the Wake County North Carolina Public School System, the 18<sup>th</sup> largest school district in the United States: on the student performance front, about 60 percent of the district's schools failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress last year under No Child Left Behind. On the political front, the district's high schools are at risk of losing accreditation if [the superintendent] can't help unite a fractured board and community. And on the diversity front, the National Women's Law Center and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People have filed different federal complaints, alleging sexism in athletics and racism in the district's system for assigning students to schools. (p. 72)

Political situations such as these are not uncommon in the public education system, as it is a demanding job rife with conflict and public accountability. Its public nature means that public dissatisfaction will likely be leveled against the office,

particularly if the community the superintendent serves faces economic hardship. Therefore, superintendents of the 21st century must be prepared to withstand tremendous upheaval and turnover in the school boards, as well as a reduced number of superintendents remaining in the profession.

### Leadership

Leadership, leadership strategy, and leadership styles all factor prominently in the success of a superintendent, specifically when one considers how many stakeholders the position relates and reports to on a daily basis including the school board, the public, the parents, funders, and of course, the students themselves. Weak leadership sounds the death knell for any superintendent; the job itself remains “politically charged” (Mellon, 2011, p. 72). The superintendent of the 21st century, however, must be able to apply a combination of leadership styles contextually, according to the needs of the role; thus, flexibility becomes key to long term success. A leadership style or strategy that works in one context may fail completely in another.

Kowalski (2005) asserted that superintendents “have been encouraged to be democratic, ethical and transformational” in their leadership approaches (p. 211). The democratic leadership style values the core tenets of democracy; as such, the democratic leader understands that the “relationships between a leader and the organization’s members are bound by collaborative efforts to achieve mutual goals” (Kowalski, 2005, p. 211). The democratic leadership style, as it applies to the superintendent’s role, will therefore, derive from the understanding that the “organization’s members grant them the authority to act on their behalf”; as a result, the authority invested in the role can be removed at any point (Kowalski, 2005, p. 211). The



democratic leadership style of the superintendent also implements policies and procedures from an implicit “moral responsibility” and seeks to “fulfill social contracts with the organization’s members” (Kowalski, 2005, p. 211). The superintendent of the 21st century must value and effectively apply democratic leadership and “exhibit the capacity to create one community out of many voices” (Kowalski, 2005, p. 211).

The superintendent of the 21st century must also apply moral and ethical leadership; these styles pertain because the role remains continually subject to a high level of “unending scrutiny” and involves numerous issues that come to light via the public education system, including “hierarchy, privilege,...power,...democratic participation, and equal access to programs and resources” (Kowalski, 2005, p. 211). The sensitive nature of public education – namely, the enormous diversity of the American public in terms of race, creed, socioeconomic status, and religion – means that “school administration...ethics extend beyond legalities to such issues as bias, discrimination, nepotism, violating confidentiality, commitment to work responsibilities and playing politics for purposes of self-interest” (Kowalski, 2005, p. 212). Thus the superintendent of the 21st century must apply a moral and ethical understanding to his or her decision making activities.

Transformational leadership refers to the style of leadership that facilitates “shared organizational improvement goals” (Kowalski, 2005, p. 213). Transformational leaders empower colleagues and stakeholders in order to elicit and sustain lasting organizational change; this form of leadership remains crucial for superintendents, particularly in light of No Child Left Behind (2002).

The superintendent of the 21st century must apply transformational leadership to build: A shared vision of the school; create...and align...school and district goals;

create...an intellectually stimulating environment; nurture...a positive, learning-oriented culture; provide...individual support and development opportunities; model...best practices and learning-oriented organizational values; create...authentic organizational structures that support shared decision making venues, [and] establish...high expectations for student and adult learning. (Kowalski, 2005, p. 213)

Transformational leadership applied in the superintendency positively affects the working environment of teachers and administrative staff, as well as the public perception of the role.

Authentic leadership represents another style of direction with significant application in the realm of the superintendency of the 21st century. According to George and Sims (2007), this style of leadership understands that “no one can be authentic by trying to imitate someone else” (p. 191). Superintendents who are authentic leaders use the experiences of their own lives and the experiences they encounter on the job to form an authentic leadership style; thus, leadership emerges from one’s own unique perspective on his or her life and work experiences.

George and Sims (2007) assert that: when asked what motivates them to lead, authentic leaders consistently say they find their motivation through understanding their own stories...The stories of authentic leaders cover the full spectrum of life’s experiences. They include the impact of parents, teachers, coaches and mentors who recognized their potential; the impact of their communities, and their leadership in team sports, scouting, student government and early employment. Many leaders find their motivation comes from a difficult experience in their lives: personal illness or the illness of a family member; death of a parent or a sibling; or feelings of being excluded, discriminated against or rejected by peers...all [authentic] leaders...find their passion to lead through the uniqueness of their life stories. (p. 8)

The superintendent of the 21st century, therefore, needs to trust his or her experiences as a teacher, leader, administrator, and public figure in order to make informed choices and spearhead directives, particularly when those issues are contentious or fraught with political issues and public recrimination. Successful

superintendents who follow an authentic leadership model remain devoted to their own development and willingness to “test...themselves through real-world experiences and reframe...their life stories to understand who they [are] at their core. In doing so, they discover...the purpose of their leadership and learn...that being authentic [makes] them more effective” (George and Sims, 2007, p. 9). The nature of the job tests the resiliency and self-confidence of even the most seasoned leader.

Authentic leaders demonstrate certain characteristics and transferrable skills across industries. These traits include “self-awareness, confidence, resiliency, and optimism” (Bird and Wang, 2011, p. 144). Authentic leaders in the role of superintendent will also demonstrate a facility with communication and a public persona that is magnetic and charismatic. On the whole, authentic leaders are:

[F]uture oriented and have a proclivity for action. They establish long-term, meaningful, and transparent relationships with followers. Authentic leaders have a passion for their purpose and practice their moral/ethical values consistently. They have the ability to empathize with different types of people and situations and they build on the strengths of followers (Bird and Wang, 2011, p. 144).

In the realm of public education, authentic leaders who gravitate toward the profession of school superintendent fare well in this highly visible office. According to Bird and Wang (2011):

[T]he review of literature reveals some interesting parallels between leadership style, behavioral characteristics, and effective operational practices. Leaders who are steadfast, unbiased, goal-focused, and develop deep and open relationships with their subordinates, seem particularly well matched for complex organizational operations that require vision, data driven decision-making, honesty, and teamwork (p. 145).

Authentic leaders drawn to the profession of superintendent also often come from other industries such as business or the military. An example is Anthony "Tony" Tata, a former Brigadier General with the U.S. Army who took over the role of superintendent of

North Carolina's Wake County School District in December of 2010 (Mellon, 2011). Due to the fact that authentic "leadership is a very transferrable skill set from one industry to the next" (Mellon, 2011, p, 72), the leadership experience that Tata brought from his deployment in Afghanistan easily facilitated the transition into public education. In recent years, education researchers have turned their attention to authentic leadership and the possible applications it might have in public education. As Bird and Wang (2011) explain, "Authentic leadership has its roots in the business literature and is just starting to emerge in education literature" (p. 153). Superintendents of the 21st century will benefit highly from the tenets of authentic leadership – self-development, communication competency, openness, and personal magnetism – to help them navigate the role and unite often deeply divided boards and communities. As Bird and Wang (2011) assert:

University graduate programs in educational leadership should examine [the] merits [of authentic leadership] for inclusion in principal and superintendent preparation programs. Hiring boards would do well to include authenticity in their list of desirable characteristics in screening and selecting candidates for executive positions. Governing boards could add assessment items calling for evidence of authentic leadership into their executive evaluation performance review processes (p.153).

Since the role of superintendent exists in the public sector, money will likely always be an issue; thus, the authentic leader in the profession must be a skilled negotiator able to pull opposing views toward alignment and attract sustained funding. "In all likelihood, educational resources will remain scarce and highly competitive relative to other social goods and services in the public sector" (p. 153). Therefore, school superintendents will need assistance in securing and maintaining the funds necessary to effectively implement policies and procedures that will benefit all of the students in their districts

(Bird and Wang, 2011). Authentic leaders in the role of superintendent are far more likely to possess the drive, charisma, and determination necessary to spearhead change in the public education sector.

### Summary

Chapter 2 contains a literature review that provides a brief history of the superintendent profession as well as conceptualizations for the role, both current and future. This chapter also outlines the state of the superintendency profession as of 2011 and includes reviews of the literature pertaining to the effect of technology, specifically how technological advances in communication tools affect the role of the superintendent. This chapter contains an overview of selected literature pertaining to the perceived impact of distance education on the profession and highlights selected research on the impact of the No Child Left Behind law of 2002, as well as the perceived effect of attrition and turnover on the superintendent profession. The chapter concludes with a review of effective leadership styles that will equip superintendents to face the challenges of education in the 21st century.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Method

The purpose of this study is to assess the current and future role for public school superintendents as identified in six case study interviews with current school superintendents working in the public school system in the United States. The purpose of this case study research is to comprehend the experiences and viewpoints of the participants, specifically with regard to the challenges that the superintendency will face as it progresses into the 21st century and recommendations for training programs.

Chapter 3 presents the demographic and background information of the participants; it also outlines the participant selection process and the research method and design. Further, the interview design method and procedure will be described in detail herein. Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion of the case study research design and highlights its appropriateness for this particular inquiry. Chapter 3 also contains the research questions compiled for the study, the sampling criteria, and some discussion of the study population. Descriptions of the data collection and data analysis methods are also discussed in this chapter. Chapter 3 contains a brief discussion of ethical concerns and geographic locations as they relate to this study.

#### Research Questions

The following section contains a listing of the research questions that guided this study. The respondents received an open ended written survey and participated in a semi-structured one-on-one interview designed to elucidate answers to the following four research questions:

1. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, what current challenges do superintendents face for which they are not adequately prepared?
2. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, on what areas of educational administration should future superintendents concentrate for job preparation?
3. What skills, knowledge, characteristics and attitudes do experienced superintendents identify as most critical for the success of future superintendents?
4. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, what challenges do not currently exist but have a strong possibility of coming to fruition?

### Research Design

Qualitative research investigates the significance of the points of view and experiences of a particular segment of respondents in order to expand understanding of a given phenomenon. The qualitative approach to research becomes appropriate when the researcher seeks to examine a phenomenon in which he or she endeavors to obtain a more profound understanding and awareness of the lived practices and perceptions of a particular group (van Manen, 1990). Using these classifications, I chose to employ a qualitative research methodology to carry out this study.

The case study research method was used to conduct the study. Yin (2009) defined the case study method of research as “an empirical inquiry that...investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context, especially

when...the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). The case study method seeks to function as a comprehensive technique that includes the reasoning behind the study design, the procedures used to collect the data, and the approaches used to examine the data (Yin, 2009). When the researcher employs the case study research method in his or study, the goal is to manage the:

[T]echnically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result... [the research] relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result...benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p. 18)

The case study method of research is featured prominently in many education research studies (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Qi, 2009; Yin, 2009). The case study research method, which Qi (2009) identified as one of the three main research methods applicable to the problem of authentication and acquisition of knowledge in the educational sphere, is a method that “seeks to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors and may be finally described as interpretative and subjective” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Qi, 2009, p. 21; Yin, 2009). The value of case study research for education researchers is that it “can bring us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research” (Qi, 2009, p. 21).

The case study qualitative research method accentuates thorough background analysis of a restricted number of circumstances, events, or settings without divorcing them from their particular contexts in an effort to understand their relationships (Qi, 2009; Yin, 2009). As Qi (2009) notes, “education researchers, in particular, have made wide use of... [case study research] to examine contemporary situations in education



and provide the basis for the application of ideas and extension of methods” (p. 21). The case study research method seeks to represent, investigate, and deduce the distinctiveness of real participants and real situations via the use of comprehensible first person accounts (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Qi, 2009; Yin, 2009). As such, the case study research method intends to “present and represent reality” (Qi, 2009, p. 21). It should be noted that the case study research method does not seek to represent the entirety of an issue; it does not seek to “represent the world, but to represent the case” (Qi, 2009, p. 22). Herein lies the area of case study research that typically incurs the highest degree of criticism. Potential problems with the case study research method will be outlined in the Potential Risks section.

This study was grounded in phenomenology, or the post-positivist philosophical framework. Noor (2008) describes phenomenology or post-positivism as a philosophical structure that supports the study of reality as a “socially constructed” entity, as opposed to an entity determined via scientific, rational, or objective means (p. 1602). The success of qualitative research and the goal of the qualitative researcher therefore depend less on the ability to “gather facts and measure how often certain patterns occur, but to appreciate the different constructions and meanings that people place upon their experience” (Noor, 2008, p. 1602).

Post-positivism represents the philosophical framework employed to study the actual experiences of the study participants (Noor, 2008; van Manen, 1990). Post-positivism concerns itself with the awareness of the fundamental “subjectivity of social phenomena”; as such, post-positivist study necessitates qualitative research methods (Noor, 2008, p. 1602). When applied in a study that employs the case study research

method, post-positivism extends its definition and influence beyond mere philosophy; it becomes a comprehensive method that seeks to determine the fundamental nature of human experience (Gibson & Hanes, 2003; Noor, 2008; Qi, 2009; Yin, 2009). The combined impact of the case study research method and the post-positivist theoretical framework creates a method of research that includes human experience as a key component of the study (Noor, 2008; van Manen, 1990; Yin, 2009). Thus, the case study research method grounded in the post-positivist theoretical framework facilitates the study of how individual points of view toward the same experienced phenomena may differ among study participants. Post-positivist case study research methodology is the method of choice for this study, as it provides a means to study the experienced phenomena of working superintendents in the United States. The case study research method informed by the post-positivist theoretical framework supports the aims of this study in the following ways:

- Actual experiences of the participants are paramount in the interview process as well as in the data collection and data analysis phases of the research
- Differences in perception toward the issues that face superintendents of the 21st century among participants inform rather than hinder the research
- Respondents were not removed from their professional context or dependent circumstances; thus, I gain insight into the real world aspects of the superintendency and the challenges experienced by those on the front lines of the profession

#### Boundaries of the Study

The boundaries of this study are limited to the involved six cases, which include

six superintendents representing five different states. The states that will be represented in this study include Kansas, Washington, Arizona, Texas, and California. These superintendents make up the Western States Benchmarking Consortium (WSBC), recognized by the AASA as group of superintendents who are progressive, system thinkers who understand change strategies (*District Administration*, 2006).

### Sampling Method

The population sample used for this study was determined by using an “insider” to help with the identification and recruitment of participants. King and Horrocks (2010) suggest that such insider assistance can have real advantages, including the identification of potential participants who meet the sampling criteria of the study and the opportunity to access this pool without the need for lengthy research and introductions (p. 18). I decided to use an experienced, practicing superintendent who had strong professional ties at the national level to help recruit several superintendents to serve as case studies of future superintendents and their roles. Beyond identification, I used the same insider to assist with the dissemination of letters requesting participation. The insider in this case serves as a source of credibility for the potential participant, and the relationship between the insider and potential participant provides a validity and security for all of the parties involved. In essence, the insider is “the warm introduction” that facilitates discussion between the researcher and the potential participant. “If a request [to participate] is coming through a known and trusted colleague, people are more likely to give it proper consideration than if [the request] had arrived from a stranger, where it might be seen as just another form of junk mail” (King and Horrocks, 2010, p. 32).

## Population

The six participants who have been recruited for this study are all currently employed as superintendents of school districts that are member-districts of the Western States Benchmarking Consortium (WSBC). Formed in the mid-1990s, the WSBC consists of a small group of superintendents and other key executives from a handful of large high-performing school districts located in the Western United States. These superintendents focus their efforts toward improving learning opportunities and performance for all students by meeting three times a year to engage in dialogue about best practices, discuss strategies for improvement, and share academic and administrative goals. The Consortium developed four strategic areas of focus: student learning, capacity development, community connectedness, and data-driven decision making. The Consortium also works in a strong partnership with the American Association of School Administrators (AASA).

The AASA regularly showcases a WSBC session with the intentions for other districts to unite and develop their own consortia. Former AASA executive director, Paul Houston, describes the WSBC superintendents as “practitioners doing the [job] but with high-level thinking, and they are a model of what progressive leadership should be (*District Administration*, 2006, p. 49).

## Geographic Locations

Due to the current geographical location of the prospective study participants, the principal method of collecting data to conduct this study will be telephonic interviews and written surveys. The six school districts represented by the study participants will include:

- Blue Valley Unified School District, Overland Park, Kansas
- Lake Washington School District, Redmond, Washington
- Peoria Unified School District, Peoria, Arizona
- Plano Independent School District, Plano, Texas
- Poway Unified School District, Poway, California
- Vancouver School District, Vancouver, Washington

### Sample Demographics

The sample consists of six white males. The age range of the superintendent sample group is between 40 and 65 years of age. The range of years of experience as an educator in the public school system is 20 to 40 years. The range of years of experience as a superintendent is a range between 2 and 31 years.

### Instrumentation

This study provided the respondents with a survey of open-ended questions. Using open ended interview questions permitted the study participants to delve into any direction preferred by the participants and also facilitated natural boundaries to direct the interview (Seidman, 1998; Seidman, 2006).

This study then analyzed the responses from the written surveys and follow up with corresponding semi-structured phone interviews to review the same questions a second time. This second step is designed to fill in any gaps of information that arise from the written interview results. A semi-structured phone interview combined with the open-ended questions contained in the written survey will facilitate an adaptive approach to the research and also modulate the flow of the interview process (Moustakas, 1994).

The semi-structured phone interviews will also offer the participants a means to impart their stories, insight, experiences, and points of view regarding the phenomenon under investigation in their own words. The semi-structured phone interview method remains amenable to reflection, recollection, and analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 1998; Seidman, 2006; Yin, 2009).

For the purposes of this study, the two-step interview technique will follow the grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Grounded theory employs multiple forms of data sources to structure the study; these forms may include semi-structured or unstructured interviews, direct observation, or structured surveys (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The grounded theory approach is appropriate for this study, for it supports the revelation of a practical theoretical direction for research gleaned from multiple sources (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The 15 survey questions appear in Appendix D.

#### Data Collection

Each of the potential research participants received an email that requests their participation in the study. A copy of the text of this email appears in Appendix C. The request email was digitally encrypted and digitally signed; the email was securely sent as an individual email to each prospective participant and not in bulk email format or blind carbon copy. Prospective participants were asked to specify their willingness to participate via a “yes” or “no” email response. Thereafter, each participant who indicated “yes” was contacted to confirm his or her participation and to verify particulars of the study including date, time, and location.

Seidman (2006) stresses that the most valuable skill a researcher brings to the interview process is the ability to listen. Qualitative researchers must actively listen to what participants say, concentrate on the essence of the responses, and analyze the relevance of what is being said as it is being said (Seidman, 1998; Seidman, 2006). Notes were taken during the interviews to facilitate this purpose.

I was available to answer any participant questions prior to the commencement of the interviews and in all stages of the study thereafter. The follow up phone interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. I expected the duration of the written survey to last 45 minutes and the follow up phone interview to last 15 minutes. I took copious notes during the phone interviews to assess the data compiled.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis remains a core element of successful qualitative case study research. Effective data analysis legitimizes the study findings and imparts credibility. It also strengthens the integrity of the study and helps to focus the researcher's intent.

Seidman (2006) states a preference to finalize all interviews before the researcher begins the analysis phase. In the case of this study, all of the written surveys and follow up phone interviews will be concluded before the researcher assesses the feedback.

The data compiled by the written surveys and the follow up phone interviews was examined using the modified 7-step van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994; van Kaam, 1966). This method includes: "(a) listing and grouping, (b) reduction and elimination, and (c) clustering and thematizing." (Moustakas, 1994, p. 190). The constituent patterns

that the researcher gleans from the written surveys was compared to the interview notes and reported thematically according to the four research questions.

### Potential Risks

Specific risks are associated with using insiders or intermediaries, specifically in the area of bias. According to Wengraf (2001), the potential for the insider to “frame the event,” could result in unintentional distortion of a participant’s responses (p. 190). Also, the ethical danger exists that the insider may exert pressure on people to participate, denying genuine, free informed consent; in this sense, the relationship between the insider and the potential participant can become a double edged sword, particularly if it is coercive, since the answers that the potential participants give can be colored by emotions such as resentment or obligation. In balancing the risks and advantages, the researcher must carefully choose an insider who does not have a hidden agenda on the topic, who is seen as trustworthy by peers, and who is held in high professional regard by those potential participants whom the researcher has targeted to recruit. To further overcome the stated risks, I kept in regular contact with the insider during the recruitment process. I ensured the potential participants received proper clarification and additional information as needed and as requested. Once participants agreed to take part in the interviews, the use of the insider diminished to enable each participant’s responses to be kept confidential and to develop trust between myself and the participants.

Some critics posit that the case study method of research contains inherent flaws which render it an inappropriate and inefficient research technique. As Qi (2009) explains:



[C]ritics of the case study methodology point out that the study of a small number of cases can offer no grounds for establishing reliability or generality of findings. Case studies have much potential in research areas, but it is somewhat problematic in principle and practice, especially from the point of view of the single case and the wider use of such a study. (p. 22)

Case study research may also bias a study's findings due to the researcher's prolonged and concentrated exposure to the specifics of the case (Qi, 2009; Yin, 2009).

### Ethical Considerations

Walker (2007) notes that trust between the researcher and the study participants will support the interview process. One key element of trust building is informed consent. Seidman (2006) highlights the main aspects of informed consent and participant rights herein:

The right to know the purpose of the study and the use of the results. The right to know how the study will be performed and how much time will be required to participate. The right to confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy. The right to ask any question of the researcher at any time in the process. The right to withdraw without any negative recourse. The right to refuse to answer any question and to review all answers. The right to the researcher's contacts' information. (p. 64)

The informed consent used in this study conforms to each criterion; it can be found in Appendix D. The participants must read and sign the informed consent form before embarking on the written survey and before beginning the follow up phone interview.

### Confidentiality

Confidentiality remains critical to effective qualitative research (Seidman, 1998; Seidman, 2006). A commitment to confidentiality on the part of the researcher assures the participants that their personal information and the result from their interviews will be protected throughout the study phase and beyond. Confidentiality ensures that the participant's name will not be used or in any way be affiliated with the interview

transcripts that the researcher collects, and that all personal information remains properly secured (Seidman, 1998; Seidman, 2006). For this study, the identity of each participant was encoded from the outset. I refer to the study population as Superintendent A through Superintendent F. This coding system will be used on all interview results, all forms of transcription, and at all times during the study phase to maintain the anonymity of all participants.

Upon study completion, all of the participant's personal information, consent forms, transcripts, and digital recordings were stored in a locked file drawer and will be kept secure for a five year period. All electronic files associated with the study were saved to an external storage device and removed from the host computer; the external hard drive was secured in an alternative locked file drawer for the same duration. Once the five years are up, all data associated with the study will be destroyed.

### Summary

Chapter 3 contains a detailed overview of the research methods that will be used to conduct the study as well as the study parameters. The chapter begins with an overview of the research method and the research design, including a listing of the research questions and a discussion of the appropriateness of the case study research technique for this study. Chapter 3 also outlines the boundaries of the study, the sampling method that will be used, and the specifics of the population that will be participating in the study, including the demographics and geographical locations that the participants represent. Chapter 3 also provides an in-depth description of the methods of data collection, data analysis, and instrumentation that were used to conduct the study. This chapter also highlights the potential risks involved using the

insider sampling method and the case study research method. Chapter 3 concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations present in the study and details the steps that the I took to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

In this chapter, participant responses of both the written survey and phone interview are reported and analyzed. Each case study was approached using the phenomenological framework outlined by van Kaam (1966) and modified by Moustakas (1994). As such, the experiences and viewpoints of the participants, specifically with regard to the challenges that the superintendency will face as it progresses into the 21st century and recommendations for training programs, were carefully noted.

The following section contains a listing of the research questions that guided this study. The respondents received an open ended written survey consisting of 15 questions and participated in a semi-structured one-on-one interview designed to elucidate answers to the following four research questions:

1. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, what current challenges do superintendents face for which they are not adequately prepared?
2. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, on what areas of educational administration should future superintendents concentrate for job preparation?
3. What skills, knowledge, characteristics and attitudes do experienced superintendents identify as most critical for the success of future superintendents?
4. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, what challenges do not currently exist but have a strong possibility of coming

to fruition?

Using these research questions as the premise for this study, this chapter is divided into four sections. First, a description of the participants is summarized in general terms. The second section presents the results of the written survey questions and phone interviews that correlate to Research Questions 1 and 2. The topics include: superintendent preparation, relevant courses, future course design, school board training, mentoring, and establishing consortiums. The third section presents the results of the written survey questions and phone interviews that correlate to Research Question 3 on the topic of necessary 21st century knowledge and skills the experienced superintendents of the WSBC identified as most critical for the success of future superintendents, including the topic of technology. Finally, Section 4 presents the results of written survey and phone interviews that correlate to the fourth research question and is presented as the topic: Future Issues and Challenges in Education.

### Participants

The boundaries of this study are limited to the involved six cases, which include six superintendents representing five different states. The states represented in this study include Kansas, Washington, Arizona, Texas, and California. These superintendents make up the Western States Benchmarking Consortium (WSBC), recognized by the AASA as group of superintendents who are progressive, system thinkers who understand change strategies.

These case study participants are all currently employed as superintendents of school districts that are member-districts of the Western States Benchmarking

Consortium (WSBC). Six superintendents were recruited and all six participants responded. The member districts include the following:

- Blue Valley Unified School District, Overland Park, Kansas
- Lake Washington School District, Redmond, Washington
- Peoria, Arizona Unified School District, Peoria, Arizona
- Plano Independent School District, Plano, Texas
- Poway Unified School District, Poway, California
- Vancouver School District, Vancouver, Washington

The Western States Benchmarking Consortium is comprised of superintendents who come together on a regular schedule to share professional experiences, discuss best practices, and create policies designed to improve the learning experience as well as the learning environment for students in their districts (Western States Benchmarking Consortium, n.d.). The members of this group proved to be exceptional case study participants not only because of the depth of their collective experience but also because the WSBC enjoys a long-standing and fruitful professional partnership with the American Association of School Administrators (Western States Benchmarking Consortium, n.d.).

The Consortium members have shared definitions of what defines an educational organization's success, and WSBC members employ these benchmarks to identify and communicate the necessary steps toward the ultimate goal of "achieving the highest quality public education" (Western States Benchmarking Consortium, n.d., para. 3).

The WSBC intends for these benchmarks to help member districts and educational institutions “in recognizing and acting on key areas of emphasis to improve learning for all students” (Western States Benchmarking Consortium, n.d., para. 3).

A total of six superintendents were invited via email to participate in this study. Six superintendents responded, representing an overall response rate of 100%. There was a 100% participation rate among the six respondents. Table 1 summarizes the overall response rate and participation rate.

Table 1

*Overall Written Survey Response and Participation Rate*

	Invitations Sent	Invitation and Consent Returned	Invitation and Consent Declined	Written Survey Completed	Response Rate	Participation Rate
Total	6	6	0	6	100%	100%

Following the written survey, the respondents were invited to participate in a follow up phone interview. The response and participation rates for the follow up phone interview are both 100%. Table 2 summarizes the overall response rate to the follow up phone interview.

Table 2

*Overall Follow Up Phone Interview Response and Participation Rate*

	Phone Interview Invite and Consent	Invitation and Consent Acknowledged	Invitation and Consent Declined	Phone Interviews Completed	Response Rate	Participation Rate
Total	6	6	0	6	100%	100%

The superintendents that participated in this study were all white males of large, suburban school districts. Each superintendent earned a doctorate degree in educational leadership. Participants represented school districts from five different states. The size of the respondents' school districts ranged from 22,000 students to 55,000 students. The years of experience as a superintendent ranged from 2 years to 31 years. All respondents were members of the WSBC. Table 3 summarizes the demographics of the participants.

Table 3

*Summary of Demographics of Participants*

	Gender of Participants	Range of Experience as Superintendent (number of years)	Earned Doctoral Degree	Range of School District Size (number of students)	Number of States Represented
Total	6 males	2 – 31 Years	6	22,000 – 55,000	5

The data compiled by the written surveys and the follow up phone interviews were examined using the modified Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994; Van Kaam, 1966). The results were grouped and discussed thematically to address the research questions. The following themes were identified and investigated:

- Superintendent preparation (Research Questions 1 and 2)
- Superintendent knowledge and skills; (Research Question 3)
- Future challenges in the superintendency (Research Question 4)

Five out of six superintendents felt prepared via their superintendent preparation program. Two out of six superintendents reported they had mentors, but all recommended that a mentoring program would be invaluable to new superintendents



entering the profession. None of the superintendents reported formal training in how to work with a school board; however, several of the superintendents reported that through the professional and state associations that they have cultivated, they received adequate training on how to build a team environment between a superintendent and the school board. The majority of the superintendents reported that the future of superintendent preparation needs to include a firm grounding in technology that can be successfully implemented in instruction. Future preparation also needs to focus on understanding how to lead change and how to negotiate the competitive environment education has become as a result of alternative educational options such as charter schools, private schools, virtual schools and parochial schools. The superintendents asserted the superintendent preparation programs need more classes in the following fields:

- Leadership
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Problem solving
- Technology integration
- School reform
- School finance in an era of funding reductions
- Implementing change

Most superintendents recommended the need for preparation programs to use more applicable styles of instruction such as solving real scenarios and problem based

learning, as well as courses that take theory and apply it to real life, pragmatic conditions.

### Superintendent Preparation

This section of the paper will present the findings of the written survey responses and phone interview that correlate to the following research questions:

1. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, what current challenges do superintendents face for which they are not adequately prepared?
2. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, on what areas of educational administration should future superintendents concentrate for job preparation?

The majority of the superintendents that participated in the case study expressed overall satisfaction with the superintendent preparation program that they attended, with some specific caveats that will be detailed later on in this section. Most of the superintendents that participated in this study completed their superintendent preparation program ten years or more prior to this study.

Superintendent A expressed overall satisfaction with the superintendent preparation that he received. This case study participant noted that he felt properly prepared for a role as a superintendent, despite the fact that he did not become a superintendent until nearly two decades after he finished his educational program. Superintendent A identified the strengths of his educational training as the quality of instruction in the classes that he deemed essential for the superintendency, including human resources, facilities, law, curriculum and instruction, and planning.

Superintendent A identified the research component of the program as less applicable to the superintendency, as well as the statistics classes.

Superintendent B felt that the superintendent program he attended lacked the same degree of richness that he found in his doctoral studies. Superintendent B clarified that his doctoral studies offered comprehensive research into the area of best practices in achieving student educational improvement and gave him the tools he needed to comprehend and interpret research more effectively.

Superintendent C expressed satisfaction with the program he attended. Superintendent C felt that the program prepared him for the demands of being a superintendent. However, he did not feel that the program he attended adequately prepared him for the significant changes that have occurred in the profession over the last 15 to 20 years. Superintendent C identified the strong points of the program he attended as school finance, law and organizational theory. The elements of his program that he found less well developed included a dearth of instruction as to how to approach the media as a superintendent, how to integrate technology into the teaching curriculum, relationship building, and above all, a complete lack of preparation in regards to positioning the superintendent as an instructional leader and an advocate for continuous enhancement of the learning environment.

Superintendent D expressed satisfaction with the program he attended to prepare for the role of superintendent. Superintendent D identified the strong points of his program as values alignment and leadership instruction; classes in organizational development; design and whole systems thinking; instruction in change management; continuous improvement theory and design; district, state; and federal policy

development; program evaluation; the curriculum, instruction and assessment course, community engagement and partnership development courses; classes in public relations; communications classes; and classes in strategic planning.

Superintendent E also felt that the educational leadership program he finished as part of his doctoral program successfully clarified the relevant leadership issues that are pertinent to public education. Superintendent E also felt that his educational leadership program provided relevant information on a range of specific leadership subjects and models. Superintendent E felt that the strength of his program was its skill in integrating his coursework with the position he worked in at the time as a deputy superintendent. The coursework allowed him to apply his professional experience when preparing his presentations and assignments and allowed him to relate his work experience to the specific leadership topic.

Superintendent F did not feel well prepared for the superintendency when he completed his program. Superintendent F also iterated that he did not feel that the superintendent training programs available met the needs of superintendents in the field. Superintendent F finished his doctoral program and superintendent credential program in 1995 and became a superintendent in 2007. Despite this gap in time between training and appointment, Superintendent F nonetheless categorizes the majority of superintendent training programs as overly dependent on theory and not sufficiently cognizant of the politics and nuances involved in the superintendency. Superintendent F did say that the strengths of his program were its theoretical grounding and choice of reading and writing assignments.

### *Relevant Courses*

When asked what class or classes specifically enhanced his knowledge and skills as a superintendent, Superintendent A noted that the planning classes his program taught have been essential. Superintendent A also expressed satisfaction with the facilities class that his program offered as well as the human resources class, which he deemed beneficial to his current role. Superintendent A felt that his program's law course provided an excellent introduction. Superintendent A clarified that the areas of study which he currently applies on a daily basis as a superintendent included leadership, communications, collaboration, and problem solving.

Superintendent B felt that the coursework his program offered in the area of technology was an adequate introduction to the swiftly transforming environment of the digital society that we now inhabit. Superintendent B noted that the role technology plays in education has grown exponentially since his superintendent training program.

Superintendent C found that the courses of school law and finance were the two programs of study that he deemed most practical and relevant to his role as a superintendent. Superintendent C noted that in his role as a superintendent, the skills he uses most often are human relations and human resources. Superintendent C also noted that dealing with and applying mass media to communications and developing educational reform are high in demand for the position.

Superintendent D named the following classes that specifically enhanced his knowledge and skills as a superintendent: school finance in response to funding cutbacks, collective bargaining, information technology and digital solutions, disruptive

technology and technological possibilities, business intelligence and performance management.

Superintendent E expressed value for several classes that he felt specifically enhanced his knowledge, skills and day-to-day duties, particularly those involved in the leadership element of the program. The classes that offered the most relevance included cultural diversity, closing the achievement gap, district finances, legal issues in education, personnel practices, and leadership for implementing change.

Superintendent E noted that the skills he acquired through the classes that taught leading change, addressing the achievement gap and providing a culturally proficient environment have been most relevant to his current role.

Superintendent F felt that the courses in law, human resources practices, and instructional practices were relevant. However, Superintendent F offered the caveat that an overtly theoretical basis for these courses without corresponding practical application made them less useful.

### *Future Course Design*

When asked what course he would create and design for a superintendent preparation program based on the knowledge gleaned from his professional experience, Superintendent A replied that it would be a leadership class with special emphasis on how to deal with Boards of Education and the media.

Superintendent B responded that the current Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) research conducted by Tim Waters and Rob Marzano offers an outstanding basis for understanding the key role that the Superintendent takes

part in the overall functioning of the educational system (Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning [McREL], n.d.; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Superintendent C responded that his course would be entitled Superintendent as Instructional Leader. The objectives of the class would encompass knowledge and understanding of curriculum and instruction, finding out about the most current research about how students learn, and instruction as to how to build and maintain school improvement programs. The subject matter would originate in the point of view of leadership skills development and teach superintendents how to apply this knowledge to improve the school district.

The name of Superintendent D's course would be Thriving (not just Surviving) Your First Year in the Superintendency. This course would apply a theoretical basis of instruction organized in pragmatic ways across several domains including dealing with boards of education, public policy advocacy, finance and strategic alignment, community engagement, strategic planning and continuous improvement.

Superintendent E responded that he would design a course entitled Creative and Flexible Leadership to Meet the Demands of Our Rapidly Changing Society. The main objective of this class would be to assist future superintendents in developing the leadership skills necessary for creating and putting into practice continuous improvement plans in school districts. The class would teach superintendents how to develop flexible plans that adapt to and tackle the need for rapid change in public education. Superintendent E noted that the conventional approach of building multi-year, long-term strategic plans is no longer applicable in the public education sphere.

Superintendent F specified three courses that he would create: the first would

focus specifically on the politics involved in the role of superintendent including board relations, leadership, legislative work and looking after sensitive human resources issues. This course would be taught using a case study method and would include real world examples and problems for superintendents to solve. The second course would teach organizational culture and change management. This course would be taught from a practical perspective with less emphasis on change theory and a balance of emphasis between change management and issues of organizational culture. The third course would highlight the future of education and educational innovation.

### *School Board Training*

Superintendent A stipulated that his school board training came from his mentor during his first two years of the superintendency. Superintendent A did not recall any formal training during his program.

Superintendent B had no school board training at all. All of Superintendent B's school board training has come from colleagues and on the job experience.

Superintendent C also received no formal school board training. Superintendent C noted that his professors would comment on the need to work with Boards and the need to build a team; however, actual training came from the workshops conducted by the state and national School Boards Associations and from administrative organizations.

Superintendent D also received no formal school board training, and he noted that more formal school board training is an area where preparation programs can improve. Superintendent D gave an example of investigating Carver's policy on governance framework theoretically and pragmatically.



Superintendent E did receive school board training via his leadership training course. Superintendent E noted that the topic of superintendent and school board relationships was repeatedly covered during this course, as it pertained to the individual courses and topics of the leadership program.

Superintendent F also did not receive any formal training for dealing school boards. His superintendent program did offer a model of policy governance that was developed by a group of consultants. Superintendent F noted that the governance model trained him on implementation of school board relationships.

### *Mentoring*

The superintendents highly recommended that first year superintendents have a mentor. Mentor assignments can be managed by the state, university, district, or professional associations. Most superintendents felt a state run program would be optimal due to the logistics involved.

The need for such a mentoring program can be measured by the example of one superintendent who took it upon himself to find a mentor. Another superintendent's school board paid for him to have a nationally recognized former superintendent as a mentor.

All superintendents agreed that mentoring can help fill the gaps of preparation programs and provide a lifeline of support to help anticipate the unknowns of the position. One superintendent explained that he consulted with his mentor about his new role as a public figure and the constant scrutiny that comes with it. He cited an example of understanding the benefits and drawbacks of residing in the district versus residing

outside the district. The insight of a mentor can be invaluable to navigate the intense scrutiny of the public.

### *Establishing Consortiums*

The establishment of consortiums was noted as another forum to assist in the preparation and development of future superintendents. The WSBC was established for superintendents of non-competing schools districts who lead school districts with similar characteristics and issues. The idea behind the consortium is to share ideas, solve problems and collaborate. Member superintendents also often involve executive level administrators in these discussions – such as deputy and assistant superintendents – and these education professionals contribute expertise in the areas of curriculum, instruction and assessment. Superintendents and their executive staff value the direct conversations with leaders who are nationally recognized as thought leaders and innovators in education.

Participation in WSBC provides superintendents with strategic conversations designed to address the instructional needs of students, and how to best address challenges facing the districts. This represents one of the core values of WSBC for its members; such conversations are impossible to have among superintendents from neighboring and competing districts, as they will actively withhold information and strategies to protect their own competitive edge. The WSBC conversations also lead to accelerated personal and professional growth, and the organization encourages expanded thinking among its members. Districts may have different ways to operate the system but have definitely found similarities, specifically in the area of problem solving.

The consortium is a hub of innovation that allowed participating superintendents to challenge themselves. Five of the six superintendents are new superintendents who were working in a district as an assistant or deputy superintendent and have attended WSBC meetings in that role. All five noted that their involvement with the consortium was not the sole factor but a significant contributing factor in the preparation for their eventual role as a superintendent. By participating in the WSBC, these assistant and deputy superintendents were able to observe how effective superintendents carry themselves, communicate, think, solve problems, and collaborate. They were able to model themselves after top-notch superintendents and be a part of the collective knowledge of successful superintendents representing successful school districts. The WSBC superintendents studied the book *Good to Great* by Jim Collins and discussed succession planning; however, none of the superintendents realized that most of them are indeed the result of effective succession planning (Collins, 2001).

#### Necessary 21st Century Knowledge and Skills

This section of the paper presents the findings of the written survey responses and phone interview that correlate to the following research question:

3. What skills, knowledge, characteristics and attitudes do experienced superintendents identify as most critical for the success of future superintendents?

Superintendent A identified the skills, knowledge, and attitudes most critical for success for the superintendent of 2020 as problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration, leadership styles, working with people including board members, staff, and members of the public.

Superintendent B felt that the successful superintendent of 2020 must have the means to impart vision, must demonstrate empathy and must be a problem solver. This case study participant also understood that the superintendent of 2020 must be an active collaborator, instructional leader, communicator, and innovator, and that he or she must demonstrate integrity.

Superintendent C wanted to emphasize that the superintendent of 2020 requires skills and knowledge related to change efforts, school improvement strategies, as well as dealing with mass media and social media. This case study participant also believed that the superintendent of 2020 must establish credibility in order to implement and sustain school improvement efforts.

Superintendent D felt that the successful superintendent of 2020 must be a value-centered individual; he or she must also be child and student centered. This case study participant also felt that in order for a superintendent to excel in 2020, he or she must be an effective communicator, a strategic systems thinker, and an effective coalition builder. Superintendent D also felt that superintendents of the future must demonstrate flexibility and adaptability, they must be future focused, they must challenge the process, and they must be committed to continuous improvement. Finally, Superintendent D believed that the effective superintendent of 2020 inspires and empowers others to act with coherency and purpose, models the ways of change, understands the interdependency of relationships and results, and demonstrates business intelligence and performance management.

Superintendent E identified the skills, knowledge, and attitudes most critical for success for the superintendent of 2020 as understanding the change process, as well

as understanding the importance of leadership in addressing continuous improvement to ensure equity and access for all students in their district. Superintendent E also noted the importance of understanding change and the change process.

Superintendent F identified the skills, knowledge, and attitudes most critical for success for the superintendent of 2020 as a deep understanding of organizational culture and a firm grasp on how to build relationships of trust, collaboration, and common purpose. Superintendent F also believed that superintendents of the future need to develop the ability to create a learner-centered organization (Senge, 1990). Superintendents of 2020 must also be able to design systems for efficiency and effectiveness, implement instructional practice, knowledge, leadership, technology and innovation. Superintendent F also believed that superintendents of the future need to demonstrate knowledge, leadership, flexibility, and resiliency.

Superintendent A believed that superintendents need to master email, voicemail, written communications, and texting; and he noted that the school district needs to have a presence on Twitter and Facebook. However, he did not believe it necessary for a superintendent to achieve personal mastery of social media.

Superintendent B noted that future superintendents will require advanced technical skills. Those skills will need to be in the area of technology, professional development, leadership and leadership development, and talent management.

Superintendent C believed that mastery of technology was crucial for the role. District superintendents must be prepared to determine the strategic value of technology tools immediately.

Superintendent D understood that a school district must cultivate an active digital social media presence. He did not feel it incumbent upon the district superintendent to manage this presence.

Superintendent E underscored the importance of effective communication and skill in various technologies, and he saw this as a key element of successful leadership. He viewed social media as a strong communication tool in today's society. Superintendents of large school districts in particular need to hire staff with the expertise necessary to manage social media.

Superintendent F believed technology and social media to be very important from the point of view of superintendent modeling, which requires that superintendent develop the skills they want to instill in their students.

#### Future Issues and Challenges in Education

This section of the paper will present the findings of the written survey responses and phone interview that correlate to the following research question:

4. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, what challenges do not currently exist but have a strong possibility of coming to fruition?

Superintendent A expressed his belief that the effect of technology on public education will be momentous and transformative. Superintendent A also felt that the continued funding shortages on public education will necessitate public school officials to become creative and proactive in order to realize the goals they have set.

Superintendent A noted that the increasing standards are a good thing. Superintendent A saw the main challenge of the future as collaborating with Board of Education

members and prioritizing issues. Proper delegation will also challenge future superintendents.

Superintendent B believes that the main issue in education that the superintendent of tomorrow needs to prepare for is a completely different model for schools. Such a model might consist of different ways to matriculate students that is not constrained by grade levels or calendars. Superintendent B viewed the swift rate of change as the main impact on the public education system, and the growing influence of external forces, including competition.

Superintendent C states that the main issue in education that the superintendent of tomorrow needs to prepare for is the effect that virtual schooling will have on the existing public education. Superintendent C also felt that superintendents of the future will need to prepare for accountability systems, working with reduced resources, increased competition with charter schools and the challenges of building a team with board members. Superintendent C's view of the critical challenges of the future included instructional leadership, school improvement efforts, and state and federal accountability systems, working with mass/social media, and sustaining school effectiveness in a climate of reduced resources.

Superintendent D noted that the public school reform agenda will be the pressing issue that superintendents of the future face. Other key issues, according to Superintendent D, will be public support and funding, business intelligence, digital 21st Century learning environments, changing student and community demographics, performance management and college, career and life demands. Superintendent D saw the growing role of public policy and the politicization of public education as a serious

challenge to the superintendent's leadership. Other challenges include funding and changing student demographics.

Superintendent E felt that the ability to lead change in order to address the needs of students in the swiftly transforming society in which we currently live will be the main issue that educational leaders will face in the 21st century. The type of leadership needed for the future is one that understands transformational leadership and the change process. Superintendent E noted that the political realities of being in a very public role will continue to be the most challenging aspects of the superintendency of the future.

Superintendent F believes that the continued competition with international educational institutions will challenge superintendents the most in the 21st century. Superintendents will also face the challenge of delivering the educational needs of students with far less funding. Superintendent F felt adequately prepared for the challenges of the future. He noted that his confidence came from watching outstanding superintendents in other districts perform.

### Summary

Chapter 4 provides the results of the written survey responses and phone interviews of the six superintendents featured in the case studies. This chapter was divided into four sections. First, a description of the participants was summarized, followed by participant responses that correlate to superintendent preparation. Participant responses on 21st century skills, knowledge, characteristics and attitudes the experienced superintendents of the WSBC identified as most critical for the success of future superintendents were shared. Finally, the results of written survey responses



and phone interviews revealed what the WSBC superintendents felt were the future challenges of the superintendency.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to assess the current and future role for public school superintendents as identified in six case study interviews with current school superintendents working in the public school system in the United States.

Overall, the results revealed three natural categories that will be discussed in this chapter. These categories are superintendent preparation, knowledge and skills necessary for the superintendent, and future challenges of the superintendency. The content in each of the following sections was extracted from the written surveys and phone interviews conducted with each of the case study participants to answer the following research questions:

1. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, what current challenges do superintendents face for which they are not adequately prepared?
2. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, on what areas of educational administration should future superintendents concentrate for job preparation?
3. What skills, knowledge, characteristics, and attitudes do experienced superintendents identify as most critical for the success of future superintendents?
4. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, what challenges do not currently exist but have a strong possibility of coming to fruition?

## Superintendent Preparation

Based on the perceptions and experiences of the six superintendents used in this study, the challenges for which superintendents need to prepare in the 21st century center around the rapid acceleration of change that public education is experiencing. The participants noted the need for superintendents to be better prepared in understanding the dynamics of the change process and the role of leadership in providing continuous improvement for a school district.

The superintendent responses reveal that more preparation is needed in the area of school-board relations and finance, especially with shrinking budgets and more state and federal unfunded mandates. This supports Michaels and Young (2006) who found that a valuable component in superintendent preparation was the hands-on practical understanding found in courses centered on budgeting and school finance. The superintendents in this study felt that superintendent preparation needs to include courses that are authentic, relevant, and applicable, and occur in a collaborative setting. Thus, superintendent courses need to be steeped in improvement strategies from the superintendent vantage point. The participants explained that courses need to have more focus on the superintendent as an instructional leader and a developer of instructional leaders. 21st century leaders will require exposure to more case studies to hone their judgment skills. Superintendents also need to learn how to innovate and create school systems that meet the changing needs of the communities in which they serve. Certainly, the role of innovator will define the superintendency in the 21st century. One superintendent aptly noted that the superintendent of tomorrow must learn to innovate, or that leader will become irrelevant.

The superintendents in this study further explained that superintendent preparation needs to include more application based instruction, similar to problem based learning. Practicing superintendents could work with aspiring superintendents by presenting them with a current problem they are facing and facilitate how to work through the problem by using this approach (Michaels and Young, 2006). Examples in which problem based learning can be applied include the following: contract negotiations; media issues and negative publicity, rezoning of attendance zones, cutting budgets, school board relations, failed bond attempts, and the pre-planning and post-planning of a school board meeting.

#### Knowledge and Skills Necessary for the 21st Century Superintendent

Based on the perceptions and experiences of the experienced superintendents who participated in this study, the key skill sets needed for 21st century superintendents include the ability to solve problems, innovate, and communicate effectively, according to the consensus reached by the case study participants. Other important skills included key leadership skills such as the ability to collaborate constructively with a diverse group of stakeholders and the ability to understand and spearhead the change process.

Consistently, the superintendents surveyed and interviewed emphasized the need to understand the change process and possess the skills of transformational leadership. The future of the public schoolhouse is certain to continually evolve and may progress with the current theme of providing students with more options via the school choice movement. 21st century superintendents will need to remain future-focused while multi-tasking the needs of today.

The pendulum on expectations of the superintendent has swung from that of a manager and bureaucrat to that of an instructional leader who can focus on the needs of students while simultaneously operating as a strategic systems thinker. Superintendent role conceptualizations were identified by Callahan (1966), Cuban (1976), and Kowalski (2005) as teacher-scholar, manager, democratic leader, applied social scientist, and communicator. The WSBC superintendents' responses indicate that the role of teacher-scholar has lost its importance. Future superintendents will need to develop their skills as instructional leaders and prepare for this re-emerging teacher-scholar role. Furthermore, the WSBC superintendents report that 21st century superintendents will need to be able to innovate and remain committed to continuous improvement. Additionally, Superintendents of the future will need to constantly assess the learning environment and remain competitive in their ability to meet the growing demands of education specialization that students and parents currently expect. According to the participants surveyed and interviewed, tomorrow's superintendent will need to market the type of instruction being delivered in order to brand the quality of schools in their district.

The superintendent of the 21st century must be a technophile who understands the dynamic and transformative role that technology plays in communication, education, and in society in general (Björk & Brunner, 2001; Kowalski & Keedy, 2005). The WSBC superintendents agreed that it was not necessary that the superintendent have all of the technical knowledge and skill to personally utilize the technology for broad and targeted communication, but they explained that superintendents will need to understand the significance in how technology can be used. Another important characteristic of the

21st century superintendent includes the ability to build and maintain relationships and strategic partnerships. This may require superintendents to seek partnerships with competing school entities including virtual schools, charter schools, private schools, universities, and neighboring districts.

Finally, the consensus of the superintendents surveyed was that the superintendent of tomorrow needs to communicate effectively to build relationships of trust, collaboration, and common purpose. By actively involving stake-holders and consistently communicating a message of student-centeredness while remaining future-focused, the 21st century superintendent will need to hone his communication skills, including the skill of listening (Kelly, 2009).

#### The Future of the Superintendency

Each of the superintendents who participated in the case study offered distinct and clearly articulated opinions in response to this question. Overall, the consensus of the six superintendents proved that technology will qualitatively transform public education in the coming decades, as will increasing competition with educational alternatives, including charter, private, and parochial institutions, to public education.

The participating superintendents recommended additional training centered on the integration of current and future technology with classroom instruction. All of the superintendents in this study agreed that the use of social media, especially when used as a communication tool, will be essential for school districts to harness.

One superintendent noted the importance of effective communication using various methods as being extremely important for a successful leader. While the understanding of social media and its impact as a strong communication tool in today's

society is important, using the skill in specific applications is not deemed as critical as the understanding of the impacts of each. It will also be important for current and future superintendents to ensure that they hire staff members who can develop the expertise in specific media in order to help support both the district and that superintendent (Berge and Clark, 2009).

All participants concurred that the most pressing issue facing schools today centers around school choice. The WSBC superintendents explained that this issue will redefine not only the role of the superintendent in the future but also the blueprint of American schooling. 21st century superintendents need to understand the available and emerging dynamics of the various choices for acquiring education. Such “choices” will have a direct impact on public education and can provide models that may improve existing systems. Superintendents need to discern how to embrace the positive components of choice, resist those parts that create inequities, and fight for students and schools that have a difficult time advocating for themselves. One superintendent comments, “We need to serve all students, but not protect the status quo.”

#### Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation of this study is the small sample size. The WSBC was used for the reputation of its member superintendents and the knowledge and experience they have; however, this group only consists of six member school districts.

Future research should investigate the effectiveness of mentoring programs for beginning superintendents. Currently, such programs are either non-existent or have inconsistent expectations for outcomes. Another area for future research includes investigation into the effectiveness of consortiums pertaining to the development of

future superintendents. Five of the six superintendents in this study were products of the WSBC and cited that their involvement with that consortium encouraged their leadership development.

Lastly, this study reveals an additional role for future superintendents. The role of innovator deserves further research in order to examine specific areas in need of innovation, such as providing more opportunities for school choice.

### Conclusion

The data collected from the six participants in the case study clearly indicate a lack of cohesion between what the superintendents learned in their university professional preparation programs and what they practice in their day-to-day activities (Bird, Murray & Wang, 2009). Simply extending district historical procedures or duplicating that which has been experienced through on-the-job training fails to take advantage of scholarly discourse (Bird, Murray & Wang, 2009). At best, small incremental change is possible, but practicing superintendents need to access more robust change possibilities in order to meet the challenges of real world settings. The superintendents involved in this study tended to favor a hybrid approach – rigorous theoretical insight grounded in real world practice. Since superintendents typically spend a good deal of their time solving challenging problems including funding shortfalls, competition from both domestic and international educational institutions, and the constant scrutiny of the media; their preparation must provide opportunities to develop their leadership skills and solve real world problems in an environment in which they can take risks, fail, and learn in the relative safety of their educational tenure, rather than make costly decisions in the public eye. Future research should be directed



at uncovering the best practices and testing their applicability in diverse districts in order to facilitate communication and information exchange between professionals who serve diverse populations (Bird, Murray & Wang, 2011). University preparation programs could then be informed as to the content of courses and the creation of experiential requirements during internships, as a means of adequately preparing superintendents of the future to assume an active leadership role immediately after graduation (Michaels and Young, 2006; Bird, Murray & Wang, 2009).

Balancing budgets without sacrificing the needs of students proves to be one of the most challenging responsibilities of a superintendent, and as the case study participants all note, this issue will be the norm rather than the exception, as public education moves further into the 21st century (Michaels and Young, 2006). Thus, the intersection between cost cutting ability, money management, and effective leadership needs to be combined, facilitated, and addressed in a scholarly fashion as a merged concept rather than separate silos of school finance and educational leadership (Bird, Murray & Wang, 2009). The needs of children and the scarcity of available resources are not going to subside, yet the superintendent must create the means by which his or her district can prosper. Superintendents of the 21st century, therefore, need to be better prepared and re-tooled through the assistance of improved research productivity (Bird, Murray & Wang, 2009).

This study agreed with much of what the review of literature revealed concerning the needs for superintendents to be prepared for the 21st century. This study contributes to the literature with its finding of a potential new role conceptualization: the superintendent as innovator. Four role conceptualizations for the superintendent were

introduced by Callahan (1966) as: teacher-scholar, manager, democratic leader, and applied social scientist. Four decades later, Kowalski (2005) added the role of communicator. The findings of this study support these previously identified roles but recommend additional preparation for superintendents in the re-emerging teacher-scholar role, a role identified in the 21st century as that of an instructional leader. Furthermore, future superintendents will also need to hone their problem-solving skills and develop the role as innovator. This sixth role has been identified by the participants of this study as a critical area for the success of 21st century superintendents, noting that future superintendents must innovate, or cease to be relevant.

APPENDIX A  
INTRODUCTORY E-MAIL TO SUPERINTENDENTS

WSBC Superintendents,

My name is Courtney Gober and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of North Texas (UNT) and a high school principal in Plano ISD, Plano, Texas. For my dissertation, I am conducting surveys and interviews about the preparation needed for superintendents for the 21st century. I have researched the purpose and principles of the Western States Benchmark Consortium (WSBC) and find that work and membership of that consortium is progressive, innovative, future-focused and practical enough for its members to serve as the sole participants in this qualitative study. This study has received support by one of your members, Dr. Doug Otto, recently retired superintendent of Plano Independent School District in Plano, Texas.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a written survey, followed by a telephone interview. The survey questions will be sent to you in February, 2012. I estimate that it will take between 30- 45 minutes to respond to the 15 open-ended questions. Your written response to each question is greatly appreciated. Please note that you will have the opportunity to expound on each response during a short phone interview to follow.

All research records will be kept confidential by the principal investigator. No individual responses will be disclosed to anyone because all data will be reported on a group basis.

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact me using the contact information listed below. Thank you for taking the time to be part of this research and for helping me to further my education.

Sincerely yours,

Courtney Gober  
UNT Graduate Student

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM SUPERINTENDENT OF PLANO ISD

To: WSBC Superintendents  
From: Superintendent of Plano ISD  
Date: February, 2012  
Re: Dissertation Interview

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WSBC Colleagues,

Those of you that have doctorates and those who are working on one certainly know how important and how difficult it can be to get participation in doctoral student research. Courtney Gober, a doctoral candidate at the University of North Texas and a high school principal in Plano ISD, has contacted me asking assistance to use WSBC superintendents for participants in his study. Courtney is researching the preparation needed for 21st century superintendents.

Mr. Gober has developed 15 open-ended questions that he asks each of us to complete individually. Afterwards he plans to schedule a short telephone interview that will serve as a follow-up of the survey. He then plans to look at the correlations of our responses to propose recommendations to adapt superintendent preparation programs. The process is expected to take 45 minutes for your written survey followed by a 15 minute phone interview.

We will be given access to the results of this study and these findings could be shared within our organization and professional networks. I have been assured that all research records will be kept confidential by the researcher and that all data will be reported on a group basis.

Thank you for taking the time to be part of this research and for helping an aspiring superintendent further his education.

Regards,

Doug Otto

APPENDIX C

OFFICIAL SURVEY INVITATION E-MAIL TO WSBC SUPERINTENDENTS

To: WSBC Superintendents  
From: Courtney Gober  
Date: February, 2012  
Re: Superintendent Preparation for the 21st Century – Interview Questions

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WSBC Superintendents,

This e-mail is an official invitation to an interview to collect qualitative information on how to prepare superintendents for the demands of the job in the 21st century. The study population will include seven superintendents from the Western States Benchmark Consortium.

This survey will take 45 minutes to complete. It is my goal to have all superintendents participate and complete the survey before March 1, 2012. Please find survey questions attached.

Thank you in advance for your participation. Not only does your participation add to the body of literature that directly impacts the field of education administration, it also is impacting my personal education.

Thank you for your participation!

Courtney Gober  
Graduate Student  
University of North Texas



APPENDIX D  
SUPERINTENDENT PREPARATION FOR THE 21st CENTURY  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

**Title of Study:** Superintendent Preparation for the 21st Century

**Student Investigator:** Courtney Gober, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Teacher Education and Administration. **Supervising Investigator:** Dr. Bill Camp

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to identify effective traits and necessary skills that superintendents of public schools will need to have in the next 10-15 years. These superintendents will receive a 15 question survey to be completed individually to determine what they consider to be needed skills and traits for future superintendents. This study will determine the significant correlations of recommendations from the superintendents and propose that this research be used to adapt instruction for superintendent preparation programs. The four research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What skills, knowledge, characteristics and attitudes do experienced superintendents identify as most critical for success for future superintendents?
2. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, what current challenges do superintendents face for which they are not adequately prepared?
3. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, what challenges do not currently exist but have a strong possibility of coming to fruition?
4. Based on the perceptions and experiences of experienced superintendents, on what areas of educational administration should future superintendents concentrate for preparation?

**Study Procedures:** You will be asked to answer 15 questions in writing that will take about 45 minutes of your time. The written survey shall be returned to the student investigator via e-mail at [REDACTED]. You will then be asked to answer similar follow up questions via a telephone interview, which will take about 15 minutes of your time.

**Foreseeable Risks:** There are no foreseeable risks are involved in this study.

**Benefits to the Subjects or Others:** This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you, but we hope to learn more about what is needed for superintendent preparation programs to better prepare superintendents for the future demands of the job.

**Compensation for Participants: None**

**Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records:** The telephone interviews will not be recorded; the written notes taken from the interview as well as your written responses to the initial survey will be maintained in the Supervising Investigator’s office at Matthew’s Hall on the UNT Campus. The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the study, you may contact **Courtney Gober** at [REDACTED] or **Dr. Bill Camp** at [REDACTED].

**Review for the Protection of Participants:** This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

**Research Participants’ Rights:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read all of the above and that you confirm:

- **Courtney Gober** has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**For the Student Investigator or Designee:**

I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX E  
SUPERINTENDENT PREPARATION FOR THE 21st CENTURY  
SURVEY QUESTIONS

## Superintendent Information

Size of School District: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years as superintendent at current district: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years as superintendent total: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Directions:*

*Carefully consider the following 15 open-ended questions. Please prepare a written response for each question. Any additional notes or comments that you would like to share can be obtained during our telephone interview which will be scheduled for February 2012. The results provide information for the recommended enhancement of superintendent preparation programs. Please return completed survey to Courtney Gober at [REDACTED].*

1. Do you feel your superintendent (Education Leadership) program prepared you for the superintendency? Explain strengths and weaknesses of this program.
2. As you reflect upon your current day-to-day duties, what class(es) specifically do you feel enhanced your knowledge / skills as a superintendent? Which of your skillsets has become more in demand for your role since you underwent your training?
3. If you were asked to create / design a course for a superintendent preparation program what would that course be called? What major objectives would you emphasize in that course? How would the training differ from what is already offered?
4. During your first year as a superintendent, did you have a practicing superintendent serve as a mentor? Was that mentorship useful to you?
5. What skills, knowledge, and attitudes would you identify as most critical for success for the superintendent of 2020?
6. What individual characteristics have had a positive effect on your job success and career?
7. What challenges do you currently face for which you feel you were not adequately prepared by your training? Of those challenges, which ones are most likely to be recurring and eventually associated with the job of superintendent in the future?

8. How can the role of consortiums (such as the WSBC) serve as a catalyst for preparing superintendents for the future?

9. What area(s) of educational administration should be the focus for future superintendents?

10. How important is it that superintendents be able to effectively use social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.), email, texting and other means of technology for communication? Are there others that will be important?

11. Today, a growing popularity exists for choosing charter, private, and parochial schools. How should superintendents be prepared to handle these competing school choice options? What impact do you envision these alternative forms of education will have over the next decade?

12. Public and political pressure for local, state, and national school reform is growing. How should superintendents be prepared to handle such reform? What area of reform do you feel most affects the role of the superintendent?

13. Have you received any formal training concerning working with your school board? Did such training come from your superintendent preparation program?

14. The use of virtual schooling (i.e. distance education) may greatly influence the organization of future schools. What will the impact be and how should superintendents be trained?

15. For what issue(s) in education should the superintendent of tomorrow be prepared?

Superintendents,

Thank you for participating in this study and helping me take this very challenging step in my doctoral work. Please send the completed survey to me at

████████████████████. I will be sure to forward you a complete copy of my dissertation upon its completion. If you have any questions or comments please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Courtney Gober

APPENDIX F

APPROXIMATE SCRIPT FOR SUPERINTENDENT TELEPHONE REMINDER

(SCHEDULE INTERVIEW TIME)

[WSBC Superintendent Name]

This is Courtney Gober, and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of North Texas. Earlier this month you received two invitations to participate in a study entitled: *Superintendent Preparation in the 21st Century*. The purpose for my calling is three-fold:

1. To confirm that you have received the invitation and to ensure that there are no technical issues exist in keeping you from completing the 15 open-ended questions.
2. To address any questions, comments, or concerns that you may have.
3. To schedule an appointment for a telephone interview, with questions relating to the written survey, which should take about 15 minutes.

**If the superintendent expresses interest in participating:**

I will ensure that questions were received and schedule a telephone interview appointment.

**If the superintendent expresses that they wish to not participate:**

They will be thanked for their time and consideration.



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