Causes of job turnover in the public school superintendency: An explanatory analysis in the western United States

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CAUSES OF JOB TURNOVER IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY:
AN EXPLANATORY ANALYSIS IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES

by

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ABSTRACT

CAUSES OF JOB TURNOVER IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY: AN EXPLANATORY ANALYSIS IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES

by

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The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to determine the factors that affect public school superintendent turnover in five western states. An explanatory theory was developed to cover all of the possible variables and show the relationship between those variables. The questions that guided this research study were:

- What environmental factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?
- What governance factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?
- What personal factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?
- What are the incentives and/or disincentives that influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?

Quantitative data were collected using an internet based survey sent to 400 superintendents in five western states. Subjects were selected based on the size of their school district (2,000-10,000 students). Qualitative data were collected through personal interviews with eight long-serving (7+ years) superintendents from the survey pool. Interviews were analyzed and coded using Auerbach and Silverstein’s six-step qualitative data coding method.

The researcher found that governance factors (i.e., relationship with school board, role conflict) were the leading factors in determining superintendent tenure. The researcher found that possession of high-functioning communication skills by the superintendent
aids in the length of tenure. For aspiring superintendents, the understanding of the complexity of the superintendent position was found to be important before entering the superintendency, as the complex nature of the job can be overwhelming for those superintendents who are not aware of the varying aspects of this position.
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Chapter 1

Introduction of Study

Public school superintendent turnover in the United States has been a popular topic of research for a number of years. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) has sponsored a decennial study into the state of the superintendent position. Numerous other studies have been conducted focusing on the mobility rate and lack of numbers of candidates seeking the superintendent position (Cooper, Fusarelli & Carella, 2000; Dlugosh, 1994; Yee and Cuban, 1996). Since 2008, no less than twenty-five dissertations have been written dealing with various topics pertaining to school superintendents and job tenure.

Why has the topic been so popular? Has it been the changing public perception of education and its role in the America of today (Anderson, et. al., 2010)? Or could it be the emphasis on educational leadership that has come into play since the inception of No Child Left Behind and the upcoming reauthorization process of the Elementary Secondary Education Act, which will give guidance as to the direction of education in our country?

In Collins’ book, Good to Great, he discussed how “good is the enemy to great.” The American education system for years has been considered great, pumping out award winning scientists and mathematicians, producing business minds that have led their industries in production around the world, and leading the way with high rates of literacy and post-high school training and education. Yet, over the past decade, the school system has come under attack for falling behind its counterparts in Europe and Asia. Why was that? Research has shown that as the world changed, our school systems did not
(Watkins, 2011). That reflected a leadership problem. Leadership of our public schools has started at the top, with the school board and the superintendent. As Collins has pointed out, first determining the “who, and then the what” was one aspect that separated the good from the great. Collins (2001) found that good-to-great companies understand the importance of "getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats" (p.46). After that, these companies "figured out where to drive it" (p.46). Collins further discovered that the old adage "people first" was only half right. In good to- great companies, it was the “right people first" (p.46).

With superintendent turnover hovering around the 5-6% mark (Glass, 2000) and large numbers of superintendent retirements presently occurring and projected to occur in the relative near future (Cooper, Fusarelli & Carella, 2000), finding the who, and then retaining the right “who”, has become much tougher for the hiring committees of public school districts.

“One of the toughest jobs in the nation is being a superintendent of a public school district. The high rates of turnover indicate that today’s superintendent vacancies are occurring more frequently” (Malone, 1999, p.3). “There seems to be evidence that when the top management person leaves, the entire organizational structure is affected, regardless of the professional setting” (Shields, 2002, p.5). There has been a diminishing number of superintendent candidates due to retirements, board politics, and stresses of the position that include inadequate funding, increased state mandates and educational requirements along with heightened community expectations (Chance & Capps, 1992). Superintendents have been hired to move the district forward in whatever role the school boards, staff, and communities deem necessary for the superintendent to meet the needs
of key community stakeholders. Hiring and retaining highly qualified leaders has become a challenge. However, amid these opportunities to improve a district, there have been practicing superintendents who remain in a single position for a longer period of time.

**Purpose of the Study**

One decade into the 21st century, it is widely acknowledged that superintendents must confront issues that are more daunting than ever before. Research suggests that superintendents are in the best position to cultivate and nurture the change and innovation that is required of public schools in order to successfully navigate the substantial challenges they will encounter (Peterson & Barnett, 2005). The purpose of the study is to identify and analyze factors influencing the length of tenure of public school superintendents in the western United States. Utilizing the information will help individual and school district efforts to eliminate possible turnover triggers, assist mentoring of administrators, and create more stability and higher retention rates among current superintendents in public school districts.

**Conceptual Framework**

In determining the lens in which this research project would be framed, the researcher focused on career development and leadership theories.

Career development theories help make sense of experiences. There were found two types of career development theories: structural and developmental. Structural theories focused on the individual characteristics and occupational tasks while developmental theories focused on the human development across the span of life.

Leadership theories have explained the concept and practices adopted to become a leader. It has given precise information on the leadership qualities and attributes one
must have to become a leader. It also has encompassed other variables such as situational factors and skill levels.

The researcher found that none of the existing theoretical models of career development or leadership theory completely covered the scope of factors that could affect superintendent turnover. For example, Schein’s *Career Anchor Theory* was the most applicable as to why a superintendent may choose the profession and remain in it, but did not adequately address the issues of shortened tenure caused by external forces. Fiedler’s *Contingency Leadership Theory* described the types of behavior and personality tendencies that were associated with effective leadership, but did not allow expansion to include how these tendencies could positively or adversely affect length of tenure. A third option was the use of a relational leadership theory, which would be a relevant framework for exploring the relationships between superintendents and school boards, but would not cover any other factors that may arise that had an influence on length of tenure (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

With a growing dissatisfaction in the existing theories’ ability to account for factors that contribute to superintendent turnover, the researcher turned to the advice of Brubaker and Thomas (2000) and proposed creating an explanatory theory that would cover more variables and show a greater relationship between those variables than an existing theory did.

The process of building an explanatory theory began by identifying the phenomenon that the researcher wanted to explain; in this case, what are the factors that relate to superintendent turnover? Consistent with Brubaker and Thomas, the researcher identified causal factors from the literature that seemed to be significant in determining
superintendent turnover. The existence of a lay school board and their relationships with the superintendent, personal characteristics of the superintendent, external motivators, and incentives or disincentives for doing the job emerged as significant factors that had an impact on superintendent turnover, leading to the following guiding research questions for this study:

1. What environmental factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?

2. What governance factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?

3. What personal factors influence the tenure of the superintendents in western states?

4. What incentives and disincentives influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?

Methodology

Utilizing an explanatory mixed-methods design (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000; Creswell, 2003), this study explored the factors influencing superintendent turnover in several western states. In Phase One, an internet based survey was developed and administered based on guidance from the research questions. Participants for the internet based survey were selected from superintendents of intermediate size school districts from five western states. Based upon the data collected from Phase One, an interview protocol was developed and administered in Phase Two. The interview protocol was administered to eight subjects who fit the same description as the participants from the internet based survey. Data were collected and compared with the survey data as well as
pertinent data from earlier studies that had been completed, such as the State of the Superintendency Survey (Kowalski, et.al, 2010), to determine the viability of identified factors in influencing superintendent turnover. The methodology will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 3.

**Limitations of the Study**

1. The study was voluntary and information may have been difficult to obtain from public school superintendents due to the sensitivity of the subject matter in dealing with their own tenure.

2. Responses depended on time required to complete the survey and/or interview questions and superintendents' willingness to participate.

3. It was assumed that the respondent population accurately reflected the superintendents in western states’ public schools and not all superintendents nationwide.

4. Likert scaled questions may have restricted the opportunity to gain additional information from respondents.

5. An internet based questionnaire tool was used to gather responses; it is assumed that respondents had the technological skills to complete the questionnaire.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of the study, the following definitions were used:

*Job Factors*: Any aspect of the job that exerts influence on the outcome and performance of those doing the job.

*Environmental Factors*: Any aspect from powers outside the internal structure that exerts influence on the outcome and performance of those doing the job. (CASE, 2003)
Governance Factors: Any aspect from within the management structure that exerts influence on the outcome and performance of those doing the job. This could include local, state, and/or federal management structures. (Glass et al., 2000)

Personal Factors: Any aspect of the individual doing the job that exerts influence on the outcome and performance of the job. This could include, but not limited to, personality traits, value systems, and/or skill-sets. (Carter and Cunningham, 1997)

Superintendent Turnover Rate: The number of superintendents employed in a school district within a designated number of years.

Turnover Triggers: Any environmental, governance, or personal factors that contribute to superintendent turnover.

Intermediate Size School District: Any public school district with a student population that falls between 2,000 and 10,000 students. (NCES, 2003)

Long-serving Superintendent: A public school superintendent who has been in his or her current position for at least 7 years. (Glass and Franceschini, 2006)

Significance of the Study

The study allowed for examination of superintendent's perceptions of why public school superintendents depart from their positions and their perceptions of factors contributing to the turnover rate of public school superintendents. Factors identifying the superintendents' role, superintendents' demographics, and superintendents' perceptions of effectiveness provided additional evidence of why public school superintendents participating in this study depart from their positions.

Superintendents have served in a very public position in which they have received much criticism and scrutiny about the job they have performed. Because of this, they tend
to be guarded in their participation and responses to research surrounding their positions. Superintendents have also been reluctant to discuss leadership situations in which they did not succeed. This reluctance factor was overcome by the researcher by following up initial quantitative survey findings with a more intimate qualitative interview with individual superintendents. This study provided reports of personal experience in working with public school superintendents and the challenges faced by superintendents in public schools.

It has been in the best interest of the school district and the community to maintain leadership within the superintendency. Each time a superintendent leaves a school district, the school and community has experienced financial loss by bringing the new superintendent in for close to or above the salary of the previous superintendent (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). They have experienced a culture change, which comes with new leadership, which could be either positive or negative. Ultimately, this brings change, which has not always been the easiest thing for human beings to deal with.

This study is significant because the superintendent has been the primary leader of a school district and has provided leadership in every aspect of the organization. Leaders who change school districts every three years create instability in the school system which has resulted in decreased continuity of learning across grade levels, increased teacher and staff turnover, increased administrative turnover with principals and other leaders in the district, and an inability for the school district to implement long range school reform initiatives.

Instability in the superintendent position has also directly impacted student achievement within the district’s classrooms. A study conducted by McRel provided
evidence that length of superintendent tenure in a district positively corresponds to student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). These researchers found that superintendents who are able to focus the efforts of stakeholders on student achievement, enhance the academic achievement of students. In a related field, Waters & Marzano (2006) referred to Chris Whittle's book *Crash Course*, which provided an illustration of the most successful CEO's in corporate America. Whittle shows the average tenure of successful CEO’s extending from 11 years all the way up to 35 years as compared to some of the largest school district superintendents’ tenure averaging from 1.4 years to 2.5 years. Whittle drew a conclusion that increased length of tenure of superintendents who focus on key responsibilities would likely enhance school district performance. Waters & Marzano (2006) found that the length of superintendent tenure "has a positive effect on the average academic achievement of students in the district" (p. 14). Their research found that as early as two years into a superintendent's tenure these "positive effects appear to manifest themselves" (Waters & Marzano, 2006, p. 14).

**Summary**

Chapter 1 introduced the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework and guiding research questions. Research methodology, limitations, research definitions and the significance to the study were also covered.

Chapter 2 contains the review of literature and research as it applies to the purpose of this study. A historical perspective of the superintendent position, along with current findings relating to the guiding research questions are included.

Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the conceptual framework and methodology of the mixed method study. The purpose of the study and the guiding
research questions are reviewed. The research procedures, including instrument detail, population descriptions, and description of the analysis to be used is explained.

Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative results of this study. Quantitative results are compared to the corresponding results from the 2010 State of the Superintendent Survey (Kowalski, et. al. 2010). Qualitative results are expressed in relation to the theoretical constructs which emerged from the research.

Chapter 5 begins with a review and critique of the methodology. It continues with the summary findings, including the relationship of factors within the conceptual framework, conclusions, implications for educational leaders, and finally, the recommendations for future research.
Introduction

Educational leadership has been about relationships and collaboration and cooperation between all school community stakeholders—teachers and students, students and parents, teachers and parents, schools and communities, superintendents and school boards (Houston & Eadie, 2002).

A primary responsibility of school superintendents has been “to play a leading role in building and maintaining strategically significant relationships, and the one that has been at the heart of the district’s strategic and policy level leadership—and most critical to the effectiveness” of the district—has been between the superintendent and the school board (Houston & Eadie, 2002, p.iii).

Systematic change in a school system has been largely the responsibility of the superintendent. The school superintendent has the influence to make or break any school based improvement process (Hansen & Marburger, 1988). Due to increased management demands, including political agendas, superintendents often find themselves removed from the classroom level of school operations (Berg & Barnett, 1998).

The first section of this review is a comprehensive look at the history and development of the superintendent position. Next, a literary review of superintendent turnover suggests three major themes: (1) turnover as a result of governance factors; (2) turnover as a result of superintendent personal factors, including leadership experience and effectiveness; and (3) turnover as a result of environmental factors. Each of these
themes is explored in it’s own section, with an additional section looking at the incentives and disincentives of the superintendent position.

**Historical Overview of the Public School Superintendency in the United States**

During the 1600’s, a form of public school had been established in the communities founded by the pilgrims. Over the next 150 years, communities developed a system wherein those chosen supervised the operation of schools and the extent of education provided. Even though not an official role, community volunteers were given the authority to develop and enforce policy and the responsibility for all aspects of school organization and functioning (Campbell, 2001).

Because of the remote location of many communities causing a lack of transportation, schools were usually located within walking distance of their stakeholders. As a result, early America had an abundance of small school districts, many consisting of a single one-room school houses.

The growth in population brought with it the common school movement with its emphasis providing a common education for the students. This movement placed increased responsibility on the volunteers who managed the local schools. When the job became too extensive for these volunteers to manage, they sought relief from their local school boards to appoint a full-time individual to manage the day-to-day operations of the school district (Campbell, 2001).

Finally, in 1812, a formal superintendant position within the public education system was created in New York. Among the responsibilities of this new position were developing a plan for common schools, reporting to the state legislature, and accounting
for the use of public funds (Kowalski, 2006). Over the next twenty years, all northern states and some southern states established the office of state superintendent.

One of the primary reasons to create the positions of state and local superintendent was to have the means to "communicate elements of the common curriculum and provide supervision to ensure its implementation" (Kowalski, 2006, p.12).

In 1837, Buffalo, New York hired a position they called a “school inspector”, which in effect was the first local school superintendent (Butts & Cremin, 1953). By 1890, most major cities had established like positions (Kowalski, 2006). However, by the end of the 19th century, very few states had moved to the point of authorizing the local boards to appoint their own school superintendent. The local boards were just not equipped with the legislative authority to hire their own superintendent. There were even communities that were not sure that having a superintendent was necessary. Because of this uncertainty, some local boards hired the position, got rid of it, and then put the position back in place (Knezevich, 1984). It was not until the twentieth century that local school district superintendents were hired in non-urban settings to operate independently of the state superintendent.

The local school structure was affected by the changes in America’s economic structure in the early 20th century. America was progressing from an agricultural society to an industrial society dominated by manufacturing. While the size of the urban schools were larger, the number of rural schools far outdistanced the number of urban schools. "With this urbanization movement came the urgency to centralize control of all management activities, including the schools" (Campbell, 2001, p.18). With the changes
of the industrial revolution taking place, the roles and responsibilities of the school superintendent also changed. The structure of governance in local school districts became more and more centralized. This centralized authority structure emphasized a top-down command form of leadership that isolated the power and authority at the top of the organization, taking previously held control of decision-making out of the community and placing it into the hands of school boards and local administration. School boards pushed for a centralized form of governance that would encourage the quick passage of educational policy (Kowalski, 2006).

Many administrators felt that the pressure to conform to existing standards of practice limited their ability to work effectively as instructional leaders and change agents (Fullan and Steigelbauer, 1991). One outcome that was not intended of centralized governance was the practice of administrators trying to avoid conflict by failing to inform the superintendent of problems, lessening the ability of the superintendent to understand the issues and problems facing the school district (Kowalski, 2006).

Schools districts have slowly become more decentralized and now function as systems working together with both centralized and decentralized components in their organizational structures, policy development, implementation procedures (Kowalski, 2006). Decentralization resulted in a flatter organizational structure. It also resulted in the distribution of real power to individuals and groups throughout the school system, not just to those at the top of the power structure (Kowalski, 2006). Within the decentralized structure, superintendents are able to focus on building community, fostering the creation of a vision for the school district, facilitating collaboration, and providing those at the level closest to the problem or need with decision-making power (Hanson, 2003). As the
leader of the school district, the challenge for the superintendent has been to determine the level of decentralization needed to achieve school improvement and student academic achievement (Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004).

Complete decentralization of school districts has not been a realistic conclusion since public education has been tied to state and federal governments through funding and legislation. Many superintendents have embraced a collaborative leadership style, distributing power to individuals and groups that the flatter organizational structure allows. However, not all superintendents have embraced this change. While some superintendents prefer shared leadership, some fear the increased criticism and legal liability that could occur when the decisions or actions taken by subordinates result in mistakes or violate laws (Kowalski, 2006).

Superintendents have not wanted to be seen as managers or politicians, but as educational professionals and instructional leaders (Kowalski, 2006). The perception of superintendent as a professional educational leader was further strengthened by the establishment of standards of best practice specific to the position of superintendent.

The current school superintendent has led to an educational system that has been more complex and diverse than ever before. Compared to early superintendents, current superintendents have assumed different roles and have had a higher degree of responsibility in the function of the school district. These responsibilities require a significant time investment. In addition to time devoted to every-day school district duties, the superintendent has been expected to be an active participant in community and civic functions (Kowalski, 1995; 2006).
In what would become the standard in superintendent research, the National Education Association’s Department of Superintendents sponsored national surveys of the American school superintendency beginning in 1923 and 1933. The purpose of these nationwide surveys was to compile demographic profiles, perspectives on educational issues, and description of “best practices” in the superintendent position (Glass et al., 2000). Following World War II, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) jointly published the surveys with the NEA and have solely sponsored their application since 1971 (Kowalski et al., 2010). Studies were completed in 1952, 1960, 1971, 1982, 1992, 2000, and most recently, in 2010. A mid-decade study was also conducted in 2006. Although the purpose behind the studies has not changed appreciably over the past century, the focus and findings of the surveys have changed dramatically from study to study. Beginning with the 1982 study, parameters were established which would drive the next three decade’s studies. Personal characteristics, professional experiences, job context, preparation, school board relations, evaluation, and opinions on key educational issues constituted the content of the studies from 1982 on (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Prior to 1982, most of the studies focused on professional practice recommendations based on the survey data, as well as the discussion of specific traits and skills needed by successful superintendents (Glass & Franceschini, 2007).

**Superintendent Departure**

Much like superintendents have a hard time implementing their own initiatives due to their lack of authority, CEOs in the business world are seeing their power shift to shareholders, board of directors, and legislatures (Lucier, Schuyt, & Tse, 2004, p. 1). Booz Allen Hamilton found in 2004 that “forced turnover is up 300 percent since 1995
and that business has entered the era of the short term chief (Lucier, Schuyt, & Tse, 2004, p. 2). Hamilton’s study shows that this shift in power in corporate America is past the point of recovery. More than 14 percent of the total chief executive population were forced from office for performance-related reasons or because of disagreements with their boards (Lucier, Schuyt, & Tse, 2004).

This phenomenon of power shifting is not unique to corporate America; many world corporations are experiencing the same. (Lucier, Schuyt, & Tse, 2004). The transfer of power is attributed to "continued pressure for investment returns, geopolitical uncertainties, expanded regulatory oversight, and international talent wars, along with perceived or real inability for many CEO's to deliver" (Lucier, Schuyt, & Tse, 2004, p. 3). Business leaders of the future will require a different skill set and knowledge base in order to survive and change with the demands of their business world. This is not unlike the changes that are absolutely necessary to the public school superintendent of today.

Underperformance is the main reason that CEO’s have been fired. (Lucier, Schuyt, & Tse, 2004). Underperformance is usually measured in the CEO’s inability to raise the returns on shareholder investments. Another factor that influences CEO departures has been the increase in company mergers. Merger driven departures have been defined as when a CEO leaves after his or her company has been acquired by or combined with another (Lucier, Schuyt, & Tse, 2004).

Brokhovich, Parrino, and Trapani (1996) suggested that a typical length of tenure for a CEO is eight years. This length of tenure allowed the CEO to not only help define and implement policies of the firm, but also allowed them the ability to see the results of these policies.
Giving all the blame to the chief executive officer for business failures has been a common practice that covers up the real problems of poor CEO/board relationships. Failed returns on investments result in replacing the CEO and selecting a new CEO to "bring back the lost glory" (SR, 2002). Many company’s choose to replace the CEO, despite the long and expensive process that choosing a replacement requires (SR, 2002).

Jeffery Garten has stated the challenges facing the modern chief executive as "almost intractable" (Stybel Peabody Lincolnshire, 2001). The top three reasons that CEO’s depart their positions according to Garten are: 1) The sheer difficulty of running a multinational company during a time of tremendous technological change. 2) The great uncertainties of the global environment. 3) The need for a CEO to be both a business leader and a global statesman concerned with everything from environmental protection to rules for cyberspace. (Stybel Peabody Lincolnshire, 2001)

In comparison, factors that influence superintendents to depart from their positions have been consistent to those of their business world counterparts. In the 2000 Study of the American Superintendency, superintendent respondents indicated the number one reason why they leave a school district was to move to a larger district (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2002). The second most reported answer superintendent respondents gave for leaving a district was conflict with school boards (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2002). Superintendent respondents also indicated that "lack of adequate finances for school district operations and lack of community and board support" were additional reasons that they left their positions (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2002, p. 70).

When the organizational environment has undergone substantial change and the executive leader's skills and expertise no longer fit the district's chosen strategy, turnover
can be viewed as an adaptive event, allowing the districts to engage in strategic reorientation and improve performance (Cao et al., 2006). Turnover as an adaptive event has raised the possibility that leadership movement may be explained by any number of organizational factors.

**Turnover as a Result of Governance Factors**

The status of relationship between the school board and superintendent has been more likely to influence turnover in the superintendent position than any other factor. The literature on the relationships between superintendents and school boards, however, has not generally been characterized in a positive light (Mountford, 2004). Mountford reported that "school board members who practice power in a dominating or oppressive manner can overtly and covertly exert influence over school activities in ways that make the decision-making process and relationships between board members and superintendents difficult at best" (p. 704). More often than not, when superintendents have been removed from office involuntarily, their removal has been due to poor relations with the school board (Metzger, 1997). Johnson (2010) found that for local school governance to survive, superintendent and board relations must improve.

Yet, according to national surveys, the relationship between boards and superintendents has appeared to have been a healthy one. The 2010 State of the Superintendency Survey (Kowalski et al., 2010) found that 72 percent of superintendents reported evaluations from their boards as "excellent" or "above average." In addition, 87 percent of board members who participated in the National School Boards Association's study of more than 700 school districts reported the relationships superintendents had with their board members was the most important factor in evaluating their
superintendents (Land, 2002). Kowalski et al (2010) examined the effect of board conflict and found that 15 percent of superintendents in the nation leave their positions because of conflicts with the board.

Research shows that superintendents need to explore and implement strategies for building and maintaining a strong, positive, working partnership with the local school board. School boards should then focus on their governing role and treating the superintendent as a partner and educational expert (Fullan et al. 2005). Fullan et al. (2005) described successful organizations as those that value differences and may not always be congenial or consensual. "Working in a [collaborative], high trust yet demanding culture, participants take disagreements as normal when undergoing changes, and are able to value and work through differences" (p. 72). Danzberger (1998) suggested that strategies should be put in place at the beginning of the board-superintendent relationship to encourage a positive environment. "An effective school board-superintendent relationship is much more likely if the expectations of each are paid careful attention to during the selection process and the initial months of the relationship as well as during the maturation of the relationship" (Danzberger, p. 213).

The lack of a clear understanding of the separation of powers between the superintendent and the school board has proven to also be a major hindrance in the superintendent and school board relationship (Danzberger, 1998; Mountford, 2004). In the 1985 Institute for Educational Leadership study, The Superintendent of the Future, it was indicated that there has been little understanding of the role of the school board when compared to that of the superintendent—in some cases "perpetuated by superintendent training, which emphasizes a limited definition for board and executive leader roles:
superintendents administer school systems and boards only make policy” (p. 208). The survey also showed that the public perception of school board power being an individual entity and not a group power is often misunderstood. The public also has not understood the nature of the relationship that must be developed and exist between the board and the superintendent (Hill & Celio, 1998). According to Elmore (2000), candor and initial clarity is required by both the school board and the superintendent in how they view their roles.

In his study on school board training and superintendent relationships, Rice (2010) found that many board members “fail to properly understand their roles and duties, which often lead to role confusion, challenging board/superintendent collaboration issues, and an increased number of board members with personal agendas” (Rice, 2010, p. i).

Adding to the issue of role conflict has been the difference in boards from one school district to another, which has brought differing opinions as to the separation of powers. Rockwood (2010) concluded that as each board of education is different, so are their expectations for the superintendent. “There is no one set of expectations … that are perceived to be most critical for superintendent success in each and every setting” (Rockwood, 2010, p. 144).

In addition, the nature of the governance relationship, in which primary authority and power over the superintendent has been assigned to a board of lay community members, has provided more telling explanations of turnover. Studies of superintendent turnover have cited problems related to power struggles with board members as the primary reason for superintendent turnover (Byrd, et al., 2006: Fusarelli, 2006; Thomas,
Carroll (2010) stated that superintendents should expect differences to occur between them and their board regarding job expectations. Williams (2010) acknowledged that a superintendent is “keenly aware of the fact the school board is the evaluator of superintendent performance and renewal of contracts and therefore must be diligent at maintaining a quality working relationship with school board members” (Williams, 2010, p. 147).

Many power struggles have begun and occurred due to the lack of trust which exists between levels of school leadership. In one survey of 140 superintendents in large, urban districts, 60 percent of the respondents said that school board micromanagement is a moderate to major problem, and 54 percent described their board's lack of focus on policy matters as an impediment to district effectiveness (Mountford, 2004).

Effective boards have usually had an external focus to their work, which has been to advance the mission of schools (Plecki et al., 2006). Plecki et al. outlined that in executing its roles, the school board has been expected to be accountable to the state, the federal government, and local constituents at the same time. This situation created a role conflict for local school boards.

Today, school boards are expected to be: interest representatives . . . , trustees for children . . . and delegates of the state.... These missions are in conflict because they require boards to serve different masters and accomplish different objectives.... Mission confusion—between the board's roles . . . is one reason why school boards often look disorganized. (Hill, 2004, p. 3)

A different picture of governance and how it might be improved has taken into consideration the interactions of other participants in the leadership hierarchy. The
interaction of these participants has had an impact on superintendents' work, especially in how leaders directed attention to the needs of children and the quality of learning.

Research has shown that the relationship of the district superintendent and the school board president is central to the quality of leadership in the district (Glass, 1992). The board’s perceptions of the superintendent's leadership has been arbitrated through the relationship with the school board president (Glass, 1992). "The board president is more likely than other board members to have frequent communications with the superintendent outside of the formal meeting" (Petersen & Short, 2001). Petersen and Short studied the relationship between superintendents and school board presidents and found that because superintendents and board presidents maintain formal authority by virtue of their positions, they have been the leading source of influence in the leadership of the district.

**Turnover as a Result of Superintendent Personal Factors**

Determining the positive personal factors of a superintendent has been important as schools have moved toward 100% student pass rates by 2014. The evidence found in the following studies have shown that the successful superintendent today has met the NCLB requirements by focusing on student achievement and demonstrating improvements in student outcomes as measured by benchmark assessments.

Kowalski (2006) stated that “the top executive in a larger organization is typically expected to possess knowledge and skills that are greater than those possessed by his or her subordinates” (p.65). He went on to clarify this statement by saying that “this individual is granted a great deal of power and authority and access to information not readily available to others” (p.65). He reported that as many as 50 characteristics of
superintendents’ behavior have been researched. However, they can be combined into two broad categories. These categories are situational variables and personal variables. He wrote that effective educational leadership must include characteristics of leadership as well as those related to student learning. He stated that effective school superintendents must be leaders of learning and instruction, which requires them to have a working knowledge of instructional supervision, student learning, and curriculum design.

In their work on determining skills that were essential for school leaders, Langley and Jacobs (2006) identified five skills that school leaders needed to possess: (1) the ability to be insightful, (2) positive, strong interpersonal skills, (3) self-growth, (4) flexibility, and (5) keeping in touch with the community.

Additionally, Petersen’s (1999) study of five California superintendents revealed that superintendents named four characteristics that were essential to be an effective superintendent: (1) possession and articulation of instructional vision, (2) development of an organizational structure that supports the instructional vision and leadership, (3) assessment evaluation of personnel and instructional programs, and (4) organization adaptation.

Jones, Goodwin, and Cunningham (2003) completed a study which investigated 18 district level administrators who had received the Leadership for Learning Award from the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). The purpose of this study was to examine the specific characteristics employed by these superintendents in the course of their daily work. These selected superintendents were asked to rank in order from one to five those areas of responsibility that they thought were most critical for
success. The areas deemed most important were curriculum, finance, professional development, school board relations, and vision (Jones, Goodwin, & Cunningham, 2003).

Cataldo (2011), in his study on what school boards looks for in hiring a superintendent, found that the traits wanted most were leadership qualities of ethics and values and strong communication skills. McDermott (2010) wrote that the greatest challenge to a superintendent’s ethic of responsibility is to “do what is in the best interest of students while working through the intrinsic political and cultural structures that are unique to all locally-controlled school districts” (McDermott, 2010, p. v).

Vaughan (2010), in his study of 30 school districts in Southern California, found that the “scope of communication as a skill extends beyond simple transmission of information” (Vaughan, 2010, p. 100). Vaughan also found that the communication not only must be shared equally among the members of the board, it must also be accurate. Failure to adhere to accuracy and equal sharing was found to create an environment of distrust between the school board and the superintendent.

In a study of successful and unsuccessful superintendents, Chance (1992) found that long serving superintendents, defined in this study by those who served for more than twelve years, believed open communication with the school board and community to be an important leadership attribute. Lack of open communication was found to be a main reason for superintendent leaving the position.

According to Carter and Cunningham (1997), the key to a successful career as a superintendent involved open communication, strong character, and effective decision-making. Superintendents must have been well-informed of the different interests involved and had maintained a clear understanding of the multiple implications of all decisions.
In the 2000 *Study of the American School Superintendency*, Glass et al. (2001) cited Carter and Cunningham (1997) and wrote:

For the superintendency to survive and flourish into the 21st century, superintendents will need to serve as role models, demonstrating the high degree of professionalism necessary to increase their influence on policymaking at the local and state levels. In addition, they will need to attract political influence by encouraging needed changes in curriculum and educational technology clearly aligned to a strategic vision. A focus on the future, which involves all players both inside and outside the school district, will make the job of the superintendent that of a master juggler in an increasingly complex organization, (p. 6)

**Turnover as a Result of Environmental Factors**

*Legislative Influences.* There has been an increased influence of environmental factors on local school district governance (Cunningham & Hentges, 1982). Legislative mandates have often not allowed wriggle room for the school board or superintendent to alter rules when it comes to implementing new laws and policy.

Today, the superintendency has been influenced by the unprecedented demands of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation (Jennings, 2003). This legislation required school districts to test children in Grades 3 through 8 in reading/language arts, science, social studies, and mathematics. All test scores must have been disaggregated by school, district, and state for (a) family income, ethnicity, and race; (b) limited English-proficient children; and (c) children with disabilities. Districts must have set targets for all schools to raise the test scores of certain student subgroups by specific amounts to ensure that by the year 2014 all children attain a 100% proficiency level in reading and
mathematics. Schools receiving federal Title I funds have been subject to corrective action if they did not raise the test scores for each subgroup. Local school districts also must have filled all classrooms with highly qualified teachers or have faced the loss of federal aid (Moore & Fonseca, 2003).

Before NCLB, superintendents were often seen as managers (Duignan, 1980; Griffiths, 1966; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981), but today’s superintendents have been charged with bringing about student achievement. For example, in a follow up investigation of five instructionally recognized California superintendents, Peterson (2002) established a relationship between the stated vision of the superintendent and the mission and goals of the district, instructional planning, and community involvement in the academic success of the district.

This study was supported by an investigation by Morgan and Petersen (2002), that looked at five different school districts of instructionally recognized superintendents and five randomly chosen districts with similar size, demographics, and superintendent tenure records. The results of this study showed that superintendents in the academically successful school districts possessed an instructional vision, were closely involved in the evaluation and monitoring of instruction and collaborative planning, and developed instructional goals with district personnel and community members more so than the randomly chosen districts (Morgan & Petersen, 2002).

The superintendent today has been meeting the NCLB requirements by focusing on student achievement and demonstrating improvements in student outcomes as measured by benchmark assessments. Researchers have suggested that today’s
superintendent needs to focus on student instruction and achievement (Johnstone et al., 2009; Morgan & Petersen, 2002; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

**Lack of adequate funding.** Historically, district superintendents have always been required to do more with less. According to Glass & Franchesini (2007), "Superintendents perceive funding levels to be the number-one problem facing their districts" (p. 59). It is evident to all that superintendents have faced the seemingly impossible task of securing the necessary resources to successfully meet federal and state mandates in an era of economic downturn. Resources have almost always been scarce relative to the demands. Houston (2001) states "expectations and resources are mismatched" (p. 429). In the state of current economic downturn, the issue of inadequate funding is being viewed as a crisis in education.

Instructional leaders in school have always found the job of increasing student achievement a daunting task. Now with the decrease in funding, the required performance benchmarks by *No Child Left Behind* (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) could certainly have been a significant influence on the declining applicant pool. Funding provided by the federal government has provided, at best, minimal support to the state and local burden (Glass & Franchesini, 2007). One could argue that with yearly budget cuts to K-12 education, prospective applicants for the superintendency have had reason to pause when considering the timing and conditions of making the application. Glass (2000) remarks that "States need to engage in research studies to "find" levels of "adequacy of funding" sufficient for districts to meet present state education standards" (p. 3).
Incentives and Disincentives Influencing Superintendent Turnover

**Stress/Time Demands.** The superintendent position has been a demanding position that has required both physical and mental stamina (Domenech, 1996). Superintendents have dealt with difficult situations among school board members and with competing agendas. "School districts are under intense pressure from state and federal governments, school boards, unions, courts, tight budgets, diverse parent interests and the increasingly complex needs of children" (Hall & Difford, 1992, p. 4).

Dealing with limited or inadequate funding, competition of scarce resources, and meeting state and federal accountability standards for student achievement are among the top stress factors in the management life of a superintendent (Glass et al., 2000; Goldstein, 1992, Harvey, 2003). Recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, dealing with teacher incompetence or criminal behavior, low staff morale, and complaining parents who threaten litigation are peripheral stresses with which the superintendent must also deal with (McAdams, 1995).

With the advent of the Internet, the instant access to knowledge and information has also created an environment of immediate results for the superintendent to function in, putting considerable stress on the superintendent. Usually receiving the brunt of criticisms when things go wrong in the district, superintendents have received little credit or recognition for success and have often been the topic of negative discussion and second-guessing by local press coverage of educational issues (Carella, 2000; Goldstein, 1992; Hodges, 2005; Lowery et al, 2001).

Unrealistic expectations of perfection in both their personal and professional life, being away from direct classroom instruction, adverse working conditions, substantial
time commitments, dealing with special interest groups, loss of privacy, salary limits, and being treated as public property have often been mentioned as the downsides of the superintendent position (Blumberg, 1985; Campbell 2001; Carella, 2000; Hodges, 2005). Retired school superintendents have cited the stresses arising from the public, political, and personal demands placed on them as the main reasons for their decision to retire.

Health concerns caused by the stress of the job have also become a factor affecting the length of superintendent tenure. In her study on stress factors in the role of superintendents, Carroll (2010) found that by understanding the different stress factors involved in the leadership position of superintendent, potential position candidates can know if they are a good fit for the position or are prepared to take on a position that “by its nature has specific stressors” (Carroll, 2010, p. 56).

**Upward Mobility.** In a study of contributing factors of turnover of school administrators in Nebraska, Dlugosh (1994) found that administrators sought positions with greater compensation or higher status in the profession. This compensation or status was usually found in the movement to a larger district. It has been reasonable to expect more experienced superintendents to command higher salaries in larger districts where a superintendent's responsibilities may be more complex or wealthier districts where the demand for education has been likely to be greater (Ehrenberg et al., 1988). A widely-accepted generalization about the mobility of superintendents has been that superintendents typically move, at least early in their careers, from smaller to larger and from poorer to wealthier districts (Ehrenberg et al., 1988).

**Insufficient pay and compensation.** According to Cunningham and Burdick (1999), "a serious case can be made for the argument that public school superintendents
are woefully underpaid when compared to business executives, who often serve in more secure and less visible roles" (p. 30). In describing the reality of the salary picture for superintendents, Glass (2000) shared the following information:

Compensation packages are public information, and many boards try to keep superintendents' salaries in line with what they perceive to be the public's acceptance level. Often, this kind of caution operates to drive good candidates to better-paying districts. At other times, it deters well paid central-office administrators and principals from applying (p. 2).

When compared to top leadership positions in business and industry, superintendent salaries have been relatively low (Jones, 2000). According to Hodgkinson & Montenegro (1999), "as teacher salaries have improved, as well as those of senior office staff, the economic advantage of being a superintendent may be declining slightly" (p. 14). A larger increase in salary has been noted from teacher to principal than from principal or central office to superintendent.

The problem of salary and compensation has compounded issues such as turnover due to mobility. According to the Task Force on School District leadership (2001), "the most common reason superintendents leave their position has been to work in a better-paying school district" (p. 7). Esparo & Radar (2001) highlighted the following realities of superintendent pay and compensation:

Consider addressing the superintendent's salary and benefits. There is strong concern for the economics of the superintendency. The dilemma it presents is clear: Why would one aspire to a higher-pressured, more demanding, higher-profile position, requiring a longer work day and year, where the salary and
benefits are disproportionate to those paid to teachers and building level administrators? The decrease in the pay of administrators and, in some states, salary capping, are major deterrents in the minds of superintendents and superintendent aspirants (p. 48).

Increasing the amount of compensation for superintendents may become a necessity to counter turnover. Most potential applicants have wanted and expected a substantial step up. If the stress and demands continue to increase, salary and compensation must be positively addressed in order to attract highly qualified applicants who are successful in what they are currently doing (Sobehart & Schellar, 2001).

**Additional Factors.** Along with the other issues that surround the superintendency, the sheer complexity of the position cannot be ignored. The complexity of tasks and responsibilities coupled with the skills and competencies required for a superintendent have become overwhelming for future superintendent applicants (Konnert & Augenstein, 1990). Margaret Orr (2006) summarized the complexity inherent in the role of superintendent:

> The context of superintendents' work defines both its scope and the leadership that they exert, influencing their effectiveness...The challenge for superintendents is not simply how to respond to their context, but how to work within it and even try to change it for the benefit of their schools and students (pp. 1365-1366).

Today's superintendent has been and will continue to be flooded with difficult challenges. According to Paul Houston (2001), "As education stands in the national spotlight, there are few roles as complex or as pivotal as that of the public school superintendent. And as we move into the future, it is inevitable that the job will continue
to be one of controversy, concern, and consequence” (p. 429). For the potential superintendent, a future in the superintendency offers great challenges and little comfort.

Summary

This chapter attempted to establish the theoretical framework and relevant literature for analyzing the circumstances that set the stage for superintendent turnover and mobility. One conclusion that has been drawn from the literature was that not one single factor can be associated with superintendent turnover; rather, superintendents have left or have been removed from their posts for any number of reasons—some shaped by the board, some produced by the superintendent, and some by environmental influences.

The theoretical foundation for the study as well as the literature review has set the stage for a mixed methods study having used survey research and interview data to examine practicing superintendents’ view on the three factors explored in this chapter. These factors ultimately influenced the superintendents’ exercise of leadership at its core: providing leadership direction and influence across sociopolitical structures.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify and analyze factors influencing the length of tenure of public school superintendents in the western United States. Utilizing the information could help individual and school district efforts to eliminate possible turnover triggers, assist mentoring of administrators, create more stability among current superintendents, and contribute to greater superintendent achievement.

Research Questions

The following research questions were generated through the researcher’s reading of related literature:

1. What environmental factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?
2. What governance factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?
3. What personal factors influence the tenure of the superintendents in western states?
4. What incentives and disincentives influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?

Methodology

This was an explanatory mixed-methods design (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000; Creswell, 2003) comprised of two separate phases. Creswell (2003) recommended this methodology when a researcher wishes to use the “best of both quantitative and
In Phase One, participants were asked to complete survey questions based on the four research questions. For the purposes of this study, the internet based survey was named the Western States Survey (WSS). The 2010 State of the Superintendency Survey (SOS) was a guide for the researcher in developing the questions for the WSS. Demographic questions from the SOS were used in the WSS to be able to identify the participants of both surveys in a like manner. The researcher also used questions from the SOS that directly related to superintendent turnover. Use of the same questions from a national study like the SOS supplied valid and reliable survey questions to be used in the WSS.

The SOS utilized a rigorous process of review and refinement to provide content validity in their research. After potential items were selected for inclusion in the initial SOS instrument, content validity was assessed by a panel of experts. Panel members were invited to participate based on two qualifications: their past experiences as practicing superintendents in the public school setting and their current experiences as professors. The panel of experts was asked to review the proposed SOS instrument relative to content associated with the roles and responsibilities of current superintendents in the public school setting. Based on the recommendations of the panel of experts concerning the content of the proposed instrument, some items were deleted, modified, and/or new items were included. After revising the SOS instrument to comply with the panel’s recommendations, a pilot test was performed with practicing school superintendents.
Participants in the SOS pilot study were asked to complete the proposed instrument and to make recommendations about format as well as content. Based on the reactions of pilot study participants, modifications were made again prior to administration with the defined population. A similar process was utilized with the WSS, including a pilot study and use of an expert panel to review the content of the survey.

The researcher developed further questions from the research that provided a more extensive look at the length of superintendent tenure. These questions were validated through the pilot study process that is described below. The survey data was collected from January 2011 to February 2011.

In order to refine, extend, and explain the general picture in Phase One, Phase Two engaged participants in an interview protocol developed from the responses to the WSS in Phase One. The protocol was organized into six sections. Section One allowed the subject to describe his or her professional experience. Sections Two (Environmental Factors), Three (Governance Factors), Four (Personal Factors), and Five (Incentive/Disincentives) corresponded with the four guiding research questions. Section Six gave the subject the opportunity to add detail without restriction to the interview. The questions in Sections Two, Three, Four, and Five were derived from specific questions taken from the WSS. More open-ended in nature, these questions were selected to provide a wider lens into factors related to the length of superintendent turnover. These interviews occurred during March 2011. Each of the interviews was recorded and transcribed, with a copy of the transcription being sent to each of the participants to review and add detail without restriction.
A pilot study of the proposed methodology was conducted on each of the two data collecting instruments to ensure that bias was limited and validity of the instruments was sound. The WSS was piloted on eleven subjects that met the same requirements as those stated for the study participants. The interview protocol was piloted on three subjects that met the same requirements as those stated for the study participants. Questions asked and recorded answers were submitted to a panel of experts for content analysis. During the pilot study process, the researcher reviewed the methodology and protocol for design flaws and made changes as necessary to address any such flaws. The pilot participants were selected from within the state of Nevada so as to avoid any overlap of participants in the actual study.

Population

In Phase One, superintendents were contacted from intermediate size school districts from the Region 7 of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) geographic designations which include Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Nevada, Montana, and Wyoming. The researcher did not limit this study to one state in particular, so a strong cross-section of western states was used in selecting the participants. Due to the researcher having been currently employed in the state of Nevada as a building administrator and having had consistent contact within the profession with superintendents in the state, the researcher did not conduct this research in Nevada. Recent research that answered some of the research questions was completed in Oregon, and that research was discussed in the review of literature (Berryhill, 2010). Due to this research being recently completed, the researcher did not conduct this research study in Oregon. Contact information was gained from the AASA database of
superintendents. Selection of sites based on the size of district was important as factors could change significantly if the study were to go to smaller or larger districts. An intermediate size school district was defined as a district with between 2,000 and 10,000 students (NCES, 2003). Keeping the size of district used in the middle of the range of school district enrollments kept the results worthy of interpretation by all sizes of districts.

During Phase Two, eight long-serving superintendents in intermediate size districts from the above mentioned western states were selected for participation. For the purpose of this study, long-serving was defined as at least seven consecutive years of service at the same school district, which exceeds the current average tenure of superintendents (Glass et al., 2006). Participants were selected from a list of Phase One respondents who answered affirmatively to a question asking whether they would agree to participate in a follow-up interview. The researcher attempted to mirror the descriptions of interview participants to that of the survey respondents, including state, locale, and gender. Interview participants were then contacted via telephone for a brief explanation of the process. Participants then signed and returned a consent form approved by UNLV Internal Review Board (IRB). Consent forms were collected and stored with the research advisor.

**Participant Selection**

In Phase One, survey subjects were selected based on criteria of present employment, location, and size of district. Participants were recruited through email invitations and directed to an internet based survey site. The survey consisted of five sections: 1) demographic information, 2) questions related to environmental factors, 3)
questions related to governance factors, 4) questions related to personal factors, and 5) questions related to disincentives and incentives. The purpose of the survey was to create a sampling of data to examine, compare, contrast, and use to develop further questions and a direction of research for Phase Two.

Interview subjects were selected using a purposeful sampling technique. Purposeful sampling is described as intentionally selecting individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Dane (1990) points out that the advantage of purposive sampling is that it allows the researcher to focus on people or events that have grounds in what they believe and is critical for the research. Instead of focusing on the typical instances such as a cross-section or a balanced choice, the researcher is able to concentrate on the instances that display wide variety – possibly even focus on cases to illuminate the research question at hand. Purposeful sampling is delineated further into multiple forms, and this study used the form of typical sampling to select the interview participants. Typical sampling is described as using a person or site that is typical to those unfamiliar with the situation. In this study, long-serving superintendents of the same school districts described above were selected to participate in the interviews.

Upon collection and analysis of the survey results, eight long-serving superintendents from the pool of respondents were contacted via telephone by the researcher to solicit their participation in the interview protocol. Upon acceptance of participation, interview appointments were established. Interviews were conducted via video conferencing or telephone.
Protection of Participants

This study followed all UNLV IRB requirements to ensure that all subjects that participate in this study were afforded any and all protection needed for participation. There was no risk to participants in the study. Subject participation did not cost anything and subjects did not receive any money for participation. Subjects did not directly benefit from this study. Subject participation in this study added to the professional knowledge and understanding of the reasons for superintendent turnover in western states' public schools. Data collected was stored on a password protected laptop computer in the locked office of the research advisor.

Data Collection Procedure

Phase One of data collection occurred via the Western States Survey. All four research questions were covered in this survey. Participants received a link via email to complete the survey. One week after the first link had been sent, a second link was sent to those who had not completed the survey as follow-up. Third and fourth reminder emails were sent prior to the close of the survey.

Phase Two of data collection occurred through interviews. All four research questions were covered in the interviews. All interviews occurred via video conferencing or telephone. All interviews were recorded with typed responses of the recordings being made to allow for content analysis of the responses for like phrases and terms.

Procedures for Analysis

This study examined the factors surrounding the turnover of school superintendents in western states’ public school districts. The data, as they relate to the research questions, emerged from using descriptive data, quantitative data and qualitative
data to provide insight into the commonality of factors surrounding superintendent turnover. The analysis of data is described as it occurred in the two phases of research.

**Phase One Analysis.** Phase One analysis occurred with the results of the quantitative survey data. Upon completion of the survey, all results were tallied by question and response. Data was reported using measures of central tendency. Data was linearly analyzed by comparing the responses to the corresponding questions and responses from the 2010 State of the SuperintendentSurvey (Kowalski, et al., 2010).

**Phase Two Analysis.** Phase Two analysis occurred with the results of the qualitative interview data. The analysis was guided by the six-step coding and analysis procedure outlined by Auerbach and Silverstien (2003). The purpose in this coding analysis procedure was a step by step guide to move the researcher from a lower to a higher level of understanding of the data. The six steps of the procedure are as follow:

1. Raw Text- The raw text was the complete transcripts of the interview.
2. Relevant Text- The first step following the completion of the transcripts was to cut the text down into manageable proportions. This was accomplished by reading through the raw text with the guiding research questions in mind. Text that was directly related to the guiding research questions was kept; the rest was discarded, thus reducing the amount of text to be worked with.
3. Repeating Ideas- With the selected relevant text now available, similar words and phrases emerged from the participant’s responses that were used to describe the same idea. These words and phrases were called repeating ideas and were identified and pulled out of the relevant text.
4. Themes- The repeating ideas were grouped by ideas that they had in common. These groups were called themes. The themes were used to organize the repeating ideas.

5. Theoretical Constructs- With the repeating ideas organized into themes, the researcher was closer to answering the research questions from the data that emerged from the interviews. In the same way that repeating ideas were organized into themes, themes were in turn organized into larger, more abstract ideas called theoretical constructs.

6. Theoretical Narrative- In like manner, the theoretical constructs were organized into theoretical narratives, which summarized what had been learned about the research questions. This narrative was the final bridge between the researcher’s questions and the participants’ responses from their experiences.

Melding the Analysis with the Conceptual Framework

The final piece of the analysis was to take the three pieces of research, the quantitative survey results, the qualitative interview results, and the 2010 State of the Superintendent Survey results and determine the level of interaction among the research factors when looking at the results of the three data sources.

The researcher began by looking at the quantitative survey results, exploring the responses for differences and similarities between the WSS results and the SOS results. In comparing like questions from each of the two surveys, the researcher was able to isolate responses that either gave answers to the research questions, or required further explanation to garner answers. The questions that required further explanation were
included in the qualitative interview protocol and asked in personal interviews with active superintendents. The interviews were recorded and transcripts were generated. From these transcripts, themes surrounding the research questions emerged, with repeating ideas being grouped together and developed into theoretical narratives which summarized what had been learned by the researcher.

By not only comparing and contrasting the results, the researcher found supporting text and numbers within the results which would prove or disprove any interactional relationship between the research factors. The existence or absence of the interactional relationships between the identified factors then provided the basis for the proving or disproving of the explanatory theory process.

**Summary**

The creating process of an explanatory theory provided the lens through which the results from the data sources were analyzed. Quantitative and qualitative measures were used. Research factors, as found in the related literature, were quantified and qualified based on the experiences of current superintendents in the western United States and then analyzed for comparison, contrast, and identification of interactional relationships.
Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study is to identify factors that determine superintendent turnover. This study used quantitative and qualitative measures to collect data from currently serving superintendents of intermediate size school districts in the western United States.

This chapter provides the results of the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Data is reported by the data source with discussion on contrast and comparison also included.

Quantitative Results

A profile of subjects is presented, followed by the results of the study which are organized on the basis of the following research questions, which guided the study:

1. What environmental factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?
2. What governance factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?
3. What personal factors influence the tenure of the superintendents in western states?
4. What incentives and disincentives influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?

A Profile of Respondents

Western States Survey (WSS). Of the 168 superintendents who participated in the study (CA=113, WA=40, ID=8, MT=2, WY=5), the majority of respondents were
male (69%), Caucasian (87%), with Doctoral degrees (51%), and served in small towns or cities (36%). A typical superintendent for this study was between the ages of 56-60, had served in the current position for an average of 5 years, had held one position as a superintendent, and had served in a district with between 2,000 and 5,000 students. The overwhelming majority of the superintendents had a positive relationship with their school board members (98%), spent less than six hours a week in communications with their board (54%) and described their board as functioning as a cohesive and motivated team (54%). When asked if they would choose to be a superintendent if they had to do it all over again, a resounding 92% answered yes. Results are summarized in Appendices 1 and 2.

2010 State of the Superintendent Survey (SOS). Of the 1,766 superintendents who participated in the study from all over the United States, the majority of respondents were male (76%), Caucasian (94%), and served in rural areas (51%). A typical superintendent in this study was between the ages of 56-60. The overwhelming majority of the superintendents had a positive relationship with their school board members (97%) and spent less than six hours a week in communication with their board (63%). When asked if they would choose to be a superintendent again, a resounding 88% answered yes.

Notable Numbers in the Profile. While most of the numbers matched up fairly consistently between the two surveys, there were several notable differences. Those differences are as noted below:

1. The type of community lived in between the two survey populations was quite different. 67% of the respondents in the WSS described their
community as a small town/city or suburban while 72% of the respondents in the SOS described their community as a small town/city or rural.

2. In the SOS, 24% of the respondents were female, compared to 31% in the WSS.

3. The WSS had a higher percentage of Hispanic or Latino respondents (8%) as compared to the SOS (2%). The SOS had a higher percentage of Black or African American respondents (2%) as compared to the WSS (0%).

**Quantitative Research Question #1**

What environmental factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states? The respondents were presented with several questions surrounding the effect that possible environmental factors have on them as superintendents and asked to rate them based on level of influence, level of benefit, or levels of asset versus liability. Possible factors explored included school board members, district and school level administrators, legal interventions, media, community involvement, current salary and benefits, state department of education, elected officials and No Child Left Behind.

**Western States Survey (WSS).** When asked to rate the level of influence that certain groups have on them, superintendents listed school board members, administrators in the district, and students in the district as the most influential. They also noted that state and national superintendent associations as well as business elites have the least amount of influence on them in their jobs. In like manner, school and district level administrators along with school board members were listed as being factors that were the greatest asset to superintendents. At the top of the list as major liabilities to superintendents were the state departments of education and legal interventions.
The survey also asked for the superintendents’ opinions on the benefits of the No Child Left Behind Act. 60% of superintendents responded that the detriments of this legislation have been greater than the benefits. Results are summarized in Appendices 3, 4, and 5.

**2010 State of the Superintendent Survey (SOS).** When asked to rate the level of influence that certain groups have on them, superintendents listed school board members, administrators in the district, and students in the district as the most influential. They also noted that business elites, elected local officials and national superintendent associations have the least amount of influence on them in their jobs. School and district level administrators along with school board members were listed as being factors that were the greatest asset to superintendents. At the top of the list as major liabilities to superintendents were the state departments of education and legal interventions.

The survey also asked for the superintendents’ opinions on the benefits of the No Child Left Behind Act. 65% of superintendents responded that the detriments of this legislation have been greater than the benefits. Results are summarized in Appendices 3, 4, and 5.

**Notable Numbers from Research Question #1.** The overall responses to the questions were answered very similarly in both studies. The differences in responses were in the numbers. Those differences are as noted below:

1. In the SOS, only 25% of the respondents listed national superintendent associations as having no influence on them at all, while 52% of respondents answered the same in the WSS.
2. The WSS respondents noted much more of an influence from employee
unions/organizations in the district as compared to SOS respondents, 21% of
whom noted receiving no influence at all from these groups.

3. An overwhelming majority (90+%) of respondents in the WSS listed district
and school level administrators as major assets in their job. The percentages
in the SOS, around 66%, were quite a bit lower, including the response that
22% felt that district level administrators were neither an asset nor liability.

Quantitative Research Question #2

What governance factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western
states? The questions concerning governance factors centered around who has influence
with the board and the reasons why the board hired the current superintendent.

Western States Survey (WSS). Superintendents responded that they felt they
had the most influence with the board. The other factors with notable influence on the
board were administrators other than the superintendent, teachers, and parents. Those
with the least amount of influence on the board were the National School Board
Association, business elites, and elected state officials.

When asked why their school board hired them, superintendents responded that
the ability to be an instructional leader, personal characteristics, and the potential to be a
change agent were the top reasons they were selected. Results are summarized in
Appendices 6 and 7.

2010 State of the Superintendent Survey (SOS). Superintendents responded
that they felt they had the most influence with the board. The other factors with notable
influence on the board were administrators other than the superintendent, parents, and
teachers. Those with the least amount of influence on the board were the National School Board Association, business elites, and elected state officials.

When asked why their school board hired them, superintendents responded that personal characteristics, the potential to be a change agent, and the ability to be an instructional leader were the top reasons they were selected. Results are summarized in Appendices 6 and 7.

**Notable Numbers from Research Question #2.** Once again, the general ratings of the factors were very similar between the surveys. Specific differences are as noted below:

1. In the WSS, superintendents rated the ability to be an instructional leader as the top reason for being hired. In the SOS, they listed personal characteristics as the main reason for being selected.

2. The WSS respondents noted much more of an influence from employee unions/organizations on the school board as compared to SOS respondents, 21% of whom observed no influence on the school board at all from these groups.

**Quantitative Research Question #3**

What personal factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?

The questions concerning personal factors centered on factors that may affect performance as a superintendent and specific reasons superintendents may and do leave their positions.

**Western States Survey (WSS).** Superintendents rated job related stress, excessive time requirements, and role conflict as the factors that constitute the most
problems for them in their positions. Lack of status, lack of opportunities for professional growth and unrealistic performance expectations were listed as the factors that cause the least amount of problems. In rating the factors that may cause them to leave their positions, relationships with the school board was overwhelmingly listed as the top factor (81%). Funding issues, career advancement, and salary and benefits were also listed as main reasons that they could leave. Job description and sense of responsibility were rated as the lowest reasons that may cause them to leave. While a large majority of superintendents (62%) were not superintendents in their previous position, those who were left that position most often to assume a new challenge or due to conflict with the school board. 92% of respondents said that they would be willing to accept their current position again. Results are summarized in Appendices 8, 9, 10, and 11.

2010 State of the Superintendent Survey (SOS). Superintendents rated job related stress, excessive time requirements and role conflict as the major factors that constitute problems for them. Lack of status, lack of opportunities for professional growth, and lack of respect were rated as factors not as likely to constitute problems. When leaving their last superintendent position, most left to assume a new challenge or due to conflict with the board. 59% of subjects were not superintendents in their prior position. Results are summarized in Appendices 8 and 10.

Notable Numbers from Research Question #3. Comparable numbers were not available for all questions asked between the two surveys, but some interesting results did emerge.
1. A large majority of superintendents were not superintendents in their prior positions, leading the researcher to believe that most are in their first superintendent position.

2. In the SOS, lack of respect was not as much of a problem in their positions as it was for WSS participants.

**Quantitative Research Question #4**

What are the incentives and/or disincentives that influence the tenure of superintendents in western states? The questions concerning incentives and disincentives centered around the reasons that the subjects became superintendents and how satisfied they are with aspects of their jobs.

**Western States Survey (WSS).** The reasons that superintendents listed as the force behind becoming a superintendent were the opportunity to make a difference in the district and the ability to influence the direction of the district. 83% of respondents were satisfied with their current total compensation packages (salary and benefits), while citing the areas of relationships with district employees, personal job fulfillment, relationships with community and the ability to make a difference in the district as the areas of their job that satisfy them most. As for their future plans, 81% plan to remain in their current position, with 67% wanting to remain a superintendent until they retire. Results are summarized in Appendices 12, 13, 14, and 15.

**2010 State of the Superintendent Survey (SOS).** A large majority (87%) responded that they are satisfied with their current total compensation package (salary and benefits).
Notable Numbers from Research Question #4. With only one question allowing comparison and contrast between the SOS and the WSS included in this section, and the results of that question being almost identical, interesting correlations between data from the WSS are listed below:

1. With 65% of participants citing the opportunity to make a difference in the district and 94% of participants saying that they are satisfied with their ability to make a difference in the district, it appeared that superintendents were succeeding in the reasons that they pursued this particular job.

2. In Research Question #2, 92% of superintendents responded that they would accept their current position again. In Research Question #3, 81% of superintendents listed school board relations as the main reason they would leave their positions. In Research Question #4, 91% claim they are satisfied with the relationship with their school board. The researcher considers the results of these three factors to show how important the relationship between superintendent and the school board really was to the subjects of the studies.

Summary of Quantitative Results

The analysis of the data revealed school board relationships, career advancement in a larger district and salary and benefits were the most important factors which may influence a superintendent’s decision to leave the position. Results suggested that superintendents were satisfied in their current positions. While the majority of superintendents (70%) did not plan to leave their position in one year, the likelihood of leaving their position increased as the time span increased (63% within five years and 70% within ten or more years). The majority of superintendents reported a positive
relationship with all members of their school board and felt that their school board functions as a cohesive and motivated team. They also reported that school board members and administrators within the district were the two groups who exerted the most influence on their decisions. District level administrators, school level administrators and the school board were reported as major assets to the superintendent. Superintendents reported that their ability to be instructional leaders along with personal characteristics were the main reasons they were hired by the board.

Within their jobs, superintendents reported job related stress and excessive time requirements as the major problems that they face. They reported the opportunity to make a difference in the district as the main reason for becoming a superintendent and a large majority (83%) report they are satisfied with their total compensation packages. Finally, when asked the likelihood of choosing to be a superintendent if they had it to do over again, 92% responded affirmatively.

Results from the WSS study and the SOS study were very similar, with only a few exceptions. The percentage of female respondents in the WSS being significantly higher than the rate of female response in the SOS raised the question of access based on locale for females in the superintendent position. Also, the disparity in influence of national associations between the two studies raised a question as to regional influence of these associations.

**Qualitative Results**

For purposes of the qualitative portion of this study, the researcher selected eight subjects from the quantitative survey participants who met certain criteria. All were long serving superintendents (at least seven years in their current position), who had agreed to
participate in further study question, and were proportionately representative of the number of superintendents in each Western state surveyed. After contacting the eight superintendents via e-mail, all responded with the desire to participate in a personal interview with the researcher. Phone interview appointments were scheduled with each of the eight superintendents by the researcher. The researcher provided the subjects with a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview. The researcher led the interview, allowing the subjects to talk their way through the interview questions with the researcher moving the interview on from question to question upon completion of the subject’s answer. The interview was divided into six sections. Section 1 gave subjects a chance to introduce themselves, including their experiences as superintendent, their length of tenure, circumstances surrounding their hiring, and circumstances surrounding their predecessor’s departure. Section 2 dealt with personal factors that influence the tenure of superintendents. The subjects were asked to describe factors that may inhibit their effectiveness and also to describe any personal traits or skills that they have observed possessed by superintendents that have either extended their tenures or caused their tenures to be shortened. Section 3 involved questions surrounding governance factors. Subjects were asked to describe their current relationship with their school board and any suggestions that might enhance the school board's ability to function with the superintendent. They were also asked to describe any other interest groups that exert influence on the governance structure of the school district. Section 4 explored the environmental factors surrounding the tenure of superintendents. Subjects were asked for their opinion as to the primary reasons that superintendents leave their positions and what their prediction of superintendent turnover was for their particular state. Subjects were
also asked if they were given another opportunity, whether or not they would accept their current position in their current district. Section 5 dealt with the incentives and disincentives, with subjects explaining their main reason for becoming a superintendent, the major causes of stress in their position, and, if they were ever to leave their superintendent position, what would be their main reason for leaving. Section 6 allowed the subjects to expound on any of the questions that they had been previously asked or to add anything to the interview that they felt was necessary. The researcher recorded the interviews using one digital tape recorder and took notes as well. The voice recordings were transcribed and can be seen in Appendix 22.

The transcripts were analyzed, using a method developed by Auerbach and Silverstein. According to the method, there were six steps used to code the interviews. Step one was organizing the interviews into raw text, or text in its complete form. Step two consisted of identifying the relevant text, or text that is related to the specific research concerns. Step three called for finding repeating ideas within the relevant text. Step four involved finding groups of repeating ideas that had something in common, calling what they had in common a theme (See Appendix 23). Step five was made up of organizing the themes into larger more abstract ideas, called theoretical constructs (See Appendix 24). Finally, step six consisted of organizing the theoretical constructs into a theoretical narrative, which summarized what was learned about the research concerns. Analysis of the interviews resulted in four theoretical constructs, which aligned with the original research questions.

The first construct was Skills Needed to be a Successful Superintendent. When asked questions surrounding personal factors, the subjects responded with a variety of
different answers. The response given by a majority of the subjects dealt with skills surrounding building relationships with the school board and community. The word politics was mentioned several times, including “being politically savvy” and politics is inherent in school boards and school superintendents." With the current economic climate affecting most school districts, knowledge of budget issues and budget processes was also a skill mentioned by most subjects as necessary in being successful as a superintendent. Finally, the last idea which was repeatedly seen within the interview responses was an emphasis on communication skills. The subjects described communication not as just being able to get their ideas across but also by being able to listen well. Examples from the transcripts concerning Construct 1 are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct 1 - Skills Needed to be a Successful Superintendent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>On factors that inhibit effectiveness:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“I really focused a lot on developing relationships with people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“If you act too directive or too analytical or too expressive and you don’t get your ideas down to a common sense grass roots level you lose people so I really focus on those things with the knowledge I really have to be versatile.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I think on the positive side, people who are open and inclusive in communication have an easier time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…some factors that you just don’t have control of that frustrate you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I would say the board structure has always been my biggest challenge, mostly because I am not a politician. I will do what I think is right rather than what I think will make the board happy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think communication is one of the key factors, and communication at every level from the people you work directly with to the community.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
“Politics is inherent in school boards and school superintendents, not only the internal politics between the school board and the Superintendent, but also between the Superintendent and staff and unions and bargaining groups and the community at large.”

“I am a firm believer in integrity and honesty; 100% integrity, 100% honesty is a very important key prerequisite, throughout. That’s incredibly important.”

“Being a superintendent is about people, and superintendents that last longer are really good at relationships.”

The second construct was Developing Relationships with the School Board. All of the respondents suggested that they have positive relationships with most of their board members. However, all cited instances and examples of ways that they develop that relationship with their board members. Relationships of trust and respect with the school board along with a clear understanding of the separation of powers between the school board and superintendent were mentioned consistently by all respondents. A common tool used to develop those relationships was the use of board retreats or other "away time". One subject said that they had a “family type of relationship” with their board. "You agree to disagree. It is not always roses, but in the end, you are used to working with each other and compromise to come to the best decision," they said. This seemed to be the consensus of all respondents. Clearly understanding the separation of responsibility and the ability to make a decision and move forward allowed positive relationships to exist between the subjects and their school boards. Examples from the transcripts concerning Construct 2 are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Construct 2- Developing Relationships with the School Board

On how to enhance the school board’s ability to work with the superintendent:
“I spent about a year making myself a real available to them and making sure that I was listening as much if not more than I was talking.”
“One of the things that we did was we had a couple of retreats where we brought in people to talk about how to develop operating agreements, what the role was with the school board cut versus the role of the superintendent and then we revisit those agreements annually.”

“If I were to do it over again, what I would say to a younger person is pick your battles and don’t get so adamant about certain issues.”

“His advice was to treat them well and take care of them- and make sure there is the time away- we do a board retreat in the fall and spring.”

“…we do that together and it allows us to not only attend some of the same training sessions, but it allows us to get to know each other better in a social setting without the artificial settings that a school board meeting with news media and public audience and that type of a thing.”

“Picture a river and you are on a raft and a bend is approaching and you have to decide which way to go. Every time there is an election, or a board member dies, a member falls off the raft and a new one jumps in the water swims to the raft and there is a lot of splashing that goes on in the transition. So you have to have some towels- and at the next bend in the river- decide which way does this group want to go.”

“The initial exercise was to go through and determine those policies that were the board’s responsibility and those policies that were the superintendent’s responsibility and the board goes through the revisions every year, revisiting that separation of power- where sometimes the power overlaps, what is the board’s responsibility, and what is the superintendent’s responsibility- and that has provided a real level of clarity as far as board members being viewers from the 30,000 foot level, and being worried only about board governance policies and board responsibilities and not the day to day operational responsibilities that I am charged to carry out.

The third construct was Reasons for Leaving the Superintendent Position.

Regardless of previous responses surrounding the positive nature of their school board relationships, the respondents all concur that the single most prevalent reason for leaving the superintendent position is conflict between the school board and the superintendent.

“No being able to get along with the board” or “getting cross-wise with the board” seemed to be the most common responses. Most felt that the larger the district the superintendent was in, the faster the relationship would probably deteriorate.
Retirement and moving on to new challenges also were mentioned, but not with the same regularity. “Retirement only happens once,” said one subject, “and it usually isn’t in the same district that you started as a superintendent in.”

On the reverse side of this construct, when asked if given the chance, would they take their current job again, all of the subjects responded “yes”. Reasons from “it is a solid, stable district” to “this place matches my expertise” to “some people can just pick up and leave, but not me” were given for staying in their current job. A majority of the subjects also mentioned their relationship with their board as a reason for staying.

Examples from the transcripts regarding Construct 3 are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Construct 3- Reasons for Leaving the Superintendent Position

On why superintendents leave their positions:
“I think typically they get crosswise with the board.”

“We are all living on borrowed time, so to speak, so the longer you stay around the more people you have to say no to and that ends up catching up with a lot of people.”

“…about 5-10% can’t make it because they can’t work with the board. They are too bull headed to understand that the board is in charge.”

“A number of people move on who want more responsibility and more pay.”

“If you pursue and take a superintendent position and you are not a fit for that community, intellectually, affectively, if you are not a fit for the philosophy of the board, I think your tenure in that position is pretty much going to be limited.”

On their predictions of superintendent turnover:
“People will continue to stay around five years or less in most districts and in particular large urban districts.”

On if they would accept their current position again:
“I think that as soon as people can retire they do.”

“Yes, I would do it over again. I will keep doing it a little longer than I need to because it is just really fulfilling work.”
“This has been a great opportunity for me. It is just large enough of a district that I have been able to do some things that my colleagues in smaller districts have not been able to be involved in.”

“Absolutely, because I still have a lot of work to do.”

The fourth construct was Incentives and Disincentives of the Superintendent Position. When approached with the question of why they became a superintendent, most subjects responded simply, “I was ready for the next step in my career.” Along with it being the next step, the responding superintendents also felt that they could “provide something more to the district than was currently being provided.”

Although they were looking for that next step, the respondents were also quite clear on what caused them stress once they hit that step. “The budget.” “Working just ungodly hours.” Basically, lack of time and money. But those were not the reasons that these superintendents would leave their positions. While retirement was the top answer, moving to a larger district and board conflict also appeared in the responses. Examples from the transcripts regarding Construct 4 are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Construct 4- Incentives and Disincentives of the Superintendent Position

On why they became a superintendent:

“because I thought I could do it better than the ones I had seen.”

“…and I thought- that’s what I need to do is become a principal because a great principal is everything to a school.”

“I have had just a lot of really good mentors along the way. I would have to say that they convinced me that it could be a worthwhile thing to do.”

“I thought I could make a bigger difference as Superintendent, than I could being a teacher, principal or Assistant Superintendent, and the opportunity presented itself.”
“After being a principal for 5 years- I felt I had brought my pull along and I was ready for the next step”

“…at the time I was hired I was an assistant superintendent and my superintendent said one of these days you are going to get to the point to where you look at what I'm doing and think 'I could do a whole lot better.' And when that happens that's your cue that you're ready for the next step and that's exactly what happened.”

On what causes stress in their job:

“I guess what I am saying is prepping people so that they are motivated to take the next step is certainly the biggest issue that causes you stress because you can live or die on those hills.”

“Right now it is mostly connected with budget, budget cuts, the associated cuts to staff, layoffs and cuts of favorite programs that aren’t going to be continuing.”

“People are willing to fill every moment you have- and unless you tell them not to- they will.”

“The increasing intervention by the state and federal government.”

“Trying to keep your ear to the ground and become aware of issues before they pop up so that you can get ahead of them.”

On why they would leave their current position:

“I will be 65 in May.”

“Well, I am not going to leave this one until I retire.”

“When the board starts to do stupid things that are not good for kids- that would definitely do it.”

“to have more time for myself.”

“I think my next step is a larger district and I am interested in doing that.”

Summary of Qualitative Results

Analysis of qualitative data resulted in four theoretical constructs which showed the interview participants were happy in their current positions and did not have
immediate plans to seek employment elsewhere. Participants noted the value of skills in
the area of politics, budgets, and relationships as key to a successful superintendency.
They agreed that the separation of roles and responsibilities along with “away time” in
the form of board retreats or board trainings to develop relationships of trust and respect
between the board and superintendent are also very important. All agreed that school
board-superintendent conflict was the main reason people leave the superintendent
position, as well as the cause for the growing number of retirement age superintendents.

Results of the Study within the Conceptual Framework

Qualitative and quantitative results from this study complemented each other to
the point that the conceptual framework that guided this study was justified by the results.
Organized by the four research questions, the quantitative and qualitative results are
expressed and discussed below, including their interactional relationships within the
conceptual framework.

Research Question #1: What environmental factors influence the tenure of
superintendents in western states? When researching the environmental factors, the
research led down the road of outside influences that disrupt the tenure of
superintendents. These outside influences were different in scope than school board
relationships or personal characteristics. They included such factors as legal
interventions, federal and state legislations, and the media. However, through the
research findings, the amount of impact that environmental influences really had on
superintendent tenure seemed to be very low. If there was one factor that seemed to fit in
this section that had a major impact it was retirement. In the interviews with
superintendent subjects, retirement was the main reason that they gave as to why they
would leave their current position. There was also feedback given that most of the
turnover happening within their states was due to retirement. In the survey results,
retirement was the most popular choice for future plans of the superintendents.

Research Question #2: What governance factors influence the tenure of
superintendents in western states? In direct comparison to environmental factors,
governance factors account for most of the reasons that superintendents leave their
positions prematurely. As one of the interview participants explained his experience,
“Superintendent and school board conflict. That’s the only reason I have ever left.” That
statement sums up the results of the research. Although it was not the number one reason
why survey responders in both this survey and the 2010 State of the Superintendency
(SOS) survey left their previous positions (leaving to assume a new challenge was), it
was number two. When compared to the results of other survey questions, such as
“Describe your current relationship with your board”, the results show an overwhelming
majority saying that their current board relationships were positive. From these results,
one can understand the public’s confusion as to why there are so many superintendent
position openings and turnover happening at a rate of every 3-5 years. In turning to the
interview results, eight of the respondents noted the school board relationship was the
main cause for superintendent turnover. While all eight also rated their current situations
as positive, they agreed that their current situations were the result of hard work and other
factors that created the positive environment. All agreed that in their experience, getting
“crosswise with the board” was the sure way of shortening one’s tenure.

Within the interview data, several repeating ideas were found as to why
superintendents have problems with their school boards. The one mentioned most often
was role conflict, or both sides not having a true understanding of what they are to do as compared to the other. The quantitative data supports this trend, with role conflict being mentioned by 32% of the subjects in the WSS and 37% from the SOS as a factor that constitutes problems for superintendents. This lack of clear separation of powers leads to misunderstandings, power struggles, and a sense of mistrust or lack of respect. Many of the respondents cited the need to be able to build those relationships of trust and respect as something that all superintendents needed to invest time and skill in cultivating. Most responded that the best place they had found to build these relationships were on board retreats, or some sort of “away time”, where frank discussions could be held without the structure of regular board meetings.

Research Question #3: What personal factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states? As discussed above, skills in relationship building were mentioned most often as those that are required to extend one’s tenure as a superintendent. Other personal factors that were mentioned repeatedly include political astuteness, budget awareness, and communication skills. These skills corresponded with some of the top reasons that superintendents gave as to why they were hired, which included personal characteristics and the ability to be a change agent. All of the personal factors that have been mentioned can be directly related to the condition and building of relationships with the school board, which is where most of the research subjects returned when mentioning these characteristics.

Research Question #4: What incentives and disincentives influence the tenure of superintendents in western states? The results of the survey, the interviews, and the SOS were all in line with each other. The main incentive that influences tenure is the feeling
of being ready for the next step in a career. For some, it was the reason they became a superintendent. For others, it was the reason they left their last position. Those feelings of being able to provide something more than was currently provided proved to be an incentive that could not be ignored by the research subjects. Retirement also was mentioned repeatedly as a positive incentive to move on from their last position. Obviously, because they were still in a superintendent position, they found a way to take another job while still retiring from their last position.

The findings of disincentives were not directly connected to long or short tenure, but rather to the overall working conditions of a superintendent which could influence a decision to stay or leave. The two main complaints were in the area of time and money—the complaint being a lack of both. As one superintendent put it, “If you allow people to take your time, they will.”

Summary

With the four guiding research questions and the quantitative results having had a clear interactional relationship with the four theoretical constructs developed through the qualitative data, the results garnered through this research study painted a clear picture of the status of factors that had a determining effect on superintendent turnover.
Chapter 5

Summaries, Findings, Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that determine superintendent turnover. Factors that determine superintendent turnover were identified through the literature review. Superintendents were asked to determine the impact these factors have on superintendent departure from their positions and their perceptions of these factors in the superintendency. Superintendents rated various aspects of governance, environmental and personal factors based on their experience with superintendent turnover. Superintendents also provided additional insights in regard to these factors that impact a superintendent's ability to provide continued leadership to a school district.

Review of Methodology

For the purposes of this study, an explanatory mixed methods design comprised of two separate phases was used. For the first phase, a survey instrument was developed based on the four research questions. For the purpose of triangulation, the researcher was able to use multiple questions verbatim from the 2010 State of the Superintendency Survey (Kowalski, et al, 2010) with permission from the authors. Before sending the survey out to the selected research population, it was piloted with presently serving superintendents in Nevada as well as several research experts. Following their suggestions and approval, the survey was distributed to 402 active school superintendents in California, Washington, Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho. Participants were selected based on the size of district (2,000-10,000 students) within these five states. The survey
remained open for a four-week span, during which four reminders were sent to improve participation. Upon completion of the survey process, results were gathered and used to determine focused questions which then made up the interview protocol, phase two of the research design.

In the interview protocol, questions were organized as they applied to the four research questions. Participants were chosen from the original group of survey participants. In addition, length of tenure (7+ years), location of district (rural, suburban, urban) and gender were taken into account to come as close to replicating the return of survey participants as possible. In the end, eight superintendents were interviewed. Each interview was done via phone or video conferencing by the researcher. The interviews were recorded and the researcher transcribed the information from the recordings (Appendix 22).

Once all of the data from the interviews had been collected, the data was coded. Using a data analysis procedure common to grounded theory methods called “theoretical coding” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) a system was developed to analyze the information acquired. This process was guided by Auerbach and Silverstein’s six step coding procedure, which includes “(1) raw text, (2) relevant text, (3) repeating ideas, (4) themes, (5) theoretical constructs, and (6) theoretical narrative” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 35). The data was coded by hand as the researcher felt it was the best way to become immersed in the data and really understand what the subjects were trying to express in their responses to the interview protocol.
Critique of Methodology

Like most well-planned things in life, this process took longer than originally planned. Knowing how busy educational professionals are, and they, being the primary base of population for this study, made it difficult to expedite the data collection process. Had several of the delays been foreseeable, the timeline for starting the research could have been moved up.

As is probably the case with most survey researchers, obtaining a higher response rate would have been preferred. Although the 46% return rate seems on average to other returns that researchers on this topic have reported, the goal on this survey was to at least break 50% and approach 75% if possible. It was not, especially in the particular states that were surveyed. The disparity between response rates geographically probably would have made a bigger difference in the results had they been broken down into small sub-categories. As it was, because a concentrated size of district (2,000-10,000 students) was used, the results were looked at holistically without breaking them down into small sub-categories. In retrospect, increasing the population size by including several other states in the region could have offset the disparity of return that occurred in the study by the inclusion of one highly populated western state.

Summary of Demographics

Superintendents from 168 public school districts located in California, Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming participated in the Western States Survey (WSS). 87% of the participants were white, while 8% were Hispanic or Latino. The percentage of Hispanic or Latino respondents was quite higher in the WSS compared to the 2% of Hispanic or Latino participants reported in the 2010 State of the Superintendent Survey.
(SOS). 31% of the WSS participants were female, which was also quite higher than the 24% of female participation reported in the SOS.

The average age of the participating superintendents fell in the 51-55 years old range, which puts a majority of the participants approaching retirement age within the next decade. The average superintendent in this study had between 11-20 years of school administrator experience before becoming a superintendent.

An overwhelming majority (98%) of the participating superintendents reported having a positive relationship with a majority of their school board members, and most described their boards as “aligned with common interests and goals” and functioning “as a cohesive and motivated team.” 87% of the superintendents report that they spend less than 9 hours a week communicating with school board members.

Finally, when asked the likelihood of choosing to be a superintendent if given another opportunity, 92% responded affirmatively.

**Findings and Understandings**

Findings from the research are summarized and discussed as they directly relate to the four research questions.

Research Question #1: What environmental factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?

When identifying the groups of people who have the most influence on them, the superintendents identified school board members, administrators and teachers within the district and students as those groups having the most influence on them. Outside groups, such as community special interest groups, state and national superintendent associations,
state and local officials, media and business elites were mainly classified as only having a slight influence on the superintendent and their position.

The superintendents then identified the variables of highest asset in their jobs which were district level administrators (93%), school level administrators (91%), and school board members (63%). The results support the findings of the SOS survey, which also listed these three variables as the top three assets for superintendents.

The superintendents mainly identified the variables of legal interventions, media, current salary, current fringe benefits, and their State Departments of Education as neither an asset nor a liability.

One factor that had a major impact was retirement. In the interviews with superintendent subjects, retirement was the main reason they gave as to why they would end up leaving their current position. There was also feedback given that most of the turnover happening within their states was due to retirement. In the survey results, retirement was the most popular choice for future plans of the superintendents.

The one area that seemed to have been a detriment more than a benefit in the eyes of the participating superintendents was national legislation, namely the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2002, or No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as it is commonly known. 60% of the superintendents noted more detriments than benefits since the inception of this legislation. These findings of the WSS support the findings of the SOS, which showed that 65% of the superintendents felt the same way about NCLB.

From the results of this study, environmental factors did not show a high impact on length of superintendent tenure. So the question is raised, “Why don’t environmental factors have a higher impact on the length of superintendent tenure?” A possible
conclusion could be that within a superintendent’s daily course of events, the chance of impact by environmental factors is proportionately less than factors dealing with governance, personal issues, and incentives. That is not saying that situations do not occur when legalities or media pressures are not so great that they create a negative environment, but the chances of those types of situations occurring are quite a bit less than the daily dealings with the school board and other district administration.

Research Question #2: What governance factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states?

Relationship with the school board (81%) was the most mentioned governance factor when identifying the cause for which the superintendents left their last positions. The survey and interview results show that most superintendents view their current relationships with the board as positive, and this makes sense since they were still currently employed at the time of the research collection. Were those relationships to turn sour, however, the results show that this would become the factor with the highest impact on the superintendent’s future length of tenure.

The other piece to governance factors which was repeatedly mentioned was role conflict between the superintendent and school board. Role conflict could be described as either side not knowing what their job is or of what aspects of their job they are in charge. This delineation of power emerged as an important facet to keep the above described relationships between the superintendent and school board on the positive side of the equation. Without a clear understanding of role responsibility, conflict ensues and relationships can deteriorate quickly. Within this scenario, the effectiveness of both the
board and the superintendent are put at enormous risk, which cultivates a culture which would not ensure a long tenure for the superintendent.

Research Question #3: What personal factors influence the tenure of superintendents in western states? If relationships with the school board are one of the factors with the highest impact on the length of superintendent tenure, then the development of those relationships would have to be on the top of the priority list of skills that superintendents need to have. The results of this study show that being highly skilled in relationship building, not only with the school board, but with all stakeholders, was identified as a key personal factor in determining length of superintendent tenure.

One of the areas that was not focused on during this research was the influence of the budget on superintendent tenure. Budget awareness was a skill mentioned repeatedly as one that, if possessed and executed by a superintendent, would decrease some tension in their work environment and in their relationship with the school board. As the country is currently in an economic crisis the likes of which it has not seen in many years, the effect on the funding of public education is not only drastic, but also very concerning as the funding levels that are confronting many school leaders are much less than what is needed to provide needed opportunities for student learning. As this budget crisis continues, the effect of the stress, the lack of resources, and the need for budget creativity for superintendents will be interesting to watch to see the impact it has on superintendent turnover.

Research Question #4: What incentives and disincentives influence the tenure of superintendents in western states? With the current climate of labor disputes in state governments, professional sports, and local school districts, the researcher was surprised
to not see salary and benefits as a major incentive or disincentive influencing the length of tenure of superintendents. In fact, it rated quite low (1%) on the overall list of incentives and disincentives. “Wanting to take the next step” and “having the ability to influence the direction of the district” were identified as the major reasons for being in their current position.

In determining the factors that may cause a superintendent to leave his/her position, superintendents responded that after relationships with their school board (81%), funding issues (39%) and career advancement with a larger district (38%) played the largest roles in determining their length of employment in a district. Job related stress (61%) and excessive time requirements (55%), which may be the effect of one another, were also cited as factors that constitute problems for the superintendents.

It was not surprising to see lack of time and budgeting money were major factors that caused superintendents to shorten their length of tenure. If there are two things that school districts, administrators, and teachers are clamoring for, it is more time and more money to provide the needed instruction to students. It seems as though those same feelings are found in the superintendent’s office as well.

**Implications for Educational Leaders**

Several implications were found from the results of this study which could have a far reaching impact on current educational leaders as well as those who are aspiring to those positions.

**Relationship with the School Board is the Key.** Regardless of a school leader’s preparation, his/her career experience, and areas of expertise- if the superintendent cannot get along with the school board, his/her tenure will be short. The understanding of
building that relationship of trust and respect—or of “caring and nurturing” the school board—is one that has a far reaching impact on the length of tenure. Taking the time and effort, both in everyday contact and in those situations where the superintendent is able to take a board retreat or make “away time”, is something that most leaders know, but of which they probably just need to be reminded. The other aspect to this relationship is the importance of understanding the roles of each side. One superintendent described a process called “board governance”, which effectively took the board and the superintendent through the policy book, assigning responsibility for the different roles to either the board or the superintendent, and then revisiting that separation of powers each year to make sure that they were still comfortable in their roles. “Understanding what the other is to do and not do sure makes it easier to do your job,” said the superintendent.

Communicate. Communicate. Communicate. As important as political astuteness and budget awareness are as personal factors, the ability to communicate effectively with the board, school administration, parents, and community is paramount to ensure longevity of tenure. As several of the superintendents pointed out, effective communication is not just about being able to get a point across so others understand. Perhaps more importantly, it is effectively listening to what others are saying, both verbally and non-verbally, so the other side is completely understood before a response is given.

Know What you are Getting Into. As with any job, knowing exactly what the job entails will only help in determining how long a person will last in that position. Superintendent of schools is not a job for the timid, the meek, or the unconfident. As one superintendent said, “If you want an easy job, don’t be a superintendent.” The
complicated intertwining of personal relationships, politics, time pressures, financial crises, personal agendas, community traditions, state and federal legislations, and the all important --what is best for students-- makes it very easy to understand why there is a shortage of superintendents and that number dwindling each year.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

While the findings in this study provide useful information for current and aspiring school leaders surrounding factors influencing superintendent turnover, further research into the topic of superintendent turnover will provide further understanding of the factors surrounding this issue and possible solutions to help raise the continuity of leadership in our school districts.

1. Replication of the study, expanding the sample population to include a larger region up to a national study.

2. Replication of the study, correlating responses into sub-categories (ie. gender, locale, size of district) to further understand nuances around the topic.

3. A state or national study correlating superintendent turnover with effects of the economic downturn.

4. Studies investigating the possibility of increased access to superintendent positions by women based on regional locale.

5. Studies investigating the specific actions and skill-sets of long-serving superintendents which extend their length of tenure.

6. Replication of the study utilizing Systems Theory as the conceptual framework.
7. Studies investigating the policy and management conflicts within the school board and superintendent relationship.

8. A demographic review of school board members and how that demography effects length of tenure for superintendents.

9. Replication of the study in a non-traditional school (ie. Charter school, Online school, etc.) setting.

10. Study exploring the relationship between the movement to nationalize public education and the incentives/disincentives of being a superintendent.

11. Replication of the study in larger public school districts (ie. Student populations of 10,000+).

12. Studies investigating the factors effecting tenure of alternative route superintendents.

13. Studies exploring the relationship between school boards and superintendents and how they balance the values and ethics of that relationship with longevity.

14. Studies investigating the exact nature of communication needed to ensure longevity in the superintendent position.

15. Studies exploring the entry level tenure and success of superintendents by gender.
Appendices

Appendix 1

Profile of Subjects, Categorical Variables

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<td>Idaho</td>
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### Community Type

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### School Enrollment

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<td>2,000 to 4,999</td>
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### School Administrator Experience prior to Superintendency

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<td>21-25 years</td>
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Relationship with School Board Members

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Description of Current School Board

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<td>Aligned with common interests and goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Functions as a cohesive and motivated team</td>
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Hours per week spent with Board communications

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Likelihood of choosing Superintendent as profession again

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Appendix 2

Profile of Subjects, Continuous Variables

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## Appendix 3

Frequency and Percentage Distributions of Individual or Group Influence on Superintendents

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Appendix 4

Frequency and Percentage Distributions of Levels of Benefits of ESEA-2002

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Appendix 5

Frequency and Percentage Distributions of Levels of Asset vs. Liability of Variables on a Superintendent

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Employee unions/organizations in your district

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Parents in your district

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Students in your district

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Community special interest groups

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<td>36 22 448 26</td>
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<td>20</td>
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Appendix 7

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of reasons the school board employed the current superintendent

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<th>Reason</th>
<th>WSS</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to be an instructional leader</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal characteristics</td>
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<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential to be a change agent</td>
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<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to maintain the status quo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to manage fiscal resources</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having experience outside of education</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to communicate</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
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Appendix 8

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of factors that constitute problems for superintendents

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<th>SOS %</th>
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<td>1183</td>
<td>66</td>
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<td>Lack of opportunities for professional growth</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Role Conflict</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>37</td>
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<td>Excessive time requirements</td>
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<td>55</td>
<td>1066</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>Unethical employee behavior</td>
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<td>408</td>
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<td>Unrealistic performance expectations</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Lack of status</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>Lack of respect</td>
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<td>169</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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Frequency and Percentage Distribution of factors that may cause superintendents to leave their position

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<td>12</td>
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<td>Salary and Benefits</td>
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<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of responsibility</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementation of school reform</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of achievement</td>
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<td>Relationships with school board</td>
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<td>Relationships with community</td>
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<td>Career advancement with larger district</td>
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<td>Personal health concerns</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>Board elections</td>
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<td>Funding issues</td>
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Appendix 10

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of reasons for leaving their last superintendent position

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<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td>1038</td>
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<td>Retired, but allowed to keep working</td>
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<td>Resigned because my spouse relocated</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Resigned to increase my compensation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resigned to move to a better community</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>environment</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>62</td>
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<td>Resigned to assume a new challenge</td>
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<td>228</td>
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<td>Resigned to go to higher performing district</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<td>I was dismissed prior to the end of the contract</td>
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Appendix 11

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of superintendents willing to accept their current position again

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Appendix 12

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of reasons for becoming a superintendent

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<td>Opportunity to make a difference in the district</td>
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<td>Power to influence</td>
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Appendix 13

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of satisfaction with current total compensation

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<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
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### Frequency and Percentage Distribution of satisfaction with aspects of the job

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### Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Superintendents’ future plans

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Appendix 16

Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review

Approval Notice

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:

Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation, suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: January 14, 2011

TO: Dr. Robert McCord, Educational Leadership

FROM: Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

RE: Notification of IRB Action by /Charles Rasmussen/ Dr. Charles, Rasmussen, Co-Chair

Protocol Title: Causes of Job Turnover in the Public School Superintendency: An Explanatory Analysis in the Western United States
Protocol #: 1010-3617M
Expiration Date: January 13, 2012

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed and approved by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45CFR46.110 - Cat. 7 and UNLV Human Research Policies and Procedures.

The protocol is approved for a period of 12 months and expires January 13, 2012. If the above-referenced project has not been completed by this date you must request renewal by submitting a Continuing Review Request form 30 days before the expiration date.

PLEASE NOTE:

Upon approval, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the protocol most recently reviewed and approved by the IRB, which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent forms and recruitment materials. The official versions of these forms are indicated by footer which contains approval and expiration dates.

Should there be any change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a Modification Form through ORI - Human Subjects. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB. Modified versions of protocol materials must be used upon review and approval. Unanticipated problems, deviations to protocols, and adverse events must be reported to the ORI – HS within 10 days of occurrence.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects at IRB@unlv.edu or call 895-2794.
INFORMED CONSENT
Department of Educational Leadership

TITLE OF STUDY: Causes of Job Turnover in the Public School Superintendency: An Explanatory Analysis in the Western United States

INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Robert McCord, Toby Melver

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 702-895-4167

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to identify factors which influence superintendent tenure.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit this criteria: Public school superintendents of intermediate sized districts (2,000-10,000 students) in the western United States.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Participate in a personal interview covering follow-up questions from the online survey dealing with factors that may influence job turnover in the public school superintendency.

Benefits of Participation
There may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to add to the professional knowledge and understanding of the factors surrounding superintendent tenure in western states’ public schools.

Risks of Participation
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. These may include uncomfortable feelings when asked certain questions, etc.

Cost/Compensation
There may not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take 30 minutes of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Robert McComb at 702-895-4167. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.
Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV indefinitely after completion of the study.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

__________________________________________  ____________________
Signature of Participant                           Date

__________________________________________
Participant Name (Please Print)

*Participant Note: Please do not sign this document if the Approval Stamp is missing or is expired.*

Audio/Video Taping Consent:

I agree to the researcher audio and/or video taping the personal interview. I understand that only the principal investigator and student researcher will review the tapes to review and validate my responses.

__________________________________________  ____________________
Signature of Participant                           Date

__________________________________________
Participant Name (Please Print)
Appendix 18

Survey Email Three – Informed Consent with Reminder to Complete Survey

September 15, 2010

Dear Public School Superintendent:

You were recently invited to participate in a research study to identify superintendent turnover factors, trends and projections. If you have already completed the survey, thank you for your participation. **If you have not completed it, I would appreciate your clicking on the link below and completing the survey now.**

All public school superintendents of intermediate sized districts (2,000-10,000 students) in the western United States are being invited to participate. There are no specific risks associated with the type of information collected for the study. Participation is voluntary and you may discontinue at any time. All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV indefinitely after completion of the study.

I would appreciate your participation in my research study. **This would involve answering a web-based survey which is estimated to take about 10 minutes to complete.** As a follow-up to this survey, some participants will be contacted to participate in a personal interview. Please understand that by proceeding to the survey, you are consenting to participation in this study and you agree to the above information and certify that you are at least 18 years of age.

The link to the online survey is displayed below. To participate, click on the link below or copy/paste the link into the address line of your internet browser.

Survey link:

I am currently in the dissertation phase of my doctorate at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, working under the guidance of Dr. Robert McCord (robert.mccord@unlv.edu). For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the **UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.** I can be reached at tmelver@elko.k12.nv.us or call 775-738-7255. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and participation.

Sincerely,

Toby Melver
Doctoral Candidate, University of Nevada-Las Vegas
Principal, Northside Elementary School
Elko, Nevada
September 15, 2010

Dear Public School Superintendent:

I would like to request your assistance and expertise in the collection of data for a research project. I am currently in the dissertation phase of my doctorate studies at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, working under the guidance of Dr. Robert McCord (robert.mccord@unlv.edu). The purpose of the research study is to identify factors which influence superintendent tenure.

All public school superintendents of intermediate sized districts (2,000-10,000 students) in the western United States are being invited to participate. There are no specific risks associated with the type of information collected for the study. Participation is voluntary and you may discontinue at any time. All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV indefinitely after completion of the study.

I would appreciate your participation in my research study. This would involve answering a web-based survey which is estimated to take about 10 minutes to complete. As a follow-up to this survey, some participants will be contacted to participate in a personal interview. Please understand that by proceeding to the survey, you are consenting to participation in this study and you agree the above information and certify that you are at least 18 years of age.

The link to the online survey is displayed below. To participate, click on the link below or copy/paste the link below into the address line of your internet browser.

Survey link:

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu. I can be reached at tmelver@elko.k12.nv.us or call 775-738-7255. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and participation.

Sincerely,

Toby Melver
Doctoral Candidate, University of Nevada-Las Vegas
Principal, Northside Elementary School
Elko, NV
Appendix 20

Quantitative Survey Instrument

DEMOGRAPHICS

1) In which state is your school district located?
   - California
   - Washington
   - Idaho
   - Montana
   - Wyoming

2) Which one of the following best describes the geographic location of your school district?
   - Urban
   - Suburban
   - Small town/city
   - Rural
   - Other

3) How many students were enrolled in your district as of October 1, 2010?
   - Fewer than 2,000
   - 2,000 to 4,999
   - 5,000 to 9,999
   - 10,000 or more

4) What is your age?
   - Less than 36
   - 36-40
   - 41-45
   - 46-50
   - 51-55
   - 56-60
   - 61-65
   - 66+
   - Decline to answer
5) What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female
   - Decline to answer

6) What is your racial/ethnic group?
   - American Indian or Alaska Native
   - Asian
   - Black or African American
   - Hispanic or Latino
   - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
   - White (not Hispanic or Latino)
   - Decline to answer
   - Other (Please specify)

7) How many years of experience have you had as an administrator (not including superintendent experience)?
   - 0
   - 1-5
   - 6-10
   - 11-15
   - 16-20
   - 21-25
   - 26+

8) The total years at current superintendent position: ______ (input box)

9) Were you employed as a superintendent in another district prior to your current position as superintendent?
   - No
   - Yes
     If yes, how long were you employed as a superintendent?
       - Less than 12 months
       - 1 -3 years
       - 3-5 years
       - 5-9 years
       - More than 9 years
10) In how many public school districts have you served as the superintendent (including your present position)?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 or more

11) In how many states have you served as superintendent?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

12) What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?

- Bachelor
- Masters
- Doctorate

13) Looking ahead, where do you see yourself in 5 years? (Select one)

- Plan to continue current superintendency until retirement.
- Plan to continue in a superintendent position, in current district or another until reaching retirement age.
- Plan to leave as soon as I find a position in a university.
- Plan to leave as soon as a find a suitable position outside of education.
- Not sure, but current job is impossible.
- Other

14) Why did your predecessor leave the position?

- Retirement
- Voluntarily left for a new position
- Contract terminated unvoluntarily
- Other (please specify)
15) How many superintendents has your district had over the past five years (including yourself)?

- One
- Two
- Three
- Four or more

GOVERNANCE FACTORS

16) Which one of the following most accurately characterizes the extent to which you have positive relationships with your school board members?

- My relationships are positive with all board members.
- My relationships are positive with a majority of board members.
- My relationships are positive with only a few board members.
- My relationships are not positive with any board members.

17) Which one of the following is the primary reason why your school board employed you as superintendent?

- Ability to be an instructional leader
- Personal characteristics (e.g., honesty, tact)
- Potential to be a change agent
- Ability to maintain the status quo
- Ability to manage fiscal resources
- Having leadership/managerial experience outside of education
- Ability to communicate with stakeholders
- Uncertain
- Other (please specify)

18) Which of the following best characterized your school board? (select one)

- Not actively engaged
- Dominated by a few members
- Represents distinct community factions
- Aligned with common interests and goals
- Functions as a cohesive and motivated team

19) How many hours per week do you spend communicating directly with your board members?
20) What is the level of influence each of the following individuals or groups has with your school board?

   a) Superintendent (you)
   b) Administrators other than the superintendent (both district and school level)
   c) Teachers in your district (not including the teachers’ union)
   d) Employee unions/organizations in your district
   e) Parents in your district
   f) Students in your district
   g) Community special interest groups in your district
   h) National School Boards Association
   i) State school boards association
   j) Elected state officials (e.g., governor, state legislator)
   k) Elected local officials (e.g., mayor, city council)
   l) Business elites (e.g., corporation presidents, small business owners)
   m) Media (all types including print and electronic)

Survey taker will select one option for each choice from the following: considerable, moderate, slight, none, uncertain

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

21) What level of influence do the following individuals or groups have on you as superintendent?

   a) School Board Members
   b) Administrators in your district
   c) Teachers (not including the teachers’ union)
   d) Employee unions/formal organizations
   e) Parents
   f) Students
   g) Community special interest groups
   h) National superintendent associations
   i) State superintendent associations
   j) Elected state officials (e.g., governor, state legislator)
   k) Elected local officials (e.g., mayor, city council)
   l) Business elites (e.g., corporation presidents, small business owners)
   m) Peer superintendents from other districts
   n) Media (all types including print and electronic)
Survey taker will select one option for each choice from the following: considerable, moderate, slight, none, uncertain

22) How frequently do citizens seek to influence policy decisions in your district through overt political action (e.g., petitions, show of force at school board meetings)?
   o Often
   o Occasionally
   o Rarely
   o Never

23) Which one of the following most accurately describes the effect of the No Child Left Behind Act (the reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act signed into law in January 2002) on your school district?
   o Detriments have been far greater than benefits.
   o Detriments have been slightly greater than benefits.
   o Benefits have been slightly greater than detriments.
   o Benefits have been far greater than detriments.

24) Are the following variables an asset or liability to you as a superintendent?
   a) School board members
   b) District level administrators (e.g., assistant superintendents, directors)
   c) School level administrators (e.g., principals, assistant principals)
   d) Legal interventions (involvement of the courts in education)
   e) Media (all types of print and electronic media)
   f) Community involvement
   g) Current salary as superintendent
   h) Current fringe benefits as superintendent
   i) State department of education
   Survey taker will select one option for each choice from the following: Major asset, Minor asset, Neither an asset or liability, Minor liability, Major liability

PERSONAL FACTORS

25) Which of the following constitute problems for you in your current position? (Select all that apply)
   o Job related stress
   o Lack of opportunities for professional growth
   o Role conflict (i.e., competing expectations of you)
   o Excessive time requirements
   o Unethical employee behavior
o Unethical school board member behavior
o Unrealistic performance expectations
o Lack of status
o Lack of respect
o Other (please specify)

26) What factors effect your performance as a superintendent?

  o Too many insignificant demands
  o State reform mandates
  o Collective bargaining agreements
  o Difficult relations with board members
  o District too small
  o Lack of community support
  o Board micromanagement
  o Board elections - changed expectations
  o Other (please specify)

27) In your opinion, what are the factors which may influence job turnover among superintendents? (choose three)

  o Job description
  o Leadership opportunities
  o Autonomy
  o Salary and benefits
  o Sense of responsibility
  o Implementation of school reform
  o Sense of achievement
  o Relationships with school board
  o Relationships with community
  o Career advancement with larger/more successful district
  o Personal health concerns
  o Board elections
  o Funding issues
  o Other: (Please specify)

28) Specifically, are you considering leaving your current position:

  A) Within one year? ( ) Yes ( ) No
  B) Within five years? ( ) Yes ( ) No
C) Within ten or more years? ( ) Yes ( ) No

29) If you have held more than one superintendency position, what was the most important reason for leaving the last one? (Select one).

   o Not applicable because I was not a superintendent prior to my current position.
   o My contract was not renewed.
   o I was dismissed prior to the end of the contract.
   o I resigned due to substantial conflict with school board members.
   o I resigned due to substantial conflict with one or more community groups
   o I resigned to enhance my career by moving to a higher performing school district.
   o I resigned to assume a new challenge (e.g., moving to a different type of school district)
   o I resigned to increase my compensation.
   o I resigned in order to move to a better community environment (e.g., better schools for my children, better social climate)
   o I resigned for health reasons (e.g., the job was too stressful, needed a different climate)
   o I resigned because my spouse accepted a position in a different location.
   o I resigned in order to relocate in a state with a better pension system.
   o I resigned, started collecting a pension, and took advantage of a policy that allowed me to continue as a superintendent with another employer.
   o Other (please specify)

30a) If given another opportunity, would you accept your current position as superintendent in this district again?

   o Yes
   o No
   o Not Sure

30b) Why or why not?

INCENTIVE/DISINCENTIVE

31) What was the main reason you became a superintendent?

   o Compensation
   o Ability to influence the direction of the district
   o Opportunity to make a difference in the district
   o Power to influence
   o Other (please specify)
32) How satisfied are you with your current total compensation (both salary and benefits)?
   - Very satisfied
   - Moderately satisfied
   - Moderately dissatisfied
   - Very dissatisfied

33) Please rate your level of satisfaction with the following:
   - Personal Job Fulfillment
   - Relationship with your community
   - Relationship with your school board
   - Relationship with your district employees
   - Ability to make a difference in the district
   - Ability to implement your educational reform
   - Ability to be a change agent
   - Ability to manage fiscal resources

Survey taker will select one option for each choice from the following: Very satisfied, Moderately satisfied, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, Moderately dissatisfied, Very dissatisfied

34) If you had to do it all over again, would you choose to be a superintendent?
   - Definitely yes
   - Probably yes
   - Unsure
   - Probably no
   - Definitely no

35) As a follow-up to this survey, would you be interested in participating in an anonymous, protected interview with the researcher?
   - Yes
   - No
Main research question: What are the personal, governance, and environmental factors and incentives/disincentives that influence the tenure of superintendents?

The 14 questions listed below will direct the interview conversations. They are written alternatively; some of them may or may not be posed according to the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. This protocol is semi-structured; interviewer may pose emerging questions (not listed below) as appropriate according to the interview conversation. Each interview is anticipated to last not more than 40 minutes. It is recommended for the interviewer to skip the remaining questions in each part if the designated time limit is exceeded.

**Part I- Introduction questions to warm up the conversation. (Limited to 5 minutes)**

1. What is your experience as a superintendent?
2. Please describe your current position (length of tenure, circumstances surrounding your hiring, your predecessor’s departure)

**Part II- Exploring the personal factors that influence the tenure of superintendents. (Limited to 10 minutes)**

3. What personal characteristics effect your performance as a superintendent?
4. In your experience as a superintendent, what have you seen as personal traits or skills possessed by superintendents that have either extended their tenure or caused their tenure to be shortened?

**Part III- Exploring the governance factors that influence the tenure of superintendents. (Limited to 10 minutes)**

5. Describe your current relationship with your school board. Has it always been characterized as it is now? If not, what caused the change?
6. Are there any suggestions that you could make that would enhance the school board’s ability to function as one with the superintendent?
7. In your experience, have you observed any other interest groups that exert influence on the governance structure of a school district? If so, who are they and how do they exert influence?

**Part IV- Exploring the environmental factors that influence the tenure of superintendents. (Limited to 10 minutes)**

8. In your experience, what are the primary reasons that superintendents leave their positions?
9. Have those reasons changed or evolved over your time in education? If so, how?
10. What is your prediction of superintendent turnover in your state?

Part V- Exploring the incentives/disincentives that influence the tenure of superintendents. (Limited to 10 minutes)

11. What was the main reason you became a superintendent?
12. What are the major causes of stress in your position?
13. If you were to leave the superintendent position, what would be your main reason for leaving?

Part VI- Ending the interview. (unlimited)

14. My questions are finished to this point; do you have anything else you would like to add about the superintendent position that may be a factor in shortening or lengthening superintendent turnover? Or anything related I forgot to ask, but you would like to talk about?

Interviewer will thank participant for their time and interest in participating the study.
Appendix 22

Interview Transcripts
(** denotes words removed to protect identity of subject)

Interview #1

Describe your experience as a superintendent-

That is a broad ranging question- first of all- I had the opportunity to be an assistant superintendent for about 9 years of a district of about 4200 students and I had great superintendents to work for and I learned an awful lot from them- I would say that when I came to this superintendency I had some tools that I might not have had- I will tell you what those tools are- one is to understand essentially the affective skills that you need to be successful in a job charged with instructional leadership, management, political relationships and legal implications- those are the big 4- I really focused a lot on developing relationships with people- I took a position in a school and a community that I understood and knew- and I did that because I was a fit for it- and I think that is absolutely essential if you want to take a good run at someplace and making a difference long term- I had a lot of support from the board that I came in with as far as the changes that they wanted- which was fine- I was all for the changes that they were looking to accomplish and the joyous thing about that process was they allowed me the time to provide those staffing changes and certain instructional leadership changes in the district to occur over a period of time- which is to say we wanted to go as fast as we could to adopt the changes and institutionalize the changes but not go too fast as to upset the apple cart and really ruined our chances to keep things going- beyond that- we changed the process on how we chose people- I have always been a student of people and a long time ago when I was a principal I believed that getting the right people in the right seats on the yellow school bus was the important thing to do- the second thing I figured out was it wasn’t their academic credentials that made a difference it was their affective skills in relationship to being a part of a team as far as moving things ahead one inch at a time and keep pushing until you had the achievements made and in place that you wanted to have- frankly that is how I have operated in this district for many years and I have been lucky to work with great school boards who have bought into our common sense and pragmatic approach to keeping the right people and getting rid of the wrong people who were not making the grade and pushing the people all the time but giving time to consolidate that were responsible for putting into place those initiatives

Specifically- describe your current position, length of tenure, circumstances around your hiring, if you can, your predecessor’s departure-
Circumstances around my hiring are that I am in Cody, Wyoming and I am in my 14 year as superintendent- but I had previously been a principal in Wyoming but went back to my home in south Dakota as an assistant superintendent but knew that I always wanted to return to Wyoming- and frankly I wanted to come to Cody and there were a set of circumstances that worked in my favor- here is the other thing that is really nice- my predecessor was so unloved that it made my honeymoon period for me quite a bit linger in my initial years as superintendent- and certainly gave me time to consolidate relationships with the board and with community- I really focused on public relationships with the community as there had been a sour note previously about eh school district- I engaged in lots of public speaking opportunities to describe who we were and what we really believed we wanted to do and that rang a bell with the community

*Let’s move onto some personal factors- what are some personal factors or characteristics that could or do inhibit your effectiveness as a superintendent- Not necessarily of your own- but what are some you have seen that could be inhibiting*

I guess I would say that in addition to being politically savvy I have had experience with leadership styles- which is something we do with our administrative team- everyone who comes into our district new- and by the way every two years we go back do our own profile assessment to make sure we are still the people we thought we were and still have the leadership styles that we thought we had- which is to say that I am an expressive- so I am really focused on ideas and making modifications that will enhance the opportunities for staff developing and student learning opportunities- and I am also aware that you need to be directive- a lot of times you need to analytical- and for an expressive- it is very difficult to be amiable- so you have to practice those things and practice the versatility so that you can move around those things pretty easily- those are the things that I have concentrated on- but I also know that at any given time if I were to emphasize any one of them it can be damaging to what I want to do as a superintendent- it can be damaging to the relationships in our administrative team- and certainly publicly- if you act too directive or too analytical or too expressive and you don’t get your ideas down to a common sense grass roots level you lose people so I really focus on those things with the knowledge I really have to have the versatility and not just focus on being a driver or whatever

*Describe your current relationship with your school board- has it always been characterized as it is now- if not- what has caused the change-

Well, I can’t tell you how many member I have had in 14 years- probably around 30 in that amount of time- we have a 7 member board- for the most part I have had excellent boards- but on occasion I have had boards where 2 out of the 7 were kind of dicey to work with- I guess I could say that some people have thought they were elected in relation to my poor performance and that I wasn’t the best person for the district- but we
have managed that over the years - but by and large over the 14 years - working with the board in a professional and team oriented manner has worked very well here and we always tell the board that my job as the superintendent is through you to understand what the community wants and I want you to be successful as board members and I say to each and every one of them that I hope it is your responsibility to feel that it ought to part of your job to help me be successful - so we can keep the district moving in positive ways -

*Do you have suggestions to make on how to enhance the board’s ability to work with you as the superintendent?*

One of the things that is unique in this state and we have done it here, but if you take a look at your operational policies and if you laid them on top of each other it would be about 2.5” think - so we have gone through something called board governance - which is where we go through with the board and revisit it every six months - and the initial exercise was to go through and determine those policies that were the boards responsibility and those policies that were the superintendents responsibility - and the board goes through the revisions every year of revisiting that separation of power - where sometimes the power overlaps - what is the boards responsibility and what is the superintendents responsibility - and that has provided a real level of clarity as far as board members being viewers from the 30,000 foot level, and being worried only about board governance policies and board responsibilities and not the day to day operational responsibilities that I am charged to carry out - that has worked quite well and I think it always does, I should say it has always worked well here if board members chose to understand that division - there has certainly been from time to time individual board members who are built in micro mangers - so then the bottom line is that it is the responsibility of the remainder of the board in a majority sense to manage those board members - and we have ever only had 2 at a given time - to maintain that level of responsibility and to hold up their end and say - wait a minute, this is not really our problem - they understand that their ultimate responsibility is to make sure that I am doing my job effectively for the district and if they don’t then they have to evaluate me in a negative way but so far that has not happened -

*What are primary reasons that superintendents leave their positions?*

If I had to pick one thing, I would say that they are not a match for the community and not a match for the board - If you pursue a superintendency and take a superintendent position and you are not a fit for that community, intellectually, affectively, if you’re not a fit for the philosophy of the board, I think your tenure in that position is pretty much going to be limited - I would say that another thing would be if you have a strong administrative team, and they have been part of your community for a few years - if you think as a new leader that you are going to come in and simply determine how that admin team is going to move forward and they are attached to the community - you will have
yourself a political problem- that is the second thing that causes a lot of issues and I think maybe the third one is coming in with great ideas and I think a lot of superintendents do, but pushing them faster than the board and the community is ready to accept.

*What is your prediction of superintendent turnover in your state?*

Well it is better than the national average, which I think is about 3 years. I don’t know what to say- I am not from Ohio or Wisconsin- I am from a heartland western states where there are still a lot of cowboy ethics and handshake stuff- there is still a lot of common connections with people, and if you kind of follow the formula that I have outlined in what not to do, I think you can succeed in a district in Wyoming for a good amount of time- if you have the intellectual ability to do so-

*If you were given another opportunity, would you accept your current position and why?*

Absolutely, because I still have a lot of work to do- I kind of have this philosophy that I share with the board all the time that I think if you are standing still, you are going to get passed- so we are constantly in the process of raising the bar not just for ourselves as administrators but working with our teaching teams and buildings to take the next step and provide the professional development to move up the ladder and work on a growth model for our student performance understanding that to me initiating and sustaining change is a plateau process that takes a little while, then you have to consolidate some, and then you can push again- visiting with my board the other night, they asked, what’s in the future- basically I said we are on a plateau and we need a couple of years to consolidate or PLC process, our LODI process, our RTI process, and our NWEA Mapping process for formative assessment- if we get the four of those in place and follow them- it will be an institutional change, a level 2 change that we’re working on and it will take awhile

*What was the main reason you became a superintendent?*

Because I thought I could do it better than the ones I had seen- don’t you think the same thing?- bottom line is I started out as a teacher- I was a teacher for 3 years and I thought- holy cow- I think I can be a better principal than my principal was- so I was only a teacher for 3 years and I have been an administrator for almost 35 years- Principal for 12-14 years, assistant superintendent for 9 years, and superintendent for 14 years-

*What are the major causes of stress in your position?*

I think the biggest strain that you have is initiating a change you want in relation to programs- and then getting everyone to follow you and you work your way through them- so I guess what I am saying is prepping people so that they are motivated to take the next step is certainly the biggest issue that causes you stress because you can live or
die on those hills- I used to real upset when angry people came into the office- but I have learned to pigeon hole that kind of stuff into individual boxes- when there are letters to the editor and stuff we have come to understand that that usually represents a half of a percent of the people at the most- most of the time- so- we’ll take the criticism and learn how to deal with that and move on-

*If you were to leave a superintendent position, what would be your primary reason for leaving?*

The truth of the matter is- I had a conversation with the board the other day- I will be 65in May- and I have been on a two year contract- I said I want to let my contract with you expire and then year to year because I think that is fair to you and it is what I need at this time- and then I went on to say to them that I have a lot of friends who have been superintendents and they said that one day they woke up and said- I just don’t want to do this anymore- and I said to my board that that day has never happened for me and I don’t anticipate it happening anytime soon- but someday it will and I will let you know when that day comes and until then- we have a lot of work to do and I have a lot of initiatives that I want to put in place and get solidified and institutionalized and figure it will take at least two years minimum- after that- I will have to figure out what I want to do because I have a lot of advocational interests-

**Interview #2**

*So the first question is to just describe your experience as a superintendent? To describe your current position, your length of tenure, circumstances around your hiring, your predecessor’s departure-*

So you want specifically my path to a superintendent or what led up to that?

*That would be terrific*

I will start with the current and work backwards- I will start with when I became a superintendent and then we can explore what came before that-I was in Palmdale School District which is in the Antelope Valley kind of where the space shuttle lands- I was a principal at the time of a dual immersion school. I heard over the mountain pass, about 15 minutes away, there was an instructional position as assistant superintendent in curriculum and instruction. I applied for that position in a very small rural district, and had I known much about the district, I would have truthfully been much more reluctant to apply. It turned out fine- so that is good- I was interested in moving to the district level- and I knew in Palmdale there was already a lot of top brass already in place that were well established and had years ahead of them so I was probably not going to move up in Palmdale. I saw this as a good opportunity to move into the district level at a young age- I believe I was 37 or 38 at the time- so I grabbed it and I applied. It was a pretty
thorough process for an asst superintendent- it should be anyway- but it was pretty thorough and I thought- this is interesting- I interviewed with the board- which in my experience is not so common- actually for an asst superintendent job- I thought at the time that the board was studying me quite intently- but I didn’t think a whole lot about it- so I moved to the district- Asst superintendent of curr/inst- and principal of the primary school- it was a very small district so you wore several hats- In short order- I realized the board was at odds with the superintendent- basically that district is in the history books- I have seen it- as to what not to do when you unify- what they did was they didn’t fund unification- the didn’t fund their building- but they unified without a place to put high schoolers- so that put a lot of challenges and fight and difficulties and everything between everyone- you know with scarce resources- At some point- the board decided I was the answer to that- or at least the present superintendent was not the answer- so about a month before a major bond election that was supposed to fund unification- I think they thought I could maybe alter the course of the election by coming in- I think they basically thought I was pretty friendly and decently well liked and thought- she could probably throw this- I was put in way too late- in terms of the election for sure- and there was already active opposition and it wasn’t going pass- there were people out there actively saying vote no, vote no- and so I became superintendent- I think was one dark rainy December- I think it was the same meeting that they fired my boss- there was an attorney there that said- we are going to hire you- do you accept- I said- your know with a dark feeling in the stomach- yes- I guess- and that is how it started- any questions on that before I move on?

No

That was a very stormy district- just difficult- the high school they finally built- none of it was approved- it was just a mess- I think given what we had to deal with- I did a decent job of establishing relationships- before long- somebody from- a recruiter that I knew well called me and said- we need to get you out of there- that place is a hornet’s nest- and that was true- so I said great- where am I going- He said- how about Keppel- which was about 30 minutes across the valley- it was still within driving distance of my home- it was double the size of the district- which is what I liked- I like to double the size as I progress- I went from 2,000 to 4,000- It was a needy district and so it met my needs and was a good fit- so for the first time- I was in place that I had chosen to be and felt was a really good fit- I did that for four years and then- I wrote a book about superintendents and did like 50 interviews- I came to the conclusion- one of the questions was what is the right length of tenure for a superintendent- which everyone said was about 5 years- no more than 7- so my fourth year- I thought- my own kids are out of high school, they are leaving the nest, I am going to leave the nest- so I went to Monrovia which is about 10,000 students and that is where I am now in my second year.

What can you tell about your predecessor’s departure in these last two positions?
They were both long time superintendent and retired- they were both institutions and very stables- I have the theory that a board hires a superintendent very much different than the person who preceeded them- so with that –I am pretty verbal and pretty effervescent and both of them were pretty quiet- known for listening- counseling- one came up as a psychologist- In Keppel- here is Monrovia- they came up through the personnel office- both were very much peacemakers- take you in their office- they would close their mouths and you would talk- so in that sense- they really didn’t really create the speed of change that the board was looking for- so they probably brought me in to facilitate change- both were- the one in Monrovia- she was encouraged to retire- she had been in the seat for twenty years- in my mind about 12 years too many- and the board was ready.

*In educational terms- movers and shakers- which it sounds like describes your personality- does that personality trait tend to lower the length of tenure.*

With my belief system- I think there are two types of superintendent- one will stay in a dist for 20 years- I really appreciate those people- I think they provide stability- so that’s great- others see that there are limitations in their effectiveness after a certain amount of years and say it is time to go- while others- I would say the third group is very personally motivated to be successful and they might not have the motives that are best for public schools- I am thinking about the LA county Superintendent Darlene Robles- is an example of someone who comes in- does a fantastic job- establishes relationships- then looks around and says- I have been here 7 years- I am going to move on to the next challenge- and does so thoughtfully- that is what I hope to be.

*Moving on to personal factors that influence superintendent turnover- what do you see as factors that inhibit your effectiveness as a superintendent?*

The board structure is really a challenge– I think for all superintendents.

*Do you have 5 or 7 member board?*

I have a five- I have had 3 five member boards so far- I think there are always people on the board who are very thoughtful and in it for the right reasons- at least a third of the board has been in it for some sort of personal gain or notoriety- so I think that structure- because it does lead to notoriety and personal agendas do come up- You said limitations?

*Yes- things that keep you from doing your job- from your perspective-*

I think the laws are in place for the right reasons- some tie our hands but I think they are mostly there for the right reasons- I think we run out of time- I think a lot of us are unwilling to delegate- so you really have to work on not letting your own desire for
control get in the way of your ability to effectively lead- but I would say the board structure has always been my biggest challenge- mostly because I am not a politician- I will do what I think is right rather than what I think will make the board happy- and that always leads into some difficulties- especially with those members who have their own agendas- They want a personal favor- I say no- and they are mad

*Have you seen personal traits of other superintendents that have seen their tenures shortened due to particular personal traits that they have?*

Yes- definitely- some of them you have a difficult board, and that is just the luck of the draw- I would say that 1/3 of all boards very difficult to work with- some of them you have to be principled- like I will say- I am not going to accept bribes- if I see a board member accepting bribes then I am not going to go along with that- so I see some of my fellow superintendants making decisions like that that put them at risk- but more often than not it’s not listening effectively to the board- it’s one thing if a board member says for example- one of my fellow superintendants had an incident where a board member came to her and asked to see the personnel file of a particular employee- and she was correct in denying that request- but I think her approach was bull-headed- where if you listen and you say- let’s talk about why you want to see it and see what other info we could gather that would keep you from getting into that file because that is inappropriate- but I think she basically said- you people are always asking for things that are inappropriate and I am not going to do it- and I am going to be speaking tonight to female leaders about distinctions but her husband can say- I am not going to do it with a smile on his face and he gets away with it- where she tried it and got fired- I don’t think that is male/female- I think it is just different people and she couldn’t nuance that.

*Governance factors is what we will move on to now- describe your current relationship with your board- ha sit always been characterized that way- if not what caused the change?*

I have a really smart board- and I love them for that because they get it- I think we have a very respectful and thoughtful relationship- as personal agenda type pieces weave their way into our experiences, I am less liked by the ones who want the favors that I am not going to grant- We have 3 presently who are willing to ask for something that the common person is not privy to or won’t get- as I say no- some come around to respect the decision- I have one who is still hung up on the fact that I said I am not hiring who you want me to hire- the superintendent makes hiring decisions- the board can approve or deny but that is my decision- and I am not going to hire your neighbor- that has led to some difficulty-

*Are there any suggestions you would make that would enhance the school board’s ability to function as one with superintendent?*
I am not sure- is that a superintendent training question or a board training question- I don’t think it is the boards job to work in unison with me- it is my job to figure out where the board stands and represent them- so – I would say #1- it is my job to see where they are on the various issues- and when I see that they are divided- then I need to get out and fully massage that before the board meeting so that I understand before I put it on the agenda what the issue is going to cause as far as board response- For w=example- we have a resolution right now before the board that they are divided on . The board president and I were talking yesterday about whether to put it on the agenda or not.- we need to hear the dialogue- people need to hear why they disagree- let’s put it on- but I don’t really expect them to agree with me- what I do expect is if there are too many points of disagreement, then it is time to for me to consider doing something else- but they are in charge

Besides the school board- Do you see any other special interest groups that are trying to exert influence on your decisions or on the structure of the school dist?

Yes- but they are pretty easy to discard because they don’t make policy-I think the school board in all in my experience is the big lion in the room- we did enact one- I told you it was dysfunctional- in that case we had groups trying to disrupt the board- to cause them to be ineffective- which they were- like dominating the board meeting, recording the meeting, agitating the members, things like that.

Environmental Factors- what do you see is the primary reasons superintendents leave their positions?

I think that as soon as people can retire they do- because it is a tough job- and CA system at least is set up that after so many years- it is just not beneficial to stay on the job- you can make ton more money as a retired superintendent doing something else- so there is the retirement group- there are people who- a few of my colleagues- of the people I know- about 5-10% can’t make it because they can’t work with the board- they are too bull headed to understand that the board is in charge- and the rest- I see them moving-leaping as they want to personally be successful- some just put in their time- 7-10 years and then move on to a new district- and they don’t seem to go very far- we all change seats but we all still know each other-

What is your prediction of superintendent turnover in your state?

I think it is less than it used to be- I think large urban districts will have higher turnover- but I think the rest of us who have more normal sized districts- I would say we have about 3 years- but the recruiters- in my experience- I have been here 1.5 years and I have already been approached by recruiters- I know their expectation is that after year 3 I start looking-not that that would be my expectation- but theirs- so they start hammering you- because they know you are on a 3-year contract-
Would you accept your current position again? Why?

Yes-It is a great solid stable district with a lot of things that match my expertise- they have some real difficulties with language learners which is a specialty of mine- There is a lot of mission type work for me here- like discovering the underserved and serving them- so it feels good-

The main reason you became a superintendent?

You know if you ask a room of superintendents this question they will- 1/3 to ½ of them will say someone else told them they should do it- like mine- I thought I was going to be an assistant superintendent and the board kind of threw me into it- and I loved it so I stayed-

So moving from building principal to central office- what was your impetus behind that-

It’s funny you should ask- this probably won’t apply to anyone else in the world except me- but I had dual immersion school that was a magnet school- ½ day English ½ day Spanish K-6- but the district also collapsed their SPED program and put 4 classes of ED on my campus. So I had about 1000 kids and trying to manage the dual immersion program and then they put ED on there and honestly- I loved the ED kids and I was good with them- but they broke my heart- and after a while they were bigger than me and they could take me and we were having to use physical restraints and it was hard- so I thought- this work is for somebody else- I couldn’t see things getting better and it was just too sad.

Major causes of stress?

One thing I keep saying here in Monrovia is the only person who is going to manage the superintendents rest relaxation and exercise is the superintendent. People are willing to fill every moment you have- and unless you tell them not to- they will- so I would say- my day starts everyday at 6:00 and I don’t get home before 6:30. But right now I have meetings every single hour on the hour between now and late March when I am having back surgery-so it just- the pace and you know if your board is not completely settled- which they are usually not- then there is some stress with that.

Looking ahead- if you were ever going to leave the superintendent position, what would cause you to leave it?

When the board starts to do stupid things that are not good for kids.- that would definitely do it- In my first job- I was flat out asked to do things that were not good for kids- which is why when a chance came to take another position- I took it- As long as I can do good work- I would stay-
Interview #3

Describe your experience as a superintendent

Qualitatively or quantitatively?

Either way is fine- This is the qualitative portion of my research

My first experience as a superintendent was in Simi valley- I was actually Asst. superintendent but on and off I was acting superintendent- because the board there had gotten a lot of change and dysfunction- we had gone through 7 superintendents in 3 years or 4 years- I don’t know- so I got a little bit of grounding that way- I then went to another district with about 16-17,000 students, a k-12 district- about 87% free and reduced lunch- a majority Hispanic- kindergarten kids came to school with limited or no English, just to give you a feel for the district- I was there for 4.5 years- I had 14 different board members there- I had 3 board members die- 2 of cancer 1 of a heart attack- so we never really had a consistent board- the longest I ever had the same 5 members was for a 16 month period- in my second year- so we were constantly changing- Then we had an election- and the incumbents didn’t do so well- the mayor got his people in- we kind of had a mayor against the school district- the board was trying to stay out of the politics but the mayor kept pushing it- so he got his people in and a week later I was gone- so I actually retired- I was 55 at the time- I retired- went to Pepperdine- helped them get them doctorate program in school leadership started- I was program director-did that for 4 years- then they wanted to make the position a tenured position- which I understood- they wanted to make the position in policy and administration- which was my doctorate degree- but I just felt like I wasn’t in a place in my life that was what I wanted to do- I loved working at the university I still chair students there- I still teach a 1 credit class- but I just didn’t want to- I didn’t like- if it was 10 years in front of it- I might of done it- but the dean and I talked and I decided to leave- and the next day I got a call about being the interim superintendent for San Gabriel- so I went and met the board and July 1, 2006 became the interim superintendent- and somehow-0 when they asked me if I wanted the job- I said no- I am going to go back to retirement- so 5 years later I am still here- the interim label went away that September- So San Gabriel is an interesting district- it is small- at least for southern CA- we have 8 schools- 5400 kids- it has been fun—it is the smallest place that I have worked- a majority of the kids are – about 55% are Asian heritage- with a majority of those being Cantonese- while everyone speaks Mandarin- there is this Chinese class and political issue with a (tai won chek vs Cantonese political ) difference in town- political action- a significant group of Vietnamese- our district office sits across from the San Gabriel Mission, the original mission in the system- the found of Los Angeles came from that mission- There are enough Vietnamese in the area that they do a Mass on Sunday nights in Vietnamese- so that is kind of legacy of all that went on in southeast Asia- about 37% of kids are Hispanic- but the community is more
divided- it is kind of divided by race- but there is a north side and a south side- the north side is a very wealthy chunk- white, Hispanic , Asian- the country club side of town- that is where the money people are- although there are some people in the south side with money- and then there is the Valley boulevard area- the Chinese commerce area- which on any given night is a cleaner southern ** version of Hong Kong- it is quite astonishing- then there is a very poor section of town- which is mainly Hispanic and white- we then have a little Japanese, a little pacific islander, - the power structure in town old white and male- although that is changing- on city councils and school board- we are starting to see more female board members- we have one Asian board member- This is an older community- but very desirable because of its close proximity to downtown Los Angeles- the school district- despite over 50% of the students are title I qualified- that is just not the identity of the school district- nobody would every describe San Gabriel as a title I district- although outsider might- I think that is a reason for the high achievement scores that we have- it is kind of how you see yourself-

Are you considered urban, then?

The community considers itself suburban, but it is really both- it just isn’t in the middle of LA- just an older suburban community with small homes on larger lots- it really is a mix

Any comments on your predecessor’s departure?

There was a longtime superintendent who had been here 18 years- and most of that time it was a k-8 dist- he helped with the unification about 15 years ago- about 2 years before I came- he had a heart attack and then a stroke- so they named the asst superintendent for educational services as interim- then when it was obvious he wasn’t going to return- they appointed her on a one year term to be superintendent- that year- when you hear the board members and principals describe it- was a very contentious year- this lady was not superintendent bound, had not superintendent training so she had a tendency to , in public, tell the board members off- and as board members are apt to do- prone to micro managing- she would say- I am not going to give you that information- I don’t think you should be bothered with that- so the board took some actions before I got there to create advisory committees that would report to them directly-0 but they didn’t let any administrators to be on it- just classified, certified, parents, community members- they voted themselves on the cabinet- basically on all administrative functions- so we have had some board turnover since I have been here- so the newer members were not there when all that happened- so they are trying to keep it going- but it isn’t quite so closed as it once was-

What are some factors that inhibit you effectiveness as a superintendent?
There is always the board- looking at your role in a superintendent- especially in a small dist- people look to you to provide instructional leadership- so one of the things that happened with this board- we got a member on who is kind of pushy- and we have a majority of the board on now who was not here when I was hired- and they just go off in a different direction- so when you don’t have board stability- which is better word than just the board- because- really except for one board member who has been contentious- here the rest have been really good- but when they change- they all have their own priorities- studies show that when you have aboard for a consistent amount of time- you can move forward- but when you have that kind of change- starting stopping- and something gets left in the wayside- obviously the budget in CA has been very difficult- he had to cut back the help in this office and the board still wants what they want- so I have to go through my own email and sort through it- which was originally done by an assistant- but now I have to do my own-

In your experience have you seen any personal skills or characteristics of superintendents that either extend their tenure or shorten it?

I think watching superintendents- a couple of things- 1- being a superintendent is about people- and superintendents that last longer are really good at relationships- and I do think that listening- especially with board changes- you have to fundamentally pay attention- I think that superintendents who get in trouble are those you don’t pay attention- to their board or to their budget- I have seen superintendents who have put total trust in their business people and get in trouble when the business end goes wrong- the big thing is not being astute enough in listening to know what your board really wants

Describe your current relationship with your board- has it always been characterized as it is now- if not what has changed?

I think what causes it to change are the people- so 2 years ago- it was a different board- it had a president who was very difficult to work with- a former manager of an energy company- he was the micro-manager- he is one who really wanted to run the school district- He would say I am the board president so I am in charge- he would sign things and do things and I would say you are in charge of what you are in charge of and I am in charge of what I am in charge of and we all have our roles and responsibilities- but he took a tremendous amount of time- we just spent a year and half untangling bad advice from an attorney- So except for a member who does not want to be a member of a board- That is one thing I have seen from superintendents I have worked with- especially young ones- is that they want to do things for individual board members- What I have found is that if you doing something for one, that means you are into doing something for somebody else- a board member might not agree with it- CA law is pretty clear that boards can only work as a board- although some board members are not always clear about that- so this board- other than the one member who is running for a different
elected position—this board is a pretty good board—pretty respectful—they are pretty much split in their political beliefs but once a decision is made—we move forward—

Any suggestions you could make that could enhance a school board’s ability to work with the superintendent?

I think one of the things—I have worked with a board consultant who works with the board—I let the board choose who they want—and one of the things that we did was to clarify what is important to the individual board members and what their styles are—one of the things we found here was that everyone was high on information needs—and although all were high on information—we needed to clarify things better—just because things were going well for one person didn’t necessarily mean they were going well for others—so we set some ground rules and checkpoints—like are these communications meeting your needs—are you getting what you wanted—and with new boards—you have to revisit these each time—if you don’t—then boards can tend to be fractured in their attempts. Picture a river and you are on a raft and a bend is approaching and you have to decide which way to go—and every time there is an election, or a board member dies, a member falls off the raft and a new one jumps in the water swims to the raft and there is a lot of splashing that goes on in the transition. So you have to have some towels—and at the next bend in the river—which way does this group want to go—

What are the primary reasons superintendents leave their positions?

Certainly retirement is one of them—a number of people move on who want more responsibility and more pay—In my experience—that is especially true of men with families—in this area at least—women tend to stay longer and tend to be more—you become the head mother and such—also when superintendents leave it is because they have gotten sideways with their board—and usually because the board has changed—it is like I have been here 5 years and I am on 8 board members—and depending how the elections go next week—I could easily be on my 10 or 11th board members here before it is over—that really does catch some superintendents, when the board changes—sometimes it is not a good fit anymore and sometimes you don’t get to find out if it is a good fit because of the politics of it—and I also think that some superintendents just get burned out on it too—women tend to also do a district—stay there—although you see a little different now—but women seem to be a little older—they get to their superintendent a little later—due to children or other reasons—

If given another opportunity—would you accept this position again? Why?

Yes—specifically accept the San Gabriel position again—I will be retiring again in another year—my children are all grown—my kids just don’t think I will retire again—they tell me something else will suck me in again—
What was the main reason you became a superintendent?

When I started teaching was 1968- and whole civil rights era- I went to USC- in fact the whole watts riots happened when I was at USC- and I got involved with some groups doing recovery in the city and found that I really enjoyed helping children. So I changed my whole direction and became an elementary teacher and had some horrible experiences with principals- I was ready to quit- in fact I had taken the LSATs  and quit and go to law school- My first principal was an alcoholic- she was awful and mean spirited- the second principal was a do nothing- sitting there just waiting to retire- teachers didn’t collaborate- pretty good teaching staff but everyone was miserable- and I was especially miserable- I knew I had made a mistake- in fact my husband was a teacher at this time too- he subsequently became a principal- I went back to school- and finishing my master’s degree- and meet up with a great professor who talks me into the administrative credentials program- and then we got a great principal assigned to our school and I thought- that’s what I need to do is become a principal because a great principal is everything to a school.

Interview #4

What is your experience as a superintendent?

This is my first superintendent job and I have been in ** since July 1, 2004. So this is my seventh year.

Describe to me if you can the circumstances surrounding your hiring and if you can, the circumstances around your predecessor's departure.

I was in a neighboring district in the same County. I was actually not looking when this job came open but when the job did come open I was encouraged to apply. So I did so. My predecessor had been here seven years and got caught up in a controversy that really centered around three things. One was the high school math curriculum. One was the high school schedule. And third it was anything but a straw but it definitely broke the camel’s back, and that was a capital construction bond that was not adequate to cover all of the perceived commitments that the district had made. For example, the community felt that the district was going to be able to use the $33 million that they passed along with state matching funds to do a series of three projects, the last of which centered at the high school. They got about two thirds of the way through and realize that they were going to have big-time money issues. There were a variety of reasons for that, most of which were unavoidable but the community just went ballistic and my predecessor decided at that point that it was time to look for greener pastures.

What are some factors that might inhibit your effectiveness as a superintendent?
There are essentially a couple of factors that are front and foremost on my mind right now. One is collective bargaining with teachers. This state happens, and I am not real familiar with Nevada, but ** has a very strong teachers union and it is affiliated with the NEA and boy can I tell you, they are a force to be reckoned with. Most of their agenda, even though a lot of it is driven through their state organization, the local leadership really has a lot to do with how that is played out. And we have had a very difficult relationship ever since I have been here. We've got a guy who was president of the ** Education Association up until this year who was hard to deal with. He has stepped aside, yet he is still the lead bargainer for the teachers. So even though the guy who replaced him as president is much easier to get along with and reason with at the table, his predecessor is the voice. Their style is to push, push, push. They take a strike vote early on and will take us right down to the 11th hour the day before school starts and so it has been very difficult. So that is probably first and foremost one of the biggest challenges for a superintendent in the state of **. Another is not unique to ** but has become a bigger issue this legislative session and that is the budget. Our state is facing a 5.1 to $5.2 billion deficit and that is after making significant cuts for the current school year, some of which happened midyear. So we are in the process of having to cut about $3 million and we are not alone. Districts statewide are really struggling.

*Have you seen any personal traits or characteristics of other superintendents that have either extended their tenure or cause it to be shortened?*

I think on the positive side people who are open and inclusive in communication have an easier time. That requires a tolerance for messiness, because both of us know that when you open the process up it tends to get messy on the part of staff in the community. So that is one trait that I have seen is essential. Another is to work the board or work with the board to develop trust in them as a superintendent. My own personal experience with that has been it takes looking for opportunities for the board to get out there pursue areas of interest for them. What I mean by that is when I see superintendents who try to keep very tight control on their board and limit their access to schools and limit their access to putting forth ideas that they would like to have considered boards give very frustrated when that happens. What I have tried to do is try to open up our schools to them and by agreement with her principles and department heads is when a board member makes contact with you I want a heads up but I also want you to be responsive to them. So it is kind of a matter of working with the board to ensure that they understand that you are the guy that you want them to go through but at the same time that they have the freedom to go visit schools and visit classrooms and also that if they have an idea that they think is worth pursuing that they can put that out there. And that I will take it seriously instead of trying to figure out why it won't work but that I will do some research and get back to them. I think that is a formula for me has worked and that has also worked with other superintendents that I have seen.
Describe your current relationship with your school board. Has it always been characterized this way if not what has caused it change?

I have a very strong relationship with my board currently. My board changed my third year to a job from a board that had been placed when the bond issue blew up all left. Some of them resigned midterm, some elected not to run again but over an 18 month period of time there was 100% board turnover. And that took a ton of work for the first year or so because I had people coming on who had strong opinions and yet did not know the system and didn't know much how public schools operated. They thought they knew, but they did not have much in the way of information. So I spent about a year making myself a real available to them and making sure that I was listening as much if not more than I was talking. I was just trying to make sure that if they went to a workshop I went with them. If they went to a meeting I went with them. So it was a matter of building relationships with them and also educating them but doing it in a way that respected what their interests were and what their concerns were. It has worked well. My current board is pretty energetic which is a good thing for the district, sometimes it is of the challenging thing for the superintendent because they can create a lot of work for you.

Any suggestions you could make that would enhance a school boards ability to work with the superintendent?

One of the things that we did was we had a couple of retreats where we brought in people from the school Directors Association to talk about how to develop operating agreements, what the role was with the school board cut versus the role of the superintendent and then we revisit those agreements annually. So that has been helpful. Another thing probably the most helpful thing has been when I heard that when people were going to step off the board it was helpful to talk with them about how if they resigned midterm, it gave their other board members a chance to recruit and fill their position with somebody who fit with the team and that has just been incredibly important. What it avoids is people who see an opening and have a single issue that they are concerned about so they run on that platform.

In your experience have you observed any outside interest groups trying to exert influence on the structure of the school district?

We had a big blow up here my first year and it was timely and resulted in some very important things happening but I wished it had played out a little differently. This community has become increasingly Latino over the past 15 years. Our student population currently is majority Latino. That has been very challenging for the white non-Latino community to accept and to deal with. And so are Hispanic Latino population toward the end of my first year here, got very upset about a couple of issues that happened at her high school that came in and just came out in force and we had some
long board meetings and dozens and dozens of people lined up to speak and tell about how they had been discriminated against, how terrible their experience in the school district had been, and some of them were talking about 20 to 30 years ago. Some of them were talking about more recent issues so that that is definitely a group that exercised considerable pressure on us. It was a good thing but it was also a difficult thing to get through. We have also had parents of higher capable students who are convinced that most of our time is spent trying to make sure that our low achieving students achieve standard. They have come to the board a number of times with a litany of complaints. We have groups in the community who are concerned about the quality of our school lunch programs, who have come to our board with complaints in the past and both those groups both the high and the healthy schools groups, we have tried to be responsive and so they have as a result of their complaints exercise some control over how we have improved and those are good things. So those are probably the three biggest special interest groups that have pushed us over the last few years.

*In your experience what you see is the product primary reason the superintendent's leave their positions?*

I think typically they get crosswise with the board. And I think them leaving is a result of them getting crosswise with different community groups. I think we are all living on borrowed time, so to speak, so the longer you stay around the more people you have to say no to and that ends up catching up with a lot of people I think. The other thing that happens is that people end up making decisions, single decisions, that end up coming back to bite them. For example we’ve had people around here who have tried to take on pretty popular high school principals and it has come back to bite them and they end up leaving. Again my predecessor there was a perception, and I think it was wrong to a large degree, but it was a perception nonetheless that there was financial mismanagement. Those kind of things tend to push people out.

*What is your prediction superintendent turnover in your state?*

I think people will continue to stay around five years or less in most districts and in particular large urban districts. We have seen a lot of turnover in the last 5 to 6 years in **and it is just untenable**, **has more stability in those districts are very difficult to maintain a job for any length of time that allows you to get much in the way of leverage.**

*If you had another opportunity would you accept her current position again? Why?*

Yes this is been a great opportunity for me is just large enough district that I been able to do some things that my colleagues in smaller districts have not been able to be involved in. It is very diverse from the standpoint of our Latino population and that makes it unique in **. So that has been just a tremendous learning experience. And I have had a chance work with great staff and a number of very talented board members.
What is the main reason he became the superintendent?

I was kind of looking for the next step. I had been assistant superintendent for seven or eight years and at the time I was hired I was an assistant superintendent in my district. The superintendent said one of these days you are going to get to the point to where you look at what I'm doing and think I could do a whole lot better. And when that happens that's your cue that you're ready for the next step and that's exactly what happened.

What is the major causes of stress in your position?

I think you end up working just ungodly hours and you're trying to respond to a variety of different constituent groups. Trying to keep your ear to the ground and become aware of issues before they pop up so that you can get ahead of them. Financial constraints and trying to figure out how you're going to streamline the budget yet maintain the capacity to move forward.

If you are to leave the superintendent position, what would be your main reason for leaving?

I think my next step is a larger district and I am interested in doing that.

Interview #5

Describe your experience as superintendent

Meaning where and how long and those types of things.

Yes

I am in my seventh year as superintendent of ** School District. This is the only place I have been a superintendent. I was an assistant superintendent in this district and before that an assistant high school principal. My teaching experiences have taken me a lot of different places prior to coming to **. I have been in ** for 15 years. That’s kind of the pathway I followed here

What were the circumstances around your hiring? If you can, your predecessor’s departure?

Yes, he, I think, had had discussions with the board about me taking over for him and actually, he kind of quasi-retired into managing a construction project- we passed a bond here in our district and he really wanted to lead that project but realized that he didn’t want to do all the other work of a superintendent while he was managing that bond project. So, he told the board he was stepping out of the superintendent’s role and at...
What are some factors that might inhibit your effectiveness as a superintendent?

Just sort of looking at the external focus right now, I think anyone’s effectiveness is limited by the state of the economy and cuts and just the feeling that everybody seems to be collectively pointing their finger at education, not having to been able to attain what they hoped we would with No Child Left Behind and other things right here in my own state. So, it seems that we are getting a lot of collective frustration, or everybody’s angst and education is an easy one to pick on. And yet when I look at my own district, they are very supportive, very positive, loves the schools. I think another limiting factor on effectiveness is, and my primary focus would be on the learning success of students but there are a lot of distracters to that- today we have been pulled off most of the day by a parent who has been through most of the chain of command below us- this started as a bus issue- so it is a parent who has blown through transportation- blown through the building principal- blown through the assistant superintendent- and no we are getting a little legal advice because it is one of those things that has taken on a life of its own. So those kinds of things limit effectiveness. So I guess the challenge is to make each of those encounters that limit our effectiveness not be a factor that limits us. I think another thing on the superintendent’s role, or my board’s expectation of me that I am the person out there networking and making connections in the community and making sure I understand how we fit into the bigger picture of our community. And I don’t think that is a limiting factor, it’s just part of what makes a job with a lot of demands and a lot of competing stakeholders- they are all important.

Have you seen any personal traits, skills, characteristics of superintendents that either extend their tenure or cause it to be shortened?

I think communication is one of the key factors, and communication at every level from the people you work directly with to the community and in our case, kind of the extended community – because in the city of **, there are actually 5 districts and we are the smallest of the five- and we are very closely interconnected with the other districts around us- so that is why I am saying that even beyond my own ** community, it is communication at a city-wide level as well. But I think that is what can help the most or hinder the most, is making very clear what the strategic focus is of the school district and understanding the context enough that we know we fit into that, and how do we communicate very clearly what our goals are for students and how we are accomplishing those and how we hope to work with other around us everywhere from our own parents to our own employees to carry out that goal, even though there are lots of things that want to pull you off in different directions that you remain really clear about where you want to go for the education of kids.

Describe your current relationship with your school board- has it always been characterized this way- if not, what caused it to change?
I have been very fortunate in inheriting a very stable school board and although during my tenure, I think, two of them have moved on, because they had been on the board so long, it was time to go on to other things, we have replaced those with equally good people. And the board continues to be and has the mainstay of one board member has been on for 28 years and he quite the person who just get it and understands that the board is really there to support policy and procedure and good decisions- but they really trust the administration and we just have a really good feeling among them- between them and me and my assistant superintendents where they understand what our jobs are they really let us do our jobs and we provide them with good information and let them feel that they have the say on the policies that guide us. So it is a good relationship and it has been.

Any suggestions that could possibly enhance the relationship between the school board and the superintendent?

Not my own- from the former superintendent, who did a wonderful job here in **, he always talked about care and nurturing your school board- care and feeding of the school board, so to speak. So his advice was to treat them well and take care of them- and make sure there is the time away- we do a board retreat in the fall and spring- we go usually to an outdoor education center, something like that- some place that is not expensive and close at hand- and quiet- where you feel like you have gone away some place- to have those times to have the longer conversations- not the ones, we don’t make decisions on those days but we talk a lot about the bigger issues – and us the time for good thought and communication and that sort of thing. We carve out those times with the board.

Have you had any experience with outside interest groups trying to exert their influence on the governance of the school district?

There is a ** Policy Council at work right now, which is, I don’t really know where they generated from, so to speak, they sound very official at first blush but they are not. And they are taking data here in our community and wielding it however they see fit to meet their own needs- although they are not coming specifically to my school board, they don’t come to meetings, but we are seeing messaging out there, directed at sort of this feeling that we’ve got a lot of detractors about education. The other thing that I am pretty fortunate about is we really don’t get people coming to our board meetings very often, other than maybe they are there to do a little presentation, but we really don’t get the people who are coming in the door with an axe to grind. And I think part of that is we work really hard at the district office to try to get solutions for people before they feel like they are so frustrated that they are just going to go to the school board. The minute we get the phone call of “I want to know who your school board president is” and my office personnel is very well trained that with a very friendly tone and conversation- “Can I ask you what your concerns are?” Most often people unload those concerns and so
it allows us to get to work on it immediately rather than having them thinking that they just have to hold up all this emotion and then come lay it all out at a school board meeting. So, it is rare when we get somebody show up to a meeting that we don’t know exactly who they are and why they are there. In terms of, oh yeah, we know they are bringing the Boy Scouts tonight, otherwise it really causes ripples when someone walks in and we are like “Who is that?” – actually our public information officer sort of stands and greets people in the hallway and if there is anyone we weren’t expecting, finding out if they needed to speak to the school board about anything- because I know some of our neighboring districts, the normal thing is to have a lot of people show up. I think our community believes that our school board is doing a good job is doesn’t need to try to get their attention.

**What are the primary reasons you think superintendents leave their positions?**

I think if you are feeling that you are not effective in your district or community, I think there is a lot of negative direct- you know I can bear, sort of at the state level things that don’t seem to favor education too much, but I don’t think I could bear that very long in my own district. Like I said, my district, they are good. They are supportive. They pass levies. But I think that if you feel you don’t have a good relationship with your board or with your principals, or if you have too many parent groups that are unhappy or those kinds of things- because goodness knows that job is too big of a job to continue to do it if you don’t feel rewarded, even there are tough things that you deal with, but if you don’t in the end feel like things are going well for the kids or basically everyone around you kind of understands why we do things the way we do. But on the other hand, we have spent a lot of time developing community engagement in my tenure here. And so I feel that we have such good support from everything from our local church community to our businesses- you know they kind of get that we have a lot of kids and families who struggle, and if we all pitch in there together to work on behalf of these kids- and it has helped us get some good grants. So that is all it takes to reward me is the feeling that the community is together on this and there is a good level of caring going on.

**What is your prediction of superintendent turnover in your state?**

Every year, I don’t know what the percentage is, there are a lot of us, like I am within range to retire whenever I choose to. And I haven’t decided that I am ready to quit the job and retire- and a lot of my colleagues are kind of in the same place, really close to retirement age, in fact my husband is retiring this year just because he has done it for more years than I have and he is ready for something else. So that is part of the turnover in **and the other thing that is happening is our small rural districts are losing a lot of population, and a lot of those jobs have become half time superintendents rather than full time. So they are great jobs for the retired superintendents who don’t want to fully give up working but do it at a slower pace. So I think the number of superintendent jobs in **,
if you equate it with full time is down, and I think the retirement age is another factor and then there are a few of those that move on just because they have too much tension between themselves and their board or between themselves and their community. But I don’t have too much of that going on here in my local area.

Would you re accept your current position if you had to do it all over again?

I would. I have learned a lot and I feel that every year I get so much wiser, that is probably why part of it is like I don’t really want to retire yet because I am still learning a lot of how to do this job even better than I have done it before. So, there is just so much that you can do to continually learn about what’s going on, there is always that challenge that is ahead of you. But yes, I would do it over again. I will keep doing it a little longer than I need to because it is just really fulfilling work.

What was the main reason you became a superintendent?

I never would have thought I would have done anything like that, in fact I never really thought I would go after being a principal. But part of it- so my husband is also a district superintendent- and he went to work right out of college and was on the fast track- he taught for 3-4 years and then he had his first vice-principal job and then very quickly his first principal job and I stayed home with the kids off and on- but I need to get the certification thing, so I was plugging away on miscellaneous credits and he said “why don’t you take something aimed at getting your principal’s certification then you have another ace in your pocket.” I was kind of like are you crazy, why would I want that- but took a class on his advice and kind of got hooked. So I would say that is the way it has been for me. Because once I was a middle school principal in another district, and I thought I would stay there until I retired because it seemed so perfect, and then I got invited to look at a job here in ** and then… I knew the superintendent thought I could sort of become a superintendent if I wanted to, so I have had just a lot of really good mentors along the say. I would have to say that they convinced me that it could be a worthwhile thing to do. Don’t just say you won’t do it- take a look at it and see at each step whether it would seem fulfilling.

What are the major causes of stress in your job?

The first couple of years- a couple of personnel issues that really rose to a pretty high level. A couple of teachers that I had a pretty strong feeling needed to go but they were teachers that had been in the system quite a while- and then one of them got cross-ways with some discipline related things and it was a good opportunity to take full advantage of that. But anyways, it sort of consumed the first year of my superintendency. And that does not feel like a very positive thing when you are embroiled in that. So I know that that- personnel issues that come all the way up the line and have to do with somebody’s career is for me, personally, very stressful, because I would rather keep everybody happy,
but not to forsake what they are doing in the classroom with kids and not to forsake how they treat colleagues, and if they are cheating the system, then I am not going to go along with that kind of thing. So that is one, and along that same kind of line, at times it has seemed like a little bit of tough road with our teachers’ union, and probably because when we are at the table, they come with the mindset that at all costs, jobs should be preserved. So every once in awhile that comes up- in fact in the past year things have escalated with the union where it wasn’t very productive so I had somebody from our state level and from the ** Education Association, so from their side, I said you must have people in your state organization who do consulting on relationships and how you do productive work together even when you viewing a given dilemma from a different perspective. It took them a little while, I think it flabbergasted them that I would be suggesting that I would like them to find somebody from their own side if possible- actually- before I went down that road- I knew there was a very good person working for the ** that might do that kind of thing and finally, by the end of the summer, we sat down in several sessions, brainstorming how we would work together and maintain a productive conversation. And so this year it has been very good. And those are the kinds of things I think- why didn’t I figure that out a while ago- So that is the learning part for me that after a few years of trying things different ways all of the sudden something falls into place in not quite the way I would have thought it would and so I keep thinking that there are things that I could get just the right grasp on it and that too would be solved. As in every job you learn so much from doing and trying what you think is the right approach and if that doesn’t work then trying to do some reflection and soul searching as to what would be a different way to approach this that would work.

If you were to leave a superintendent position, what would be the main reason for leaving?

Retirement- I have grandkids and other interests that I would like to pursue- but it is just hard- I feel this is an environment that is not really big- our district office has 14 people who work here in the district office and so we are very close to each other so it is work, but it is friendships and all kinds of things- so when I leave it will be because I have decided that they need somebody new and fresh and I have got different things that I can do. And I don’t think that is going to be too far out there.

Interview #6

Describe your experience as a Superintendent.

Let’s see, in public administration I was superintendent/principal in the ** for 6 years, place called ** and then I was superintendent, that was a K-8 district. Then I was superintendent/high school principal in a K-12 district in **County, that’s just north of **. ** County is North of **. In fact my youngest daughter was born in **. Then I became the superintendent of the ** Unified School District down in ** County.
was for four years. See it went 6, 3, 4 and then I am currently superintendent of **Elementary School District in ** and I have been superintendent here for eleven years and just agreed to a 2 year extension for 2 more years.

Tell me something about the circumstances of your hiring there and your predecessors.

The retiring superintendent and I have known each other for a couple of decades. In fact I gave him some shit because he was doing, through the small schools association, boardsmanship, superintendent trainings in **. He came up for 3 school superintendents up in ** County to do training with the boards. I had known him before that. Within 6 months all 3 of the superintendents had new jobs and were out of there. And I said “good job, you are going to get us all fired. Way to go Al.” The problem when you tell boards things they don’t want to hear. I figured they would shoot the messenger no, they shot us.

But you were a little bit easier to hit, probably.

I was there.

What are some factors which might inhibit your effectiveness as a superintendent?

The number one is the relationship with the board. That is absolutely critical. If I may I would like to go back to an earlier question just briefly. I worked overseas for 10 years and I was essentially a superintendent but the schools were microscopic schools. I mean like 30, 40, 70 kids kind of thing. But I was the only administrator. Anyway, it’s that board relationship is absolutely critical because your vision for the district has to matchup the boards’ political vision for the district also. In districts where I felt the urgency to move on it is clearly the relationship with the board. There is other things to it cuz I was doing the small town thing for a long time. By the small town thing I mean you don’t have much of a chance to hire your own people. You are hiring the wives of local farmers, local businessman, DA’s wife that kind of stuff. You don’t have a whole lot of flexibility with what you can do with staff. A bigger district has a lot more remoteness. It is not remoteness, it is very personal. You have to be pretty careful when you are dealing with your board. You have to quickly understand where the bodies are and then you have to decide if you have an issue and that’s the hill you willing to die on. And in close I found a hill to die on. I’m still right but I’m wrong in their sense. I was not a good fit for their community. They were right about that.

In your experience have you seen any personal traits or skills that have either extended a superintendent’s stay or caused it to be shortened?

Let me answer that in a couple of different ways. First of all, I think the superintendent must absolutely have a strong moral/ethical core. I have watched more idiot superintendents lose their jobs by stealing gas from the district pump, by having an affair with the school secretary, by just ridiculously, stupid things. And so I really think that having a moral/ethical core for the person, a system of beliefs, that makes them really a
family person, I think that that’s essential. You are talking to a guy that has been married for 40 years anyway. Secondly, you have to have a sense of humor. Even now with every decision that you make or everything you do, it ends up on Facebook somewhere. I had a parent the other day call me an asshole. I said it was in the job description. I think it is number 2. It is just the nature of the job. Have a sense of humor and don’t carry the stuff home with you. You have a job to do. It is not an easy job. If you want an easy job, don’t be a superintendent. I hope that helps you.

Describe your current relationship with your school board. Has it always been characterized as it is now or if not what has caused the change?

I have got the most unique situation in the world. The board that hired me is still in office. They have run virtually unopposed every year. I have the same board and I have the longest sitting board in ** County and someone says I may have the longest sitting board in **. My junior board member is in his fourth term. They still call him rookie. My senior board member I think is pushing 30 years maybe 32 years on the board. Combined they have something like 120 years of experience on that board. They are bright business people, 4 men and a woman. They are just wonderful and they’re no bullshit and they clearly understand the role of superintendent. They gave me my direction and then they support me in accomplishing that direction. I have less politics to deal with, with my board than I have in any other board I have experienced. It’s wonderful. It’s one of the reasons we have high test scores. It’s one of the reasons why we were able to have bonds passed and do all that stuff. The community likes what they see. We do not have controversy. I take that back. We have controversy. We deal with it in a professional way. You can’t have a school district and not have controversy.

Any suggestions you would make that would enhance the school board’s ability to work with a superintendent?

With this board? No. And I am reluctant to this whole board…I suppose in your research that you have read Michael Wert and Kurst and all those guys from Stanford and stuff…There is a professionalism to boards…Let me put it…Let’s try another way. In a previous district the biggest idiots on my board have ** School Board Association Superintendents Academy Certificates. They have taken all of the classes, they have heard all the stuff, but it didn’t take. I mean they did it but it didn’t change their view of what their role was on the board and what the superintendent’s role was. It makes that relationship uncomfortable. So I am reluctant to tell board members anything. They are elected officials which makes them by nature political animals. You’ve got to educate them. In my experience has been if I get a new one, I have done in several other districts; you take them to the small school districts conference or down to ** School Boards Association Conference. They do a good job of vetting them and explaining the legal do’s and don’ts and the nature of the role. Often I go with them. But I am with them mainly to talk at dinner and lunch about what they are learning and to share my experiences with them. They have to learn at their own pace and kind of dawn on them that what they thought they were elected for is not what they are actually going to be doing. I don’t like to tell board members what to do. They’re elected officials. It’s my
job to do what they tell me to do. If what they are telling me to do at some point violates
the moral ethical core values, it is my job to move on and not their job to change their
view.

*Have you observed any outside interest groups trying to exert influence on the
governance structure of a school district?*

That’s funny. No, not in my district. I watch other districts here; the big thing of course
is because of all the state budget that everyone is having. You are in Nevada, but ** is as
bad as you can get. Also the battle of the ** Teachers Association, trying to put board
members on and getting stories to the press that are really ugly, anti-administration, that
kind of stuff. That’s going on. None of it here. In fact, I have teachers… we have what
we call BAM sessions, BAM stands for bitch and moan. It’s one teacher from each
school gets to meet with me, with my associate superintendent and the assistant
superintendent with the door closed. They can say anything they want and generally say
we are so grateful to be working here. We have dealt with the stupid stuff before, the
complaint that toilet paper at their school is rougher than a lot of other schools. That is
literally things we have had to deal with. It keeps down negotiations. Negotiations stick
with what negotiations is supposed to be about. We take care of the nickely stuff. And it
helped spot a principal I had to fire. So that was good too.

*How often do you do that?*

Once a month.

*Do they sign-up for that?*

They vote their own people in but since I have been here 11 going on 12 years I’m
getting to my third generation of teachers. And I make a point, I have my administrators
and myself, my ** and myself, Fridays we go out and hang around the schools. We are
in classrooms. We try to hit 15-20 classrooms everyday on average. It takes two to three
hours out of your day to do that but it is important to have that relationship s and still
understand what is going on in classrooms. I have a district of 3600 kids, five schools.

*What do you see as the primary reasons that superintendents leave their position?*

Board-Superintendent conflict. That’s the only reason I have ever left. Well, I left my
first district, I loved them, it’s just that the job was getting boring. I needed to do
something else. It wasn’t their fault. They wanted me to stay.

*What is your prediction of the superintendent turnover in your state?*

I don’t know. I have been here 11 years and virtually we have, what do we have here 40
some districts in this county and the county superintendent has a…what does she call it
a…she calls it the Superintendents Academy; she has some word for it. And I have gone
through 3 county superintendents. Anyway there is only one person at the table who was
at that table when I came to ** County, one other person. So I am outliving everybody, in some cases literally. So predictions I don’t know. Let’s see thinking around me the guy two districts over is in his third year, the guy right next to me to the east is in his second year. The guy south of me is the one who has been here longer than have. The other kid has been in two years in?? and to the left has been there four years. The guy to the north is in his third year. A little instability I guess. There is always turnover in this job. It is a killer job and for big districts usually your superintendent is the last job they are going to have once they get in it. And you have guys like me that are kind of itinerant who go where the work is interesting. It sounds good until your wife says it should stop. Then it stops.

*If given another opportunity would you accept your current position again? Why?*

Absolutely! My board. They are great. And the people in here they have been fun and because I took a district that started with 1400 and it’s gone to 3600 and did that in about a 7 year stretch and it has been kind of flat lined since. I have been able to build three and a half schools. Almost every teacher in this district was hired by me. Every principal was hired by me. I trained my own principals in my own academy. My district office people, all but one, were hired and promoted by me. And so this organization is me. I’m pretty proud of what I’ve been able to build. When you inherit a district as a superintendent, if you are going to be moving around, where everybody has been in their job before and you are just the most recent guy to sit at the desk, and if you don’t get to hire people, you are just a hired hand. And that didn’t happen here. This was the best move I could have ever made.

*What’s the main reason you became a superintendent?*

Oh, more difficult to say. I have, in my whole life, always been in leadership positions. How’s this; I started a paper route when I was 10. When I was at the University of Oregon I was a student senator, I was the student delegate up to the Oregon Legislature. When I was a teacher I was involved in the union and negotiations and building rep. I just always have done that. I put myself through college with cash earned in a summer job, where I had about 15 people working for me. I was 16, 17, 18 years old and had a bunch of people working for me. That was in food services selling food during the summer. Anyway I have just always been like that. I like the responsibility. I like the action. I’m an adrenaline junkie…probably am. It was kind of inevitable. My dad was an elementary principal. But he got fired at the end of his career by a superintendent. I told my dad I’d have fired him too. As a superintendent if I tell you to do something a certain way, you do it or you get out. That’s all there is to it.

*What are the major causes of stress in your position?*

Causes of stress? I’m fighting this comment because it sounds so much like an old fart. And it is the idea that parents now days seem whatever their kids want, they want to make that happen. Whether it violates school rules and dress codes, whether it’s their diet, whatever it is the parents feel it’s their job not to be a parents but to somehow be a
good buddy facilitator for their kid. I think most of the issues I’ve had to deal with, with students, goes back to that issue. It is not insurmountable. I do a lot of parenting… to parents. Being an old guy you get to do that after a while. I tell them gently not in front of somebody so they get embarrassed. I say you’re wrong on this. Let me tell you why you are wrong. As an adult you are free to tell me to go piss up a rope. That’s fine, but you are going to hear from me with what the right course of action on this was. I would say that would be my only stressor and like I say, hit and miss, it flares up occasionally. No big deal, part of the job. I don’t have any labor problems. And I fire 1-2 teachers a year for non performance. I can get the really bad ones because they are usually idiots. You tell them you are right about??? and then they do it again. That makes it really easy. I’ve never figured out a way of getting rid of teachers who drift toward mediocrity. You know their life gets kind of different than what they started out. They are not putting the effort into it anymore. When I figure out that, I will become a consultant and you can hire me. Then I will get the big bucks.

If you were to leave the superintendent position what would be your main reason for leaving?

My wife said that was enough, stop working. I’ve been working since I was 10 and I am 62 I should have retired a couple of years ago. There is no more money in it for me. I’m working because I like working. At some point, I don’t know. We’ll see.

Interview #7

Describe your experience as a superintendent.

What do you mean describe?

Tell me about your history as a superintendent.

I started out as a principal with the same dist- I was a junior high principal for 5 yrs- after 5 yrs- I was director of curriculum and person for 1 year- then assistant t superintendent in same area- then interim superintendent when the superintendent left for one year- then after that- I was appointed superintendent and starting July 1 of this year, I have been here for 25 years-

Can you describe the circumstances of your predecessors departure?

They put him on leave- from April to June- I don’t know if his contract was up or not- but he was put on leave and got the boot in June- They put me in for a couple of months when he was on leave- then we did interviews- they went outside first- - I help them get the people to interview- they did all the interviews on a Saturday- they didn’t like any of them- and they decided to go with somebody in house.

And it has obviously worked out for them.
I guess so- I told them I never wanted the job because I didn’t have any superintendent experience and they wanted a new high school built- I didn’t know anything about building a high school so I told them to go outside- They had all day of interviews- about 5-6 males- they weren’t happy with any of them- so I took over and have been here ever since.

What are some factors that inhibit for effectiveness as a superintendent?

Personal factors? Ummmmm, I don’t have too many factors on my personal side that inhibit me from doing my job- I am 61 years old- I am at work on a Saturday- I don’t have kids at home- My husband has his own business that keeps him busy- sometimes you want to steal more time for yourself- you get frustrated with the budget-union issues- that kind of stuff- some factors that you just don’t have control of that frustrate you.

In your experience- have you seen any personal traits or characteristics of other superintendents that may have extended their tenure or shortened it?

I think the biggest thing is the board- you start arguing with your board and you don’t want to be around- I remember a superintendent friend of mine who used to be a principal of mine- said to me that he gave his board his resignation in January- and he used to say I am counting the board meetings, not counting the days. I think it is the inability to get along with your board which is the main reason why superintendents leave- in my 25 years, I have actually was fired 7 years ago- and the community rallied behind me and put not just one but two recall elections together and between an August and November recall- they got rid of the board that was responsible for firing me and put in their own people who hired me back.

Describe your current relationship with your board.

I have been with this board- one has been on 24 years- the rest have been on for 12-14 years- we are in Kiwanis together- we got them voted in on the recall- basically the last 7 years have been the same board- it is sort of a family type of relationship- you agree to disagree- it is not always roses but in the end you are used to working with each other and compromise to come to the best decision-

Okay- do you have any suggestions that could enhance the board ability to function with the superintendent?

The more I am with it- the deal is learn to pick your battles- when I was younger, I was a lot more principled and argued over a lot more minor issues- now it is like- even on a major issue- instead of picking a battle- I let it go- and in a week or so it is usually diffused and that it is not as bad by not taking such an aggressive stance on something- try to sometimes work through the back door- by saying I know you are adamant about
this- but what do you think about this or this option- If I were to do it over again, that is what I would say to a younger person is pick your battles and don’t get so adamant about certain issues.

*Have you observed any outside interest groups trying to exert influence on the school district?*

With the recall elections- we got some radical Hispanic people who really didn’t like how things were going but they didn’t have the knowledge to understand them- and they got in probably through some illegal election practices but pretty much- within a year they were out the door and we haven’t seen them back.

*Interesting. I think you have already answered this question- the primary reasons that superintendents leave their positions- I think you said due to how they get along with their board-*

I think pretty much it is the school board and maybe making some issues that rub the unions the wrong way. But pretty much the superintendent and school board relationship- those are the ones ultimately responsible for your contract.

*What is your prediction of superintendent turnover in your state?*

I think it is pretty much 5 years

*If given another opportunity- would you take your current position again?*

I think so- you know my husband has his business here- so for me- we are pretty much entrenched in the area here- I know some people can pick up and leave- but I guess I could- but then I would have had to be away from my kids and my husband and that was not something I looked forward to- I have been in this since I was 35- So when your kids are 5 years old, even though another opportunity might come along that is more prestigious or lucrative or a bigger district- I just did not feel that I wanted to be apart since my husband had his business here and is the mainstay of providing for our family- I would say in my circumstances that I would have taken this job again.

*What was the main reason you became a superintendent?*

After being a principal for 5 years- I felt I had brought my pull along and I was ready for the next step – to move from the site to the district level to cause some positive changes-

*What are the major causes of stress in your position?*
Right now, the budget in our state—so we are really hurting—the increasing intervention by the state and federal government.

*If you were to leave the profession, what would be the main reason for leaving?*

To have more time for myself—

*Good answer—*

I am here today—out of the last 6 Saturdays, this is my fourth one working—

**Interview #8**

*Describe your experience as a Superintendent.*

I have been here in ** for 24 years and the last 18 have been Superintendent. My predecessor hired me when he was new as his Assistant Superintendent, so we came to this district together. After he had been here for 6 years he accepted a job in Oregon, and left here about the middle of May, so the board appointed me as acting Superintendent for one year, the following March they gave me a continuing contract as Superintendent so there wasn’t really an application process or competition for the job, I somewhat fell into the job after my predecessor left and had the opportunity over the space of a year to convince the board that I could do the job they wanted done here.

*What are some factors that might inhibit your effectiveness as Superintendent?*

Well I suppose politics and money are the main two factors. Of course money is on the top of everybody’s agenda right now in almost every district, we are like everybody else and are cutting things that we think are too important to cut but they have to be cut anyway. That influences our effectiveness in terms of student achievement and programs that we like to offer that we cannot offer anymore. Politics is inherent in school boards and school superintendents, not only the internal politics between the school board and the Superintendent, but also between the Superintendent and staff and unions and bargaining groups and the community at large. We have a large Navy base here in ** and so that adds a different element that not every district has. There are all kinds of different politics associated with both our local city government, county commissioners and the navy base and Chamber of Commerce. I use the term politics in a more favorable sense than the public media has used for some time now. I think that is part of dealing with the public and dealing with the community and dealing with people in general.

*In your experience have you seen any personal traits, skills or characteristics that Superintendents have that have either helped extend their tenure or possibly shorten their tenure?*
Why I am a firm believer in integrity and honesty, 100% integrity, 100% honesty is a very important key prerequisite, throughout, that’s incredibly important. Beyond that the particular skills that are needed in any particular district vary from time to time, whether it is an emphases on curriculum and student achievement, or an emphases on budgets, or an emphases on passing levies, or an emphases on building schools or remodeling schools, that varies somewhat depending on the local district what skills set is needed to do any of those and do it well. I think that the integrity and honesty other personal skills and other personal attributes certainly to some degree and I will use the word people person, being a good communicator, both verbally and in writing and face to face and in person, those come with the territory.

Describe your current relationship with your school board.

I really like my local school board, and I think that they like me. In the time that I have been Superintendent, I have had 25 different school board members. So I have a pretty good group of people to compare them to. The current school board is unique in the sense they are all men, I have never had a school board that was all male before, and they share a common sense of humor which shows up all the time at public school board meetings and in workshop sessions. They get along with each other really well and are committed to the job they do. They do their home work, they always read everything I give them in preparation for a board meeting, they ask questions, they give me advanced notice if they have concerns or questions so if I need to do my homework or make some adjustments or answer their questions in advance I can do that.

Would you say over the 25 years you would be able to characterize your relationship the same way?

Absolutely, I have been very fortunate in having extremely good school boards throughout.

Any suggestions you could make that could enhance a schools boards ability to work with a Superintendent?

You know we do a number of things that I have consistently done during the time I have been here, and they are attending the state school directors association meeting which is an annual meeting, and we do that together allows us to not only attend some of the same training sessions, but it allows us to get to know each other better in a social setting without the artificial settings that a school board meeting with news media and public audience and that type of a thing. Then typically we have two or three board workshop training sessions a year. We bring in a consultant from the state school directors association and focus on a topic of interest or need on the part of the school board those also because they are less formal and out of the public eye they are public meeting but typically nobody attends other that the school board they allow us to form some
relationships as a team that are harder to establish when you are at a public board meeting. I also have a lot of one on one individual relationships with school board members by phone by e-mail and in person. I think that helps to form a sense of camaraderie and team work.

Any outside interest groups that you have had experience with that have tried to exert their influence on school district governance?

There isn’t anything that I would call a concerted organized group that that is their purpose. We have had as I mentioned the navy is a big presence here and so we maintain constant connections with the Navy the chamber of commerce here first of all they are extremely supportive, the executive director of the Chamber of Commerce graduated from our high school here about 10 years ago her father was on the school board she is a tremendous cheerleader for the school district and has been an advocate when we try to pass bonds or levies. Our city mayor is a former school board president and three of the city council members are former school board members so we have a lot of very strong connections with the city the chamber and the navy. Our local rotary club, we have two rotary clubs, but the larger and older of the two sponsored a campaign to raise money to build a new football stadium and then they sponsored the campaign to pass the election to do that. Then they followed up with sponsoring the campaign to pass an election for a bond to modernize the entire high school. So their special interest was the stadium and they wanted the stadium to happen first and then if the stadium passed then they would support the high school so we did that and we raised half a million dollars in donations before we even had to have an election. Then the Kiwanis has a whole lot of activity going on in the school district with different key clubs and builders clubs and that sort of thing. The other rotary sponsors a number of things in conjunction with the school district, the Lions club does something similar, the Soroptomists so each of those service clubs has a close connection to the school district including lots of volunteers promoting different programs that the school district also does so in none of those is a one issue group they all have other components to their mission, they all have a very strong connection with the school district.

In your experience what are the primary reasons Superintendents leave their positions?

Just in my immediate area actually there are three reasons that are about equal. One of them is retirement, they age out of the job. Second is they move to a different Superintendency either because it is larger or more lucrative or in a place that they would rather live, and the third issue would be they make a mistake, or violate a rule. I am not sure when the general category would be. I am thinking of one Superintendent that was convicted of a DUI, one who was found guilty of double charging expenses, another on that made some mistakes with the budget that he tried to cover up. Those were cases of the school board essentially either firing for cause or getting rid of them. There was
another one who had an affair with a high school principal those go on to be the category of ethical lapses.

*What’s your prediction of Superintendent turn over in **?*

This year it seems to be actually a little less than normal and that may be connected to two things one is that people are holding on to their jobs longer because of the economy, the second is the state of ** changed their retirement, where as educators used to retire after 30 years, now they have to retire after age 65. So where as 30 years might be somewhere between 50 & 55, 65 is more like 40 years or 45 years. In ** State with the change in the retirement system more people in every position are going to stay in their positions longer than they used to. You know I don’t know personally we have 295 school districts in this state and I don’t know enough about the 295 to know to give a general answer to your question, but I think there are some pressures that would keep the Superintendents on the job longer than they used to be.

*Given your tenure I think I kinda know the answer to this but if given another opportunity would you accept your current position again?*

Yeah, I have had an exceptionally positive and satisfying time here.

*What was the main reason that you became a Superintendent?*

Because I thought I could make a difference, I thought I could make a bigger difference as Superintendent, than I could being a teacher, principal or Assistant Superintendent, and the opportunity presented itself.

*What are the major causes of stress in your position?*

Well right now it’s budget but various times, sometimes it’s union bargaining, and sometimes it’s pressure for student achievement, student results. Right now it is mostly connected with budget, budget cuts, the associated cuts to staff, layoffs and cuts of favorite programs that aren’t going to be continuing.

*If you were ever to leave a Superintendent position what do you think the main reason would be?*

Well I am not going to leave this one until I retire although actually I think that when I retire from this job, I still like the job, I might see if there is another district that would want to hire me for a few years, because I think that I’ve got some skills and talents to bring to the position and it doesn’t feel like having those and doing nothing with them but sitting at home and being retired is going to be as satisfying as being able to use them achieve some results.
Environmental Factors

they are not a match for the community
not a match for the board
coming in with great ideas
but pushing them faster than the board and the community is ready to accept.
school board
maybe making some issues that rub the unions the wrong way
they get crosswise with the board
getting crosswise with different community groups
making decisions, single decisions, that end up coming back to bite them
Board-Superintendent conflict
are feeling that you are not effective
retirement, they age out of the job
move to a different Superintendency either because it is larger or more lucrative or in a place that they would rather live
they make a mistake, or violate a rule.
can retire they do
eye can’t work with the board
leaping as they want to personally be successful
retirement
move on who want more responsibility and more pay
they have gotten sideways with their board
just get burned out on it too
better than the national average

5 years

five years or less in most districts

holding on to their jobs longer because of the economy

Superintendents on the job longer than they used to be

less than it used to be

more normal sized districts- I would say we have about 3 years

urban dists will have higher turnover

Absolutely

still have a lot of work to do

I think so

some people can pick up and leave

Yes

great opportunity

very diverse

Absolutely! My board

I would

learned a lot

I am still learning

always that challenge that is ahead of you

Yeah,

positive and satisfying time

Yes

Yes

match my expertise
solid stable district

**Governance Factors**

some people have thought they were elected in relation to my poor performance and that I wasn’t the best person for the district board in a professional and team oriented manner

my job as the superintendent is through you to understand what the community wants and I want you to be successful as board members and I say to each and every one of them that I hope it is your responsibility to feel that it ought to part of your job to help me be successful

a family type of relationship

you agree to disagree- it is not always roses but in the end you are used to working with each other and compromise to come to the best decision-

who had strong opinions

did not know the system and didn't know much how public schools operated

real available to them and making sure that I was listening as much if not more than I was talking

building relationships with them

also educating them

in a way that respected what their interests were and what their concerns were

they clearly understand the role of superintendent

give me my direction then they support me in accomplishing that direction

very stable school board

the board is really there to support policy and procedure and good decisions-

they really trust the administration

where they understand what our jobs are they really let us do our jobs

common sense of humor
get along with each other really well and are committed to the job they do
do their home work,
always read everything
ask questions, they give me advanced notice if they have concerns or questions so if I
need to do my homework or make some adjustments or answer their questions in advance
I can do that.
respectful and thoughtful relationship
what causes it to change are the people-
really wanted to run the school district-
we all have our roles and responsibilities-
want to do things for individual board members
if you doing something for one, that means you are not doing something for somebody else
once a decision is made- we move forward-
board governance
determine those policies that were the boards responsibility and those policies that were
the superintendents responsibility-
revisiting that separation of power- where sometimes the power overlaps- what is the
boards responsibility and what is the superintendents responsibility
worried only about board governance policies and board responsibilities and not the day
to day operational responsibilities
responsibility of the remainder of the board in a majority sense to manage those board
members-
leanr to pick your battles
sometimes work through the back door
pick your battles and don’t get so adamant about certain issues.
couple of retreats
develop operating agreements,
role was with the school board cut versus the role of the superintendent
revisit those agreements annually.
elected officials which makes them by nature political animals
got to educate them.
take them to the small school districts conference
my job to do what they tell me to do.
care and nurturing your school board- care and feeding of the school board,
treat them well and take care of them
there is the time away
a board retreat in the fall and spring-
attending the state school directors association meeting
get to know each other better in a social setting without the artificial settings
board workshop training sessions
one on one individual relationships
form a sense of camaraderie and team work.
don’t think it is the boards job to work in unison with me- it is my job to figure out where
the board stands and represent them-
they are in charge
we set some ground rules and checkpoints

Incentives/Disincentives

could do it better than the ones I had seen
was ready for the next step
to cause some positive changes
looking for the next step
always been in leadership positions
have had just a lot of really good mentors
make a difference
opportunity presented itself
someone else told them they should do it
had some horrible experiences with principals
need to do is become a principal because a great principal is everything to a school
initiating a change
when angry people came into the office
letters to the editor
the budget
increasing intervention by the state and federal govt
to respond to a variety of different constituent groups
working just ungodly hours
Financial constraints
that parents now days seem whatever their kids want
personnel issues
teachers’ union
budget
union bargaining
pressure for student achievement, student results
People are willing to fill every moment you have
the pace
if your board is not completely settled
I will be 65 in May
To have more time for myself

I think my next step is a larger district and I am interested in doing that

I am 62 I should have retired a couple of years ago

Retirement

Well I am not going to leave this one until I retire

When the board starts to do stupid things that are not good for kids

**Personal Factors**

being politically savvy

experience with leadership styles-

you need to be directive

you need to analytical

if you act too directive or too analytical or too expressive and you don’t get your ideas down to a common sense grass roots level you lose people so I really focus on those things with the knowledge I really have to have the versatility and not just focus on being a driver or whatever

sometimes you want to steal more time for yourself

frustrated with the budget

union issues-

some factors that you just don’t have control of that frustrate you.

collective bargaining with teachers.

is the budget

relationship with the board.

your vision for the district has to matchup the boards’ political vision for the district also.

You don’t have a whole lot of flexibility

that’s the hill you willing to die on.
not a good fit for their community.

limited by the state of the economy and cuts
everybody seems to be collectively pointing their finger at education,
So I guess the challenge is to make each of those encounters that limit our effectiveness not be a factor that limits us.
a job with a lot of demands and a lot of competing stakeholders
politics
money
Politics is inherent in school boards and school superintendents, not only the internal politics between the school board and the Superintendent, but also between the Superintendent and staff and unions and bargaining groups and the community at large

The board structure is really a challenge
the laws are in place for the right reasons-
we run out of time
unwilling to delegate-
not letting your own desire for control get in the way of your ability to effectively lead-
always the board

the budget
is the board
open and inclusive in communication
tolerance for messiness,
to work the board or work with the board to develop trust in them as a superintendent
keep very tight control on their board and limit their access to schools and limit their access to putting forth ideas that they would like to have considered boards get very frustrated
have a strong moral/ethical core
sense of humor
don’t carry the stuff home with you
If you want an easy job, don’t be a superintendent.

communication is one of the key factors

is communication
clear what the strategic focus
understanding the context enough

how do we communicate very clearly what our goals

integrity and honesty, 100% integrity, 100% honesty

emphases on curriculum and student achievement
emphases on budgets
emphases on passing levies,

emphases on building schools or remodeling schools

being a good communicator, both verbally and in writing and face to face and in person

you have a difficult board

you have to be principled

not listening effectively to the board

is about people

are really good at relationships

listening

those that don’t pay attention- to their board or to their budget
Appendix 24

Step 5: Theoretical Constructs from Repeating Ideas

**Personal Factors**
- Political astuteness
- Budget awareness
- Union relationships
- School board relationships
- Communication skills

**Governance Factors**
- Separation of powers between school board and superintendent
- Relationships of trust and respect with school board
- Board retreats or other “away time”

**Environmental Factors**
- School Board – superintendent conflict
- Retirement
- Personal satisfaction in career choice and path

**Incentives/Disincentives**
- Ready for the next step in career
- Personal feelings of being able to provide something more than is currently provided
- Retirement
- Lack of time
- Financial constraints
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