EFFECTIVE INDUCTION AND MENTORING PRACTICES: PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE AND MALE SUPERINTENDENTS IN THEIR FIRST YEAR IN A NEW STATE

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of SANDRA SHELDON
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EFFECTIVE INDUCTION AND MENTORING PRACTICES:  PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE AND MALE SUPERINTENDENTS IN THEIR FIRST YEAR IN A NEW STATE

Abstract

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The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the perceptions of six seasoned superintendents, new to the state being studied on the effectiveness of induction and mentoring programs. The purpose is also to gain an understanding of these programs as they relate to differences in gender and levels of experience. The findings from this study have implications for job, district and community stability and improvement in student learning. The portraiture of the six superintendents studied revealed that all but one were retired from another state and thus at the end of their career. The unretired superintendent indicated that she only wanted one superintendency and would not seek another district. Four of the six relayed that this would be their last superintendency. The interviews indicated that there was no consistent induction process across the state with the exception of a meeting in the summer for new superintendents sponsored by the state association for superintendents. In five of the six cases, a mentor was assigned, but no structure was provided and the superintendents indicated that they found their own network independent of the assigned mentor. These networks included other superintendents in the region, colleagues from their former state, the district central office staff, university professors, community organizations, and the regional education agency. The study found that a more structured support system should be in place for any new superintendent in the state, but this system should be differentiated for superintendents new to the superintendency and
for experienced superintendents new to a state system. In addition, the study found that a system for the induction of women into the superintendency needs to be strengthened and more formalized. This system should start with the mentoring of principals and central office workers and should include opportunities for leadership at a variety of levels. Follow up studies will be needed to determine what support systems should entail.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The current literature on educational reform suggests that a superintendent’s highest priority is instructional leadership (Marzano & Waters 2009). For the superintendent’s leadership to have a significant impact on student achievement, the tenure of the superintendent, over an extended period of time, is essential (Fullan, 2003; Elmore, 2006). Borman, Hewes, Overman, and Brown (2003) noted, “it might take longer than a decade for the effects of a comprehensive school reform model to stabilize…without consistent leadership from the superintendent, nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction have little chance for success” (p. 114). Marzano and Waters (2009) found that the longevity of the superintendent has a positive effect on the average academic achievement of students in the district. They state, “School boards and the local community should seek to provide an environment for superintendents that will make them want to spend a decade or more in one school district” (p. 9). Kerr (1998) supports this finding and adds a caution to districts to provide an employment condition that encourages the superintendent to make a long term commitment so that staff will buy in to systemic, second-order change.

For systemic change to sustain, the superintendent of today must be both and instructional leader and system manager (Elmore, 2007). Elmore professes:

In this dual role, the superintendent must work with the school board to commit to set non-negotiable long-term goals for achievement and instruction, monitor achievement and instructional goals regularly, and allocate resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction (p.68).
This is what Elmore calls the “reciprocity of accountability and capacity” (p. 68). This means the superintendent, as the instructional leader, sets a district vision that is aligned with organizational goals and is required to hold the system accountable to some action or outcome related to those goals. The superintendent then has an equal responsibility as manager to provide the system the capacity to do what is being asked. This capacity includes the necessary financial resources as well as the resource of time and continuity. The capacity of time is evidenced in the instructional improvement in District #2 in New York City. Superintendent Tony Alvarado and Deputy Elaine Fink spent eight years in District #2 and made “positive systemic change in a school district that represented a very diverse, segmented community” (p. 72). Their success was credited to high academic expectations, accountability to those expectations, the provision of resources and the eight-year longevity of the superintendent and deputy.

*Problem Statement:*

According to leading researchers on systemic change, superintendent leadership does matter and the long-term tenure of a superintendent is important in the implementation of systemic change (Kotter, 1999; Fullan, 2003; Elmore, 2006; Marzano & Waters, 2009). In addition, the blending of the managerial role of superintendent with the instructional leadership role has been found to be essential for gains in student achievement (Elmore, 2007).

Tallerico, Burstyn and Poole (1993) discuss the importance of professional development experiences in school board relations, understanding the vulnerability of the superintendency, and strengthening both formal and informal support systems to help the superintendent secure stability in their position. They propose that more personal mentorship through national, state and regional superintendent associations is essential to the tenure of the superintendent.
Much of the research in the area of induction and mentoring of leaders tends to center around the teacher leader and principal leadership (Hoerr, 2005; Kowalski, 2006; Marzano & Kegan, 2006, Wagner & Kegan 2006; Fullan, 2007). Few studies are available that evaluate the induction and mentoring of superintendents. This lack of research seriously impedes the understanding of the phenomenon of induction and mentoring of the superintendent. More research is needed to determine the sufficiency of the systemic induction and mentoring supports that are currently in place in the state being studied and determine if these supports impact long term sustainability of superintendent leadership.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of six experienced superintendents in their first year in a new state on the effectiveness of induction and mentoring programs available in the state. The study will look at how these superintendents transition into their new positions and seek to identify the formal and informal support networks and professional development opportunities accessed by these superintendents, identify any differences between male and female superintendents as they seek professional networks and induction support and discover which professional organizations are most effective in providing support for superintendents new to the state. The findings from this study have implications for job of the superintendent, district and community stability and improvement in student learning.

**Overview of Literature Review**

The literature review encompasses four areas of study: (1) The impact of superintendent tenure and stability on student achievement, (2) Superintendent induction and professional support systems, (3) Gender differences in the types of support systems accessed, and (4)
Barriers to the induction and tenure of women into the superintendency. Although not exhaustive, the literature review is extensive and provides a strong platform to launch this study.

Section one, the role of superintendent tenure and stability in learning, reviews six studies that discuss the importance of superintendent and principal leadership on student achievement. Each of these studies examines the implications of leadership on student achievement. Following a meta-analysis of twenty-seven studies reflecting data of 1210 school districts, Marzano and Waters (2009) found that there is a strong correlation between superintendent leadership and student achievement. They listed five responsibilities or initiatives in which district leadership should engage to improve student achievement. Cudiero, (2005) found significant impact of the superintendent on student achievement. Over four years she interviewed leadership teams and principals of three school districts to determine what superintendents did that affected their own roles as instructional leaders. She determined that superintendents can have a positive impact on student learning through promotion, support and development of principals as instructional leaders.

There are two studies, Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) and Fink and Brayman (2006) that look specifically at principal leadership, but the findings have implications regarding superintendent leadership as well. They found that sustainable reform is something that takes time to initiate and become part of the culture of an organization. A major concern that both of these research studies identified was the lack longevity of the principals and thus continuity of change initiatives. They both addressed the issue of transition of knowledge from the outgoing leader and the incoming leader as well as the development and maintenance of trust in the organization.
The tenure of a leader is important for systemic change (Fullan, 2005). Yet there is a belief that due to political and perceptual data, superintendents tend to not endure in a position longer than 2-4 years. Glass (2007) addresses what he calls the myth of the revolving door. He contends that superintendent leadership is perceived to be fleeting with superintendents staying in districts less than three years. In looking at districts with between 1000 and 50,000 students, tenure is 6.5 year. His concern is, if it is perceived that superintendents move from one district to the next on a regular basis of 2-4 years, then teachers and district staff become resistant to change initiatives and wait for the superintendent to just go away. This perception can be detrimental to the superintendency, causing the position to be less effective. Conversely, Meyers (2010) found that 30% of superintendents turnover in the first year of a superintendency and 70% within five years. He puts forward five recommendations designed to increase the longevity of the superintendent.

Section two, superintendent induction and professional support systems, explores different types of induction and mentoring programs currently in use. These studies recognize the importance of support systems for district leadership. The superintendency is a lonely profession (Armstrong & Rada, 1989). In their study, done before there were many support systems in place for superintendent, the researchers identified that superintendents did not have a strong connectedness with their peers. The superintendents in their survey indicated that they seldom reached out for help from peers in other districts. When they did, they created loose networks, generally centered within regional or state meetings.

Providing mentoring and support through superintendent preparation programs is one way to support the changing role of the superintendent (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). The researchers found that creating a comprehensive preparation program for superintendents is
difficult because superintendent responsibilities vary significantly from state to state and district to district. It was found that the support provided to superintendents needed to be more tailored to the needs of the individual. They did recommend nine general components for a superintendent leadership program to include a cohort group and a yearlong internship in diverse settings. It was the hope of the authors that the internship would create a lasting relationship between the members of the cohort group and their mentors.

A similar idea was recommended by Kowalski, Petersen and Fusarelli (2009). This study looked at all new superintendents in a four state region. They made a distinction between a superintendent in their first year on the job and an experienced superintendent in their first year in a new district. The researchers addressed strengths, weaknesses and omissions in the superintendent preparation programs. Among other strengths, the participating superintendents referenced the ability to network with others in their profession as a strong component.

Rounding out the research on professional support systems is the evaluation of the Iowa Mentoring and Induction program (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006). This formal mentoring program was a pilot grant from the Iowa Department of Education. Mentors and protégés were required to attend trainings focused on twelve components. A significant finding from this study is that the composition of the mentor teams was an important factor when looking at the positive impact of the program. For the mentorship to be effective, it was important to develop a relationship of trust. To promote more successful mentor/protégé relationships, it was the researchers’ recommendation that gender and race be a consideration when creating mentor teams.

The final two areas of this literature review explore the literature surrounding the difference of leadership styles of men and women to determine whether different induction and mentoring support programs need to be tailored to differences in gender. Researchers such as
Grogan, Brunner, and Shakeshaft each have multiple studies, books and peer reviewed papers documenting women and their preparation and induction to the superintendency. The studies reviewed in this document examine gender differences in leadership behaviors and the need for a variety of induction and mentoring programs to address these differences (Kabacoff, 1998; Appelbaum, Audet, and Miller, 2002; Miller, Washington & Fiene, 2006).

Research Questions

Through interviews, the study will explore the following research questions:
1. Do females and males experience induction processes to the superintendency differently, and if so, how does this impact their tenure and job stability?
2. Do these superintendents use similar leadership strategies and access similar support systems as they transition into their first year in a new state?
3. What type of support/mentoring do superintendents need/access during their first year as superintendents in a new state?
4. What induction strategies/programs could be developed and implemented that would support superintendents during this transition, helping them maintain their current position and create sustainability in their districts?

Methodology

This phenomenological research study examines the experiences of six seasoned superintendents as they are transitioning into a new superintendency in a new state. Qualitative research follows an inductive research process and involves the collection and analysis of qualitative data (generally non-numerical) to search for patterns, themes and holistic features. Data is collected through conversation, text audio or video, reviewing of archival documents, interviewing and personal interaction with the source of the data (Instructional Assessment
Resources, U. of Texas, 2010). Bogdin and Bilkin (2007) identify five features of qualitative research. (1) Naturalistic—researchers go out to the setting to gather their data. Data is collected on the premises whenever possible; (2) Descriptive Data – The data collected take the form of words or pictures. (3) Concerned with process – researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products. (4) Inductive – researchers tend to analyze data inductively. They do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses. (5) Meaning – Researchers use this approach to discover how different people make sense of their lives. They are concerned with what are called participant perspectives (p. 4-7).

The philosophy of phenomenology was developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who contended that “human consciousness actively constitutes the objects of experience….A phenomenological study focuses on descriptions of how people experience and how they perceive their experience of the phenomena under study” (Glesne, 1999 p.7). Phenomenological research is used to understand lived experiences and is considered both a philosophy as well as a method (Creswell, 2003). In using a phenomenological approach, the researcher will attempt to understand the meaning of the events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state: —phenomenologists emphasize the subjective aspects of people’s behavior. They attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of their informants (p.25). The phenomenological approach focuses on descriptions of how people experience and perceive their experience of the phenomena under study. By using the phenomenological approach, researchers attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations. (Bogden & Bilkin, 2007).

The methodology of portraiture was used in this qualitative study, relying primarily on Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’s (1997) approach. Portraitist researchers seek to accurately
represent the life experiences and voices of research participants. In addition, portraiture incorporates the knowledge and experience of the researcher. A key component in the effective use of portraiture is the relationship between the researcher and participants. They must share an understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This methodology will be more thoroughly described in Chapter 3.

Participants chosen for this study are all practicing superintendents employed in positions in a state where they had never held a superintendency. The participants were interviewed with a series of questions designed to illicit the interviewee’s perceptions regarding the induction support and mentoring that they accessed, while taking a position in a new state. The researcher reviewed the data collected through a critical theory lens to determine the type of support men and women access as they transition into a new state and if this support is such that is favored by one gender over another.

Six superintendents fit the criteria of the study. The researcher conducted face-to-face and telephone interviews lasting from 1 ½ to 2 hours using an interview guide containing twenty questions that reflected the four research questions. A digital recorder was used to record the data.

Report of the Study

This report of the study consists of five chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the subject being studied, states the purpose of the research, identifies the problem to be studied and briefly outlines methods that will be used to collect and analyze the data. Chapter Two examines the literature related to the research problem to determine gaps in the research and to form a foundation for the research. Chapter Three provides an in-depth explanation of the methods being used to collect, analyze and report the findings of the study. It also contains the
delimitations of the study and the ethical and moral considerations that the researcher observed.

Chapter Four contains a detailed presentation of the data as told by the six participating superintendents new to the state being studied. Chapter Five presents the summary, researcher’s conclusions, considerations for implementation, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Impact of Superintendent Tenure and Stability on Student Achievement

The impact of district leadership on student achievement is an area of research that is somewhat limited. There are many studies that relate the impact of the principal on student achievement, but few that investigate the role of the superintendent and central office personnel and their respective impact on academic growth. However, much of the leading research on principal leadership has implications at the superintendent level as well. (Fullan, 2005)

Marzano and Waters (2009) conducted one of the few studies on the impact of district leadership on student achievement. They conducted a meta-analysis of twenty-seven reports, which reflected data from 1,210 districts. They found in these data a correlation between district leadership and student achievement of .24 with .05 being statistically significant. The authors stated, “given this correlation between district leadership and student achievement of .24, we would predict that the average student achievement in the district would increase by 9.5 percentile points…when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected” (p. 4-5). The authors further stated the leadership needs to be of a style that promotes autonomy in the buildings and carries the expectation that building principals and other administrators in the district lead within the boundaries defined by the district goals” (p. 9).

Marzano and Waters continued by defining five responsibilities or initiatives in which district leadership should engage to improve student achievement. These five initiatives are: (1) ensuring collaborative goal setting; (2) establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction; (3) creating board alignment with and support of district goals; (4) monitoring
achievement and instructional goals; and (5) allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction (p. 8). Finally, Marzano and Waters discovered what they called the bonus finding. This finding implied that “the longevity of the superintendent has a positive effect on the average academic achievement of students in the district. This positive effect may manifest itself as early as two years into a superintendent’s tenure” (p. 9).

Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) presented theoretical insights and strategic implications gained from five years of data collection and analysis on the subject of long-term change in a study entitled Change Over Time?. This study documented leadership changes at eight United States and Canadian secondary schools over a thirty year period and their impact on academic achievement. The researchers collected data from teachers and administrators who worked with them in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. They identified five major internal and external change forces responsible for major shifts of direction in the life of a school and those who work within it. One of the forces identified was leadership succession. The researchers contend that one of the most significant events in the life of a school is change of leaders and leadership. They state that “leadership change most directly and dramatically provokes change in individual schools” (p.18). The authors used Wenger’s (1998) theory on the succession process. Wenger identifies a series of three stages of knowledge necessary for leadership and sustainability during times of transition: inbound knowledge, insider knowledge and outbound knowledge. Inbound knowledge is the knowledge of leadership or of a particular school that is needed to change, make one’s mark on it, or turn it around. Insider knowledge is the knowledge one gains from and exercises with other members of the community after becoming known, trusted, and accepted by them. Outbound knowledge is the knowledge needed to preserve past successes, keep improvement going, and leave a legacy after one has left (p.19).
According to the authors, the sustainability of school improvement and reform initiatives is repeatedly undermined by excessive emphasis on inbound knowledge of leadership at the expense of equally important outbound concerns. They state that in the most current part of the thirty year *Change Over Time?* study, leaders typically stayed in a school less than five years. This accelerated frequency of succession can be tied to demographic data of the baby boomer generation taking early retirement precipitated by standardized reform pressures and increasing pressures on school districts to bring about rapid improvement in underperforming schools. This turnover is creating instability and non-sustainability in school leadership (Association of California School Administrators, 2001). This constant turnover causes leadership to rotate through schools creating an attitude amongst teachers of entrenched resistance to reform initiatives and will not create systemic change.

Fink & Brayman (2006) explored the concept of succession of leadership with a focus on the principal using case studies of three schools. Two of the three case studies were from the *Change Over Time?* study conducted by Hargraves and Goodson (2006). The third case study was of a school that was designed consciously as a learning organization which tried to sustain its uniqueness by purposefully planning for leadership succession. The authors identified four major factors regarding principal succession: (1) Principal turnover has accelerated at an ever increasing rate. In the first 68 years of one of case studies there were only six principals. There were four principals in the final 12 years of the study. The second case study showed four principals in 28 years and then three principals in five years; (2) Established protocols for transition from one leader to another are not in place to transfer the inbound knowledge that leaders need to have. The new leaders coming in are many times inexperienced and unprepared for the challenges that face them and experienced leaders are retiring or being promoted to other
opportunities and are not available to mentor or pass on inside knowledge; (3) When a succession plan and time to transfer the inside knowledge necessary to maintain programs and change are in place, the system continues improving. Providing time for intentional transition to help develop shared understanding and commitment among faculty through meaningful communication will harmonize the new principal's inbound knowledge with the outbound knowledge of the departing leader; and (4) There is a changing nature of leadership from empowering to managerial. When governments mandate standardized and micromanaged reforms that preempt most school based direction setting, they reduce school leaders to mete functionaries (p. 86).

Fink and Brayman put forth three recommendations. The first is that schools incorporate succession plans and processes in all school improvement plans pushing administrators and those around them to take the long-term challenges of succession and sustainability more seriously. Second, place incentives in leaders' contracts that encourage them to make a long term commitment to the school. Lastly, put policy frameworks together that allow leaders to lead rather than reacting frantically and compliantly to the repetitive change syndrome of mandated and micromanaged reform.

Finally, the researcher stated that their study indicated the rapid turnover of school leaders and principals especially creates significant barriers to educational change. If school leaders are viewed by teachers, parents and students as merely interchangeable messengers of agents external to the school, then the kind of leadership required for long-term, sustained enhancement of learning for all students will remain cruelly elusive.

Superintendent tenure has long been believed to average two to three years in a position (Glass, 2007). A team of researchers looked into this so-called revolving door theory of the
superintendency (Natkin, et.al, 2002). The purpose of the research was to determine whether the superintendency is a position where the job is fleeting and superintendents should be advised to keep their bags packed, rent rather than buy new homes, quit the job rather than fight and expect and prepare for failures or if the short tenure of the superintendent was a myth. They took the premise that for change to be successful at all facets of education, there needs to be a stable and predictable leadership over a sustained period of time. If the myth was in fact true, they stated, “the three-year cycle of dismissal, search and selection, reorganization and dismissal again was the greatest single hindrance to improving the quality of our schools” (p. 29). This being said, the authors found in their review that the average superintendent tenure varied depending upon the size of districts studied. Larger, more urban districts did tend to turn over superintendents every three to five years with an average sustainability of 4.71 years. The authors referenced a study by the Council of Great City Schools where the mean tenure for the 48 districts responding was 2.33 years. These were the largest of the urban school districts in the nation, many of which are in dire-straits when it comes to improvements in student learning and the achievement gap. However, when looking at smaller, less urban districts, the superintendent tenure averaged 7.25 years. In reviewing superintendent tenure in a study covering 25 years and 1,103 superintendents in 206 districts from less than 1,000 to 50,000 students, the median tenure was 6.5 years with 274 superintendents still in office at the time the study was conducted. These data indicate that the idea of the revolving door superintendency may indeed be a myth that is propagated by word of mouth, but not backed by data.

Glass (2007) noted several negative consequences with the perpetuation of the myth that superintendents only spend two to three years in a position. His study indicated that the less time a superintendent expects to spend in a new district, the more reluctant they may be to
undertake deep reform and may instead focus efforts on objectives that can be easily accomplished within two or three years.

These studies also found that school systems can be negatively impacted by the revolving door myth, in particular, the mindset that improvement initiatives will go away as fast as the current superintendent. District personnel, teachers, parents and even the board will not buy-in to the reform efforts, holding out for the next new superintendent. This belief that the superintendency is a revolving door can also have serious political implications. The belief in the notion that there is high turnover in the superintendency can lead the public to see superintendents as hired guns, coming into a district to take care of a few problems and then leave. This leads to distrust of the position of superintendent and can cast a negative pall over education in general. (Natkin et.al 2002)

Superintendent tenure and student achievement was analyzed in a study by Meyers (2010). He compared the impact of superintendent tenure on the third grade scores of the Kansas Reading Assessment. The implications of this study reveal that the length of tenure of a Kansas superintendent does have a significantly positive impact on student academic achievement. Myers cited studies that allude to the impact of No Child Left Behind on the superintendency (Tallerico & Bursten, 1996; Cuderio, 2005; Orr, 2006). His findings indicate that there is a 30% turnover in the first year of the superintendency and a 70% turnover of superintendents within five years (p. 68-69). He contends that this high rate is due to many factors including the political nature of the superintendency, high accountability tied to high standards and test scores, and an environment where interest groups, board relations and regulatory issues tend to make the position unworkable. He has five recommendations to increase the longevity of the superintendent. (1) improve post-secondary superintendent preparation program; (2) creation of
a research-based superintendent mentor program; (3) promotion of formal and informal superintendent support groups; (4) continued emphasis in training school board members in the concepts of proper boardsmanship; (5) conduct additional examinations of multiple variables as they relate to the superintendent and student academic achievement.

Superintendent Induction and Professional Support Systems

The role of the superintendent has changed over time from an emphasis on management to one on instructional leadership (Elmore, 2006). Historically, superintendents were selected from the ranks of principals with little or no formal preparation for the job. The expectation of the superintendent was to work with the board, manage the plant, keep the books balanced and deal with personnel issues as they became evident (Glass, 2007). The role of manager still exists and is essential to the success of a school system, but the importance of management has taken a back seat to the focus on instructional leadership. Because of this, research has been conducted to determine the need for better induction and professional support programs for instructional leaders (Asbury & Hackmann, 2006; Elmore, 2006; Fullan, 2008).

Grogan and Andrews (2002) documented the changing role of the superintendent and provided recommendations for improvement in superintendent preparation and professional development programs. Their research found that the principal preparation programs tended to provide professional development that perpetuated the existing system. When looking at superintendent preparation programs, there were fewer to review. “Few universities have programs tailored specifically for the position, although most Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs in educational administration are considered to be preparation programs for superintendents” (p. 245). However, in reviewing programs it was found that they were instructor and classroom based and had very little training in the field. In looking at why it was so difficult to make
superintendent preparation programs more relevant to the position, the researchers found the responsibilities of the superintendent can vary significantly from state to state and from district to district. Some significant variables included size of district, state laws and regulations, board/superintendent roles, and fiscal requirements.

Grogan and Andrews made nine recommendations for the redesign of superintendent preparation programs. These recommendations focused on collaborative leadership skills, teaching of essential knowledge organized around problems of practice and ISLLC standards, promotion of ethics and moral leadership centered on issues of social justice, and practiced through a yearlong paid internship in diverse settings.

Kowalski, Petersen and Fusarelli (2009) looked at the demographic profiles of novice superintendents and their employers. In this study, the researchers looked at all new superintendents in a four state region. Their focus was on the novice superintendent, noting that the “critical nature of the induction year in professional education has long been recognized in relation to teaching. Unfortunately, research on novice superintendents and efforts to strengthen the induction year in this pivotal position has not received an equivalent level of attention” (p.18). They made a distinction between the first year superintendent, one with superintendent experience, but with a new employer, and first time superintendent, one who has never been a superintendent. First time superintendents were asked to identify the three greatest strengths, weaknesses and omissions in their preparation. Strengths included courses in school law and finance. Also referenced were the ability to network with others, the importance of the internship, personnel administration and intellectual stimulation. The weaknesses included the heavy emphasis on theory and the fact that the program instructors were not practitioner based with many never serving in the position of superintendent. Suggested areas to include were
school board relations, politics of education, collective bargaining and additional law and finance.

The Iowa Mentoring and Induction program was a pilot funded by a $350,000 grant from the Iowa Department of Education. In conjunction with the School Administrators of Iowa and the fifteen Area Education Agencies, a mentoring and induction program was developed for principals and superintendents in their first year in leadership positions. Mentors were required to apply for the position showing that they “had four years of exemplary administrative service that included a positive influence on student achievement, the use of data-driven decision making, a commitment to student success, and a willingness to provide personal time and attention to a protégé” (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). Once selected, the mentor and protégé were required to attend a series of training sessions that focused on twelve components. An interesting finding from this study was that principals and superintendents saw little benefit in the development of skills or specific advice on addressing difficult issues. They did see benefit in the positive relationship building between the mentor-protégé team. They also made positive reference to the help they received for socialization into the profession, and the ability to have reflective conversations and role clarification (p. 183). Alsbury and Hackmann’s findings included strong assertions that gender and race are two important variables that should be considered in mentoring programs and that they are at the forefront as mentor-protégé teams are selected. Finally, the mentoring programs should acknowledge the benefits to both mentors and protégés. They need to be flexible in scheduling, content, communication processes and delivery models to accommodate individual needs of both mentors and protégés.

Armstrong and Rada (1989) examined the relationships among school superintendents. They surveyed superintendents in Washington State to determine the networks and
connectedness of the profession. This study was completed before there were any formal mentor programs in Washington. The purpose of the study was to describe the structure of a superintendent network, and how superintendent attributes influence the network. The researchers reviewed data based on age affiliation, gender, and connection through a university credential program. Age data was disaggregated to identify the oldest and youngest 10% of superintendents surveyed. The older superintendents showed a greater degree of connection to the organization than their younger peers. Twenty-six of the two hundred plus responses were from women. Even though the sample was small, the data indicated that there was little connectivity within the gender. The data from the two university programs in the state showed that the connectivity was stronger between cohort groups. The final analysis looked at the nine minority superintendents in the state. There were no names mentioned by any of the non-white superintendents. One third of the superintendents in the state were not mentioned on any of the surveys suggesting that they did not have a peer that they relied on or confided in. It appears that over one third of the superintendents in the state, at that time, “could not even look to their peers for friendship and support” (p. 15).

**Gender Differences in Leadership Behaviors**

Reviewing leadership styles in men and women from a historical perspective, Grogan (1996) recognized that not only were the subjects of most of the leadership studies men, but the standards against which they were judged had been set by men.

Miller, Washington, and Fiene (2006) discuss a legacy of discrimination to explain men’s and women’s differential career aspirations and achievements. They use three conceptual models to explain the under representation of women in leadership positions. (1) The meritocracy model looks at psychological pre-dispositions of women to explain the persistent
and continuing gender segregation in the profession. The focus is on internal traits and is person-centered, holding women responsible for not being selected because they lack the traits of traditional male leadership. It assumes that the most competent people are promoted according to their ability. This model implies that men are more competent than women because they are chosen more often. (2) The discrimination model turns attention from the individual to the organizational perspective. The shift is from internal traits to external obstacles that hinder advancement. Women do not advance to high levels because they are locked into low visibility, low power jobs such as supervisors or coordinators. Most males that move to the superintendency have experience in high profile positions providing them with opportunity, a strong network and preferential sponsoring. Women, coming from low power jobs do not have those connections. (3) The women’s place model is the third conceptual model. It views society as a whole, not individuals or systems, as the root cause of inequities. This model is illustrated by (a) the different ways boys and girls are acculturated, (b) the lack of female role models in positions of formal authority in general, (c) endemic differences in gender expectations and (d) socio-cultural stereotypes about —what’s ladylike” and —who looks like a leader” (p. 111).

Appelbaum, Audet, and Miller (2002) reviewed what they called four schools of thought regarding women versus men leadership approach. The first school of thought is that leadership is biologically determined and innate for men. A second area of thought discusses the role of socialization and explores the notion of gender role as a determinant of leadership. A third concept is the acknowledgement that there could be a variety of contributing causal factors, outside of the gender role, that could predict and influence leadership effectiveness such as the personal attitude, self confidence, the corporate environment, and the ‘good-ole-boys’ club. The fourth and final school of thought is that there may be a difference in the way men and women
approach leadership and attempts to understand and articulate this difference. They suggest that in many cases, women take on a more androgynous approach to leadership, being less like women, but not totally like men.

Pounder and Coleman (2002) have described the androgynous approach to leadership. Their research questioned which was a better leadership style, that of women or that of men. They looked at a variety of studies concerning leadership styles of women and men in different organizational settings. Their findings state:

It seems that any conclusion on whether women are better than men in leadership roles, or vice versa, may be missing the point. Arguably, a hostile, rapidly changing environment replete with conflicting and competing pressures, confronts most modern organizations. This situation has not gone unnoticed in the literature on gender and leadership, with emphasis often given to the need for modern leaders to be androgynous, a term that is used to describe a leader regardless of biological gender, able to combine the best of male and female leadership traits (p. 128).

Four theoretical models that have been used to study gender differences in leadership behavior were explored in terms of their contribution to arguments for and against gender differences (Stetler, 2002). Each model focuses on either an organizational, social or individual characteristic to explain how and why gender differences in leadership might exist and why different styles might ultimately be appropriate in different tactical and strategic situations for each organization and its culture” (p. 91). (1) Organizational dynamics and national culture model suggest that leadership effectiveness is a combination of person- and task-oriented behaviors to balance organizational characteristics/national cultural expectations of human
resources, structure of the organization, political maneuverings, and symbolic representation of the organization. In this model, men and women are assumed to have different skills with respect to task- and person-oriented leadership behaviors, which may account for differences in analyzing and balancing an organization’s set of values (Quinn, 1988). (2) Social role theory describes individual behavior as driven by societal expectations. This theory argues that any differences can be accounted for by socialization of the individual leader (Carless, 1988). Women and girls are socialized with more of the behaviors that are found in transformational leadership, while men tend to be more socialized towards transactional, autocratic types of leadership. Carless states that women are naturally socialized towards skills in participative leadership, collaborative group management and quality interpersonal relationships. (3) Relational theory argues that a primary human need is to develop and maintain relationships. Much like the social role theory, women tend to value relationships, and so support and value those aspects that are represented in their work environments, creating a stronger need for expression of these relational or person-oriented values and skills (Carless, 1998). (4) Attachment theory (Boatwright and Forrest, 2000) is organized around specific early caregiver relationships that result in various combinations on interpersonal relation styles. If women and men approach these drives differently based on early development, leadership styles involving person-oriented behavior will also differ.

Contemporary thinking conceptualizes a feminine style of leadership that is singularly different from its male counterpart. Some theorists suggest that certain feminine characteristics give the woman leader an advantage. Characteristics consist of heightened communication skills including being empathetic and a good listener; advanced intermediary skills useful in negotiation and conflict resolution; well-developed interpersonal skills and a soft approach to
handling people (Appelbaum, Audet & Miller, 2002). In a study by Kabacoff (1998),
characteristics of leadership were investigated. Women tended to be more highly rated on
people skills, communication, orientation towards production, high expectations for self and
others and the attainment of results. Men tended to score higher on scales assessing an
orientation for strategic planning and organizational vision. Women were more highly rated in
people-oriented leadership skills and men on business-oriented skills. Findings are suggesting
that a combination of leadership characteristics can build a more inclusive, rewarding
organization where employees on every level can aspire to be the best that they can be. This
transformative leadership style conveys a collaborative team approach that values and empowers
employees. These findings may finally steer research away from male versus female issues to
effective versus ineffective styles of leadership. “These findings support the conclusion that
leadership style/use of power is more of a choice based on an analysis of the situation than an
inherent gender predisposition and that leadership style differences, if any, may blur as gender-
mixed management teams become more common in the work place” (Langford et al., 1998; as

Tallerico, Burstyn, and Poole (1993) conducted a study of 20 female superintendents who
had exited the superintendency. They used three levels of analysis: (1) Individual level: the
experiences or lack of experience that the superintendents brought into the position; (2)
Interpersonal level: the amount of training and experience the superintendent needed to
understand the school board, deal with media and political influences and understand the
vulnerability of the position; (3) Organizational and societal level: female superintendents
tended to be selected for the most undesirable positions that did not lead to longevity or
retention. In all of these levels of analysis, the researchers come to the conclusion that
administrative organizations, school board associations and universities must all come together to develop better connections at the informal support system level. They state it is essential to connect superintendents with mentors very early on and continue to provide ongoing opportunities for professional development and networking as the role of the changing superintendency is evolving.

**Barriers to the Induction and Tenure of Women into the Superintendency**

Research strongly supports the belief that women entering educational administration have huge barriers to overcome (Blount 1998; Brunner, 2007; Grogan, 1996). A recent study found that twice as many women as men believed that the ‘glass ceiling’ still exists (Glass, 2006). In her book *Principals of Power, Women Superintendents and the Riddles of the Heart* (2007), C. Cryss Brunner stated that the women she interviewed for this research entered administrative positions as unwelcome peers, little more than tolerated by their male counterparts. They faced and overcame barriers in their careers that were totally unknown to their male counterparts. These barriers to women in the superintendency included societal beliefs in their inferiority; the need to choose between relationships and careers; weak or nonexistent support systems; expectations for their provision of maternal comfort and sacrifice; and overt and covert hostility” (Brunner, 2000).

Grogan defines these barriers as external and internal (Grogan, 1996). External barriers include issues that deal with the mentoring of females, hiring bias, the belief systems that extend stereotypes that women are not strong leaders, are too emotional, tend to be more Amazonian in their use of power, and that they are incapable of managing large systems. Internal barriers have to do with personal issues such as child rearing, partner relationships, personal doubts and fears, and the management of socially agreed upon domestic responsibilities of women.
One external barrier is the belief system that the superintendency is men’s work. This societal belief centers around the effects of feminized and masculinized roles (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Current culture identifies the role of the teacher as being feminized, whereas the role of educational administration – especially that of the superintendent – as being masculinized. Teaching is considered feminized because a large portion of teachers are female and the work fits into the traditional notion of women’s work, with the female being the nurturer. Administration is considered masculinized because men constitute a large portion of school administrators. The work fits into the traditional notion of men’s work, that of being strong, decisive, able to manage large systems, and competent with being the boss (Blount, 1998). These stereotypical notions of the nature of women’s and men’s work have existed for years. Teaching has been considered the work of instructing and caring for children, while administration has been thought to be taking charge of a school or school system. “The work touted as the more expressive work of teaching children was delegated to women, while what was considered the instrumental or rational work of managing a school was given to men”

Women have long been thought of as not having as much business sense as men and not being able to manage a budget, construction projects, transportation, and the overall maintenance of the school district. Because of this societal belief system, school boards, search consultants and communities tend not to hire women for the roles of superintendents. In a recent study of women superintendents, 79% of those surveyed stated that they felt that the tendency of school boards not to actively recruit women was an important or somewhat important factor in finding a job (Sharratt, 2006).

The internal barrier of conflict with family obligations and personal issues is another area well documented in the research. In the magazine Good Housekeeping (1988-89), the
traditional woman is represented in a series of advertisements depicting her as having a mission to provide a meaningful quality of life for herself and her family. She is supposedly a traditionalist which means paid work is less important than family and home… the dominant family discourse says clearly that she should subordinate the interests of her outside activities to those of the home” (111). This image of the little woman sacrificing her career for the good of the family relates well to the family values argument that is prevalent in our society.

Staples & Neal (2000) state the responsibility of being a mother tends to be the number one personal issue that women deal with, but there are two more areas identified in the research: responsibility for maintenance of relationships and coping with household labor (Loder, 2005). The first of these generally deals with the relationship between the woman and her husband or significant partner. Some difficulties in relationships come from the inability to move for employment due to the job of the spouse, the pressure of possibly making more money than the husband and/or being the primary wage earner, and having to spend more time in the public eye and away from home. The second internal issue, managing the home, is considered easier to address. Generally, the couple’s salaries are such that house cleaning and yard work can be hired out. In many cases, husbands and wives share the daily responsibilities of cooking and laundry (Ramsey, 1997).

A barrier that has been addressed less often is the idea that women have not been socialized to aspire to leadership roles (Grogan, 1996). They have not had the mentorship experienced by white males that provides the recognition and encouragement to pursue leadership opportunities (Fels, 2004). Fels concludes that “ambition is composed of two parts, mastery of skills and meaningful recognition of that mastery”. She defines recognition as “being valued by others for qualities that we experience and value in ourselves; it involves appreciation
by another person that feels accurate and meaningful to the recipient” (p. 9). It is through mentorship that many women develop and improve on these qualities. Theories and models of educational leadership are criticized as suffering from an androcentric bias-view of the world through a male lens when applied to female subjects (Shakeshaft, 1999). Success for school administrators revolves around male models of discipline and power; male models of administration, and models of training that focus on mentoring by traditional authorities (Glass, 2000). This is evident in the fact that a preponderance of male superintendents come to administration through an athletic coaching background. Coaching activities traditionally have provided secondary and junior high teachers with an initial step toward administration. Athletic coaching provides teachers an opportunity to demonstrate skills in leadership, management and the ability to work with community members” (p. 2). In secondary schools, coaching positions are most often held by men. Males often relate stories of mentors being a beloved coach during their high school years, with many being coaches while they were in the teaching ranks. This type of leadership experience was valued by male administrators and so people with experience in athletics were rewarded and encouraged for their leadership ability from a young age. Women, more often, did not have the opportunity to compete in sports or to coach. There was less opportunity for recognition of leadership ability and mentoring as they grew through these formative years (Grogan, 2000). This may change as the impact of Title IX and women’s sports become more prominent.

A final issue that might be a barrier is the aspiration and motivation for women to seek the superintendency. Motivation theory or the purposeful movement towards goal or achievement, asks why individuals behave the way they do in the domains of interpersonal, social, and conscious contexts (Young & McLeod, 2001). Career aspiration is a complex
concept defined by Young and McLeod as, “a three dimensional concept made up of a woman’s career commitments, positional goals and leadership orientations. A woman’s aspirations include what she hopes to accomplish during her career in education, the types of position she is interested in pursuing, the goals she hopes to realize while in such positions and the leadership styles she believes she must practice to reach her goals” (p. 469). Intrinsic motivation is defined as behaviors that are enjoyable and rewarding in themselves, while extrinsic motivation is created by an outside force or person and not under the control of the person performing the rewarded behaviors (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). The level of intrinsic motivation in a person is created by three psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness (connection to people).

Working in low level, low power positions can impact a woman’s motivation and career aspirations to the superintendency (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). In these positions, women may be overlooked and not receive the positive environmental stimulation to stay motivated. Environmental stimulation in the form of praise, positive incentives, rewards, cognitive consistency, love, and desire for power can help maintain the forward motivation and heightened career aspirations. Environmental stimulation that is aversive such as the fear of failure, negative incentives, punishers, cognitive dissonance, and fear of power can cause lowered motivation and a desire to maintain the status quo and not aspire for a higher career status. By not having positive, encouraging mentors and a supportive career environment, women can easily become complacent and not aspire to the superintendency. Therefore, it is essential that positive mentoring programs are put in place to fight this self-imposed barrier and encourage the belief and aspiration that this goal can be achieved.
Conclusion

Prior to the 1990’s the skills that were required of a superintendent were predominantly finance, personnel and facilities maintenance. With the original authorization and now the reauthorization of NCLB and the high level of accountability, the skill set has changed. Paul Houston (2001), former director of the American Association of School Administrators, identified the following eight skills critical to being a successful superintendent: (1) leading by sharing power and engaging members of the organization and community; (2) creating learning for children that is individualized and connected to personal interests; (3) bringing communities together in a kaleidoscope environment; (4) leading by focusing on the organic and holistic qualities of learning and structuring learning that speaks to the hearts and minds of leaders; (5) being a team leader and developer; (6) being a great communicator and facilitator; (7) collaborating with the school board; and (8) concentrating on problem analysis while finding the balance between doing the work and thinking or reflecting about the work. This skill set tends to support the contention that the leadership required for the superintendency is changing to more of an androgynous style rather than just being transformative or transformational. That being said, this evolving leadership skill set is one that requires mentoring in the form of collaboration, professional development and support systems for superintendents, both female and male, to provide a successful, sustainable superintendency.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study uses a phenomenological approach viewed through a critical theory lens. The philosophy of phenomenology was developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who contended that “human consciousness actively constitutes the objects of experience… A phenomenological study focuses on descriptions of how people experience and how they perceive their experience of the phenomena under study” (Glesne, 1999). Phenomenological research is used to understand the lived experiences of the participants and is considered both a philosophy as well as a method (Creswell, 2003). Using a phenomenological approach in this study, the researcher will attempt to understand the meaning of the events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations as viewed through the participant’s perspective and perceptions of the role they have as superintendents. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state: “phenomenologists emphasize the subjective aspects of people’s behavior. They attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of their informants” (p.25).

The interviews will be represented as individual portraiture. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) describe portraiture in this manner:

Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics and subtlety of human experience and organizational life. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions – their authority, knowledge and wisdom (p. xv).

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, the portraiture approach is comprised of five features: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes and the aesthetic whole. When all of
these elements of portraiture are combined, a rich narrative emerges that provides the potential for deep understanding of participant’s stories.

The data will be looked at through a critical theory lens. “Critical philosophy focuses ethics on special obligations to oppressed populations. The researcher may act as an advocate for the oppressed population, an adversary to the powerful” (de Marrais & Lapan, 2004). This analysis will seek to determine if there are any differences in the mentoring experiences of female and male superintendents.

Three female and three male superintendents were identified as being in their first year of a superintendency in the state being studied. Each participant was interviewed with a series of probing questions related to the four research questions stated earlier in this proposal. The questions drew upon perceptions and personal reflections of the experiences they have had during their transition to their new state of residence. The purpose of the interview was to ascertain the superintendents’ perceptions on the experience of the phenomenon of adapting to a school district in a new state. The interview questions were open ended and were designed to allow the superintendent to relate their experiences as they acclimated to the expectations, rules and regulations in a new state and to identify what, if any, support they received as they made these adjustments. The interviews were designed to take approximately ninety minutes to complete. They were recorded using a digital audio recording device and transcribed by a professional transcriber. Upon receipt of the transcriptions, the researcher reviewed them for similarities and differences using the four research questions as over-arching themes. Additional themes and patterns emerged as the data was analyzed. In addition to the interview data, district demographic data was also reviewed.
Bias and Self as Researcher

As a researcher and female superintendent, I bring a particular position to this study. I received my master’s degree in school administration in 1986. After applying for several secondary administrative positions over the ensuing ten years and being turned away because I did not have enough leadership experience, specifically coaching experience to work as an administrator at the secondary level, I was finally given an opportunity to be the special education director in a small rural school district. It was 1996 and I was given this opportunity because the male that was in the position resigned and there was no other person in the district qualified to do the job. I was asked to take the job and was not provided any mentoring or framework in which to work. That year, I completely redesigned the district special education program and saved the school district over $170,000 in funding that was being sent to outside agencies for student services. Bottom line, I had to prove myself to be taken seriously as a qualified, competent administrator by the four other male administrators in the district. As I took on other administrative roles, I was able to work for both male and female superintendents and saw a difference in leadership style regarding management and instructional leadership. It was about the year 2000 that I started to notice that the role of the superintendent was changing and the administrative styles of the superintendents I worked for were being driven by the need for instructional leadership. However, there was little professional development or mentoring available to help superintendents with this change. Now ten years later, after much study and research has been done on the importance of instructional leadership and the superintendency, I have questions as to whether the traditional representation of leadership style of male and female superintendents, that being the male as authoritarian and female as more transformational leader, still holds true. Are male and female leadership styles becoming more similar and, if so, what
types of support are in place to help support and drive that change in the role of the superintendent? It is my hope that this research will add to this discussion and provide input to university certification programs, regional educational organizations and state associations that educate and mentor superintendents.

As a woman superintendent, I must be aware of the potential difficulty of this personal bias interfering with the study as I have experienced many of the barriers and challenges that the female participants have also experienced. I have worked hard to be cognizant of this as I reviewed the data and formed my interpretations, reporting from the participants' experiences and not from my own.

**Ethical Considerations**

Each participant of the study was assured that complete confidentiality would be maintained. They each signed a letter of consent to participate in the study stating that their names, districts and other identifying data will remain confidential. Since there are only six superintendents new to this state, the state was not identified so as to maintain the participants' anonymity. Each district and superintendent was assigned a pseudonym to identify them in the data analysis to further insure that their identity remain confidential. Each participant was assured that no harm will come to them from participating in this study and were told they could withdraw at any time during the process. All data collected will be held for one year and then destroyed upon the completion and acceptance of the final project.

**Limitations**

There are some limitations to this study. First, it was decided that only superintendents new to the state were studied. In limiting this to superintendents new to the state, none of the participants were experienced in the laws, regulations or political structure of the state. Also,
they did not have a built in network in the state for support. Second, all superintendents studied had extensive experience with school improvement and reform. This experience level may influence their need for mentoring. Finally, the study was limited to six participants since there were only six superintendents that fit the parameters of being new to the state. There were eight superintendents that technically fit the parameters of the study, however, two of the eight had served as superintendents in the state many years in the past and had a strong network of support established. It would be difficult to identify their need for support for induction and mentoring, so they were not invited to participate.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Superintendent/District Demographic Information

During the year studied, six superintendents were hired from outside of to fill open superintendent positions. These superintendents fit the criteria for participation in this study in that they were new to the state and did not have an established network of support within the state. One of the superintendents studied had teaching and administrative experience in the state, retired and left for several years to work overseas as a principal and returned to the state. Because this position was his first superintendency, it was decided to include him in the study. There are three female and three male participants. Two of the female superintendents are Hispanic and the other four superintendents are Caucasian. One participant’s age was mid-forties; four participants were in their fifties and one early sixties. All but one of the participants were retired from another state or educational entity and so had extensive experience in the superintendency. Two of the participants had experience in Department of Defense schools, both inside and outside of the United States. Five of the six superintendents held doctoral degrees.

The size of the school districts they worked in varied greatly. Two of the districts were large, over 14,000 students; two districts are mid-size with just over 4,500 and 1,000 students respectively, while the remaining two districts are small with student bodies in the range of 100-500 students. One of the districts is K-8, feeding high school students to three neighboring school districts. The district demographics included one small and one large district being over 65% Hispanic with over 60% poverty. The other four districts were more middle-to-upper class with a mostly Caucasian population.
The qualitative data that are represented here are presented in individual portraiture.

Each superintendent represented in this section will be under a pseudonym to protect his/her identity.

Superintendent Perception Data:

Superintendent #1: William

The first superintendent portrait is of a male superintendent referred to as William. William is 46 years old and retired out of another state. He is divorced and has since remarried. He has three children—one married, one in college and one in high school.

William's career moved very quickly from teacher to superintendent. He came to administration in his late twenties, being promoted to 5-12 principal after eight years as a high school business and social studies teacher. Because this was a small, rural district, he also taught two classes. When asked about his promotion, he stated, “I really didn’t plan on doing this; it just kind of worked out that way.” At thirty-three William took his first superintendency in another small district. It was very challenging as he wore all of the hats. “We only had about 300 kids K-12, so I was everything. Then, my last year, we had a late resignation for a basketball coach, so I was also the head varsity basketball coach. It was a busy year. It was fun; I really enjoyed it, but it was busy.” After twenty-three years working in that state’s education system, he was able to take an early retirement. “.because you can do the early retirement at twenty three years, you could buy two years, take the 25-30 year option and get early retirement.” He chose to apply to the new state because he had family there. Financial motivation also caused him to choose to apply to this new state. The position of superintendent paid a much higher salary than in the state he left. “I make more money here than my wife and I both made together. So it was financial, and I’m young enough to start again to get another
retirement, so it just seemed like the right thing to do. I have one child left at home. He is a junior here in high school and my other two are doing their own thing now, so time to start again.”

When asked why he chose to be a superintendent William talked of the people that he considered mentors. One of the strongest was his father who had retired out of the same state and moved to this new state 16 years ago. “I think my father has been in the industry for 46 years, a superintendent for 38. This is just part of what we do; my brother is an Executive Director of Secondary Education and my oldest son will graduate to be a teacher also. My wife is also a teacher.” In addition to his father, William talked of the important influence coaches had on him as he grew up through high school. “They also served as principals. I had great relationships with them and they connected well with students. That was all I really knew at the time so there was no doubt I wanted to be a teacher and a coach. I never planned on going into administration because I liked the teaching and coaching aspect, but I had three young kids and they (principals) made more money, so it kind of evolved into this.”

William currently is superintendent in a district of approximately 1,200 students. The school board is made of four women and one man. The board meets twice a month, the first meeting being a work study and the second a business meeting. William communicates with the board mostly through e-mail, updating them on district events and issues when needed.

In addition to the board, William has what he calls his superintendent advisory board, “something I learned from my dad.” This board has one certified person from each building. William sets the agenda and uses this board to keep all of the buildings informed of issues and happenings across the district. He also uses this time to address any issues that are of concern to the teachers. He does a similar meeting with a classified group. He uses this advisory group to
help build trust across the district. This group does not include the union representation as he meets separately with them. “...it has actually worked out pretty good. At the last meeting they didn’t have anything to bring up.”

William identified challenges he faced when coming to this district. Some of the greatest challenges were related to the circumstances surrounding the former superintendent being non-renewed, a building administrator whose relationship with staff had disintegrated, and a general lack of trust across the district. “There is huge mistrust in this district...the board with each other, the board with our administrators, the administrators with each other...there is a lot.”

William likens the district to an onion when talking about the challenges and trust issues, “the more I keep peeling the more I keep finding. Sometimes I think if I can have a big knife and maybe cut some chunks out, this place will be a lot better.” He believes that the mistrust comes from inaccurate perceptions of past situations in the district. “I think this is a good opportunity because in a lot of people’s opinion (and I think it is completely wrong) the only way we can go is ‘up’. They feel that they have hit bottom, (which I don’t believe) but yet that (belief), for me, that is better.”

One indication that trust is starting to build is the behavior of the board. With the past superintendent, there was a lack of trust. The board had taken the role of micromanaging district administration. This caused confusion, miscommunication, and dissent. William stated, that for him, the board was standing back, allowing him to do his job without interference. “I think it was because of how they handled the past superintendent. I think they have learned and are going to think ...maybe we didn’t handle this right, so now we have hired someone, so let’s stay out of it and see what happens...that’s what I think.” This change in board behavior may have come directly from the interview. William stated that when he interviewed in the district he
talked about what he had done in past superintendencies and that his past boards let him “kinda run the school.” He heard from some staff and community members that the board would never let someone come in and do that (run the schools alone), but so far they had stayed out of the day-to-day politics and decision making in the district and let him do his job. He did indicate that there could be a change, as one of the sports teams was not doing well and the coach’s ability was being questioned by the community.

Forming relationships in the district has been a greater challenge than he imagined when he first came to the position. Many of the trust issues are deeply rooted and need to be addressed as legal matters. “We have had some formal complaints of harassment about one of our principals and we have actually had an investigator that is here right now. We also have a couple administrators that are very needy; they remind me of my children. Those things are time consuming.” William talks about how this is frustrating because he cannot form a cohesive administrative team, the first step needed to achieve a functioning district.

In addition to specific challenges related to the school district, William discussed that the greatest challenge coming to a new state was the budgeting process. When he accepted the position, his father, who also came out of the former state, told him to “forget all your budgeting and ideas from the former state because it was all different here.” To get him through the state’s different budgetary process, William credits his business manager for explaining things such as school levies, “...if you even ‘get‘ dollars per thousand, just the terminology is different from what I am used to. Where I come from you didn’t get to run multi-year levies. You got one shot. If you didn’t pass it, you were in trouble for the next year.” In addition, he talked about how the laws governing boards or dealing with the public and business communities are different here. When asked whether there was a system he could access to provide advice, he talked about
being at a new superintendent meeting and being assigned a mentor, but I have been superintendent longer than my mentor and others in the area. So as far as the leadership and what you do, I think I got that figured out.” When asked about where he could go outside the district for assistance, he said he had attended the local regional superintendent meetings two or three times, but getting away from the district was difficult for him. He also related that he did not always feel comfortable at these meetings, that he felt alone and looked at differently because you are from someplace else….like you are not one of us.” Finally when asked where he did seek counsel, he stated that there was a network of superintendents from his former state that had moved to this new state and that he called them often. He had known a couple of these superintendents as they were in the same athletic conference in the former state. He also continued using his father as his mentor and advisor on issues with which he was unfamiliar or needed assistance.

William likens the superintendency to that of a hired gun. Throughout his career, he has sought out challenging positions. He commented, “When I look back at the three districts where I have been, my job has really been to smooth things over because, for whatever reason, whomever I followed had a real hard time.” In this position, his days are full of meetings with people to form trusting relationships, healing wounds from past issues while attempting to deter current negative situations and relationships, and trying to change the district’s focus from adult issues to those related to educating kids. William has not minded moving to new jobs and situations, but stated the drawback of moving was you don’t always get the chance to see things through. You can get an idea or implement something, but you never see the outcome because you move on to another position.”
When asked about leadership, William relates leadership style as being less top-down and more collaborative. He commented that he has always remembered a comment he read by Casey Stengel that said, “Leadership is getting paid for the home runs that someone else hits.” William continues to clarify this by stating: “It isn’t an ‘ego thing’ where this is my idea, I know better than you do…it’s just like you kind of do it together. If someone else has a better idea that benefits kids, so be it. You are only as good as the people you have.” He does, however, state that there are times where the superintendent needs to take on the role of decision maker. “When you look at yourself in a mirror, you must do what you think is right...everyone may not agree with me, but one thing you will always get (from me) is an honest answer.”

The personal impact of the superintendency is an area that is not often discussed. When asked about the personal toll stress from the job has taken and how he prioritized his workload with his family and life, William became very introspective. He stated that when he made the decision to divorce, he realized that he had an opportunity to reprioritize where his life was spent. Early in his career, he spent up to 16 hours per day at work as a teacher, coach or principal. He did not spend as much time with his family as he believes, in retrospect, that he should have, and he regrets that. However, his mantra now is to prioritize why you are here. “This is more than just a job, but it is a job. You don’t hear back from a district...you know that guy put in so much time here...yet my kids remember that.” Again, he refers to his father, “My dad has that mindset. That is why he has been able to last as long as he has.” William stated that he has been given an opportunity to move to a new state and have a ‘re-birth’ to be able to reprioritize and this time “get it right.”
Superintendent #2: Estella

Estella is a fifty-three year old Hispanic female. She is married and has a twenty-year-old daughter who is attending college in another state. Estella is in her first year as a superintendent, having completed her doctorate from a prestigious university. Prior to earning her doctorate, she was a teacher and principal, and then a deputy superintendent. Because it was difficult to complete her doctorate and work as a deputy superintendent, Estella quit her job and she and a partner started a consulting firm that works with large urban district central offices across the United States to create a reform agenda. “We helped them learn to work with instructional professional learning communities at the building level. We helped them develop deeply imbedded professional development to include teacher peer observation, instructional walks, and gathering and reviewing data as far as a coordinated approach to improving instruction.”

Estella has always wanted to work in education. As a child of ten, she started tutoring kids in her neighborhood. She stated that she knew very early in her career that she wanted to be an educator. “I didn’t think I wanted to be a superintendent. I just thought I wanted to teach.” She talked of how she and a couple of her friends orchestrated tutoring sessions in their neighborhood after school. “That was the beginning of my interest in teaching. I think from then on, every job I took was as a teacher’s aide or instructional helper.” Although her parents were not highly educated, they were very instructionally focused. They expected their children to go to college. “They were on top of our schooling and they were very focused on teaching and learning in our house. My parents were one of the greatest influences on my life. They always made education a priority for me.”
Estella also talked about other people who were her early mentors. She spoke of a math teacher she had in middle school who greatly influenced her decision to go into teaching. Once a teacher, she had a principal who was a great role model. He encouraged her to start looking at the principalship. "Once I became a principal, I started looking at how I could impact a greater group of kids, how I could move into different roles in education. That's why I pursued the doctorate." She discussed the impact of her professor and his leadership team’s mentorship as one of the greatest influences on her thinking as far as school reform and school improvement. I still do a lot of reading when they publish and their beliefs and values really resonate with me.”

Estella continued working with her consulting company after receiving her doctorate. She wanted to be a school superintendent, but was having so much fun as a consultant that she just waited and waited. She actually did not seek out the superintendency in her current district; the district recruited her. They contacted a couple of her professors at Harvard for recommendations as to whom they thought would be good candidates. The professors gave Estella’s name to the district. Initially, she was not interested. She saw herself working in a district much different than the one recruiting her. Her interests were in large diverse urban districts and she felt this district was too affluent and with little diversity, but her professors encouraged her to apply and interview. The professors told her, "you really need to look at this because this district really does have some issues that have been unresolved for a while and you might be able to make a difference.” Asking if it was difficult to move to a different geographical region quite a distance from where she lived, she replied, "for me moving has been state of the art. As a consultant, I have been working across the country…so I don't feel there are boundaries for me. For me it was more: is it a match with that superintendency and can I feel
passionate about working there? Will their beliefs match my beliefs? That was more the struggle for me.”

As Estella moved through her career, she stated that she did not really perceive any real barriers to her getting new positions. She talked about how people would ask her if she had ever felt any discrimination being Hispanic and female and not being born in this country. “I have never really felt that, I have always had people mentor me and help me along so I have always had positive experiences.” She did talk about how she faced some age discrimination. She began as a principal in her twenties. She was hired by a district other than the one in which she was teaching for her first assistant principal position because her current district wouldn’t let her apply for a principal position due to her young age. “They (the district she left) called me about 6 or 7 months later and offered me a principalship. I ended up coming back.”

Estella’s school district is a large urban district with 17,300 students. The school board is composed of three men and two women. She describes the board as being amazingly supportive. “They have been supportive and instrumental in helping me navigate people to talk to in the community, giving me perspective on issues.” The board has been in place for a very long time, with one board member having served for twenty-five years. “There is a huge historical perspective in that board. They have a deep understanding in the community. This has been a tremendous value for me as far as being a new person coming in.” Although very involved, she states that the board is not micromanaging. “They respect my thinking and my direction. They are not thinking about political standing in the community or political posts. They are really focused on kids.” Estella interacts with her board frequently, both electronically and through personal meetings. She states that there are many informal times she sees board members as they are “out in the community.” She has a Friday morning coffee where one or two board
members sign up to meet. “The board members bring the coffee and I bring the donuts.” They meet for about 2 hours, starting at 7:30 in the morning. They discuss issues in the district and community. In addition to this, Estella sends out a weekly update of her week. Many times, she will send them attachments of interesting articles and information that she receives from the schools. At almost every single board meeting there will be a study session and an executive session. This keeps everyone on the same page.

Moving to a new state has been a challenge. Estella identified areas that have been particularly difficult to understand. The first is finance. She commented, “I don’t understand it fully, it is pretty cumbersome”; the second is what she calls the traditional mindset of the state, “I am coming from districts where there were charter schools, and performance plans and a much greater understanding of equity and diversity.” She expresses frustration that the state is unable to access funding from the top unless, as a state, we make some different choices. I would like to engage in helping that move forward. That has been difficult for me to accept.”

As a first year superintendent, Estella has been presented with challenges at the district level as well. She immediately had to put together a brand new cabinet, hiring some internal and some external candidates. “It is not only that I am new, but I also have a new cabinet that is also learning their role.” In addition to this, she hired a new assistant superintendent of finance who is also coming to the district from another state. She was appreciative of the fact that two of her board members are bankers. “They know the budget inside and out and are very instrumental (in helping me understand it).” She also credits her new assistant superintendent, who is learning the system fast and helping walk her through the complex state finances. Another challenge she has faced is the expectation from the board that she be very visible in the community. She reported the former superintendent “did a great job managing the district” but was not very
visible in the community in his last years. “The community is hungry for that. I am really out all the time doing community coffees and constantly engaged in conversations, and meeting with all sorts of different groups in the community. The board really wants me to be very, very visible and that is what I want as well, but it is a level of visibility that requires a lot of time and, coupled with a new job and new cabinet, that is a pretty challenging and pretty steep learning curve.”

Finding support to help her transition has been difficult. She has attended a few of the superintendent meetings in the local region, but has not found them very helpful. “There is not a whole lot of opportunity during those meetings of superintendents. The meetings are pretty tightly structured and there is no time to talk. I feel my need right now is to be able to connect with people who do the job that I am doing and I don’t know anybody in the area.” She believed networking with the superintendents from the surrounding region would be valuable. “It would be valuable for me to listen and to sit down with a group of superintendent that were maybe grappling with an issue….the budget right now…how they are engaging their community around making cuts and do real problem solving with issues that we are facing …that doesn’t happen at the superintendents meetings. That has been a little frustrating.” She did talk about a professor from a local university who reached out to her during her first months on the job. She has also been in contact with the chief academic officer from a neighboring district who was part of her program at Harvard. Estella’s desire is to find a person from outside of education who she could use as a coach. She is in conversations with board members and community people to see if there is someone from the business end of the community to mentor her “…to have a coaching relationship where I need to, every once in a while, throw some ideas out and have that person
react from a non-educational perspective. I am trying to get that set up but haven't been very successful.”

Estella expressed a huge sense of responsibility in moving into the position of superintendent. She talked of the thought and reflection it took her to make the decision to apply to the superintendent. “I knew I wanted to do it (superintendent) but I also knew it is a position that carries a lot of responsibility—a lot of responsibility with a lot of factors that are out of your control. I have always felt that taking any administrative position is moving into a risk.” The setting and accomplishment of personal goals is very important to her. “The risk for me is the risk of failure; failure for not completing your goal…I am taking a superintendency, I have these goals and things that I want to accomplish and I am taking a huge risk.” She also expressed the concern that not only are you taking a personal risk, but you are also taking a very public risk as the position is very visible, and if you fail everyone will know. She recognizes that as a superintendent she is going to be constantly expected to make decisions based on what is best for the district that may or may not be popular. That in itself is risk taking. “Being able to live with that and still staying true to your values and beliefs, saying even if I am not popular, I am still going to make it…that is hard. You always are taking risks because you are in the decision making seat.”

Coming out of a highly esteemed superintendent’s certification program, Estella believes that collaboration and teamwork is the only way that educational reform is going to happen. However, this was not always her belief. “In my first years as a principal, I was very top-down, but I think that the hard knocks that I received in that job was where I realized that if I did not engage my teachers and we didn’t work collaboratively, then nothing was going to happen for kids in the building.” This realization shaped her values and beliefs around leadership and
leading. Teamwork was the critical component in decision making and working towards a goal. “I always have an instructional leadership team. Even as a consultant, I never worked on my own; it was always a team and there was always a pair that did the thinking, planning the delivery and the facilitating.” She is a great believer in collaborative leadership, knowing that as a leader she needs to set the direction that mirrors her values and beliefs. “It (the direction) has to be congruent to who you are…you have to be very transparent about who you are and what your values and beliefs are, and then at the same time build that collective vision to guide the way.” Top down leadership is becoming more and more a thing of the past, in her opinion. She commented, “at the university level, I think they have been a lot more proactively trying to do trainings on the instructional components of collaborative leadership. In my doctoral program, a lot of what we did was done in teams. There is a real push for that collaborative problem solving structure.”

The superintendency is exciting for Estella. She talks about how much she enjoys working with adults as they learn more about teaching and learning. “I think the most exciting thing about the superintendency is working with principals, crafting professional development for the leadership in the district and really working at trying to figure out what do we need to do to improve teacher practice.” However, there are some down sides to the position, too. “It’s those hundreds of e-mails that you get in a day; the disgruntled people in the community because you made this decision vs. that decision. That takes a lot of time.” She does express frustration with people and their personal agendas, “When you get people that are so upset and look at one belief alone and are not willing to look at the bigger picture, it is tough.” However, for her, the joys outweigh the struggles. She reported, “It is always exciting to me to be able to go into
classrooms and have those conversations with principals about what we are seeing. That to me is the exciting part of the job and what really keeps me energized.”

One of the most difficult challenges Estella has had since accepting this position is one of balance. It is something she has always struggled with, especially when her daughter was home. Now that she is more independent and going to school in another state, there is less pull on Estella’s time. She expresses that that is good and bad, as she spends way too many hours both at work and at home doing email and working on evaluations. She cites the fact that her husband is a wonderful support. He also comes from an education background, having been a principal and he has also done educational consulting work with her. Even so, she believes that she spends too much time on the job and not enough at home. Her goal is to get into an exercise routine four days a week. She states that two nights a week she gets home in time to do this, but has not yet been successful in achieving this goal. Estella notes, “…to maintain a healthy life with jobs like this one, there has to be a way of figuring it out because I have colleagues in this job who are divorced, who have all sorts of issues around family time.” Balance is something on which she wants to continue working.

Estella is realizing one of her personal goals, that of being a superintendent. She expresses the desire to do well and to accomplish this goal, and make a difference in the community and district in which she works. Her future focus over the next few years is to learn how to do this job and do it well.” She indicates that this is a steep learning curve and that she will be doing a lot of observations, reading and getting herself “up to speed” on how to do this job. “The ultimate goal, now that I have the job is developing the skills that I need to be able to do this well.”
Superintendent #3 – Martin

Martin is a white male, age fifty-seven. He is married and has two adult children. Martin is new to the superintendency, having most recently been employed as principal of a private international school.

Martin started his career as a high school English and physical education teacher. He did this for twelve years and then was hired as a high school principal in a neighboring district where he stayed for 17 years. He then applied to a neighboring district for an assistant superintendent position, which he held until he retired from the state. Upon retirement, Martin and his wife, also an educator, decided to work out of the country, so he took a position as principal at an international school. They thoroughly enjoyed this time, but returned to the United States because their daughter was about to give birth to their first grandchild. In returning to this state, Martin was offered a half-time superintendent position in a small K-8 district where he is contracted for 108 days per year, but realistically spends almost twice that amount of time in district.

Martin knew from the time he was in fifth grade that he wanted to be a teacher and coach. He knew in junior high school that he was going to be a principal. –I never deviated from that. I came home in sixth grade and told my mom I was going to be a teacher or a coach and I still remember her crying. She wanted me to be a doctor or lawyer.” When asked why he was so sure of his career choice at such a young age he replied, –It was because of the people who held me accountable… I guess I was kind of one of those young guys that enjoyed having a good time…they always dealt with me with dignity and respect.” Martin cites the fact that he was lucky growing up to have great teachers and coaches. He went to school in a small rural school district, but since they could pay better than urban districts, the district attracted some top
teachers. He stated that his teachers ended up in top leadership positions in the state and that they had, during the time he was in school, a great influence over him. He really looked up to them as mentors and role models.

Martin attended a state college where he met his wife, who also went into education. He stated, “…she knew in junior high she would be a teacher or a coach…so, now both of our kids are teachers and coaches, our son-in-law is a teacher and coach….we kind of got into it that way, kind of the family business.” He did his graduate work at and his post-graduate work thinking he would become a superintendent but stated, “I got my superintendent credentials in ‘93 thinking I was going to move and then I just never did it. I really enjoyed the principalship; I still enjoyed working on a day-to-day basis with kids and the interaction.” When the assistant superintendent position opened up in a neighboring district, Martin’s wife told him he needed to apply because the principalship was going to kill him. At that time, he recalls working 70-hour weeks. He was awarded the position and served in it for three years, and then he retired. “I never thought I would go in because of the politics—so much politics are involved in being a superintendent—so I retired.” Upon his retirement, Martin took a position as school principal in the Dominican Republic. Both he and his wife had a wonderful experience and probably would have stayed another year or two if it were not for the fact of their first grandchild being born, “We knew we were going to come back from overseas because our daughter told us that she was probably going to be pregnant and have our first grandchild and that is the case. She is due in about three weeks.”

Martin’s school district is a small K-8 school district with 443 students located adjacent to four larger school districts. His students have the choice to attend high school in any of the four districts. His board is made up of four men and one woman.
Working with his board has been an interesting experience that Martin was not anticipating. He had worked with the board when he was high school principal and, at the same time, had the added hat of Executive Director of Student Learning in his assistant superintendent position. He realized there were usually a few board members who needed extra attention. However, in this new district, the board is really led by one person and the other four tend to follow him. This board member has been on the board for over 12 years and will have students in the school for at least five more years. He came to Martin after he had been in the position for two months and told him that he may be too aggressive for their small district. He indicated they had always had superintendents who were ‘servant leaders’ and that he might be moving too fast. The board member likened Martin to an ‘alpha dog’ and was concerned that he was too strong for the district. Martin decided to bring this conversation up at an executive session of the board, much to the surprise of the board member and to the other four. This was a big risk, but Martin felt it was the only thing he could do to keep the man from micromanaging his job. Since then, Martin reported that several positive changes have come from his ‘alpha dog’ management style. These included a new webpage, a different financial perspective to review each month and some grants to support district programs. He indicated, ‘I believe I have the board fully behind me now.’

Martin lists communication as one of the biggest adjustments he has had to deal with, ‘making sure that you are in constant contact and communication with that board ….there are always two you need to give special care to.’ Communication with the staff is also difficult with a part-time position, ‘...the communication of making sure the entire staff know exactly what days I am going to be in this week. In the past six years, they have gone from a 170-day superintendent to 108 days. I need to make myself as visible as possible the days that I am here...’
and make myself available for that.” Another challenge is the dynamics of the district. Over 25% of our students come in from outside of the district…kind of our own little charter school here. You should see the parking lot in the morning and afternoon. Young parents, mothers who I don’t think are working, are dropping off kids in one to two year old SUV type vehicles.” He continues to explain that this is good and bad. It is good because it brings revenue into the district allowing them to have physical education, art and music specialists; bad because 25% of the students going to the school do not pay for the local levy and taxpayers are upset about that. There are 112 students registered in the district who live outside of the boundaries.

A third challenge is working with the leadership structure of the district. That structure is a K-8 principal, one person given a stipend for special education and special programs and another for assessment and title programs. There was really no instructional leadership structure in place. Martin has asked the presidents of the certified and classified associations to meet with him and these three people every three weeks to talk about leadership in the district. We try to nudge those people along in their roles as leaders in their respective groups. Bringing these people to the table, everyone is part of that conversation now.” There has been some strain between the principal and the teachers over the years. If the CEA had a vote, after three or four years, they would have voted her (principal) gone.” According to Martin, she has done some right things and the school has won awards of distinction over a number of the past few years, but the strain is still evident in the leadership meetings. I’m not naïve enough to believe that all of a sudden we are all going to be sitting around a campfire singing Kumbaya.”

Finally, the business manager has been in the district for 37 years. Martin spends lots of time talking with her. She has great ownership of the district after all of these years and believes she is in control of the district. We all have those people when we go into districts that have
created their own empires.” One of his challenges from the board is to learn as much as possible from her as she may be looking at retiring soon. "I believe that this (business manager) will be an exception and I will probably take on some of those responsibilities.”

This conversation led into questions regarding power. Martin quoted a professor he had who said, "You never accept the responsibility without the power to back it up.” He expressed the difficulty that he experiences serving as a part-time superintendent. "I still try to feel out the power and the responsibility, because here so much of the day-to-day stuff falls on the principal and the business manager. They have made decisions (on days I am not here) and they want you to back them up without having a lot of conversation before that. I have to make sure I don’t do something also, coming in part time.” Martin believes that a part-time superintendent position is much different than that of a full-time position. Being there only 108 days spreads the power over many individuals, including board members, and that becomes hard to manage and causes chaos and confusion amongst staff. In retrospect, Martin looks at this issue of power from the perspective of when he originally applied for the position. "I would think looking at a superintendent's job that you just need to do some investigation because it has to be a two-way street. I didn’t know that. You need to be interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you. I never thought about how important it is to know the board and get to know who they are.”

Martin expressed the fact that he was lucky to have people in the area that he knew and trusted to bounce ideas off. He was very complimentary towards the regional superintendent who came over to introduce himself and offer assistance. He made sure that Martin knew that he would be available at any time. "He has great follow-through and the availability to lend support. He is a straight shooter and a real bright guy. I like him a lot.” Martin has also been
provided a mentor with whom he worked when he was an assistant superintendent, so they are friends as well as colleagues. He was very complimentary of all of the superintendents in the area stating, "It doesn’t make a difference; it seems like they are always willing to take my call.”

How superintendents balance the stress of the superintendency is always a concern. Martin mentioned that when he was a principal in the international school, he only woke up a couple nights in two years worrying about something going on at school. "In the first two months here, I was waking up once or twice a night worried, coming back as a part-time superintendent. He spoke about the superintendency being a lonely position, "...you are in that position by yourself, and so people that don’t sit in the chair, they don’t understand it. My wife has been involved in education for thirty-three years, but you can’t explain it to her because she hasn’t sat in that chair.” He said that the way he battles stress is through exercise. "I try to get on the treadmill four to five days a week and lift weights pretty heavily. I would not be able to survive if I didn’t have that.”

When asked about the joys of the superintendency, Martin responded, "...you hope that you are making a positive impact, whether it’s a classroom teacher with student learning or whether it is a coach building a team and those lifelong relationships that you’re going to have with those kiddos.” He goes on to compare this with the gratification that comes from a principal’s position. He talks about the importance that relationships play between a principal, staff and students, and the impact that can be made. He then laments that the impacts superintendents make are more global and less recognizable by others. He believes that superintendents need to sit back and take gratification from what they see they have done because "you’re not going to get patted on the back a lot and told what a great job you are
In fact, he states that you are more likely going to get a call from someone complaining rather than from someone saying thanks.

When asked about where he will be in five years, Martin responds by saying he has already kind of retired twice, once from the state system and the other from the international system. He and his wife have a long-term goal to work overseas again. They had a wonderful experience in the past and would not mind doing that again for 2-5 years. He did say that with the direction education is heading in the United States, he was not sure he would pursue a full-time position at any level. The career field was getting too political. “The longer I'm in education, the more I understand that people just don't know what we do.”

Superintendent #4 – Roberta

Roberta identifies herself as a Hispanic female. She is sixty-two years old and has five children. She is currently raising a five-year-old grandson who has been with her and her husband since he was five months old. She talks fondly of her family being two cultures, her mother being white American and her father an immigrant from Spain. Roberta graduated from high school and college in Puerto Rico, received a Master’s degree and administrative certification from the United States. She received an educational specialist degree in Counseling and a Doctorate in Educational Administration and Leadership. Her career has taken her from the United States to Incirlik, Turkey, Ramstein, Germany and later to Puerto Rico. She has previously served as superintendent of large military school systems. Her final superintendency was over a geographically dispersed school system of 25,000 students, primarily serving the children of military personnel. She has had a broad base of experience that includes classroom teacher, counselor, principal and superintendent.
Early in her teaching career, Roberta met and married a man who, at the time, was in the Air Force. Being tied to the Air Force required her to move often, and so she held a variety of jobs. “I started off as a teacher in terms of education, teaching middle school and, because at that time I was married to someone in the US Air Force, you pack your bags and you go.” Roberta talked about how this was a pretty disjointed way to have a career. “I taught in elementary and kind of middle school age and then second grade, next I was an assistant principal and then we moved and I was just glad to get a teaching job.” Roberta decided she would enjoy being a counselor. At one time, she even thought she wanted to be a clinical psychologist. “I got all the way through my internship and, I guess I was as good as anyone else, but I didn’t like the work because no one ever really wanted to get better.” She ended up being a school counselor for 3 years and then moved. When she lived in one place for a longer period of time, she was able to take an assistant principal’s position and then became a principal. During this time, she went back to school to pursue her doctoral degree. “I guess I did that (earned her doctorate) because I knew you needed the ticket. Certainly for a lot of jobs, it is the show stopper...a lot of people put doctorate preferred on their job announcements. I think people outside the profession give it a little more credence or reverence, but it does help....That was just one of those things I knew I had to do. I invested the time and effort, put in the energy and checked that box off.”

Roberta’s district is considered a large district with over 14,000 students. The current school board consists of three men and two women. Since Roberta’s hire, one board member has been replaced. She describes the board as intelligent, reasonable people. She stated one of the reasons she came to the state is because of the board-superintendent relationship. “They (the board) do governance here and that was a real selling point for me. They set the goals, the end
goals, and then we do the reporting back to them on whether we met those goals. They have their own little pet things that they are interested in, but they are a great board.”

Roberta was asked how she came to pick her current state and district. She stated that she had worked for the federal government schools for thirty-one years and was ready to leave that system. She had been superintendent of a military school system of 25,000 students spread up and down the east coast of the United States and was getting tired of the constant travel to visit the schools. She indicated that during the last eight months she was in the position, she needed a change. “The travel was killing me. I enjoyed being there, but hated getting there. I just didn’t go to work every day going: yes, I’m here.” Roberta stated she wanted to be in a system where she could connect with the community and have a short five-minute commute to work. She described how she took out a map of the United States and eliminated all of the places where she did not want to live. She then centered her search on two states. She applied for three jobs and was a finalist in all three. She talked of how she wanted to work in a community with a good Hispanic population. “I had been a principal at a school with pretty similar demographics with race and ethnicity, but not with poverty. My dad was Hispanic and I felt like I had a greater cultural sensitivity to a Hispanic population.”

When asked about mentors, Roberta talked of her mother, who was an educator. “My mother taught government and she’s really liberal, and I just don’t mean politically, but pretty much thinking that anyone could do anything.” At first, she did not want to be a teacher like her mother, but soon found that she was really good with kids and so just followed that path. As far as other mentors in her field she stated, “I really had more negative examples than positive – those men who were asleep at the wheel gave me a reason to fill the void and grow stronger.”
Roberta described one year that made a serious impact on her life. Her husband, at the time, was transferred to Incirlik, Turkey. She had left an assistant principal’s job to move to Turkey, she had two little children and just wanted to find a job. It was 110 degrees, hot, different culture, taking two kids there and no job. I had worked since I was 17 and now was pushing thirty and had no job.” She went to the school and applied for any job she could get, but was told that there were no teaching jobs available. She was called on a Friday and asked if she would come in to talk about a position which would start the next Monday. She told the principal, “You don’t need to talk to me, just put me to work, I’ll be there.” He did ask her again to come in to talk about the position. “He started to tell me about the class and I pretty soon began to figure out it was a combination class spanning three grades, third through fifth.” As the conversation continued, she figured out that she had all of the third through fifth grade students that none of the other teachers wanted. Because she was just happy to have a job, she threw herself into the teaching. All of the problem kids with behavioral issues in grades three, four and five were placed in her class. The other teachers had sent the kids they did not want to work with to the combination class. It was my best year, ever! I was the best teacher I had ever been because I needed to be. There was a need for differentiation, high levels of student engagement, figuring out what worked with kids who were emotionally a mess, and I thought that there was nothing I couldn’t do. If I could teach this group of kids, I would never, ever have a problem.” She called this an empowering year, especially when I saw what my colleagues had really done, which was horrible.” This year of teaching was what caused her to consider being a clinical psychologist. “That didn’t work out because when I started working with patients in a hospital setting, most of them were adults, and I realized I really couldn’t help them. It doesn’t work with adults like it works for kids.” She describes the year as potentially being
the worst year of my life” but instead ended up being a year that was very powerful. “I still
remember every kid in the class. I go back and look at the pictures of those kids.” She uses this
as one of her stories of encouragement and success.

The transition to this position has been strenuous, but enjoyable. When Roberta first
arrived, the board created a list of who was going to help her do this and help her do that. Who
would take her out and introduce her to the community’s different constituents. She commented
that these responsibilities quickly became “overcome with life” and did not last long. She noted
that one of her strong traits is her ability to be outgoing and to meet people. “At the local
community center I made certain that when they had the dinner at Christmas, I went and served.
I also belong to Rotary, where everybody flocks. I have found that group pretty much
demonstrates the old-line families. I do love the charity work that they do.”

Roberta spent some time meeting with the outgoing superintendent. “My predecessor
was pretty strong, but he and I are quite different. Before he came on, the district was pretty
much in shambles. It needed someone strong to come in and build it up, and he did a good job
putting things right. Towards the end, he felt things were beginning to unravel and not work
well for him. I think he recognized it was time for him to go. He had been there about the nine-
year mark. After a while, you have done what you can do and you gain enemies every year, and
finally it’s there. I don’t have my enemies yet, but they will start to pile.”

The superintendent at the regional educational agency was identified as being a great help
with the transition to this position. Roberta is one of only two or three female superintendents in
the region. The regional superintendent, also female, was assigned by the state superintendents
group as a mentor. “Our conversations have been intense, I find her to be a good sounding
board. I have asked her things like: what mistakes did you make when you first came to the
region? She has been in the region for many years and I trust her explicitly.” In addition to this resource, Roberta attends the regional superintendents meetings. They too have been a support to her as she learns more about the state educational system. “I need them more than they need me, at least right now. They have the pieces to the puzzle that I don’t have.”

Along with these resources, Roberta is very appreciative of her administrative cabinet. She has the original administrative cabinet, with the exception of the human resource person she hired when she arrived in the district. She states that because of the cabinet, she has a good understanding of how the state works. One of her concerns is that she does not have the history on the district and community. “Why that group doesn’t like this group and all of the other negative history. Frankly, I don’t want to know that stuff. I think it just gets in the way. So there is history. You simply, at least in my book, model the way you believe and don’t give a lot of credibility to some of the negative stuff that happened in the past. You need to just move it on out.” A huge issue in the history of the district is the rivalry between the two high schools. She has done her best to listen and understand, but has found it to be really unpleasant and a huge concern. “It is not so much the kids as the adults. How the adults look at it, it’s almost like tit-for-tat. Something really deep-seated, not wanting the other person to succeed. So, some things I just don’t want to know about. I just start where I am and move forward.”

One way Roberta has tried to clear the air of the negative history was to issue a proclamation for Martin Luther King Day. Proclamations such as this had not been done before by previous superintendents. A week after the district issued the proclamation, the Chamber of Commerce joined and it became a celebration. It was a very positive and very public activity tying the school district and the city together. “It is just one of those things we just have to step
out and say we are all in this together and we all have to put this petty stuff behind us, especially
in the political arena.”

Roberta spends much of her time getting to know the teachers and staff in the district. "My credibility comes from my greatest strength and that is teaching.” She goes out to the classrooms often. In fact, she talks about the difficulty her assistant has in scheduling her appointments, because her priority is to be out of her office and in classrooms. “I am in classrooms a lot. I think that makes a few people really nervous because they know that I actually know the difference when I’m there. I know when teaching is good or bad.” She makes sure that teachers do not stop instruction to introduce her. She states that she does not want to disturb learning. “I will make myself at home in the classroom.” She is proud of the fact that at a little over halfway through the school year, she has been to all of her twenty-two schools at least twice, but does admit that she has not had time to hit every classroom. One day, she took over for a principal when he was out of the building. She did lunch duty, discipline, bus duty and was visible in classrooms. Someone asked her if she did that to save the cost of a substitute for the principal. She replied, “No, it helped me see how the school was organized, the staffing and see the principal’s workload. It was good to go out and do bus duty and lunch duty and see what everyone does.” She stated how spending time in each school was difficult in such a large district with all the meetings scheduled, but how it was very important to get out of the main office and check the pulse of the teachers and students. “It is a reality check.”

Roberta doesn’t perceive herself as a risk taker. She looks at her decisions as logical choices based on reason. She constantly asks herself “what would a reasonable person do.” She is concerned because the district is far behind in technology and lacking in the use of research-based instructional strategies, and is in great need of a strong vision of what good instruction
looks like. I know what good teaching looks like and we are far from it. You can only move teachers as fast as they can keep up with you. You can push and you can nudge and I can ask rhetorical questions, and I can get rid of them if they can’t make the forward movement, but you can only take the next step if someone is following you.” She continued to reflect on taking risks. She talked about how she preferred to model behaviors such as creating her own presentations and not relying on others to do it for her. If someone else prepares things they might look better, but then I’m not vested and I’m not modeling.” She also talked about how she had traveled around the world and done a lot of things that most people would not do. Most people stay in the same area and work there their whole lives. So for me pulling up stakes and moving a family here over 3,000 miles, some people might say that is kind of crazy. So maybe that is risk taking. Could be!”

As a new superintendent to the state, Roberta believes her main responsibility is to her district. When she arrived, she found that there were huge challenges, so many that she needed to focus her energies at the district level. When asked about advocacy at the state and regional levels, she responded, I have gone to the state capital a couple times and have met with and frequently e-mail the local representatives, but other than that I kind of have to let that go right now. There are people that are skilled and knowledgeable who can work at that level so I can let it go until I get my sea legs and can become a more contributing member at that level.” At the regional level she talks about how she enjoys the regional meetings and the discussions about instruction and other things that tend to matter, but still does not put much energy into it. I have tons of energy, tons. I just need to prioritize where I put it and right now it is in the district.”

In the first few months in district, Roberta identified the many challenges that needed addressing. We have a few different priorities: literacy, graduation rate, meaningful diploma,
technology, mathematics, early childhood learning, and serious budget cuts.” She is tackling them one at a time, using the human and financial resources available. “I have shepherded the math a little bit… I just turned it over to someone the other day to do the logistical stuff. I needed to back out because it was not a good use of my time, but I had to be in there to show how important it is.” She started a technology committee to address the lack of technology in the district and has led the way in using technology devices with the administration. “When I first came in, they didn't have anything available to be able to check my e-mail when I was out of the building, and to me that is unacceptable.” She identifies the work being done by the technology committee as painful, stating how staff, from the administration down to the classroom, seriously lack updated technology and the skill to use it.

The greatest challenge Roberta identified was that of severe budget cuts. She talked about how she needed all of her skills at public relations to be able to convey the message that the district needed to cut. First she sent out two budget messages to all district e-mail users. In these messages, she talked about the state budget crisis and the concern over lack of funding. She then sent out her third message asking for input on where the budget could be cut. She received three hundred responses, some good and some not so helpful. She made sure that the concerns and suggestions were kept confidential and was able to gather some good input. She sent a report back on the district e-mail with a summary of the suggestions and thanking those who responded. She let people know what the next steps were in the budget process and reinforced the things that were going well in the district. She believed that asking for input has helped keep rumors to a minimum and provided an avenue for engaging staff in the budget process. “You tend to craft the message. People sometimes think what you tell them to think.”
When asked about barriers, Roberta related that she had run up against several issues during her career that made her stronger. She identified that being a woman in administration was difficult. One story she remembered was an interview for a principal position. She was told, “This community is not ready for you, even though your interview was the strongest and everything was right, this community is not ready for a woman, sorry! We will see you in a few more years.” She talked about how she could have filed a complaint towards this, but “My attitude towards that has always been: oh gosh, foolish people. I’ve never harbored any contempt. These people have their own problems.” A second story was about her previous position. She describes her leadership style as one that is more inclusive and process oriented, including input from a variety of sources. She believes that after several years in her last position, the people she worked for believed her leadership style was “too outgoing, too touchy.” There was a push from her supervisors to have a more military efficiency, not treating anyone with compassion and caring. “That just wasn’t my style.” She maintains a positive attitude towards these experiences stating, “I try to think that for every disadvantage that I have, look at the advantages I have. I think adversity makes you a stronger leader. I am a strong female leader. I don’t try to act like a guy. I think you surround yourself with a diversity of people that fill in your gaps and you don’t have to worry about being that stereotypical superintendent.”

Roberta currently has a three-year contract and, if things go well in the position, would consider staying longer, although she does state that this will probably be her last full-time position. At her current place in life, she is not concerned about needing the position like she did five to ten years previous when she had to have the income to survive. “There is a certain freedom in knowing I don’t have to have this job, so it has a different feel to it.” She looks at her role as a female superintendent philosophically by stating, “You must use the strengths that you
have to bring who you are with your background and what you believe to the table. The fact that you are female, you’re a mother, you are a teacher, principal, superintendent, bring all the strengths that you have and don’t back off. And if you model, make sure you model because it feels right to you. I look at some who have been great leaders, but their leadership style doesn’t fit me. I am impressed by them, but that is not my style. In that way, I’m pretty comfortable in my own skin.”

Superintendent #5 – Steven

Steven is a white male, fifty-six years of age. He is married and has two adult sons. Steven has spent thirty-two years in education and is retired out of a different state. He began his career in education as a junior high school social studies teacher and boys’ head basketball coach. Within two years, he moved to the high school and was given the role of athletic director and dean of students. He spent fourteen years in these positions, where he taught half a day and did discipline and athletics the other half. After a time, he realized he was working as much as a principal. He described it as, “… volunteering and being paid significantly less. So, I began summer school preparing to become an administrator.” He received his administrative credentials in 1993 and was hired as a high school principal in a neighboring state, where he worked for four years. In 1997, Steven returned to his previous district as superintendent and spent the next twelve years in that position before retiring under stressful circumstances. He currently is in an interim position in the neighboring state as superintendent of a small, rural, isolated school district. This position will be completed at the end of the 2009-2010 school year.

Steven received his bachelor’s degree in 1977, his master’s degree in 1978, and his doctorate degree in 2008. He was proud that both he and his son earned a doctorate at the same time, “My son received his Doctor of Pharmacology in May 2008 and I received my Doctorate
of Education in June 2008.” He was drawn to the education field through his positive association with the various sports he played in high school, where he was successful in all three sports in which he participated. “I played on two undefeated football teams with a second place in state football, a second in state basketball, a first in state basketball and top eight finishes in two track events.” In addition to his success at high school athletics, Steven played one year of college basketball and two years of college football. “I wanted to be a coach. I coached volleyball, football, basketball and track.” He had fourteen years experience as the boys’ head basketball coach with one state championship, one third place finish and one seventh place. “This is where I learned organization, teamwork and tough decision making. I wanted to have a positive impact on kids, first as a teacher, then as a principal and finally as a superintendent.” He has a list of role models including, “my dad, who taught me how to work and have a great work ethic; my mom, who taught me that life is too short not to forgive and move forward; my wife, who loves me more than I deserve; my two sons, who are better examples of a strong work ethic than me; and my grandfather who taught me to be independent.” He also credits his coaches who, “taught me the drive to be successful through individual effort.”

Steven’s school district is a small K-12 district with 437 students. There is an off-site school in the district that houses a small staff of teachers at a youth camp, which is a juvenile detention center. There are four male board members and one female. Since being hired, two board members have been replaced.

Steven has limited interaction with this board outside of board meetings. He provides them with weekly updates along with articles, letters and other items that he deems relevant. He does meet with the board chair on a regular basis, keeping him informed of what is happening within the district. Once a month he meets with the board chair and vice chair to set the agenda.
for the next board meeting. He relates that the board has been informative, but not regularly involved with his transition into the interim position.

Steven’s retirement and consequent taking of the position as interim superintendent was done under stressful conditions regarding his relationship with his former board. He had recommended a teacher be non-renewed and the school board upheld that. The teacher requested a hearing before the board during which she brought in an attorney and rallied community support for reinstatement. Steven describes this as more of a court situation than a hearing. “She had her attorney, we had our attorney. She presented her case and had strong support from strong community members. I could see the board was wavering, so I wrote my resignation on a piece of paper. The board voted to bring her back and put her on a plan of assistance. I handed them my resignation and cleaned out my office the next day.” The resignation was for the end of the year pending the fact that Steven found another position. There was quite an upheaval in the district. “I was in that district twenty-seven years. My wife still teaches in that district. That year I resigned, the high school principal resigned, the K-8 principal resigned, the business manager resigned and they lost three high school teachers. In a district of 600, you would think they would see they made a mistake. They’re paying for it!”

That spring and summer, Steven applied for several positions including three in Alaska, one in his current state and one in the state to which he moved. He was a finalist in two of the three Alaska positions, but he withdrew because of the location in Alaska and the amount of rain that the region received. He also withdrew from the position in his home state due to the location. He was one of two finalists in the last district with his opponent being very well known and successful in that state. He was not selected. He submitted for his retirement at 27 years and decided he would spend a year as a technology consultant to small districts. Steven was called
by the board of his current district after their superintendent had resigned just before school started. “The superintendent resigned on Thursday, I was contacted by the board on Friday, interviewed on Monday and Tuesday and was offered the position on Thursday. School had already started.”

Finding support from others during his transition to a new state has been difficult for Steven. When asked if he was provided a mentor from the state organization he replied, “I am not familiar with that. Who provides mentoring?” He said the state he came from had an organization where thirty-two superintendents met regularly to discuss state and local issues. He said “it would have been nice if the superintendent from the regional office would have called me and provided me with a person to call on. Maybe they thought that since I had eleven years as superintendent in a different state, I didn’t need anyone to talk to.” He talked about how the county he lives in is also disjointed, with three districts being assigned to one region and two to another regional center. Because of this, the superintendents in the county do not meet. “I am one who tries to find answers. I have been attending the neighboring county superintendents meetings. They don’t seem to mind. We talk about things less formally at the county level than at the regional meetings. The regional meetings seem to be full of stuff and are too short with no time for collaboration. I reached out and joined the county group.”

The transition to the new state was relatively easy, according to Steven, as the states neighbored each other and had similar school system structure. In fact, the district in which Steven was working was less than an hour from his home across the state line, so he was able to drive to work from home and was not required to move. “Our son lives next door to us and our other son just built a home down the road. My wife still teaches in my former district, so I do feel a little place-bound at this time.”
Some of the differences that Steven found were the need to run a maintenance and operation levy to fund the school. This was not needed in his other state. He also stated that the board was elected in the spring and took office July first. He liked that better as there was time to train new board members and to set goals at the beginning of the year with a new board. Comparing this to the new state where board members took office in the middle of the school year, thus having ‘lame duck‘ board members for the beginning of the school year helping set the yearly goal and then having ‘rookie‘ board members trying to learn their role as the year progresses. Finally, the collective bargaining was very different. In his former state, the salary schedule was negotiated at the district level, where in the new state there was a statewide salary schedule. →Bargaining language becomes even more challenging with little to bargain.” He stated that the transition was not difficult for him. →I’m not green to the superintendency and a lot of the things are the same.” He did restate that he appreciated the ability to meet and collaborate at the county level with other superintendents.

Being in a small district, there is not the luxury of having an administrative cabinet to help with the daily work of district administration. Steven does have an administrative team he has assembled that includes the K-12 principal, business manager/assistant principal, youth camp principal, administrative assistant and board member. →We meet two to three hours every Thursday. This group of people has been essential to any success we have enjoyed. I listen carefully to their counsel.” This group is valuable to Steven because they have a combined experience of forty years and are able to relay information to Steven on the climate of the district and community.

One challenge that has arisen this year is contract negotiations. The union had a three-year contract that expired August 31, 2009. There have been ongoing negotiations to get a
new contract in place, but it has been difficult. “The union is very strong here and I am trying to get them under control.” There tends to be a two school district attitude among the teaching staff, the regular school district and the youth camp. The teachers at the youth camp tend to be the more senior staff in the district and are the union core. There is considerable discontent between the teachers in the two buildings. The sticking point in the contract is that Steven wants to negotiate that seniority is regulated at the building level and not throughout the district. That way, if the youth camp is closed due to state budget cuts, the teachers there cannot bump the teachers at the regular district school if a reduction of force occurs. It is the opinion of the community and Steven that the youth camp teachers are not positive staff members and would not serve the district needs in the main district K-12 facility. At the February negotiations, the contract was extended as is until August 31, 2010. “Every teacher in this building knows what is out there and my goal is to get this contract done this year before I leave stating that you have seniority in this building only. We will get the vote.”

The second challenge has to do with a former board member. This person was a board member for eight years, four of those years as board chair. According to Steven he has personally run out the last three superintendents. The superintendent who resigned in 2009, before Steven took the interim position, had been a teacher there for four years and they hired him to be superintendent that summer. The former board member started a barrage of public records requests. The superintendent only served in that position from July 1 until late August 2009. The superintendent before him left after being harassed by this former board member. “He owns the land behind the school. He put a 4X8 foot sign up on the hill behind the school saying ‘go home baldy.’ That was his hire and he put up the sign to get rid of him.” The board member did not get re-elected; however, he still attended meetings. “At the January meeting he
stood up and started tapping the table and saying the superintendent needs to do this, and this, and this. The next morning I called him up and told him he didn’t have the right to do that.” Steven talked with him for two hours and believed that they had parted the conversation in a nice way.” Later that month he stopped by the office and volunteered to be put on a committee, but Steven would not put him on it as he did not perceive this man to be a team player.” At the February board meeting, the man showed up and Steven went over to shake his hand. The man said –You go right back over there and sit in your desk and if I want to talk to you, then I will approach you.” Steven described himself as stunned and, not knowing what to say, responded, –So, I guess we aren’t friends.” He replied, –You drew first blood, now I’m going to get you.” That was February and since then, Steven reported that they have had several public records requests. Steven has contacted the regional office to field those requests to make sure that they were handled correctly. –He’s just been picking away. He won’t be voted back in because community people have seen what he has done. As an interim he states, –I don’t have to deal with him. I can find a job wherever I want so I am not tied to this position.”

When asked about the superintendency and whether one needs to be a risk taker to work in that position, Steven gave this response, –It is my belief that risk is what separates the average/good superintendents from the great ones. As an educational leader, we may not know what is around the bend, although we can study the research and draw on others for educated opinions, so that we have an idea where we are headed. With great risks can come great rewards.” He went on to list some examples of risk taking from his experience. The first is his resigning of the superintendency over what he calls an ethical and moral issue. He created one of the first one-to-one laptop programs in his former district; he met with negative community members and challenged them to become the district’s strongest supporters. He says that
believing in people and helping the people he works with to become what they desire most is
taking a risk; and finally being positive in times of adversity and allowing the experience to
become a growth opportunity. “All of those risk taking behaviors are what make you who you
are.”

Being able to prioritize work and family has, by admission, not been Steven’s strength.
“The business of being a superintendent never ends. I wish I could say my family was always
first, but I cannot. I can say my family is always there. They love you in spite of your flaws and
mistakes.” He talks about how being a superintendent is a 24/7 job but is the most important
work one will ever do.” He states that he knows the job is temporary, “it just takes a majority
vote of the school board to wish you bye-bye,” but he classifies the job as a labor of love.”

There is a great deal of stress associated with the superintendency according to Steven
and he has worked hard to find ways to cope with it. He calls it the silent killer and has learned
that to control stress one needs to learn something different and interesting. He enjoys wood
carving, home projects and technology. He talks about how he does his best to keep his wife
from knowing all the stressors in his professional life. He uses this metaphor to describe why he
tries to keep her unaware, “it is like a fan in the stands at a basketball game. A fan has no
control over the situation. The coach has some control. It is enough for one person to worry and
to make decisions.” He did say that they schedule at trip to California every spring break. He
states that he reduces stress from about January on by anticipating this trip every year.

With all of the apparent turmoil over the past few years, Steven was asked why he wants
to continue in the superintendency. He talked about things that took the joy out of the
superintendency such as angry unions, community members with personal agendas, budget
woes, some parents and poor or mediocre teachers who refuse to become better and the laws that
keep those teachers in their jobs. But he also spoke of the joys of the superintendency: watching a young person grow and mature into a successful high school student, looking into the eyes of an elementary school student and seeing the potential, enjoying students competing in athletics and being successful, not in terms of wins and losses, but in terms of personal fulfillment and pride in an effort well done, helping a new teacher or administrator grow in the position and realize they are doing a better job than he ever did, and seeing the smiles on student faces when they understand. He states, “I will continue in the superintendency as long as I look forward to work. This is one of the best jobs there is.”

Superintendent #6 – Karen

Karen is a fifty-five year old white female. She is married with one child. Her husband is a retired administrator for an airline and her son is currently attending college. She started teaching in 1977 and taught for twenty years. She held several different teaching positions, including different elementary and intermediate positions as well as science and algebra at the high school level. She was told by her superintendent that if she went back to school and earned her principal’s credential, he would hire her to be the special education director. One summer, she went back to school and took 30 hours of coursework, completed her internship in the fall and got her principal’s credential. She continued with classes and earned her superintendent’s credential. She was 43 when she was first hired as a superintendent. “At that time, the district was small, and the superintendent decided he was leaving. That gave me the opportunity so I jumped quite literally from the classroom to the superintendency. That was a huge learning curve. I don’t recommend anyone doing that.” She was in that district for twenty-five years. She taught the first nineteen years, taught in another district for the next two years, and then returned as superintendent for the next six years. At that time, Karen quit her job to stay at home with her
young son. “I always thought I should do that. I stayed home for a few months and could not stand it.” She then decided she wanted to work for the state’s education department. “I always criticized them for what they were doing, so I thought I should try to help. I didn’t stay there too long. I went back to K-12 and was an interim principal for a short period of time.” She supervised student teachers for the local college and taught graduate classes. “I had always wanted to teach at the college level full time, so that is when I got my doctorate. I was forty-six at the time.” She was able to teach full time at the college level, but found it less stimulating than she had anticipated. Because of this, she decided she wanted to return to the superintendency. She and her husband loved the outdoors. For several years, her husband had kept a boat at marina in this state. “We chose this state because my husband loved it. Because he worked for the airline, he could fly up once a month to go sailing. I would come up for a week in the summer to sail with him. It was really fun. So, I picked a district somewhat close by and applied. It was the only job I applied for and I got it. I had never spent a lot of time in this area but found that I love this place. It is just drop dead gorgeous.” She wanted to work in a district that was medium sized where she had staff to help do the work, but small enough to get to know parents and community. Her last superintendency was in a district that was 1,000 students when she started and grew to 13,000 students in ten years. Even though the small town core stayed the same, the district became too large to be able to be in contact with the parents and community. “I went online and decided I am going to pick a district the size that I want. In a large district, people go through every channel in America until they get to see the superintendent. I didn’t want to be that far removed. So, I picked a district of about 4,000 students and it worked out just like I thought.”
There are three people who were instrumental in Karen’s decisions to be a superintendent. First she mentions her mother who was a very independent woman.” She remembered her mother would always tell Karen and her sister Don’t ever think that someone is going to take care of you. Get your degree and be able to take care of yourself.” She listened to her mother. She stated, I took her at face value, I took that advice and I ran with it.” Another mentor was a superintendent, the very first superintendent that saw that I had administrative potential.” He encouraged her to go back to school and become an administrator. The last person she mentioned was the one other superintendent she worked for. She talked about how he could get the business done, yet do it in a nice way.” She related that, I wasn’t afraid to make tough decisions and knew not to be really hard on people. He could say what needed to be said, but he didn’t take away their dignity. He was able to do it with a lot of integrity.” This person made a deep impression on her. Like to model my life that way. I know I have to make tough decisions, but at the end of the day, I don’t want to shred who you are to do it.”

Karen’s school district is a medium sized school district located in a large community in a rural area of the state. The school district has a population of 4168 students. Her board consists of two male and three female members.

Karen is very complimentary about her current and past boards. That is one thing that has been pretty consistent throughout my superintendency; I have had great boards to work with.” She has a personal policy of keeping all of her board members informed regularly. She has Friday notes that she sends board members every week, updating them on things of interest happening in the district. Just don’t want a board member to feel like they are or aren’t in the loop on anything.” She also calls or e-mails them if something urgent comes up. That is one
thing that is different in this state from the one I came from. In my former state, the laws are very strict; board members cannot talk to each other outside of a meeting.”

When talking about her transition to the state, Karen expresses a lot of confidence in what she knows as a former superintendent and how that knowledge transfers into her current situation. When asked about any specific mentoring, she states, “Well, I did go to the new superintendent’s meeting in July. Because this isn’t my first superintendency, I don’t feel lost. I can anticipate what is coming up next. If ever I should need anything, I can call those other district superintendents and say help me out here.” One system that was new to Karen was a skill center located in her district. She had never had experience with a shared satellite school that was based fiscally in her district. “Coming up to speed on that (skill center) has been interesting, so I have had to utilize the superintendents that are also part of that. I also call the region education center sometimes. They are very good.” She credits her Superintendent’s Leadership Team when she talks about transition. “They have been fabulous. Obviously there is a huge learning curve coming to a new state, but they have been very patient with me. They have not withheld information from me. They do everything they can to make sure we are all successful.”

Instructional leadership is a huge focus for Karen. “My instructional leadership team, which are all of our principals, our assistant principals and the director of the skill center, meet three Thursdays a month. We do two hours worth of instruction around our ongoing theme of school improvement. In the summer, we have a summer administrative institute where we crunch data and learn about what good teaching looks like in the classroom.” Karen talks about the importance of leading the vision and then having her central office team make sure that staff are receiving the training to implement that vision of good teaching. “My assistant
superintendent is in charge of curriculum and assessment. It is her job to be out in the classrooms with the principals and teachers to insure student achievement.”

Much of Karen’s time is spent on administrative issues and public relations. “I probably spend more of my time on management issues than the other two superintendents I know here in this state. It is just day-to-day stuff, like making sure that when people misbehave, that it is taken care of.” Her special education director resigned the previous year, so she has taken on that responsibility and is in the process of reorganizing that department. Having 15% of students in the district qualify for special education services is a concern of hers. Also important to Karen is to be a seen as an active representative of the district in her community. She belongs to Rotary and the local Chamber of Commerce. “All of us take a piece. Our business manager belongs to the business association. We just need to be visible out there.” Finally, she tries to get to all or most of the school events that take place. “Some coincide, but I try and do my best.” When asked about the stress related with such a demanding schedule, she responded, “In my first superintendency, I never knew my breaking point. I would get to the point where I would start to cry very easily. I realized that I needed to back up when I would almost get to that point.”

Karen sees herself as having a collaborative leadership style. She states that she can make the tough decisions when necessary, but in many instances would rather work through issues as part of a team. “People just call me Karen. I really don’t care about the Dr. unless I need it. I don’t believe in power over people because you don’t get anything done. I am very comfortable with rolling up my sleeves and working beside you because I think we get a lot done that way.” She talked about a local community college president that said he had his secretary filter his e-mail for him and reply to the ones she could. “That was an eye opener. Personally, I
have an urgency to reply personally to people if they e-mail you or call. I think it is important to communicate personally with people.”

Despite the appearance of a very full schedule, Karen has found ways to balance her work and home life. She indicated, “I try to get out of here by 6:00 P.M., but sometimes I don’t leave until eight or nine.” She enjoys exercising and has some hobbies that she enjoys. “I run, I go to spinning classes and I’ve done triathlons. I make sure I am physically in good shape, and I try to eat right.” She also reserves her weekends to go out on the boat. She reiterates that she knows what her breaking point is when it comes to stress. “When someone says something to me and I get teary eyed, that is when I know I am really tired and need to step back, go away and leave at 4:00 P.M. instead of 6:00 in the evening. It probably took me three or four years to understand when to step back.” She describes her future as one that is still in flux. “This will be my last superintendency. I would like to learn as much as I can while I’m here and possibly do some instructional coaching or maybe be a consultant. There are so many good things happening in this state. I want to learn about the work we are doing and share it with others.”
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative study documents the experiences of six superintendents as they navigate the superintendency in a new state. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of these six experienced superintendents new to the state on the effectiveness of induction and mentoring programs, and to gain an understanding of these programs as they relate to differences in gender and levels of experience. The findings from this study have implications for job, district and community stability and improvements in student learning.

The study had four research questions that were used to explore the phenomenon of experienced superintendents from another state transitioning into a new state. (1) Do females and males experience induction processes to the superintendency differently and, if so, how does this impact their tenure and job stability? (2) Do these superintendents use similar leadership strategies as they transition into their first year in a new state? (3) What type of support/mentoring do female and male superintendents need/access during their first year as superintendents in a new state? (4) What induction strategies/programs could be developed and implemented that would support superintendents during this transition, helping them maintain their current position and creating sustainability in their districts.

In this chapter the conclusions on the qualitative findings are organized in response to the study’s research questions. Also included in the chapter are the relations of the findings to the prevailing research. The responses are organized case by case according to the study’s research questions followed by the researcher’s findings and the recommendations for future research studies.
Discussion of Results

The first theme that this study addresses is the induction process and whether females and males experience it differently and if so, does it impact the tenure and job stability of the superintendent. The superintendents in this study experienced differing paths to the superintendency. The men came to the superintendency in a more traditional manner. All three of them credited their coaches and teachers as being the influential factor for choosing education as their career choice.

Martin talked about his teachers holding him accountable, yet being treated with dignity and respect. He stated that he knew from fifth grade that he would be a principal. When he told his mother that he was going to be a teacher and a coach, he said she cried. She wanted him to be so much more, maybe a doctor or a lawyer. As he continued through his career as high school principal, he received his superintendent credential, but did not use it. He loved being a high school principal, "being able to build those relationships and have a huge impact on the direction of student learning.” He entered the superintendency as an assistant superintendent in a neighboring district. "My wife told me I needed to apply because I was spending too much time as a high school principal and she said the job would kill me.” He worked in that position for three years and then retired and became principal in an American school in the Dominican Republic. Coming back to the state and taking the part-time superintendent position in his current district was something he did so that he and his wife could be near their daughter and newborn grandchild.

William came to the superintendency early in his career. He said his father, a school superintendent, and his teachers and coaches were his inspiration to enter education. He was in his late twenties when he served as a teacher and then principal/teacher in a small district. At
age thirty-three, he was offered the position of superintendent in the same district of 300 students. During the two years he was superintendent, he was also basketball coach. He then was hired to be superintendent in a larger rural district and was there for eight years. He credits his coaches and teachers, as well as his father, as being inspirational to him and guiding him into teaching. “I was fortunate that I had coaches who also served as principals. I had great relationships with them and they connected well with students. I had no doubt I wanted to be a teacher and a coach.” He said he went into administration because it paid better and “I had three young kids to support.”

Steven also credits his success in athletics as the major influence for him to enter the educational field. “I was an above average student who loved participating in athletics. I wanted to be a coach.” He credits his experience in high school and college athletics as the place he learned the skills he needed to be a teacher, principal and superintendent. “This is where I learned organization, teamwork, tough decision making and so on. I wanted to have a positive impact on kids, first as a teacher, then as a principal and then as a superintendent.” He also is very complimentary of his role models. He talked of the influence members of his family had on him to make him the person he is today.

Estella came to the superintendency later in her career after many successful years as a teacher, principal and deputy superintendent. She explained that she had always wanted to be a teacher and, as a child, would organize tutoring sessions with the neighborhood children. Her parents were a strong influence in her life. “They expected us to go to college. They were very focused on teaching and learning in our house.” She also credited a middle school math teacher who encouraged her to be a teacher. Early in her career, a principal took notice of Estella and encouraged her to be a principal. “I was in my twenties. I actually had to leave my district and
got hired as an assistant principal in a different district because my district thought I was too young to be a principal. Six or seven months later, my district hired me back as a principal.”

Once she was a principal, and later a deputy superintendent, she started looking at ways she could impact an even a greater number of students. “That is when I decided to get my doctorate in educational leadership and policy.” She quit her job, did consulting work and took coursework. She stated that she really liked the consulting work, but didn’t want to end my career without doing a superintendency.” When she was approached by her current district, her mentors encouraged her to take the position. It was not exactly the position she saw herself in; however, her professors convinced her that she could make a difference in this urban, middle- to upper-class district.

Roberta did not think she that she wanted to be a teacher when she was young. Her mother was a teacher and she really did not want to follow in her footsteps, “but at that time, if you were a female, you only had so many career choices.” She found that she was good with kids and did enjoy working with them, so it just naturally led to her being a teacher. She had many experiences as a teacher, principal, and counselor. “It was kind of a wobble around progression, I guess.” When she was principal, she went back to school to pursue her doctoral degree. She became a counselor, an assistant principal and then began her first superintendency. She attributes this disjointed progression partially to a military lifestyle of moving from one duty station to another with her former husband. After each move, she was willing to take any position that was available, even if she left an administrative position for a teaching or counseling position in the new duty station. As her career progressed, she continued working in the military school system. The last position she had was superintendent of a widely diverse
system of 25,000 students with schools located from Puerto Rico and north up the east coast of the United States. She retired out of that system after thirty-one years.

Karen entered administration later in her career. She shared that she taught everything at the K-9 level to include ninth grade science and algebra 1. She stated that her mother was a great influence on both she and her sister to “get our degree and be able to take care of yourself.” She also states there were two superintendents who influenced her. One was the superintendent of the district where she was teaching. He encouraged her to get her administrative certification and gave her the first opportunity as a special education director. When he left the superintendency, she replaced him. The other was a superintendent she worked for while doing her administration work. She saw that he did his work with “…lot of integrity. I kind of like to model my life that way.”

From the responses, it does appear that male and female superintendents experience differences in the induction process to the superintendency. All three of the male respondents acknowledged what Glass (2000) asserted that “coaching activities traditionally have provided secondary and junior high teachers with an initial step toward administration” (p. 2). Glass notes the majority of the teachers at the secondary level are men. The males surveyed in this study were highly influenced by coaches at a young age and went on to coach themselves. They indicated that they were able to move rapidly up the administrative ladder and all but one, who chose not to be a superintendent when offered because he loved being a principal, became superintendents at a young age with as little as five years teaching experience. On the other hand, the women had a more difficult route to administration. They did not enter the superintendency until they were in the final ten years of their career. None of the women were particularly concerned that they were older when they became superintendents. Only one stated
that she felt she had experienced overt discriminated. They all appeared to enjoy their career choices and where they are currently working. This study supports the literature on the induction of women into the superintendency (Groban, 1996; Brunner, 1999; Glass, 2000; Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). These women became superintendents later in life, through diverse routes.

The use of similar leadership strategies was a second area of inquiry in this study. Martin struggles with the challenge of meshing his leadership style with the role of a part-time superintendent position of one hundred eight days per year. He has a full-time K-8 principal and teachers on staff with leadership stipends to take care of special education and any state or federal program grants. In addition to that, he has a very strong board member who tends to take over and make directives independent of the board. Martin describes his leadership style as more managerial and as coming from a power position. He quoted a former professor who said, "You never accept the responsibility without the power to back it up." He was called an 'alpha dog' and a board member stated that the former superintendents in the district were more servant leaders and that maybe Martin's more direct style was not what they were looking for in this small district. Martin replied that if he were not the person for the job, he would like to have the conversation with the full board. The board member stated that he did not think that was necessary. Martin did choose to bring this up before the board a month or so later. He said that they were surprised that he would take this board member on. He also stated that, at this time, the majority of the board seems to be supporting him, although the strong board member has been on the board for nine years and the rest of the board has only four years experience between them. He is concerned that, because he is less than half time, many of the day-to-day decisions are made in his absence and he is expected to back them up without understanding how or why
they are made. Having decisions made at different levels by different people causes a discontinuity in the management of the district. That is difficult for him as he has always been the one in charge and now has to share that power. It is also difficult because, as the superintendent, he is the one accountable for situations that occur, even if he is not on campus at the time they happen. “I am still trying to figure out the power and responsibility of this position.”

William sees himself as a collaborative leader. He believes that leadership should be practiced through example and should be shared across the district. His leadership focus is to create a sense of trust. He commented, “There is mistrust everywhere, between board members, the board and administrator, the administrators with each other, it has been very challenging.” He has an advisory board with a representative from each building that meets once a month. Here he disseminates information and has an open forum where they can bring issues to him. He uses a metaphor of an onion to describe the district. “The more we keep peeling, the more we keep finding. I think if I can have a big knife and cut some chunks out, this place will be a lot better.” He relates his leadership style to a quote by Casey Stengel: “Leadership is getting paid for the home runs that someone else hits.” He goes on to say that “It isn’t an ego thing. If someone has a better idea and it works for kids, so be it.” He does state that when a decision needs to be made, he is very comfortable making it. “You may not agree with me, but one thing you will know, you will get an honest answer.”

Steven, like Martin, is dealing with an interim position of one hundred eighty days. Even though this is a longer contract, it has its challenges. He has a full-time principal in his main school and a principal at the state youth camp that is in his district. He talks about his role as being a manager. He identifies his principal as taking the lead on any collaboration or
instructional leadership role. He sees himself as the person in charge and the one to take care of the managerial issues that the district has including staffing, budgeting, and union negotiations. One of his biggest issues in his former district was when the board did not listen to his recommendation regarding the non-renewal of a teacher. When the board overturned his recommendation, he resigned after over 25 years in the district. He has a 'take the bull by the horns' type of leadership. This was evident when he confronted the former board member in his district after the board member had threatened to get rid of him. This type of strong manager leadership style is also evident in the way he dealt with the teacher's union. "The union is very strong and I am trying to get them under control. They all work at the camp and are not great teachers. They told this building that they couldn't be part of the negotiations. I insisted that a member of this building was at negotiations because they weren't getting the truth."

Estella describes herself as one who "leads with a team or a collective approach, opposed to individual power and direction." She does say that this leadership style was not how she would have described herself when she first became a principal. "I was very top-down and learned by hard knocks that ultimately if I did not engage my teachers and we didn't work collaboratively, then nothing was going to happen for kids in the building. It was a learning experience that shaped my whole perception and beliefs around leadership." She talked extensively about how leaders need to set the direction that mirrors the leader's values and beliefs. "It has to be congruent with who you are. You must be very transparent about your beliefs and at the same time build that collective vision." Estella was very adamant that being able to select many members of her cabinet was critical to her being able to form a leadership team that reflected the values and vision that she was trying to develop for the district. She related that her experience at Harvard working under Elmore and Johnson was a transforming
experience. —We always worked in teams. Even as a consultant, I never worked on my own; it was always a team that did the thinking, planning the delivery and the facilitating. I am a great believer on collaborative leadership.”

Roberta is a very hands-on leader. She meets with her cabinet weekly and principals on a bi-weekly basis. She does not see herself as a risk-taker; rather she describes herself as a thinker. Her question to herself is —What would a reasonable person do in this case?” She has identified many challenges in the district that she wants to take on. However, she realizes that it cannot all be done at once. She talks about the challenges her predecessor experienced, explaining, —When he came here the district was pretty much in shambles. It needed someone to come in and build it up, to almost build the esteem of the teachers and staff.” Roberta now sees her role as one who needs to work on the instructional infrastructure of the district. She has gone out to schools and been very visible in the community. She has also been visible in classrooms, making it a priority to talk with teachers and to heal some strained relationships with union members. She also understands that she cannot do all of the work alone. —I founded a technology committee and we are beginning to slog through that, oh it is painful. I just turned the math project over to someone the other day in terms of doing the logistical stuff. I needed to back out because that is not a good use of my time.” She went on to say that she had to be there in the beginning to show that the work was important and needed to be held to a high priority. She believes that she is the carrier of the message. —People think what you tell them to think. I get work done through other people.”

Karen came to her new district from a district of 13,000. She chose a mid-sized district so that she could better relate to her teachers and students. This being said, she does believe in collaborative leadership, but she relies on her instructional leaders, and her assistant
superintendents of curriculum and instruction to take on this work. She meets with her leadership team and her principals three times a month to work on their ongoing themes and will have a summer administrator retreat where they will bring in a consultant to take them through the district data. She sees her role as more of a management role and one who maintains a positive image in the community. “I probably spend more time on my management issues than other superintendents. I am reorganizing our special education department right now.” She understands the importance of teamwork, but it appears that she leaves the collaboration to others and she is seen more as the district leader. “I am very careful because we need to get the work done as a team. Sometimes when I need to get things done, I will say this is Dr. Karen Smith.” Even though she understands the collaborative role of leadership—“I am comfortable with rolling up my sleeves and working beside you”—she also states that she is not afraid to make a decision if she sees something going in the wrong direction. Being visible in the community and providing positive public relations with the community organizations is on the top of her superintendent list. She spends many evenings until seven or eight attending meetings and activities.

Although there are great deal of research documenting the supposition that leadership styles of men and women differ (Pounder & Coleman, 2002; Grogan, 2006; Miller, Washington, & Fiene, 2006), leadership styles did not appear to be gender specific in this study. Both men and women talked about being both collaborative in their work with teachers and community and more authoritative when it came to the business of running the school. Martin, Steven and Karen stated they were managers first and collaborators when needed, but Estella, William and Roberta stated they lead through collaboration, but did need to become more authoritative when the situation presented itself. This blurring of traditional leadership roles may be a result of the
emphasis on education reform and the focus on teaming and professional learning communities. There did not seem to be a great difference between genders regarding leadership styles.

A third area of inquiry entails the types of support systems superintendents accessed during their transition to a new state. None of the superintendents new to the state expressed the need for a mentor. All six superintendents related that they had been assigned a mentor from the local area by the state superintendent's association, but only two had really accessed that person. Martin, having been a principal and assistant superintendent in the region, was able to have his former superintendent and friend assigned to him as his mentor. Although he was assigned, he was just one of the people that Martin accessed. He was complimentary towards the regional superintendent. ―When I first took the position, he came over to introduce himself and offer assistance. He has great follow through and the ability to lend support.” He did express that when he had a question that there were superintendents in the region —always willing to take my call.”

Roberta mentioned that the regional superintendent, also a woman, was assigned as her mentor. Being only one of two female superintendents in the region, Roberta has enjoyed their conversations and has used the regional superintendent as an information base to learn about the community. ―I find her to be a good sounding board. She has been a good resource, but I have my other colleagues.” Roberta credits her leadership team as the best source of information as she transitions. She also attends the regional superintendent’s meetings regularly, using the other superintendents in the region when she has questions. She attended the state induction meeting for new superintendents the summer before, and attended a conference to lobby the state legislature.
William was assigned a mentor, but in his words, “Yeah, I do have my mentor, but I have been superintendent longer than he has, so as far as leadership and what I do, I think I got that figured out.” He states that he has his own circle of colleagues that he accesses when he has a question. “There are several superintendents that have retired out of my former state and rehired here. I am on the phone with them a lot.” He also relies heavily on his father who, after retiring from William’s former state, came to this state and has spent seventeen years as superintendent of a district. William seems to feel alienated from the other regional superintendents. He states, “They look at you a bit differently because you are from someplace else, like you are not one of us.” He has not attended conferences and rarely leaves the district.

Estella did not refer to anyone being assigned as a mentor from the state association. She stated that she had attended some of the regional superintendent meetings but “did not find them particularly useful.” She wished that the meetings were more collaborative and not just a “sit and get.” She said that she was going to continue to attend these meetings because, “I think I am going to need some networking with some superintendents.” Coming from a university, Estella seems comfortable reaching out to the local university as well as to a friend in a neighboring district who attended her university with her. “I am meeting with a professor of education from the local state university who reached out when I first arrived.” She is also using her board members’ knowledge of the district and community to help with the transition. Finally, Estella is looking for someone within the business community to be a coach, “I am in conversations with board members and community people to see if there is somebody from the business end that I can throw out some ideas to and have that person react from a non-educational perspective.”
Steven seemed unaware that there was a mentor program in the state. He was hired as an interim superintendent the day before school began and may have been overlooked by the state superintendent’s organization. He was never approached by the regional superintendent, either.

This did not seem to bother him. “Maybe they thought...well, he’s eleven years in the superintendency, so he doesn’t need anything...I’m not green to the superintendency and a lot of things are the same.” He did state that he did not know how much he would take advantage of a mentor, but it would have been fine to have one. He also stated that he was pretty self-sufficient, “I am one who tries to find answers...I get someone to help me.” His contacts are the two neighboring counties that are in his region. Because the county he lives in is divided between two regional offices and the five districts are distant and remote from each other, there are no county superintendent meetings. Therefore, Steven has joined the meetings in the two neighboring counties. He credits the superintendents at these county meetings as being a strong support as he transitions to the state.

Karen did not talk much about mentoring. She does not attend the monthly regional superintendent meetings and does not plan on attending any upcoming state meetings, as she will be returning to her former state for commitments she has there. She does not seem concerned that she has not received mentoring. She stated, “I attended the new superintendent’s conference in July. Because this isn’t my first superintendent position, I don’t feel lost. I can anticipate what is coming up next.” She has accessed two local superintendents who are part of a regional skill center located in her district. “If I ever need anything I can call them up and ask them to help me out here.” She did state that her two assistant superintendents helped her when she first came to the district. “They have been fabulous! They have been very helpful with me and have
not withheld information. They do everything they can to make sure we are all successful.” She credits them with keeping the district moving forward while she learns about the state.

None of the superintendents took advantage of the assigned mentor the state organization provided them. The mentor teams did not have regular meetings nor did they contact each other to talk about an issue. Each superintendent tended to find their own support system. When asked about mentoring, they all stated that they really didn’t need it. They did not see the job as different from what they had done in other positions. The only issue they all identified as needing support was the state fiscal structure. The superintendents were able to access their regional office and their district business managers to learn the new system. The use of mentoring may be different for someone new to the superintendency. Mentor programs may be more beneficial to the novice superintendent, but seem to have little use for veterans in the field, even when they are in an unfamiliar situation such as moving to a new state.

The fourth and final area of inquiry centers on the type of support systems/programs that could be established to help superintendents transition. This theme did not seem to appear as predominantly in the interviews. Each of the superintendents tended to come to their position differently. Martin was retired when he moved to the state and took a part-time position close to his new home. Estella was recruited through her university program and was reluctant at first to give up her consulting business to take the position. Karen was familiar with the area to which she moved and watched for a position that would meet her professional and her family’s personal needs. William and Roberta were retired and looking for a position in another state to finish their careers. They both had applied in several different states and took the first position offered. Finally, Steven was recruited as an interim superintendent for one year. He was uncertain as to
his future in this position. In all, the participants indicated that were not planning on a long term commitment to their current districts.

Induction and retention of superintendents is important. Of the six superintendents in this study, only one expressed an intention of working more than three to five years. Three maintained residences in their former states. If the literature states that longevity of district administration directly impacts student learning (Marzano & Waters, 2009), then it would appear that the hiring of superintendents from outside of a state, with no emotional ties to the new state in which they are working, may not be a good idea.

Recommendations for Future Study

District leadership does matter and the long-term tenure of a superintendent is important in the implementation of long-term change (Kotter, 1999; Fullan, 2003; Elmore, 2006; Marzano & Waters, 2009). In addition, the blending of the managerial role of superintendent with the instructional leadership role is essential if for gains in student achievement. The problem becomes how to support superintendents in their role so that they are successful and can make a long-term commitment to their districts, which is associated with implementing systemic changes and increases in student learning.

Tallerico, Burstyn and Poole (1993) discuss the importance of professional development experiences in school board relations, understanding the vulnerability of the superintendency, and strengthening both formal and informal support systems to help the superintendent secure stability in their position. They propose that more personal mentorship through national, state and regional superintendent associations is essential to the tenure of the superintendent. Moreover, superintendents new to a state face an additional barrier to position stability in that they often lack familiarity with existing state support systems. However, their continued tenure
is no less important than those candidates selected within the state for their first superintendent position and supports for their success need to be in place.

Given that superintendent stability is associated with student learning and that superintendents new to a position seek formal and informal networks of support, regardless of whether they are selected from within the state from outside of the state, then the following questions are appropriate for further investigation. First, what are the formal and informal support networks and professional development opportunities accessed by superintendents new to the state to support their successful induction? Second, are there identified differences between male and female superintendents new to the state as they seek network and induction support? Third, which professional organizations are most effective in providing support for superintendents new to the state?

The findings of this study may have implications for additional research in the area of induction and mentoring programs for superintendents to include:

1. Conduct a study of superintendents new to the position to define the mentoring and/or regional support they need during their first year in the position.
2. Conduct a study on the induction process for superintendents in other states.
3. Determine what topics need to be developed to provide the information and support to help the first year superintendent be successful.
4. Examine the different university programs for superintendent credentials to determine if any changes need to be made to the curriculum to address the changes that are constantly occurring in education at the state and national levels.
5. Consider how to reconstruct the superintendent internship to ensure that interns are provided the time and ability to experience the different roles of the superintendent.
(6) Examine the different types of mentoring early in the superintendent's career that focused them on the desire to become a superintendent.

(7) Look at what would be required to develop an induction and mentoring program for women to engage them in aspiring and applying for leadership positions to include the superintendency.

The development of an induction process/mentorship for retention of superintendents new to positions in this state has been an ongoing discussion at a variety of levels. The current pilot project providing district administrative team training may be a way to develop continuity in district goals and personnel. This program provides support to the district leadership by presenting the leadership teams with the latest research, having them develop problems of practice and providing structured time for focused work. This model may be adaptable to an induction program for new superintendents and their mentors. School boards could also be involved with this by requiring their new superintendent to attend these meetings and commit to attend at least one meeting with the superintendent and mentor.

It is important that there be some kind of transition/induction process for people coming to the superintendency from inside and outside of the state. These processes may have similarities, but, like in our classrooms, they must be differentiated to fit the needs of the client. The impact of a formalized induction process and personal mentor on the sustainability of leadership needs to be explored more closely.

Final Summary

This qualitative study endeavored to identify the perceptions of six experienced superintendents new to the state on the effectiveness of induction and mentoring programs and to gain understanding of these programs as they relate to differences in gender and levels of
experience. The findings from this study have implications for job, district and community stability and improvement in student learning.

Suggestions regarding the need for additional study in the area of induction and mentoring have been included. It is hoped that ongoing research will prove useful in development of mentoring programs for school superintendents, as well as for those endeavoring to develop mentoring programs in other disciplines. The information provided may also serve as a basis for future research in this area.
REFERENCES


McNulty, McNulty, R. E. (2002). *Mentoring the first-year superintendent in Texas public


Appendix A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Demographic Information:

Your Gender?
Your Age?

What are the total number of years you have served in the capacity of Superintendent?

What size were your previous districts? Current district?

What are your total number years of experience as a teacher; principal; central office administrator?

How old were you when you served in your first Superintendent’s position?

What is the current composition of your school board? Gender? Occupation? Age?

Question Guide:

1. Please talk to me about how you came to the superintendency. Start with graduation from college to present. Include your:
   Background/path taken;
   Academic preparation;
   Stories that made an impact and caused you to pursue a career in education.

2. Who are your role models and why did you chose them?

3. Why did you decide to apply to a superintendency in a different state?

4. Have you ever applied for a superintendency and not been chosen for the position? Can you reflect on why you may not have been selected?

5. Taking on the superintendency in a new state could create a huge learning curve. What has been the most difficult adjustment you have had to make in your overall approach to the job? In your day-to-day work?

6. How often do you interact with your school board members?

7. What method do you use most often to interact with your board?

8. Is the relationship/communication between you and your board president different than that with the other board members?
9. Do you have a leadership team or district cabinet? If so, what is the structure of this group?

10. As a new superintendent to the state, are there challenges that you could use help or support with? Where would you turn to get that support?

11. Tell me about any expected or unexpected barriers or challenges you have encountered in seeking and actually serving as superintendent?

12. What kind of support/mentoring have you had since your move? How does this support/mentoring differ from other states you have worked in?

13. Researchers state that risk taking is a critical factor of successful leadership. The word “risk” comes from the Greek word “to sail around a cliff,” which implies that we do not know what is around the bend. It has been said that all superintendents take a risk when they take the job. Can you give me some of your thoughts on this?

14. Share with me stories about the nature of your work. How much time do you spend on instructional leadership, management issues, community involvement, personnel and human resource management, regional and state political action activities?

15. How do you make the most of your time? How do you prioritize?

16. As Superintendent, you are seen by others as a person of power. Researchers talk about two theories of power: Power over vs. power with/to. What is your definition of power and how do you see yourself in regard to power?

17. When faced with issues that are stressful and difficult, many leaders often find retreat to renew energy and strength. How do you deal with stress to rest and renew your energy levels?

18. What do you consider the joys of the superintendency? Are there issues or situations that take the joy out of the position? How do you balance these?

19. Talk to me about your professional goals? What do you see yourself doing five years from now?

20. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendix B

Date, 2009

Dear «TITLE». «LASTNAME»,

My name is Sandra Sheldon of the Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling Psychology at Washington State University. As I discussed with you through e-mail and phone communication, I am a doctoral student studying Superintendents new to the State of Washington and the support or non-support they receive as they adjust to a new state education system. I am working on my dissertation and need to conduct interviews and field observations regarding this subject. It is my hope that you will consent to being one of my participants in my dissertation.

The research questions that this study will explore are:

5. With the emphasis on instructional leadership, are female and male leadership behaviors becoming more androgynous or continuing along traditionally identified roles?
6. Do females identify barriers in the superintendency similar/different to the barriers that are identified by their male counterparts in navigating the differences they encounter in a new state?
7. Do female and male superintendents use similar strategies to accomplish their work and move their agenda forward?
8. What type of support/mentoring do female and male superintendents access during their first year in Washington State?

The study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Washington State University. I am requesting your permission to interview you. Tapes of the interview will be kept digitally on my laptop computer in my home office and then transcribed for analyzing purposes. Only my chairperson and I will have access to these materials. All study materials will be destroyed three years after completion of the study. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from it at any time. There is not any anticipated risk of embarrassment or harm as a result of your participation in the interview. Your identity will remain confidential. You will not be identified, nor will your comments be connected to you, in this study.

Your participation is greatly appreciated. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have about the project at any time. You may also contact my instructor and chairperson, Dr. Paul Pitre, at 509-335-6363 or pep@wsu.edu. If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant you may contact the WSU Institutional Review Board at (509) 335-9661.

________________________________     ______________
Sandra Sheldon, Researcher      Date

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research.

________________________________     ______________
Participant name (printed)         Participant Signature        Date