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Superintendent Succession: The Impact of Applying Succession Management Strategies, Developing District Leaders and Promoting from Within an Organization on the Self-Perceived Degree of Preparation and Job Effectiveness of First-time Pennsylvania Superintendents

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SUPERINTENDENT SUCCESSION: THE IMPACT OF APPLYING SUCCESSION
MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES, DEVELOPING DISTRICT LEADERS AND PROMOTING
FROM WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION ON THE SELF-PERCEIVED DEGREE OF
PREPARATION AND JOB EFFECTIVENESS OF FIRST-TIME PENNSYLVANIA
SUPERINTENDENTS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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Title: Superintendent Succession: The Impact of Applying Succession Management Strategies, Developing District Leaders and Promoting from Within an Organization on the Self-Perceived Degree of Preparation and Job Effectiveness of First-time Pennsylvania Superintendents

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The leader, more than any other individual in an organization, has a profound impact upon that organization's success. Whether in the business sector or public education, it is nearly impossible for an organization to acquire and sustain success without strong leadership. Many businesses go to great lengths to develop individuals with leadership potential from within their organizations. The strategy of identifying and developing potential leaders within an organization is termed succession management.

This study analyzed the effect of providing leadership opportunities through the application of succession management on the self-perceived degree of preparation and job effectiveness of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents. The study concluded that exposure to the duties of the superintendent within the district prior to assuming the position had a significant impact on the participants' self-perceived degree of preparation and job effectiveness. The study also concluded the positive impact of mentorship, distributive leadership, and the professional learning community on the development of the participants' leadership preparation.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The leader, more than any other individual in an organization, has a profound impact upon that organization's success. Whether in the business sector or public education, it is highly unlikely for an organization to acquire and sustain success without strong leadership. Many businesses go to great lengths to develop individuals with leadership potential from within their organizations. The strategy of identifying and developing future leaders within an organization is termed succession management. This study will analyze the effect of providing leadership opportunities through the application of succession management on the self-perceived degree of preparation and job effectiveness of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents.

Tichy and Bennis stated that "Who heads up an institution is by far the single most important people judgment" (2007, p. 108). Collins also emphasized the importance of hiring a strong leader. He termed the phrase *Level 5 Leader* when describing a leader who possesses the character traits necessary to lead his/her organization to greatness. Of the 1,435 Fortune 500 companies included in his 2001 study, only eleven companies met the stringent qualifications to be identified as moving from good to great. Of those eleven companies, all eleven had level five leaders (Collins, 2001).

Like in business, effective leadership in education is essential to the success of an organization. The superintendent is the leader of the school district and is therefore ultimately responsible for the success or failure of student performance (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005). A study released by The Education Commission of the States shows that school and

district leaders (principals and superintendents) have a powerful impact on student achievement – second only to classroom instruction (Anthes, 2005).

The responsibilities of the school superintendent have expanded over the years. Superintendents are now expected to be proficient in the areas of legal issues and litigation, parent issues, collective bargaining/union issues, funding and budgeting, district/state/federal policy, student discipline, improving student achievement, teacher quality and training, and parent relations (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett & Folena, 2001). Educational Research Services added, “the effective public school administrator is expected to be a visionary, communicator, facility manager, team-builder, disciplinarian, supervisor, problem-solver, legal expert, fiscal administrator, politician, fund-raiser, in addition to being the district’s instructional leader” (2000). The importance of the job of superintendent cannot be underestimated.

Leadership in public education has taken on added importance since the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, more commonly known as *No Child Left Behind* legislation. School districts are now faced with the daunting task of having all students proficient on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) by the year 2014. Pennsylvania school districts are struggling to meet the gradually increasing proficiency targets, currently set at 78% proficiency in mathematics and 81% proficiency in reading for the 2011-2012 school year, not only with their general student population, but with economically disadvantaged, special education, and English as a second language (ESL) subgroups as well (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2011). Schools not meeting these proficiency targets are being placed on school improvement with the ultimate consequence of being taken over by the state. The first individual to be held accountable for the inability of a school or district to reach proficiency targets is ultimately the superintendent.

The expanding duties of the job combined with the increased emphasis on accountability may be contributing factors to the shallow candidate pool, dissatisfied professionals, and short tenure in some regions of the United States. In a survey of state education leaders consisting of executive directors of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) as well as the National School Board Association (NSBA), a strong majority felt that there is a superintendent applicant pool crisis in their state (Glass, 2001a). Seventy-one percent of in-house superintendents felt that the superintendency is in a state of crisis. The majority of the superintendents surveyed by Farkas, Johnson and Duffett (2003) indicated that the leadership program they completed in order to qualify for the superintendency was not aligned and did not prepare them for the job or to be an effective superintendent. Average tenure for a superintendent has been reported to be as short as two to three years. A significant study of over 2,000 superintendents released in 2000 by AASA found the average tenure of superintendents to be between five and six years (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000).

Also contributing to the importance of developing future district leaders is the amount of vacancies anticipated due to the retirement of the baby boomers, many of whom have now entered retirement age. Larson and Whritner (2001) estimated that 8,000 to 14,000 public school districts will be searching for new superintendents during the first decade of the new millennium. The high demand for district leaders will, no doubt, put a strain on a candidate pool that is already thin in many parts of the country (Beaudin, Thompson, & Jacobson, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the projected vacancies across the country, the job pool remains shallow in many areas. Although administrative leadership programs go to great lengths to design coursework that is beneficial to the development and preparation of aspiring superintendents, no coursework

can fully prepare a candidate for the actual demands of the job. Only 25% of school leaders rate their superintendent preparation program as effective in preparing them for the specific job requirements of their first superintendency (Glass, 2001a). Many active superintendents have indicated the most valuable and useful part of their preparation program was the required internship. Individuals who are accepting this position often do not have adequate hands-on training or experience with some aspects of the job to carry out their duties effectively. As a result, short tenure and job dissatisfaction are not uncommon.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to interview first-time Pennsylvania superintendents in order to identify their exposure to various job responsibilities of the superintendent within the district that they are currently working prior to taking the position. The researcher will determine the degree to which that exposure affected their self-perceived level of preparation and job effectiveness during their first year in the position of superintendent. It is the intent of the researcher to establish a direct correlation between a superintendent's self-perceived level of preparation and job effectiveness and the extent to which he/she is exposed to the various duties of the superintendency within his/her district prior to ascending into the position.

Background

In this era of accountability, it is critical for public school districts to develop future leaders within their organizations. The business world has been developing the idea of succession management since the 1970s. As Tichy and Bennis stated, "...not to have a successor at the top of an institution is the ultimate in bad people judgment" (2007, p. 109). They went on to emphasize the importance of developing a CEO succession system, stating that maintaining

strong leadership is one of the most important contributing factors to sustained performance in any type of organization. Collins found that of the eleven companies he and his research team identified as “great”, ten had CEOs who were promoted from inside the company (2001, p. 32).

The strategy of succession management has begun to take hold in public education as more leaders see the impact that applying such strategies has on the overall success of their districts. Reeves (2002) emphasized the importance of building the next generation of leaders within your own school district. He suggested that school districts should develop leadership capacity within the system by implementing a leadership training program, enabling the school district to become a center for leadership development. Jenkins (2008), while emphasizing the importance of development of people, advised that districts “Grow leaders from within, rather than buying them from outside organizations” (p. 45). McAdams (2007) supported Reeves’ assertion by emphasizing the importance of sustainability, noting “continuity is critical” (p. 6). He adds that promoting from within is less disruptive and enables a district to sustain reform momentum.

Educational researchers have emphasized the advantage of developing leaders within the organization as opposed to hiring a candidate who is not familiar with the district. Fusarelli and Jackson (2004) noted one benefit of hiring from within when stating that “locally hired superintendents have longer tenures than outsiders unfamiliar with school district culture and politics” (p. 56). Fink (2010) also was wary of the practice of hiring from outside an organization when he warned of the practice of *hire and hope*, a term used when hiring a leader not familiar to the district. He cautioned of this practice, stating that the only information you may have on the candidate is what you have obtained through the interview process.

Research Questions

There are several questions the researcher is seeking to answer. The questions center around the challenges of first-time superintendents and the effect that exposure to succession management opportunities has on their self-perceived degree of preparation and performance.

The following research questions will guide the direction of the research study:

1. What are the challenges and self-perceptions of job effectiveness of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents?
2. To what extent are Pennsylvania school districts identifying individuals with administrative potential within their organizations and applying succession management strategies to prepare aspiring administrators for leadership positions?
3. What formal policies/procedures have Pennsylvania school districts adopted for the purpose of developing leadership capacity within their schools districts?
4. What are the self-perceptions of preparation and job effectiveness of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents who have been exposed to succession management strategies compared to those who have not?
5. What recommendations do first-time Pennsylvania superintendents offer to address challenges and help the transition to the superintendency?

Significance of the Study

With the inception of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), school districts are under increased pressure to make adequate yearly progress as determined by the state education agency (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2010). It takes on added importance for districts to have a dynamic leader in the role of superintendent to guide them through this challenging era for public education. The superintendent as educational leader must ensure that the educational program of

the district is enabling every student to reach his/her academic potential and eventual proficiency by 2014.

School districts, much like business organizations, are unique entities. Each district has financial, human resource, and auxiliary structures that are inimitable to those of any other district. This study will help to determine if there is a benefit to hiring a superintendent from within the organization who has been exposed to succession management strategies and is familiar with the specific dynamics of the district.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on literature related to the area of educational leadership. The framework supports not only the educational impact of cultivating a community of collaborative learning but also the importance of leadership in sustaining continuous improvement. This framework includes an emphasis on systems thinking and the importance of developing a professional learning community that is supported by transformational and distributed leadership theory.

Systems Thinking

The world has evolved into a global economy. The skills needed to function in this environment are much different than those needed a generation ago. School districts and their educational leaders need to have defined systemic thinking in place in order to create the change needed to improve student achievement and to improve all of the underlying aspects of an educational system in order to give our students the tools needed to thrive in this global economy (AASA, 2011).

Leadership is vital to this change and to the development of a systems thinking mindset. In order for a school system to work effectively and be successful, all parts of the system must

work together toward the established goal, the vision. Systems thinking is now incorporated into many educational leadership programs, providing future district leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead systemic change.

Succession management is an important component of systems thinking. The greater the awareness and understanding an individual has of the system's vision, purpose, and core values the more likely that leader is to provide the direction in which the organization needs to move in order to accomplish sustained improvement. It is imperative that school districts integrate the development of their leadership capacity as part of their systems thinking to ensure uninterrupted, sustained improvement.

Professional Learning Community

A succession management policy will only have a positive effect on a school district if the aspiring district leaders are being cultivated within a healthy learning community. An individual groomed within a school system that places no emphasis on continuous learning will not be an effective leader regardless of the degree of leadership opportunities he/she is provided. Conversely, an aspiring leader who is part of a school system that emphasizes continuous learning for systemic improvement will have a solid professional knowledge base. When combined with an in-depth understanding of the culture within the system, this individual is prepared to lead the district to sustained improvement.

A professional learning community (PLC) is defined as “a group of educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006, p. 11). Characteristics of effective PLCs include developing a shared mission, vision, and values; collective inquiry; collaborative teams; action orientation and experimentation; continuous

improvement; and results orientation (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The common thread that runs through these characteristics is collaboration. Aspiring district leaders who are part of a healthy PLC are part of the vision of the district and are active participants in the continuous improvement process. By further developing these individuals via succession management, the likelihood of continuous systemic improvement is greatly enhanced.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership blends well with the strategy of succession management and the formation of a professional learning community. More than a decade of both qualitative and quantitative research supports the belief that individual leaders can inspire followers to greater commitment through shared purpose rather than bureaucratic mandates (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Transformational leadership emphasizes the importance of the leader developing a vision for the school district and inspiring the followers to believe in the vision. The idea of transformational leadership was first introduced by leadership expert James MacGregor Burns who noted that transformational leaders are able to inspire followers to change their expectations and perceptions to work toward a common goal that previously may have been thought of as unattainable (Burns, 1978). The theory was further developed by researcher Bernard M. Bass who identified four components of transformational leadership; intellectual stimulation, challenging the status quo and encouraging creativity among followers; individualized consideration, directly recognizing each follower's contributions; inspirational motivation, the ability to clearly articulate a vision and motivating others to follow; and idealized influence, the leader serves as a respected and trusted role model (Bass, 1985).

The most effective transformational leader is one who is familiar with the values and purpose of the organization. He/she uses this knowledge to form a vision that is likely to be supported by his/her followers. Schlechty (2009) opined that transformational leaders cannot “...simply be hired and put in place. They must embrace and be committed to the direction that the school district is headed in and must internalize the values of the system at a bone-deep level” (p. 258). Hargreaves & Fink (2006) supported the importance of the leader being familiar with the organization by emphasizing that transformational leadership “depends on recognizing and responding to the unique challenges and features presented by particular types of organizational contexts” (p. 100).

Distributed Leadership

As previously noted, the duties of the superintendent have expanded over the years. Being the leader of a school system is a very demanding job. It is clear that no leader can successfully lead an organization alone. In order for the system to operate efficiently, leadership duties must be shared by those in the organization who display leadership potential. Succession management involves providing leadership opportunities to aspiring administrators within the organization for the purpose of preparing them for job advancement and to increase their degree of preparation for various tasks associated with the administrative position to which they aspire. This concept relates well to distributive leadership in which multiple individuals take responsibility for leadership. Spillane (2006) cautioned that distributed leadership is more than just delegating leadership duties. He emphasized the importance of focusing on the process of leadership, noting “it is the collective interactions among leaders, followers, and their situation that are paramount” (p. 4). Cultivating a collaborative culture is vital to effective district leadership and the development of an effective succession management system.

Method and Limitations of the Study

This qualitative study identified six first-time Pennsylvania superintendents, three of whom were hired from within the district and exposed to succession management opportunities, and three who were hired from outside the district and provided little to no internal leadership opportunities within the district prior to starting their superintendency. The individuals were interviewed to determine the extent to which their prior experiences affected their self-perceived levels of preparation and degree of job effectiveness. Interview questions for the study focused on three leadership areas; educational, managerial, and political. Participants were asked to assess their level of preparation and self-perceived job effectiveness with various duties in these three areas such as developing an educational vision for the district (educational), managing finance and developing the district budget (managerial), and developing a relationship with the school board (political).

The study may have limited application for a number of reasons. Though the researcher has gone to great lengths to ensure the consistency of certain variables such as hire date, first superintendency, and only Pennsylvania superintendents, other variables exist. Two such factors, size of the district and previous positions held play a role in the opportunities for additional training that can be provided. These factors most certainly had an effect on the interviewees self-perceived level of preparation and job performance. One possible scenario would be if the first-time superintendent in a larger school district who was promoted internally had previously held the position of assistant superintendent prior to becoming superintendent. This individual may have been afforded the opportunity to gain experience in dealing with many of the tasks/duties of a superintendent while serving in this capacity. An individual from a smaller school district, though promoted from within, may not have had the opportunity to

complete job related tasks if an assistantship did not exist. Additionally, an individual hired from outside the organization may have been provided the opportunity to shadow the exiting superintendent for a period of time prior to the end of his/her mentor's contract. This job shadowing would afford the incoming superintendent the opportunity to gain experience with many facets of the job prior to taking over the position. Other first-time superintendents may not have been given this opportunity. For these reasons, caution must be exercised when making generalizations about all superintendents hired from within and outside the organization.

Summary

Research supports the significant impact that effective leadership has upon the success of an organization. It is common practice in business for companies both large and small to invest in the development of future leaders within their organizations through the establishment of a succession management system. With the increased pressures placed on public school districts for accountability, the possibility of hiring an ineffective leader cannot be an option. This study will determine the impact that exposure to succession management strategies has on the self-perceived degree of preparation and job effectiveness of first-time superintendents.

Definition of Terms

Achievement: Student test scores on Pennsylvania System of school Assessment (PSSA)

Adequate Yearly Progress: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires that each state shall establish a timeline for adequate yearly progress. In the state of Pennsylvania, 78% of all students tested must score proficient on the mathematics and 81% proficient on the reading assessment for school districts to make AYP.

Behavioral Theory of Leadership: Based on the assumption that leaders are made rather than born. Successful leadership is based on definable, learnable behavior.

Distributed Leadership: Leadership practice takes shape in the interactions of people and their situations rather than from the actions of an individual leader (Spillane, 2006, p. 3).

First-time Superintendent: Any superintendent who has not previously served as a school district superintendent prior to taking part in the study.

Insider: An individual promoted from within the organization to fill the role of superintendent.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Federal legislation (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001) that requires all states to develop and implement a statewide assessment of basic skills for students at various grade levels with the purpose of ensuring that all students are receiving a quality education.

Outsider: An individual hired from another school district to fill the position of superintendent.

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA): A standardized assessment administered to all 3-8, and 11th grade students in mathematics and reading as well as grades 5, 8, and 11 in writing and grades 4, 8 and 11 in science.

Proficiency: Meeting minimal cut-scores on statewide assessment test.

Professional Learning Community (PLC): A group of educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLC's operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators (DuFour et al., 2006, p. 11).

Succession Management: Combining succession planning and leadership development in a comprehensive process for finding and grooming future leaders at all levels of an organization (Conger and Fulmer, 2003, p. 1).

Superintendent: An education executive or administrator.

Systems Thinking: The process of thinking how things influence one another within a whole (Jenkins, 2008, p. xiv).

Transformational Leader: A leadership approach that is defined as leadership that creates valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders (Burns, 1978).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Strong leadership is a critical factor in determining the success of an organization. The impact of leadership in business has been well documented as having a significant effect on the success of an organization. Recognizing this connection, leading corporations for decades have gone to great lengths to develop the leadership capacity within their organizations to ensure sustained improvement and viability. This strategy of identifying and developing future leaders within the organization is termed succession management. When implemented effectively, it has had a significant impact on both small businesses and large corporations.

Succession management has been applied much less frequently in education. Research confirms not only the benefit for school districts to begin developing leadership potential within their districts, but the positive impact that succession management can have on the quality of leadership and sustained improvement of the districts that apply this practice (DeVita, 2007; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Johnson, 1996; Levitz, 2008; Wallin, 1999).

Chapter two presents a review of relevant literature. The literature is divided into seven subsections that explore:

1. The impact of strong leadership in business and education;
2. The evolution of the superintendency including the history of the position as well as present day leadership responsibilities;
3. Superintendent certification in Pennsylvania;
4. Current status of the superintendency – job satisfaction, tenure rate, candidate pool;

5. Hiring practices of school districts;
6. The benefits of applying succession management strategies in business and education;
7. The connection between succession management, organizational thinking, and leadership theories in education.

The Impact of Strong Leadership

Though the responsibilities of a leader in various realms differ greatly, one common theme is found in all arenas whether it be business or education: strong leadership is vital to the success of an organization. Forsyth (2004) stated, "... it has long been the practice in business, military service and in all levels of politics to look to the person at the top for leadership in achieving improvement goals" (p. 6). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) emphasized the importance of leadership in all aspects of life. "Leadership is worth the risk because the goals extend beyond material gain or personal advancement. By making the lives of people around you better, leadership provides meaning in life" (p. 3). Collins (2001), in an extensive study of the effects of leadership in the business world identified a level five leader as one who "blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will" (p. 21). The companies he identified in his study as moving from good to great all had strong, effective, level five leaders.

An effective leader needs to be distinguished from a manager. Bennis and Goldsmith (2010) stated that managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing. Drucker (1992) supported this opinion by characterizing managers as being efficient but leaders as effective. Managers focus on task completion while leaders are more concerned with influencing the organization.

Leadership in education is equally as important to the success of an organization. M. Christine DeVita, president of the Wallace Foundation, a non-profit organization focused on improving leadership in education, stated, “leadership is an essential ingredient for ensuring that every child in America gets the education they need to succeed.” She went on to add, “superintendents at the district level, are uniquely positioned to provide a climate of high expectations, a clear vision for better teaching and learning, and the means for everyone in the system – adults and children – to realize that vision” (2007, p. 2). In a 2004 report commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, Leithwood, Seashore Lewis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom confirmed the importance of leadership in education:

Leadership is widely regarded as a key factor in accounting for differences in the success with which schools foster the learning of their students...there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around in the absence of intervention by talented leaders. While other factors within the school also contribute to such turnarounds, leadership is the catalyst. (p. 17)

In an in depth meta-analysis of leadership in education, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) synthesized the data from 69 studies on the effects of leadership at the public school level. They established a direct and significant correlation between the quality of leadership provided and student achievement. Their study identified 21 leadership responsibilities and calculated an average correlation between each responsibility and whatever method of measurement was used in the original studies. The researchers calculated a ten percent increase in student test scores when the building leader improved his/her abilities in all 21 areas by one standard deviation.

Anthes (2005) supported the work of Marzano et al.:

The work of principals and superintendents has a powerful, albeit indirect, impact on student learning-second only, among school-related factors, to the quality of classroom instruction. And the impact tends to be greatest in schools where the learning needs of students are most acute. (p. 2)

Hallinger and Heck (1998) and Leithwood et al. (2004) analyzed additional sources of evidence of leadership's effect in education through analysis of large-scale quantitative studies on the topic. The researchers concurred that while school leadership explains only three to five percent in the variation of student learning, this accounts for nearly a quarter of the total variation (10 to 20 percent) explained by all school level variables.

Despite the fact that the superintendent is the leader of the school district and is, therefore, ultimately responsible for the success or failure of student performance (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005), the effect of district leadership on student learning is difficult to ascertain. Some researchers feel the superintendent's effect on learning is too indirect or complex to sort out. However, others have found that the superintendent, as the leader of a school district, has a significant impact on educational performance. John Forsyth, Director of Research for Educational Research Services, cited a recent study that identified effective superintendents as key to the success of improvement efforts, "Every superintendent in the districts examined in the publication accepted the role of leader of reform" (2004, p. 1).

Schlechty (2009) also supported the impact the superintendent has as leader of the district:

There are two things I know about the office of superintendent. First, whatever moral authority resides in, or is bestowed upon, the school system, that authority resides in the office of the superintendent. Second, the superintendent can delegate to others nearly

anything he or she wants to delegate (so long as the board consents) except the moral authority that resides in the office of the superintendent. In the long run, therefore, what the superintendent values, and the style of operation supported by the superintendent, will be manifest throughout the system. (p. 132)

Marzano and Waters (2009) attempted to identify the relationship between district leadership and student achievement. The authors completed a detailed meta-analysis which included 14 studies on superintendent leadership that included data from 1,210 school districts. The computed correlation between district leadership and student achievement was .24 and was statistically significant at the .05 level. The authors concluded that the findings suggest “when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected” (p. 5).

History of the Superintendency

The responsibilities of the school superintendent have expanded over the years. The position of school superintendent can be traced back to the early 1800s when an individual in larger cities was assigned the responsibility of overseeing day-to-day operations of a number of schools. One of the duties of the superintendent at this time was to travel from cities to villages spreading the word of free public education. In the early part of the 19th century, the superintendent was seen more as a head teacher and clerk, with the local board of education making most, if not all important district decisions (Glass et al., 2000).

Toward the end of the century, the superintendent’s role began to take on added importance. Superintendents gradually became responsible for all day-to-day decisions in the districts without direct oversight from the board of directors. This change came at a time when

public schools were reflecting a gradual transformation from an agricultural society to an emphasis on manufacturing (Callahan, 1966).

Throughout the 1900s, the public school system evolved into a business model of scientific management. As districts grew, the necessity for “management efficiency” emerged (Glass et al., 2000). Time management and employee specialization (teachers only teaching one subject, social workers, psychologists, nurses...) were seen as a way to improve efficiency within the district and save money. Districts moved to a model of centralized control of all management activity (Norton, Webb, Dlugash, & Sybouts, 1996). The role of the superintendent took on added importance as he/she was now seen as the leader of the school district.

The superintendency came under fire in the 1960s when the Civil Rights era brought greater involvement of school boards and citizens in the job of the superintendent as dissatisfaction with public education and the status quo increased. Special interest groups began to challenge the public school system for equal education opportunities for minority groups. The additional push for community control and desegregation resulted in policy makers having a stronger focus on the training and selection of superintendents (Glass, et al., 2000).

Through the 1980s, many groups with a vested interest in public education including the private corporate sector, politicians, and various citizen groups became so displeased with public education that a nationwide reform movement was triggered. With the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), concerns of America’s inability to compete in the world market as a perceived direct result of inferior skills of American public education graduates was brought to the forefront (Glass et al., 2000). Mandates, many unfunded, and mandatory assessment programs moved the job of the superintendent further away from educational leader to accountability manager. Leadership in public education has taken on added scrutiny since the inception of *No*

Child Left Behind (Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001).

This 2001 landmark legislation greatly altered the identity of public education by placing greater emphasis on accountability. School districts were now faced with the daunting task of having all students proficient on the statewide assessment by the year 2014. Schools not meeting these proficiency targets are placed on school improvement with the ultimate consequence of being taken over by the state (NCLB, 2010). The first individual to be held accountable for the inability to reach proficiency targets is ultimately the district superintendent.

Superintendent Job Responsibilities

Current public school superintendents are being asked to do more than their predecessors in decades past were ever expected to do. Among the qualifications are an expectation of proficiency in the areas of legal issues and litigation, parent issues, collective bargaining/union issues, funding and budgeting, district/state/federal policy, student discipline, improving student achievement, teacher quality and training, and parent relations (Farkas et al., 2001).

Superintendents are also expected to maintain their identity as instructional leader of the district. This role differs from that of a principal in that superintendents are responsible for regulating the overall capacity of the school system. In addition, the superintendent is expected to utilize managerial influence over principals and teachers. This, in turn, directly impacts student learning and achievement. Managerial influence includes thoughtful staff selection and recruitment, clearly articulated mission and goals in regard to curricular issues, as well as financial planning that supports instruction (Hoyle et al., 2005). The importance of the job of superintendent cannot be underestimated.

One superintendent summarized the feeling of many when stating:

For the last 13 years, additional tasks and responsibilities have been added on, and nothing has been taken off our plate. Adding on to the challenges of community politics, diverse cultures and languages, multi-track year-round calendar and political mandates can make the job overwhelming. (Farkas et al., 2001)

Literature on the duties of the superintendent identifies three areas of leadership: political, managerial, and educational (Bjork & Gurly, 2005; Cunningham, 1999; Johnson, 1996; Kowalski, 2005, Norton et al., 1996). Johnson found in her case study of twelve newly appointed superintendents that if the district leader was lacking in one of these areas, support by employees was lost:

When educational leadership was weak, teachers and principals often discredited the superintendent as being misguided and preoccupied with the wrong things. When political leadership was weak, the schools suffered undue financial cuts, became the captives of special interest on the school board, or became the battleground for citizens with competing priorities. When managerial leadership was weak, people became preoccupied with bureaucratic errors, communications among educators faltered, and potential school leaders could not act constructively. (p. 24)

Educational Leadership

With the inception of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 and a greater emphasis on accountability, the educational role of the superintendent as instructional leader has taken on added emphasis. One requirement of the law is for all students to be proficient on the statewide assessment by the year 2014. School districts not meeting this standard will eventually be taken over by the state. Recent comments made by President Barack Obama as well as

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan forecast that as many as 80% of all schools will be labeled as failing under the current version of the law (Klein, 2011). They have proposed a revision to the law that places more of an emphasis on student growth rather than proficiency. The law was due to be reauthorized four years ago, but has yet to be addressed in a formal manner by the federal legislative body. Until the reauthorization is passed, superintendents are faced with the unrealistic proficiency benchmarks of the 2001 legislation. As a result, achievement of all students is in the foreground of the superintendent's most pressing missions. More than one half listed the most daunting task faced in the job is that of increasing student achievement (Farkas et al, 2001).

In their 2007 study entitled *The State of the American School Superintendency: A Mid-Decade Study*, Glass and Franceschini described *No Child Left Behind* as “inarguably, the most contentious educational issue today. This multifaceted array of mandates presents to superintendents immense problems in leadership and management” (p. xvi). As a direct result of this legislation, superintendents have been forced to reallocate funds, drop programs, create new programs and address low employee morale while attempting to comply with the numerous mandates related to the legislation. Nearly 59% of 1,338 superintendents surveyed in this extensive study indicated NCLB as having a negative impact on education (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Common concerns expressed by superintendents included how to get all students to proficiency despite variables in socioeconomic status and special education placement. Many superintendents suggested using a growth model to measure average yearly progress. This is similar to the suggestion included in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act revision blueprint presented by President Obama last year (Berman, 2011). Surveyed superintendents also noted changes in the amount of funding allocated for the many compliance

mandates needed to be addressed (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). School board members indicated their primary expectation of their superintendent is to be an educational leader (40%) followed by managerial leader (36%) and political leader (13%) (Glass et al., 2000). Due to NCLB, superintendents must have the training and skills necessary to improve instruction, ensure that all students succeed, and close the achievement gap (Lipsky, 2003). Superintendents must also be trained experts in data analysis, identifying root cause for academic deficiencies, and initiate and manage change for sustained academic improvement (Peterson & Barnett, 2005).

In addition, superintendents as educational leaders must be dedicated to continuous professional growth regarding current and future instructional and curricular practices (Johnson, 1996). The superintendent is ultimately responsible for student learning. The term *instructional capacity* is used to describe the capacity to produce worthwhile and substantial learning (Spillane & Seashore Louis, 2002). It is the superintendent's role as educational leader to frame a district wide vision with measureable goals, implement support systems to develop the vision and goals, and monitor the progress toward the goals (Peterson & Barnett, 2005).

Studies of first year superintendents note that successful superintendents understand the need for a shared educational vision along with the development of clear plans for its successful implementation (Chapman, 1997; Culotta, 2008; Johnson, 1996; Orr, 2002). Other educational leadership factors common in studies of first-time superintendents included analyzing and presenting data, monitoring the related curriculum adjustments to address the data, and articulating a district focus on the education of all students and advocacy of pedagogical approaches designed to improve instruction (Culotta, 2008; Johnson, 1996; Orr, 2002).

Managerial Leadership

Although the role of the superintendent was originally conceived as a teacher leader and supervisor appointed to ensure teachers were effectively delivering the state curriculum, the role of district manager evolved through the 20th century. Management principles applied in the business sector during this era influenced the public school system. Local school boards found the need to hire executive officers to oversee the day-to-day operations of their districts (Browne-Ferrigno & Glass, 2005; Culotta, 2008, Johnson, 1996). This shift caused a noticeable change in the job description of the superintendent, who now was seen not only as an educational leader, but a manager as well. “Without effective management, school systems collapse into chaos” (Johnson, 1996). Without excellent management, leadership is not possible (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Gardner, 1990).

Superintendent as organizational manager is a concept found throughout educational leadership literature (Callahan, 1966; Cuban, 1988; Culotta, 2008; Glass, 2003; Johnson, 1996; Kowalski, 2005). The emphasis on managerial tasks is evident in both the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards as well as superintendent standards of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). Six managerial responsibilities were found in both documents: 1) school law, 2) personnel administration, 3) finance and budgeting, 4) facilities administration, 5) collective bargaining and contract maintenance, and 6) public relations (Browne-Ferrigno & Glass, 2005). Due to the ever expanding role of state and federal regulations, it is imperative for a school leader to focus attention to these and related managerial issues.

Recent studies have shown that managerial issues are among the most prominent challenges of first-time superintendents. In Chapman’s 1997 study of first-time superintendents,

managerial responsibilities were ranked second to instructional leadership as the most frequent issue addressed with the school board. Culotta (2005) noted that beginning superintendents often found themselves contending with fiscal crisis and identified the budget process as problematic and frustrating.

Political Leadership

Politics is central to the works of today's superintendent (Johnson, 1996). Unlike businesses and industries that are not dependent on taxes as their source of revenue, school districts are accountable to taxpayers who support them and policymakers who regulate them (Browne-Ferrigno & Glass, 2005). The recent economic downturn has brought increased scrutiny from political groups determined to impose their will upon local school districts and their leaders. School board meetings remain among the few settings in which citizens are still able to "pursue their interests through democratic discourse and political action" (Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young & Ellerson, 2011, p. 130). Ninety-five percent of all school districts report some overt political action occurring within their school district during the past three years. The issues generating the most political action include funding requests (tax referenda) 46%, school facility development 47.9%, and extra-curricular activities 48% (Kowalski et. al, 2011). Politics' influence on public education continues to increase.

Pressures stemming from unrelenting calls for school reform, heightened levels of instructional accountability, demands for providing a broader range of support services to more students, increased interest group activity, and the politicization of educational policy in contexts characterized by declining resources depict the harsh reality of superintendent's present circumstance that can limit opportunities for reasoned discourse. (Bjork & Gurley, 2005, p. 163)

Superintendents are forced to be political strategists, building alliances and assuaging personal interest groups for the benefit of the students. It is imperative for the superintendent to assess the local political landscape and proceed through this political minefield with caution. As Johnson (1996) noted, “politics is central to the work of today’s superintendents, who cannot succeed as educational leaders without also being active political leaders” (p. 153).

At the forefront of the political landscape is the superintendent’s relationship with the school board. In a survey conducted by *Superintendents Prepared*, an urban leadership consortium in Washington, D.C., board politics is second only to finance as the most challenging issue facing superintendents (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). The survey also found that more than half of all superintendents who lost their jobs did so because of poor board relations.

Studies of first-time superintendents support the argument that political issues consume much effort and time on the part of the new district leader. First-time superintendents became quickly aware that they needed to be politically savvy at negotiating, not only with board members, but politically influential members of the district and community (Johnson, 1996). Participants in qualitative studies on the challenges of first-time superintendents found themselves devoting an immense amount of time and effort building relationships and working closely with the school board to build political support (Culotta, 2008; Geisel, 2002; Keedy & Bjork, 2002).

Superintendent Certification

As noted above, the job description of public school superintendent has greatly expanded over the years. States are left with the formidable challenge of designing certification programs that prepare aspiring superintendents in all facets of the job. This has proven to be a daunting task. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has developed a detailed framework for

superintendent preparation programs. In explaining the purpose of the program guidelines, PDE states: “The need for instructional leadership in addition to effective management practice is essential for student success at both the school and district level” (PDE, 2011). Based on extensive research, PDE details “best practices” that all certification programs are required to incorporate into their superintendent preparation program guidelines. Best practice recommendations include the following: clearly articulated standards; leadership clearly focused on student achievement; focus of school improvement and the role of the Superintendent as an agent of school reform; formal, operational partnership with one or more school districts; extensive field-based work with well-guided internship requirements; coherently sequenced, comprehensive curriculum; uses problem-based learning to connect theory and practice; blended faculty of academics and practitioners, careful selection of highly qualified, promising participants; emphasis on the superintendents’ role as an instructional leader; and includes an internship. In addition, the state provides descriptors that universities could use as evidence that the best practices are being addressed. The Pennsylvania superintendent framework also lists PA leadership core and corollary standards upon which preparation programs should be designed (APPENDIX A).

Despite the rigorous requirements from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and comprehensive university certification programs, many current superintendents feel they were not effectively prepared for the position. The majority (80%) of the 853 randomly selected superintendents surveyed by Farkas et al. indicated that the leadership program they completed in order to qualify for the superintendency was not aligned and did not prepare them for the job or to be an effective superintendent (2003). Many made note that a better balance of theory and practice was needed. In a related survey conducted for the Education Commission of the States,

approximately one third of leaders surveyed indicated that programs preparing superintendents needed improvement (Anthes, 2005).

Many superintendents indicated that the most valuable portion of their certification program was obtained through the required internship (Glass, 2001b). Data supporting the value of the internship indicated that 71% of superintendents working in districts with less than 1,000 students had no prior central office experience. Half of the superintendents located in districts with 1,000 to 3,000 students also jumped from building principal straight to the superintendency (Glass and Franceschini, 2007). Of 500 Pennsylvania school districts, 318 have less than 3,000 students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011). Glass and Franceschini (2007) noted:

Many current superintendents gained their first experience without substantial knowledge or hands-on experience in the critical district functions of finance, budget, operations, personnel, and community organizations. Particularly important is that many new superintendents do not have experience in working daily with school board members. (p. 26)

Research supports the importance of hands-on experience in the form of an internship as an integral part of any preparatory program. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) addresses this issue with an additional emphasis in the state certification guidelines. PDE makes it very clear that “the field experience is the primary vehicle toward delivering the ideal ‘job-embedded’ learning experience” (2011). Institutions offering certification are required to describe how the program “will require candidates to successfully experience a full year (12 month) field experience of a minimum of 360 hours that is faculty supervised and superintendent

monitored” (PDE, 2011). United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in a speech addressing the American Association of School Administrators in February of 2010 noted:

Even more than educational theory, superintendents need hands-on vocational training. Superintendents require business skills, expertise in dealing with the media, the ability to negotiate with a variety of stakeholders, and a command of budgeting. First and foremost, they must be relentless in driving educational improvement. That set of skills can be hard to acquire in the classroom alone. (Duncan, 2010)

Case studies of first-time superintendents have consistently found that practical hands-on experience in various aspects of the job are essential (Chapman, 1997; Culotta, 2008; Orr, 2002). Participants in the Culotta study recommended case-study, practical approaches, a blend of theory and pragmatic, and real life experiences that are transferable to practice as essential components in preparation for the superintendency (2008). First-time superintendents in both the Chapman (1997) and Orr (2002) studies cited hands-on experience, case studies, and simulations as essential elements to a superintendent preparation program. In a 2004 study of the perceptions of new superintendents, Buckley found that “prior administrative and leadership experience in a variety of roles dealing with diverse, complex, and complicated problems are rich preparation for the position of school superintendent” (p. 140).

Though the Pennsylvania Department of Education superintendent certification program, as well as programs in other states, identifies the importance of the internship and includes it as a requirement in its mandated program, some districts provide additional leadership opportunities to aspiring administrators within their districts. Eighty-four percent of superintendents say they are actively and deliberately grooming someone on their staff for a more senior leadership position (Farkas et al., 2001). Through the application of succession management, some school

districts are providing future building and district leaders with valuable experience they will need prior to ascending into a position.

Current Status of the Superintendency

Extensive research has been conducted regarding the current status of the superintendency. The expanding duties of the job combined with the increased emphasis on accountability may be contributing factors to the shallow candidate pool, dissatisfied professionals, and short tenure in some areas of our country.

Job Dissatisfaction

Among the aspects of the job causing dissatisfaction, one of the most commonly cited by superintendents is the increased impact of politics and bureaucracy on education. With the inception of NCLB, local, state, and federal mandates that are placed upon school districts are having an ever-increasing impact. Nearly nine in ten (88%) superintendents stated that keeping up with mandates handed down to the schools (many of which are unfunded) takes up too much of their time. Eighty-one percent of superintendents said that “managing harsh public criticism and political heat” has become a routine part of their jobs (Farkas et al., 2001, p. 9). An additional 88% of superintendents identified state and federal mandates that lack corresponding funds to carry them out as a source of frustration (Farkas et al., 2001).

A detailed report explaining the views of 1,006 public school superintendents was released in 2003 by *Public Agenda* with support from The Wallace Foundation. *Public Agenda*, founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, works to help the nation’s leaders better understand the public’s point of view and to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues. According to the report, funding is the top issue among superintendents surveyed. Seventy percent felt that

insufficient school funding was the most pressing issue facing his/her district today. Another 20% felt it was implementing NCLB (Farkas et al., 2003).

Another area of consternation for many acting superintendents and the most often cited factor for superintendent turnover is school board relations (Geisel, 2002). Glass (2001c) indicated the working relationship and lines of authority between superintendents and school boards have evolved significantly over the past century. In many districts, those lines of responsibility are still not well defined, causing inefficiency and stress. Extensive research on the topic cited a difference in job expectations as the root cause of many conflicts (Azinger, 2003; Glass et al., 2000; Johnson, 1996; Norton et al., 1996; Regan, 2003). Only 56% of superintendents surveyed felt they were evaluated according to their job description (Glass et al., 2000). Another concern of superintendents regarding board relations is the involvement of special interest or “pressure” groups. Glass (2009) indicated over 50% of all districts having to deal with pressure groups that are out to force their personal agenda upon the district. This is most commonly seen in larger districts and districts that rely heavily on local property tax for funding. Only 65% of all superintendents surveyed indicated that their school board was aligned with the common interests of its constituents (p. 59).

Another commissioned paper released by the Education Commission of the States surveyed 175 superintendents judged nationally by their peers to be outstanding. Seventy-one percent of this group agreed that the superintendency is in a state of crisis. The leading reasons for the crisis according to superintendent leaders are: (1) school board/relations; (2) long work hours; and (3) stressful working conditions discouraging principals and central office administrators from seeking the superintendency (Glass, 2001).

Superintendent Candidate Pool Shortage

A number of factors are contributing to concerns about the future of the superintendency regarding the candidate pool and the availability of qualified individuals to fill expected vacancies. Some educational prognosticators are going as far to predict a candidate pool crisis in the coming decade. The Education Commission of the States commissioned researcher Thomas Glass from the University of Memphis to conduct a series of leadership issue papers to gather information on topics relating to superintendent and school board leadership. The third commissioned paper focused on *How State Education Leaders View the Superintendent Applicant Crisis*. The group surveyed consisted of executive directors of the AASA as well as the National School Board Association (NSBA). A strong majority (approximately 60%) of those surveyed felt that there is a superintendent applicant pool crisis in their state (Glass, 2001). In addition, approximately 90% of AASA executive directors and 84% of NSBA directors believed the quality of superintendent applicants had decreased.

Projected Increase in Vacancies

The start of the baby boom generation has now entered retirement age. The need for district leaders will, no doubt, increase over the next decade with some predicting 50% of the current superintendent population being eligible for retirement. The National Center of Education Statistics projects public elementary school enrollment (pre-K – 8) to continue to increase through 2016. Since 2004, elementary public school enrollment has increased to 34.6 million students in the fall of 2007. Public school enrollment in the upper grades (9-12) rose from 11.3 million in 1990 to 14.9 million in 2005, with a projected enrollment of 15.0 million for 2007. Public secondary school enrollment in 2016 is expected to be about two percent higher than in 2007 (National Center of Education Statistics, 2011). A large portion of baby-boomers

who entered the profession in the 60s and 70s will be retiring (Fink, 2010). New district administrators will have to be hired as districts expand and administrators retire (Beaudin et al., 2002). Larson and Whritner (2001) supported this prediction by estimating that 8,000 to 14,000 public school districts will be searching for new superintendents during the first decade of the new millennium. Nearly 40% of superintendents indicate a plan to retire within five years. The national yearly turnover rate for the position of superintendent is 15%. If this trend holds true, approximately 10,000 to 11,000 vacancies will occur in the next five years (Glass & Franceschini, 2007).

Tenure Rate

Average tenure for a superintendent has been reported to be as short as 2-3 years. A significant study of over 2,000 superintendents released in 2000 by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) found the actual tenure of surveyed superintendents to be between five and six years (Glass et al.). Research has shown that frequent turnover causes disruption which negatively impacts organizational performance (Geisel, 2002).

In summary, the need to develop individuals with leadership potential within our educational organizations is evident. The potential for an impending shallow candidate pool for superintendent vacancies is likely. In addition, many of the issues of concern expressed by acting superintendents such as school board relations, school funding, and experience with the budget process could be improved with hands-on leadership opportunities within the organization.

Hiring Practices: Insider vs. Outsider

A common problem area for new superintendents is unfamiliarity with the community they have become a part of. Orr (2002) noted, “learning the district and community, its values, priorities, history and resources, and problems” should be a priority (p. 17). Often, an individual accepts the job of superintendent in a new community that he/she is unfamiliar with. Having an understanding of the environment, values and traditions of the community will help the superintendent make informed decisions. As an outsider (hired from outside the district), it is important to meet with not only school groups, but civic groups as well to identify the pulse of the community (Chapman, 1997; Culotta, 2008). In this circumstance, research shows the benefit of a mentor for first-time superintendents. These individuals were often former or experienced sitting superintendents who helped novice leaders through problems specific to their district (Chapman, 1997; Culotta, 2008; Orr, 2002).

An additional challenge for leaders hired from outside an organization is the process of organization socialization. Each school district has operational procedures and a culture that are unique to that organization. The new leader is inducted into the culture of the district by means of socialization tactics, stages, contexts, and outcomes. Hart identified four stages of leadership transition: looking ahead, enchantment, disenchantment, and equilibrium (as cited in Fink, 2010). A leader who is new to an organization must proceed through the stages as familiarity and trust are formed. It is not until the equilibrium stage that leader and constituents have established the same goals and vision for the organization and sustained improvement can be achieved.

The decision to fill a position with an in-house candidate (insider) or an individual from outside the district (outsider) is one that is well researched. The seminal work in this area was conducted by researcher Richard Carlson (1969). Carlson identified two distinct career paths for

superintendents based on their career interests. Place-bound superintendents are those individuals who assume their position from within the organization. Place-bound administrators have a history with the school system and are committed to the organization rather than job advancement. Career-bound superintendents are individuals who put career above place. They are not bound by geographic ties or loyalty to a particular district and are willing to relocate to assume a position that better matches their career aspirations (Carlson, 1972). Carlson concluded that internally promoted superintendents and those hired from outside the organization relate to their organization in very distinct ways and that a superintendent's success is greatly determined by the unique needs of the school district (Carlson, 1972).

Historically, boards satisfied with the status quo have tended to give preference to internal candidates. This practice decreases the chance of disruption caused by leadership transition (Geisel, 2002) and improves overall employee morale (Kowalski et al., 2011). Hargreaves noted the possible benefit of promoting a leader from within the organization:

We may have it wrong in education in assuming that “fresh blood at the top” is a lever of school improvement. While this may apply to schools that are (close to) failing, it may need an insider to take a good school to greatness because it builds on what they inherit rather than striving toward a different vision against the inclinations and preferences of the staff. An insider may have a better grasp of the school's weaknesses and is thus able to face the facts brutally and so do something about them. (as cited in Fullan, 2005, p. 31)

Hoyle's (2007) case study of two superintendents revealed a consequence of failing to hire from within the organization. Though both first-time superintendents in the study experienced numerous successes during their tenure, one did not have his contract renewed. The

board's reason for non-renewal was "breakdown in communications" and the "drop in district morale" (p. 158). The board's report indicated the district morale began to drop when the superintendent brought in outsiders to fill numerous administrative vacancies.

School boards looking for a change in the direction of their district tend to prefer external candidates. Fink (2010) referred to this practice as *hire and hope*, as the candidate is known only to the degree that is revealed through the interview process. Failing or poorly performing school districts are often forced to take a chance on hiring an outside candidate who may or may not be the leader to take them on a path of improvement.

If a true learning community is developed, potential leaders within the organization are educated on what needs to be done to take the organization down a path of sustained improvement. Fullan identified an essential characteristic of a level 5 leader as one who has a dual focus on performance and developing leadership in others. In an area with such a high rate of leadership turnover, to not develop leaders within is a potentially disastrous situation resulting in discontinuity of direction (2005). "It is not turnover of leaders, per se, that is the problem, but rather discontinuity of direction" (Fullan, 2005, p. 35). The most effective way to ensure sustained improvement is through the application of a succession management system, where leaders are developed within a learning organization that espouses the theory of distributed leadership.

The Application of Succession Management

In this era of accountability, it is critical for public school districts to develop future leaders within their organizations. The business world has been developing the idea of succession management since the 1970s. Tichy and Bennis (2007) emphasized the importance of having a strong leader at the head of an organization to ensure sustained success. "CEO

succession in any type of organization – from political, to not for profit, to business or military – is the key determinant of organizational performance” (p. 108). Collins (2001) found that of the eleven companies he and his research team identified as *great*, ten had CEOs that came from inside the company. The author went on to describe an effective leader as being more concerned about the company’s sustained success than his own personal renown. “Level five leaders want to see the company even more successful in the next generation, comfortable with the idea that most people won’t even know that the roots of that success trace back to their efforts” (p. 26).

The idea of succession management, though fairly new to public education, has been a widely accepted practice in the business world for decades. In an article written for the Harvard Business Review, Conger and Fulmer (2003) defined succession management as “combining succession planning and leadership development in a comprehensive process for finding and grooming future leaders at all levels of your organization” (p. 1). The authors added that nothing could be more vital to a company’s health than the choice and cultivation of its future leaders.

Research strongly indicated a significant impact succession management has on the success of an organization. Bersin and Associates have established a four level succession management maturity model that identifies different levels companies may have implemented a succession management system from *no succession process* to the highest level, *transparent talent mobility*. Sixty-five percent of companies who had reached level three maturity had achieved improved business results as compared to only six percent at level one (Lameroueux, Campbell, & Smith, 2009). Rothwell cited a 2007 study of 775 business organizations. The organizations with sophisticated succession management systems benefitted dramatically with a 600% increase in overall business impact and a 570% improvement in overall employee retention (Rothwell, 2010).

Truly effective succession management is more than just having a list of employees who could one day move into a management role within the company. Charan, Drotter, and Noel (2001) noted that a person with high-potential does not necessarily make a good leader. They emphasized that the focus should be on how individuals perform when given the opportunity to complete a leadership task, thus the distinction between succession planning and replacement planning. Replacement planning involves having a list of names of individuals who could replace a leader upon his/her departure. Succession planning is actually giving potential leaders training and leadership opportunities to assess their knowledge and ability as a leader. Conger & Fulmer (2003) cited Coca-Cola Corporation which, after the death of longtime CEO Robert Goizueta, replaced him with second in command Douglas Ivester. Though Ivester was second in command and had long been groomed for the position, he failed and was removed after two and a half years of declining profit. Ivester was very accomplished in one area of management; however, his training had not addressed all facets of the job including designing and managing acquisitions, building consensus, and/or supporting multiple constituencies. The authors noted that “succession planning, as traditionally conceived and executed, is too narrow and hidebound to uncover and correct skill gaps that can derail even the most promising young executives” (p. 2).

This business analogy can be applied to education. So often, school districts (particularly smaller districts with less than 3,000 students) fill superintendent vacancies with a candidate who has proven him/herself to be an effective building administrator only to see that individual fail as a result of not being prepared for the multi-faceted job of district leader. Just because an individual is prepared to lead a building does not mean that he or she can manage the very diverse and unique challenges of running a school district. As with business, that individual

needs to gain hands on experience in all aspects of the job. Simply possessing leadership potential is not enough.

Two primary traditional paths to the superintendency have been reported in literature: teacher-principal-superintendent and teacher-principal-central office administrator-superintendent (Hodgkinson & Motenegro, 1999). Less than one percent of current superintendents followed a non-traditional path, having no previous leadership experience in public education at the building or district level (Kowalski et al., 2011). In districts with less than 1,000 students, 71% of superintendents indicated their previous position was as a building principal, while in larger districts (5,000 to 9,999 students), 72% indicated their previous job was assistant or associate superintendent. Nearly half of those superintendents serving in small districts (1,000 to 2,999 students) who were surveyed noted no previous central office experience prior to being a superintendent (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 35). Due to the diversity of prior experience, Glass and Franceschini emphasized the importance of developing succession management opportunities within the district in order to provide hands-on experience with aspects of the job that can't be addressed in the classroom:

Many current superintendents gained their first position without substantial knowledge or hands-on experience in the critical district functions of finance, budget, operations, personnel, and community organizations. Particularly important is that many new superintendents do not have experience in working daily with school board members. (p. 26)

Through the application of a formal succession management system, individuals within the school system who possess leadership interest and potential are identified and then provided leadership opportunities that parallel formal university leadership training. Once an

administrative vacancy occurs, the school board has the option of hiring from a pool of candidates who possess prior experience with numerous responsibilities of the position.

This is particularly helpful in smaller school districts that are not able to provide the traditional career ladder (teacher – principal - assistant superintendent - superintendent) due to a limited number of administrative positions. In her study of succession management in smaller rural school districts, Wallin noted, “a good succession management plan for rural principals will address the nature of the rural school system and its attendant role constraints and/or opportunities for administrators” (1999, p. 7).

As noted by the District Management Council (DMC), a think tank of public school district leaders, districts need to “inspire a culture of vision” by developing their leadership capacity. “Accounting for over 80% of district operating budgets, human capital should be districts’ number one management priority” (2009, p. 1). Reeves (2002) also emphasized the importance of building the next generation of leaders within a school district, “Most school systems are far better served by identifying and developing leaders from among their own colleagues than by hiring from other systems or relying exclusively upon the leadership preparation program of a local university” (p. 160). Johnson also cited the importance of developing leaders within an organization, “Superintendents must ensure that leadership capacity is expanded throughout district schools to implement and sustain successful reform innovations” (1996, p. 137).

McAdams (2007) emphasized the importance of succession planning in sustaining systemic change, stating “great companies manage human resources to spot and develop talent, promote from within and plan for succession. So should school districts” (p. 6). Research demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach. “Locally hired superintendents have longer

tenures than outsiders unfamiliar with school district culture and politics” (Fusarelli & Jackson, 2004, p. 56). Fink (2010) warned of the practice of “hire and hope”, hiring building and district leaders from outside the organization, stating that “mistakes can be costly in terms of student success, teacher morale, community support, and severance expenses” (p. 125).

Hall suggested that succession planning and learning community development must go hand-in-hand for a school district to sustain success. He proposed that districts develop a formal leadership development plan that specifies who is responsible for leadership development and how the district will develop all levels of leadership. He added that districts should include a detailed succession plan that spells out how it will replace its leaders. He suggested that districts provide various levels of leadership development opportunities for teacher leaders, school administrators and district-level administrators including training within the district via shadowing opportunities. Another opportunity would be providing incremental responsibility such as asking individuals to fill in for administrators during vacations or long-term leaves (Hall, 2008).

In a 2008 study of a Delaware School District, Levitz analyzed the effect of incorporating leadership development and succession planning into the district’s strategic plan. She noted that “succession planning establishes a systematic process that identifies individuals, develops their skills and abilities, and prepares them for leadership roles in the organization” (p. 1). She identified the driving factors for the district to develop a formal leadership succession plan. Among the most prominent of those factors was that one fourth of district administrators would be eligible for retirement within five years. Also, due to the financial struggles of some districts, a number of other leaders transferred to other, more affluent school districts. The author noted that many of the administrative vacancies were filled with individuals from outside the school

district. This justified a need to develop individuals within the district who possessed leadership potential. These individuals may likely show an increased propensity to remain in the district (Levitz, 2008).

After analyzing the current practices of numerous building level leadership development plans, Levitz proposed three recommendations to the Delaware school district. Recommendation one was to clarify and establish what leaders must know and be able to do. The skills and knowledge base as well as the traits the leader must possess are defined. Recommendation two was to implement specific protocols to be used for identifying and selecting high potential candidates. Recommendation three was to develop and implement a research based structure for a district leadership development program (Levitz 2008).

A similar plan was developed in Cleveland, Ohio. *The First Ring Leadership Academy* serves thirteen school districts in the Cleveland area. Facing the detrimental effects of student mobility, poverty, a lack of school funding, poor achievement, and an alarming rate of turnover among staff, particularly school principals, the school superintendents joined together to form the academy. Their goal was to concentrate their efforts on developing and retaining “highly skilled school leaders who, with appropriate training and support, could help their communities overcome the many challenges they face” (Anthes & Long, 2005, p. 2). The academy is structured in a unique way in that candidates for the program must be nominated by their district superintendent. The program is cohort-based and places a strong emphasis on a performance-based curriculum where candidates are ensured a “practice-based” experience in which they have “district and school context in which to apply their learning” (2005, p. 5). Initial findings of the program indicate that individuals are more prepared for their jobs, are staying with the district, and have a positive effect on student performance.

The Maryland State Department of Education has identified the importance of leadership in the public school setting, noting that leadership succession had become an imperative for all systems. With the assistance of Dr. Andrew Hargreaves, the Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College, they have developed the *Leadership Succession Planning Guide for Maryland Schools* (Cary & Foran, 2006). The guide consists of three sections. The purpose of the first section is to stimulate conversation about leadership succession in school systems. The second section is designed as a framework to help school systems develop their succession plan. The third section offers an example of what a succession system could be (APPENDIX B).

School districts have taken the lead from the business world and have begun developing succession management systems with positive results.

We have learned that we need to be more deliberate in identifying future leaders and then provide training that prepares graduates who can not only administer and manage, but lead – who can set a vision for student learning, create a climate in which teachers can learn, and build policies to support both. (DeVita, 2007, p. 5)

Fullan emphasized the importance of capacity building to ensure sustainability and continuous improvement. He identified capacity building as more than workshops and professional development for all. He included “the constant development of leadership for the future” in his definition of capacity building, adding “sustaining districts foster leaders who also develop other leaders” (p. 69). He stressed the danger in failing to develop the leadership capacity of the district as the primary cause of discontinuity of direction and systemic failure. “If a system is to be mobilized in the direction of sustainability,” Fullan stated, “leadership at all levels must be the primary engine” (2005, p. 27).

Succession Management and Organizational Learning

The succession management concept blends in well with proven education initiatives such as organizational thinking, professional learning communities, and transformational and distributed leadership. The effectiveness of developing the leadership capacity within your school district via the application of succession management strategies is contingent upon the strength of the learning environment that exists there. Senge identified the importance of developing a learning organization that decentralizes the role of leadership so as to enhance the capacity of all people to work toward a common goal (from Smith, 2009). The premise of the learning organization is based on the belief that education, as well as the world in general, is in the state of rapid change. Only the organizations that are flexible and constantly learning will be able to maintain sustained systemic improvement (Smith, 2009).

The public school system is inherently, a very inflexible model. Based on the late 19th century industrial model, leadership is typically autocratic and very top down. William T. Harris, United States commissioner of education in the late 19th century summarized the goal of the public education system of his time:

Our schools are, in a sense, factories in which the raw materials (children) are to be shaped and fashioned in order to meet the various demands of life. The specifications for manufacturing come from the demands of the twentieth century civilization, and it is the business of the school to build its pupils according to the specifications laid down.

(as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 21)

This antiquated system is not conducive to organizational learning or the tenet of leadership development. As a result of the standardization of the industrial age model, the leadership capacity within many public school organizations has not been nurtured. The ideas of teachers

and others not in a central office administrative role are typically not heard and the organization often is stagnant.

Only within the past several decades has public education begun to move away from this outdated model. Schlechty (2009) emphasized that learning organizations are flexible and responsive and are places where innovation and collaboration are constant, unlike the bureaucratic systems of our past. Central office administrators serve a very important role in the capacity development of the learning community. Blanchard referred to this role as *servant leader*. Central office staff, namely the superintendent, should be more concerned with developing lower level leadership by supporting actions of building leaders (principals and teacher leaders). Servant leaders see their role as supporting others rather than controlling or managing them (Blanchard, 2003; Schlechty, 2009). This approach lends itself well to leadership management and the development of a succession management system. This change in organizational thinking can only take place with a comprehensive change in how the system thinks and operates.

Systems Thinking

Jenkins defined a system as: “A network of interdependent components that work together to accomplish the aim of the system” (2008, p. xiv). In order for a system (for the purpose of this study, a school system) to work effectively and be successful, all parts of the system must work together toward the established goal: the vision. Senge (2000) identified five learning disciplines that can guide school districts through sustained improvement. The disciplines include personal mastery, clearly articulating your own vision; shared vision for the benefit of the organization; mental models, focusing on your own attitudes and perceptions as well as those of others around you; team learning, in order to pursue successful school change;

and systems thinking, where people learn to better understand interdependency and change for the purpose of sustained growth and stability of the school district (p. 7). He identified systems thinking as the cornerstone of the learning organization. Senge added, “The discipline of systems thinking provided a different way of looking at problems and goals – not as isolated events but as components of larger structures” (2000, p. 78).

Fullan (2005) identified the importance of the leader of the educational system. Among the ten guidelines for system leaders committed to sustainability, he emphasized leadership development (the long lever of leadership) as an essential component to leadership at the system level. He noted the importance of the system leader to create opportunities for potential leaders to be exposed to “job-embedded learning that is specific to the organization and is learned on the job through mentoring and related opportunities” (p. 95). In line with the systems thinking approach, his ten guidelines also include the importance of designing every policy to build capacity within the organization.

The degree of effectiveness of a succession management system is greatly affected by the systems thinking approach of the organization. The greater the awareness and understanding an individual has of the system’s vision, purpose, and core values the more likely that leader is to provide the direction in which the organization needs to move in order to accomplish sustained improvement. Once individuals have an understanding of the vision of the organization, the connectedness of all that is involved in its structure and their own value as a contributor to this organization is realized, the collective knowledge will move the district to sustained improvement (Senge, 2000).

Professional Learning Communities

For a school district to achieve sustained improvement, it is essential that the learning community concept be established (DuFour et al., 2006; Fullan, 2005; Schlechty, 2009). A professional learning community is defined as “a group of educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour et al., 2006, p. 11). PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to the students’ improved learning is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators. Schlechty (2009) stated that learning communities are the building blocks upon which learning organizations stand.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) identified six characteristics of a professional learning community: shared mission, vision, and values; collective inquiry; collaborative teams; action orientation and experimentation; continuous improvement; and results orientation. The leader of a professional learning community ensures that there is a shared understanding of the guiding principles of the district and that all are involved at some point with their development. The authors emphasized the importance of collective inquiry, encouraging teachers and building level leaders to question the status quo and constantly seek new methods. Rather than be the chief problem solver, the superintendent in a learning community plays the role of chief trouble maker, presenting problems to others and encouraging innovative solutions (Schlechty, 2009). Although successful districts are collaborative, they are not always consensual. Participants understand that differences will occur when all are encouraged to present opinion and options and accept these differences as part of the growth process (Fullan, 2005). DuFour and Eaker (1998) noted that building a district’s capacity to learn is a collaborative effort rather than an individual task. The formation of flexible, collaborative teams across the district builds relationships, improves

communication, and enhances learning for continuous organizational improvement. Professional learning communities encourage action orientation, taking action on ideas and bringing vision to reality. Leaders of professional learning communities are constantly encouraging their people to look for a better way through continuous improvement. The PLC is also results oriented, realizing the effects of all efforts are measured by results (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). A healthy PLC provides a valuable opportunity for aspiring leaders to actively contribute to the development of the organization and, consequently, gain valuable leadership experience.

Succession Management and Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership

Behavioral theories of leadership are based on the belief that great leaders are made, not born. They do not seek certain characteristics within an individual, rather what the leader actually does, thus emphasizing the importance of leadership development. Transformational leadership emphasizes the importance of the leader developing a vision for the school district and inspiring the followers to believe in the vision. The idea of transformational leadership was first developed by two theorists: James MacGregor Burns and Bernard Bass. Burns believed that transformational leaders are able to inspire followers to change their expectations and perceptions to work toward a common goal that previously may have been thought of as unattainable (Burns, 1978). Bass further developed the theory by identifying four components of transformational leadership: intellectual stimulation, challenging the status quo and encouraging creativity among followers; individualized consideration, directly recognizing each follower's contributions; inspirational motivation, the ability to clearly articulate a vision and motivating others to follow; and idealized influence, the leader serves as a respected and trusted role model (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach (1999) have done extensive research applying the concept of transformational leadership to education, arguing that transformational leadership moves schools beyond first-order, surface changes to second-order improvements that change the core of the education system in areas such as pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment (Leithwood et al., 1999). These second order changes are achieved through the pursuit of common goals, empowerment of people within the organization, the nurturing of a collaborative culture, and getting people involved in decision-making (Leithwood et al., 1999).

Research supports the dramatic effect that transformational leaders have on the success of their school districts. Schlechty (2001) emphasized the importance of having a transformational leader to ensure sustained systemic improvement. “The leadership required is transformational rather than transactional. Transformational leadership requires the leader to embrace and cause others to embrace new and revolutionary assumptions (p. 164). Nguni, Slegers and Denessen, (2006) tested the effects of transformational leadership on teacher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior, and found significant effects in all areas. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) also found a positive correlation between transformational leadership style and student achievement. Hoyle’s (2007) leadership study emphasized the importance of leadership style in determining the effectiveness of a superintendent, noting the trend from forcing others to comply to modeling the way for others through the use of empowerment and collaboration.

The nature of transformational leadership lends itself well to the development of a professional learning community and the application of succession management. By encouraging a collaborative culture and the development of the organization’s leadership capacity, transformational leaders are, in turn, nurturing future transformational leaders. The

most effective transformational leader is one who is familiar with the values and purpose of the organization. She/he uses this knowledge to form a vision that is likely to be supported by her/his followers. Schlechty (2009) opined that transformational leaders cannot “simply be hired and put in place. They must embrace and be committed to the direction that the school and school district are headed in and must internalize the values of the system at a bone-deep level” (p. 258).

Distributed Leadership

Succession management involves providing leadership opportunities to aspiring administrators within the organization for the purpose of preparing them for job advancement and to increase their degree of preparation for various tasks associated with the administrative position to which they aspire. This concept relates well to distributive leadership theory. The theory follows the premise that no leader can do it all. Leaders must empower others in their organizations to take on leadership roles, creating “an interactive web” of administrators and teacher leaders who collaborate in various ways for the benefit of the organization (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 23). Spillane (2006) added that distributive leadership is more than just multiple individuals taking the responsibility of leadership. He emphasized: “It is the collective interactions among leaders, followers, and their situation that are paramount” (p. 4).

The distributive leadership model relates well to the succession management initiative. It provides individuals with valuable leadership experience while simultaneously empowering them as part of the decision making process of the school or district. Fullan (2005) stated: “If we then can multiply the opportunities for would-be and practicing principals to obtain new learning experiences, we enable more and more leaders to develop accordingly” (p. 34).

Summary

The literature review established the nexus between strong leadership and the success of an organization. The researcher identified the impact that leadership had in the business world, and then revealed that same theme through a detailed analysis of the effect that strong leadership has in the field of education. Through an analysis of the evolution of the superintendency, the research further established the importance of the position. The evolution of the superintendent as the leader of the school district was evident in the literature cited.

The researcher clarified the various duties of the modern day superintendent as an educational, political, and managerial leader. Numerous studies were cited that supported the importance of competence in all three areas to the success of the superintendent. Information on the current Pennsylvania superintendent certification program requirements was noted in the literature review including an overview of the program standards, an analysis of the coursework and internship requirements, as well as a review of various studies related to the effectiveness of superintendent preparation programs. Literature was then reviewed on the current status of the superintendency including reasons for job dissatisfaction, the status of the candidate pool, and current tenure rate.

The literature review analyzed the hiring practices of school districts, detailing the advantages and disadvantages of hiring place-bound versus career-bound candidates. This analysis led into a review of literature regarding succession management practices and their application to business and education. Detailed information regarding the positive effects of the use of succession management in both realms was reviewed.

The literature review concluded with an analysis of organizational thinking and leadership theory. A connection was established between succession management,

organizational thinking, professional learning communities, and transformational and distributive leadership theories.

The literature established the profound impact that applying a succession management system has on organizations committed to sustained improvement, while revealing the deficiency of literature on the impact this emergent theory has on educational leadership. This study will address this literature gap by analyzing three first-time superintendents who have been exposed to succession management strategies and comparing their self-perceived job performance and preparation to three first-time superintendents who were not provided with this opportunity. The researcher's intent is to establish a connection between succession management opportunities and the level of preparation and quality of job performance of first-time superintendents.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the effect that exposure to succession management strategies had on the self-perceived degree of preparation and job effectiveness of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents. Specifically, this study sought to determine if the exposure to leadership opportunities an individual received within the district prior to his/her first superintendency helped to better prepare that individual for the various duties of the job in comparison to a first-time superintendent who had received no prior leadership experience within the organization.

This chapter describes the research design and methodology that was used in the study, including a detailed description of the instrument and selection of participating subjects. First-time superintendents from six Pennsylvania school districts were interviewed to determine their perception of the degree of preparation and job effectiveness through their first year on the job and the extent to which exposure to leadership opportunities within their district prior to taking the position affected their performance. Three of the participants were chosen from a pool of superintendents who were promoted from within the organization and were provided leadership opportunities normally assigned to the superintendent prior to ascending to the position. Three participants were chosen from a pool of superintendents who were hired from outside the organization and received limited exposure to leadership opportunities within the district prior to their first day on the job.

This study is relevant to Pennsylvania school districts as they seek ways to ensure that they meet the stringent accountability measures of *No Child Left Behind*. Strong leadership at

the building and district level has a significant effect on student achievement and the success of a district, second only to classroom instruction (Anthes, 2005). Research has shown the positive impact of cultivating leaders within the organization through the development of professional learning communities led by transformational leaders who promote distributed leadership practices (DeVita, 2007; DuFour & Eaker, 2008; Fullan, 2005; Fusarelli & Jackson, 2004; Levitz, 2008; McAdams, 2007; Reeves, 2005; Schlechty, 2006).

Succession management is defined as “combining succession planning and leadership development in a comprehensive process for finding and grooming future leaders at all levels of your organization” (Conger, 2003, p. 1). It is a concept that has been widely used in the business world for decades. It is common practice for successful corporations to identify those individuals within their organizations with leadership potential and provide them with training and leadership opportunities so that when the organization has a leadership vacancy the successor is chosen from a cadre of trained individuals from within the organization. Not only is the leader familiar with the unique operation of the business, but he/she has also received valuable hands-on experience, performing many facets of the leadership position for which he/she has been groomed. External succession has been shown to cause disruption and a negative impact on short-term organizational performance (Geisel, 2002).

Education and the role of the superintendent are no different. The duties and responsibilities of each superintendent position are unique to that organization. For this reason, it is critical for public school systems to not only identify and develop future district leaders within their organizations, but to also provide the individual with leadership opportunities involving various duties of the superintendent. It was the researcher’s intent to determine whether a nexus exists between a superintendent’s self-perceived level of preparation and

effectiveness and the extent to which he/she is exposed to the various duties of the superintendency through succession management strategies.

Statement of the Problem

Pennsylvania school districts are faced with the daunting challenge of meeting exigent achievement proficiencies set forth by *No Child Left Behind*. Sustainability and continuous improvement are imperative for a district to meet these stringent accountability measures and can only be achieved with strong and steadfast leadership from the director of the district, the school superintendent. When superintendent vacancies are filled with an external candidate, it is inevitable that temporary disruption occurs as the new leader becomes familiar with the unique culture of the organization.

Research Questions

The research questions formulated for this study were based on the concepts developed through the researcher's review of literature. Research in the area of promoting a superintendent from within versus outside an organization is limited. Research on the effects of applying the concept of succession management within the learning community framework is even more infrequent.

The principal question the researcher was seeking to answer was, "Is a superintendent who is provided administrative leadership opportunities prior to being promoted from within better prepared for the job than an external candidate with no prior administrative experience within that district?" To answer the question, the researcher interviewed superintendents from both sides of the issue and attempted to determine the effect that transformational and distributed leadership and the existence of a professional learning community had on leadership development and effectiveness.

The following research questions, the development of which was based on supportive literature, guided the focus of the study:

1. What are the self-perceptions of preparation and job effectiveness of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents who have been exposed to succession management opportunities compared to those who have not?
2. To what extent are Pennsylvania school districts identifying individuals with administrative potential within their organizations and applying succession management strategies to prepare aspiring administrators for leadership positions?
3. What formal policies/procedures have Pennsylvania school districts adopted for the purpose of developing leadership capacity within their school districts?
4. What are the challenges of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents?
5. What recommendations do first-time Pennsylvania superintendents offer to address challenges and help the transition to the superintendency?

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects that applying succession management strategies had upon the self-perceived degree of preparation and job effectiveness of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents. The researcher determined the qualitative methodological approach to be the most appropriate to address the research questions associated with this study. Gay, Mills, & Airasian described the goal of qualitative research as gaining “insights into a particular phenomenon of interest” (2009, p. 7). In this case, the phenomenon of the first-time superintendency was the focus of the study. Qualitative research emphasizes the interaction of human participants, allows for a more humanistic approach to dealing with data, and affords outcomes that are more reflective of human perspectives (Berg, 2007). The research

problem and method evolve as the researcher gains a greater understanding of the topic (Gay, et al., 2009). The researcher gathered data through one-on-one interviews. Through these detailed interviews, a greater understanding of the research topic and related research questions was attained.

The researcher chose the case study approach to qualitative inquiry as the method used to fulfill this research project. Case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system. The investigator explores multiple bounded systems over time through in-depth data collection and reports case-based themes revealed through the research (Creswell, 2007). Berg (2007) emphasized the importance of gathering extremely rich, in-depth and detailed information to gain a holistic understanding of the effect of some phenomenon. Case study approaches are commonly used in practice-oriented disciplines such as education (Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

Types of qualitative case studies are distinguished by the size of the bounded case as well as the intent of the case analysis. The type of approach most appropriate for this particular study is a collective case study in which one issue is selected with the researcher choosing multiple case studies to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2007). Participants were chosen for this study for the purpose of creating a cross-unit comparison, illustrating the participants' varied backgrounds and the effects to which they have on their self-perception of job preparation and performance. For this purpose, a comparative case study approach was utilized (Berg, 2007).

Participants in this study were categorized into one of two subgroups. The first group of eligible participants consisted of those individuals who were promoted to the superintendency from within the organization and indicated an exposure to some form of succession management. The second group consisted of superintendents who were hired externally and received limited

leadership opportunities within the district prior to his/her first official day as superintendent. Purposive sampling was used to determine the six individuals, three from each sample group, who were asked to participate in the study. Purposive or judgment sampling is used when the researcher has special knowledge or expertise about the sample group and selects subjects who represent the sample population (Berg, 2007; Gay et al., 2009). The selection of participants was determined after initial phone calls were made to each of the potential participants. Initial interest was determined at this time. Potential participants were asked to complete a brief survey, the questions of which were designed to identify prior experience as well as exposure to succession management strategies and various duties of the superintendent during that time (Appendix C).

Participants

A list of first-time superintendents was obtained from the executive director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA). The database included the district in which each individual was hired as well as the hire date. The Pennsylvania Education Directory of 2009-2010 was used to identify the individuals who previously held a position within the district they were currently employed immediately prior to becoming superintendent. Two subgroups were formed; one consisting of superintendents who were promoted from within the district, the other consisting of individuals who were hired from outside the district. In an effort to increase the validity of the study, only individuals hired within a one month time period from July 2010 to August 2010 were considered for the study.

In July of 2011, thirty-two potential participants were identified. Phone calls were placed to all thirty-two individuals by the researcher. Of that group, twenty-three were successfully contacted. The researcher introduced himself, gave a brief overview of the research,

and asked each individual if he/she would be willing to complete the survey. On July 6, 2011, an e-mail was sent to all thirty-two potential participants. The e-mail included an introduction of the researcher and a brief synopsis of the research. Attached to the e-mail was a letter from The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) indicating the research as being endorsed by the association and the researcher's identification as a PASA research fellow. Additionally, the e-mail included a link to a brief survey in which the potential participants were asked to answer seven questions about their prior administrative experience and previous exposure to various duties of the superintendent prior to beginning their current positions. Thirteen of the survey recipients were promoted from within while nineteen were hired from outside the district. The researcher received responses from twenty of the initial thirty-two survey recipients.

The twenty survey responses were analyzed to determine participant compatibility with the study. Purposive sampling was used to select the six individuals who would be asked to participate. Three individuals from each sampling group were chosen based on the qualifying information noted above, thus following a purposeful stratified approach. Stratified purposive sampling was chosen based on the intent of the researcher to establish a comparative analysis of two distinctly different paths to the superintendency. Stratified sampling is a way to guarantee desired representation of relevant subgroups within the sample (Creswell, 2007; Gay et al., 2009), in the case of this study, internally promoted candidates exposed to succession management and external candidates who were to a lesser degree or not at all. It was the researcher's intent to determine whether or not there was a relationship between a superintendent's self-perceived level of preparation and job effectiveness and his/her prior

exposure to the various duties of the superintendency within his/her district via succession management strategies.

The six participants selected for the study were chosen based on each individual's prior administrative experience and the degree to which the in-house candidates were exposed to succession management opportunities. Individuals hired from within the organization but receiving no exposure to the administrative duties of the superintendent were eliminated from possible participation in the study. Conversely, those individuals hired from outside the organization that may have been provided a long-term opportunity (beyond one year) to mentor with the outgoing superintendent prior to becoming the acting superintendent were also not considered for participation.

Following the selection of the six study participants, the researcher contacted each by telephone for the purpose of informing the individual of his/her selection, establishing a positive and professional relationship, further explaining the study, clarifying expectations, and to make the final determination of whether or not each individual was willing to participate. Upon participation confirmation, the researcher set a day/time when the interview would take place. The researcher mailed the participant the interview questions as well as the voluntary consent forms prior to the interview date.

Instrument

The nature of this study required the assessment of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents' self-perceptions regarding their level of preparation in various job responsibilities of the specific position in which they held as well as their self-perceived job effectiveness. Job effectiveness was determined by the participants' responses to various questions regarding how well they felt they handled specific duties of the job in relation to the

three categories noted in the research; educational leader, managerial leader, and political leader. In order to acquire the data for this study, in-depth, individual interviews were used as the primary data gathering strategy. Supplemental information was obtained through telephone calls and e-mail inquiries to the participants as well as secondary sources such as the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA).

The researcher used a semi-structured interview. This type of interview involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions asked in consistent order. What distinguishes this approach from a structured one is that the interviewee is free to digress and the interviewers are permitted to probe beyond their standardized questions (Berg, 2007). Interview questions were formed based on the review of literature; research on leadership, the role of the superintendent, succession management, systems thinking, professional learning theory, transformational leadership theory, and distributed leadership theory. Specific questions focused on the three leadership areas identified in the literature review; educational leadership, managerial leadership, and political leadership (Chapman, 1997; Culotta, 2007; Johnson, 1996; Orr, 2002). Particular attention was given to areas identified by the American Association of School Administrators as “critical district functions” that new superintendents often lack knowledge of and/or experience with (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 26). Participants were encouraged to elaborate on each question in an attempt to lead them into a spontaneous discussion.

The researcher interviewed the participants in person at their selected location, asking the following focus questions to begin dialogue;

1. What month/year did you begin your current position of superintendent in this district?

2. Describe your educational experience/career path as related to your current position.
(jobs held/tenure, degrees obtained/when) Specify the district in which each experience occurred.
3. Describe your internship. (competencies completed)
4. In any of your former administrative positions, did you ever receive hands-on training/mentorship opportunities that further prepared you for the superintendency?
5. How would you describe your job effectiveness when dealing with the community? (special interest groups, political action groups...) What went well? What didn't go well? Describe any experience you had prior to becoming a practicing superintendent that prepared you for this aspect of the job? (coursework, internship, on the job training...)
6. How would you describe your job effectiveness when dealing with the school board? What went well? What didn't go well? Describe any experience you had prior to becoming a practicing superintendent that prepared you for this aspect of the job? (coursework, internship, on the job training...)
7. How would you describe your job effectiveness when managing district finance and preparing the district budgeting? What went well? What didn't go well? Describe any experience you had prior to becoming a practicing superintendent that prepared you for this aspect of the job? (coursework, internship, on the job training...)
8. How would you describe your job effectiveness when dealing with personnel and union relations? What went well? What didn't go well? Describe any experience you had prior to becoming a practicing superintendent that prepared you for this aspect of the job? (coursework, internship, on the job training...)

9. How would you describe your job effectiveness as an educational leader, ensuring that your district met Adequate Yearly Progress? What went well? What didn't go well? Describe any experience you had prior to becoming a practicing superintendent that prepared you for this aspect of the job? (coursework, internship, on the job training...)
10. How would you describe your job effectiveness in developing and articulating a shared educational vision? What went well? What didn't go well? Describe any experience you had prior to becoming a practicing superintendent that prepared you for this aspect of the job? (coursework, internship, on the job training...)
11. Does your current school district or district with which you worked previously make an effort to identify individuals with leadership potential? Explain.
12. Does your current school district or district with which you worked previously offer formal in-house training to prepare aspiring leaders for future administrative vacancies? Explain.
13. Does your current school district or district with which you worked previously have a formal policy to develop the district's leadership capacity (succession management)?
14. In your opinion, what are the most significant challenges for first-time superintendents?
15. What can be done to better prepare first-time superintendents in these areas?

The researcher conducted one hour interviews with each of the six participants in the setting of their choice. All interviews were audio recorded for authenticity with the interviewer taking notes as the informant answered the questions. The audio recordings were then transcribed shortly after the interviews.

Research Questions and Instrument Alignment

The interview questions provided the researcher with sufficient data to accurately answer the research questions. The matrix shown in Table 1 outlines the alignment of research questions for the study and the interview questions that are related.

Table 1

Matrix of Research Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. What are the self-perceptions of preparation and job effectiveness of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents who have been exposed to succession management opportunities compared to those who have not?	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
2. To what extent are Pennsylvania school districts identifying individuals with administrative potential within their organizations and applying succession management strategies to prepare aspiring administrators for leadership positions?	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
3. What formal policies/procedures have Pennsylvania school districts adopted for the purpose of developing leadership capacity within their school districts?	11, 12, 13
4. What are the challenges of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents?	3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,14
5. What recommendations do first-time Pennsylvania superintendents offer to address challenges and help the transition to the superintendency?	14, 15

Validity and Reliability

Researchers emphasize the importance of reliability and validity as part of the traditional empirical research process. All research carries with it the responsibility of convincing the audience that the findings are based on critical investigation. However, qualitative researchers argue that validity and reliability as applied in quantitative research are not applicable to naturalistic inquiry. Rudestam & Newton (2007) stated, “It may not be necessary to use the traditional terms *reliability*, *internal validity*, and *external validity* in writing a qualitative dissertation” (p. 112).

Validating a research process means showing that it is well founded and sound, whether or not the results generalize to a larger group (Rudestam & Newton (2007). Many perspectives exist regarding the importance of validity in qualitative research. Writers have found qualitative equivalents that parallel traditional quantitative approaches to validation (Creswell, 2007). Gay et al. (2009) argued the importance of establishing trustworthiness by establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study. Guba (1981) defined credibility as, “The researcher’s ability to take into account all of the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (from Gay et al., p. 376).

Researchers suggest validation strategies for ensuring the accuracy of qualitative research (Berg, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Gay et al., 2009; Rudestam & Newton 2007). The researcher applied a number of these recommended strategies to ensure the validity of the research. The credibility or truth value of the findings was established by spending sufficient time with the subjects, recording detailed information through audio recorded interviews. The researcher explored the participant’s experiences and opinions in sufficient detail through the semi-structured questioning format, using follow-up questions to obtain detailed information about the

views of the participant. Prolonged participation at the study site enabled the researcher to overcome distortions produced by the presence of the researcher and to provide the opportunity to discern biases and true perceptions (Gay et al., 2009). Detailed description of the setting, the participants, and their responses allowed the readers of the study to determine if the results of the study can be transferred and/or applied to other settings (Creswell, 2007).

Another validation strategy used by the researcher was *peer debriefing*. Three administrators were asked to review data collected from the participant interviews in order to provide an external check of the research process. The peer reviewers were encouraged to ask hard questions about methods, meaning, and interpretations. The researcher kept written accounts of the sessions (Creswell, 2007; Rudestam & Newton 2007).

The researcher also employed the strategy of *member check* in which the researcher solicits participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Berg, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Gay et al., 2009; Rudestam & Newton 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified this technique as being the most critical when establishing the credibility of a study. The intent of the researcher is to take data analysis, interpretations, and the conclusion back to the participants so that they can judge the research for accuracy and credibility of their account.

The researcher also practiced *reflexivity*. This is the process of revealing underlying assumptions or biases that may cause the researcher to present findings in a particular way (Gay et al., 2009). The researcher served in the same school district for twenty-two years. In 2000, the researcher was promoted internally to the position of elementary principal after serving ten years as a teacher. Prior to ascending to the principalship, the researcher was provided leadership opportunities that gave him exposure to the duties of the school principal supplemental to his coursework and internship requirements. The researcher was also afforded

various district wide leadership opportunities in his current position. Having received exposure to informal succession management opportunities, the researcher may have had a bias that affected the interpretation of the research.

Reliability concerns the replication of the study under similar circumstances. Reliability can be addressed in qualitative research in a number of ways. Qualitative research differs from quantitative in that it is very context-bound and, as a result, may not seek to draw conclusions that can be applied to other groups. Gay et al. (2009) suggested that qualitative research include as much detail as possible about the setting and participants, thus enabling readers to determine applicability to their situation. The researcher ensured reliability of this study by audio recording the participant interviews and transcribing within thirty days while the interview was fresh in the researcher's mind. The transcription included pauses and overlaps in the participant's responses. The researcher added anecdotal notes that referenced the participant's facial gestures, tone, and other factors that may have affected the interpretation of the data. A computer program supplied by the university (NVivo) was used to assist in coding and analysis of the data.

Pilot Procedure

In the spring of 2011, the researcher submitted the request for IRB pilot study approval. Upon receiving approval from the dissertation committee and the IRB board, a panel of four individuals was identified to participate in the pilot. Participant one was a current superintendent with over forty years of experience in public education, thirty-three as a superintendent. The researcher chose to include this individual in the pilot to get the perspective of a superintendent who was near the end of his career, had a long and successful tenure, and had a vested interest in the continued success of the district. This individual likely had given thought to succession and placed value in ensuring a smooth and successful transition to his successor.

Participants two, three and four were first-time superintendents. They all had over twenty years in education and had, within the past year, begun their first superintendency. Participants two and three accepted positions in districts where they had no previous experience. Participant two was a first-time superintendent who, though his previous job as assistant superintendent was with a neighboring district and he was not promoted from within, had spent his childhood and had previously worked in the district where he was now superintendent. The researcher thought this would provide a unique perspective for the pilot, based on his familiarity with the community and the operation of the district. Participant three, although being hired from outside the district, was provided the opportunity to shadow the outgoing superintendent for four months before taking over the position. It was the interviewer's hope that the pilot interview would determine if this succession experience had an impact on his self-perceived job performance and preparedness.

Participant four was a first-time superintendent who was promoted from within the organization and was in her first official year as superintendent. Previous positions in the district included secondary math teacher, curriculum director, assistant superintendent, and acting superintendent. The researcher thought this would provide a unique perspective for the pilot, based on her familiarity with the community and the operation of the district.

All four participants were interviewed during the months of May and June of 2011 at a location of their choice. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Participants received an overview of the study in advance. Particular attention was given to the interview questions. Participants were asked to provide verbal feedback and input to strengthen the validity and value of the instrument questions. Interviews were recorded using anecdotal notes of participant input.

Pilot Results and Analysis of Data

As a result of the pilot study, slight changes were made to the interview questions based on suggestions made by the pilot participants. Question number three was eliminated. The question asked the interviewees what university they obtained their certification from. One pilot participant felt that it was irrelevant to the focus of the study and others agreed. Clarification was added to question number two at the suggestion of the pilot study participants who felt it was important to specify where prior experience occurred. All participants stressed the importance of their prior experience within and outside the district in preparing them for various duties of the superintendency. Another suggestion made by participant number three was emphasizing the importance of establishing relationships with local political groups as well as your senator and representative on the state level. All four participants emphasized the importance of the political aspect of the job in light of the recent budget crisis. The researcher added emphasis to this role in the research questions. The final adjustment made based on input from the pilot participants was in regards to the study overview that I provided. Two of the participants recommended a briefer overview of the study, taking into consideration the busy schedules of all superintendents. The researcher adjusted the dissertation overview for the sake of brevity.

Summary

Chapter three has discussed the design of this qualitative study including the research design, chosen methodology, a detailed description of the instrument, and the process used for the selection of participants. Chapter four will discuss the results of the study and what the data revealed.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to interview first-time Pennsylvania superintendents in order to identify their exposure to various job responsibilities of the superintendent prior to taking the position. It was the goal of the researcher to determine if the exposure to leadership opportunities an individual received within the district prior to his/her first superintendency helped to better prepare that individual for the various duties of the job in comparison to a first-time superintendent who had received no prior leadership experience within the organization.

The study was a collective case study in which one issue was analyzed with the researcher using multiple case studies to clarify the issue. Purposive sampling was used to identify the six individuals who were asked to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews were used, allowing the interviewer the freedom to expound upon the original questions in order to gain more depth and understanding of the participants. Qualitative data from these in-depth interviews were collected in order to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the self-perceptions of preparation and job effectiveness of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents who have been exposed to succession management opportunities compared to those who have not?
2. To what extent are Pennsylvania school districts identifying individuals with administrative potential within their organizations and applying succession management strategies to prepare aspiring administrators for leadership positions?

3. What formal policies/procedures have Pennsylvania school districts adopted for the purpose of developing leadership capacity within their school districts?
4. What are the challenges of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents?
5. What recommendations do first-time Pennsylvania superintendents offer to address challenges and help the transition to the superintendency?

Review of Interview Process, Data Collection, and Analysis

Interviews were conducted over a two week period during the summer of 2011. Subject participation consent (Appendix D) was obtained prior to each interview. Interview locations were determined by each participant and in all instances took place in his/her office. Interview questions focused on the individual's professional experience/career path, his/her self-perceived job performance as a political, managerial, and educational leader through his/her first year as a superintendent, the challenges faced by first year superintendents, and what could be done to better prepare first-time superintendents. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. If more detail was needed for a certain question or emerging theme, follow-up questions were asked of each candidate via e-mail. Interviews were recorded and, within a month following each interview, transcribed and coded using NVivo software. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software package designed for researchers working with text-based information where deep levels of analysis on small volumes of data are required. Throughout the process of analyzing the transcriptions, comparisons were made based on career path and emergent themes identified.

This chapter is divided into two distinct sections. Section one consists of a presentation of the six case studies included in the research. Each study is organized according to the following structure: demographic information about the district; a description of the participant's background including his/her professional experience leading to his/her first superintendency;

the participant's reflection of job effectiveness as a political, managerial, and educational leader; the participant's opinion on challenges of first-time superintendents, and the participant's opinion on what can be done to better prepare first-time superintendents. The data were organized and presented in this manner in an effort to parallel the structure of the interview questions and the themes presented therein.

The second section of this chapter identifies emergent themes that were exposed by the research. Themes are presented in a causal-comparative nature, establishing both divergence and similarities between those hired from within and outside the organization. Identified themes include; an analysis of the impact of positive mentors, the effects of prior experience within the district including the comparison of traditional and non-traditional progression, and the perceived intent of the district when hiring a new superintendent, maintaining continuity versus initiating change.

In order to protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all participants as well as their school districts. Specific references to individuals, locations, and incidents made by participants during the interview process were disguised as well in an effort to further protect confidentiality.

Case Study A - Dr. Mike Lewis

Superintendent, Martinsville Area School District

Dr. Lewis was interviewed at 9:00 a.m. on a sunny summer morning. I arrived at Martinsville Area School District administrative offices approximately 8:45 a.m. The administrative offices were located on the second floor of one of the district's five elementary school buildings. I was greeted by a secretary at a counter in the hallway who directed me to the superintendent's office. There, I was warmly greeted by another secretary who informed me that

Dr. Lewis would be with me shortly. At approximately 9:00 a.m., Dr. Lewis greeted me with a smile and welcomed me into his office. The office was spacious and bright. We sat at a large table for the duration of the interview. Dr. Lewis's posture was very comfortable and relaxed throughout the interview.

District Demographics

Martinsville is a suburban school district located in central Pennsylvania with 3,703 students (2009-2010 school year). The National Center for Education Statistics identifies twelve distinct urban-centric locale code categories based on location, population, and the demographic make-up of an area. Martinsville is labeled with a locale code of 21; suburb, large. The descriptor for this locale code is a "territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population of 250,000 or more". The district consists of a kindergarten center, five elementary schools, a middle school, and a senior high school. The Martinsville Area School District has a total operating budget of \$45,507,000. Per pupil expenditure is \$12,306. The district's aide ratio is .38 with 76% of its revenue generated locally (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

Participant Career Path

Though hired internally, Dr. Lewis had a very interesting career path to his first superintendency. A common theme emerged as he described each step in his professional development. A strong mentor was there to encourage him in each position he held. After completing his undergraduate degree at a local state university, Dr. Lewis accepted his first teaching job as an eighth grade science teacher at a large school district located in a neighboring county. Dr. Lewis noted that he had graduated from a small school. His experience teaching in a larger school district with over 8,000 students gave him a new perspective.

My graduating class was about 160. When I walked into this massive building I thought this has to be grades 6-12 and it was two grades, eighth and ninth in one building. But that was a great experience. They had a lot of diversity. It was a challenge. My first year as a teacher, I had cafeteria duty. I walked into the cafeteria and there were 450 fourteen year olds. I look around and I'm the only adult in the cafeteria. I don't have a clue what to do, no one told me. I'm just standing there. At the time, the assistant principal comes up the steps, looks around and says, "Wow, we screwed this up. You are the only one in here. Good luck with that. I'll be back in a little bit." I said, "Well wait, what am I supposed to do?" He said, "Keep them from killing each other."

He went on to note that it was his relationship with his former assistant principal that set him on his path to administration.

We developed a great relationship. He was a former varsity football coach and had become an assistant principal and I loved the guy. It was about the semester break. He said to me what are you thinking about doing. I told him I kicked around the idea of getting into administration. He literally took me out of the cafeteria that instant, took me down to his office, we called Stone Valley University ... that's how it started. [During] my first year of teaching I actually started administrative coursework. I don't know that I would advise people to do that, but that is truly how it started for me.

It was this same mentor who called Dr. Lewis into his office during his fifth year of teaching to inform him of an administrative vacancy in the district. Dr. Lewis was just completing his administrative internship and was not certain that he was ready to move into administration after only five years of teaching.

I was completely caught off guard. I had no plans to do that, meaning me leaving the classroom. I figured I would just get my degree and then see what happened. I was coaching baseball and loved it. We had an amazing team that year. So I did it. I went down and interviewed. They offered me the job and with the salary increase and the fact my wife could stay home with the baby, I took it.

His first administrative experience was assistant principal at the sixth and seventh grade middle school within the same district. He described the experience of working with the principal and other assistant as an “incredible experience”. It was in his second year in that building when an administrative assistant informed him of an opening in a very rural central Pennsylvania school district in a neighboring county where the previous principal of his current school was now superintendent. Dr. Lewis had reservations about interviewing for a principalship in a district with only 500 students kindergarten through twelfth grade.

So I thought, well, what the heck, I’ll go interview at least, but I am not interested. And I went, and they put an offer on the table I couldn’t refuse. It gave me an opportunity to be a high school principal and simultaneously a middle school principal and simultaneously an assistant superintendent and an assistant principal and a counselor because in those districts you’re everything. I mean there were three administrators in the entire district; the superintendent, a secondary principal, and an elementary principal.

Dr. Lewis describes the very diverse experience of working in such a small school district as rewarding but challenging.

Well, let me start with the beginning of the day, the senior class meeting. I go to the gym and I’m waiting and I’m waiting and I’m waiting. Finally, my assistant comes over the loud speaker and says, “Mr. Lewis, what are you doing?” And I say, “I’m waiting for

the senior class. Where are they?” They’re in room 8. All 27 of them were in a single classroom. You talk about a mind shift. Then at the end of the day the buses roll around and four buses pull up and, of course, I’m waiting for the next wave of buses. They laughed at me and said, “We’re done!” So anyway, a real interesting experience.

Dr. Lewis complimented the superintendent of this school district as being a very forward-thinking mentor who provided him with exposure to many valuable experiences.

After serving as the high school principal for three years, Dr. Lewis was told of a principalship in the Martinsville School District. Though it was a horizontal move, it would reduce his commute and allow him to spend more time with his growing family. Dr. Lewis decided to apply. After an extensive interview process he was awarded the position. He soon found out that the school and district had its challenges.

When I got here things were tough. The district office was not getting along with the buildings, the board was in a little bit of disarray, and people were saying, “Why in the world would you come here? You got a militant staff to deal with at the high school.” I didn’t find that at all. I mean the staff was upset about a lot of decisions that had recently been made but we circled the wagons and I said to them, “Listen, we’ll focus on this building, and I’ll take care of all the outside issues,” meaning the district office and so on and so forth.

Dr. Lewis went on to describe how he enjoyed the position of high school principal in Martinsville and thought a lot of improvements were made at the building level. However, things in the district office remained in disarray. The superintendent left the district. Then at the end of the same year, the co-superintendent (who had stepped in as a temporary replacement) took a job at a local university. It was this individual who came to Dr. Lewis and encouraged

him to make the move to central office, noting that the district was looking for a superintendent whose primary responsibility was going to be dealing with the community. Additionally, the plan was to have a chief fiscal officer and a chief academic officer to assist the superintendent. Those two individuals would run the day-to-day operations of the district. Dr. Lewis applied for the position of chief academic officer and was hired concurrently with the new superintendent.

The new superintendent that Dr. Lewis worked under for the next five years was another supportive mentor who exposed him to many leadership opportunities and encouraged him to advance his career. Upon his retirement, he confided with Dr. Lewis that he thought he was ready to be his successor and recommended that the board bring his plan to fruition.

Throughout the interview, Dr. Lewis emphasized the importance that his prior experience played in preparing him for the job of superintendent. He emphasized the importance of garnering experience in the various positions he held both within and outside the district. He also gave a great deal of credit to the many mentors who encouraged him to advance his career along the way.

There's value, in my opinion, of working up through the system. There's value in knowing what it's like to be that assistant principal that has to grunt through the day and deal with the mundane tasks associated with running the building. You think as you're doing that you look at the principal and say, "Well I can do that job. I see what that guy is doing every day." Until you step into that job then you go, holy smokes, I had no idea what that guy did. And that has happened to me every time I've moved. I have been incredibly amazed at how different the job is once you're sitting in it compared to what your view of it is when you are looking into it.

Job Effectiveness as a Political Leader

With recent budget constraints placed upon school districts by drastic state cutbacks, the role of the superintendent as political leader has taken on added importance. Dr. Lewis credits his experience within the district as helping establish a positive relationship with both the school board and community leaders.

I worked really hard to make sure that I did a good job as high school principal. I worked really hard to make sure I did a good job as the assistant superintendent. And I think in that process, I developed a reputation. As a result of that reputation, again, I say riding the wave a little bit – it carried me into the role of superintendent.

Dr. Lewis went out of his way to immerse himself in the community. Having children involved in community activities gave him the opportunity to interact with taxpayers and parents in an informal environment. He also made an effort to connect with local community groups as well as state representatives.

This is a close knit community and I have two children who go in this district, so we have those connections with people. I feel like a lot of what I did this year was had individual conversations with people. [Regarding] budget ... I'd be at a ball game and someone would come up and say, "How's the budget going?" [It's all] because of those close personal relationships. So that part I think went well.

As part of my entry plan, I met with the legislators, which was a very good thing. I actually did that early in the year before the budget ever became an issue. I developed a little bit of a relationship there -- actually, a very good relationship with both our Senator and our State Legislator over the last several months. And then I met with several community groups. I got out to all of the PTO meetings.

Despite the benefit of having previously worked in the district, Dr. Lewis thought that this familiarity with the school board may have worked against him to a degree.

What I'd become acutely aware of is that what you did previously might get you into the position, but in order to be successful in the position, you have to establish yourself as the superintendent. I don't know if I effectively established myself as the superintendent. I think that change is hard for people. In dealing with the board, it's actually been a great experience. If they were sitting across the table they might be looking at me going what in the world are you talking about? Things are going well. But I also know that it can change in a heartbeat.

Job Effectiveness as a Managerial Leader

Dr. Lewis cited his previous duties in the district for giving him valuable experience as a managerial leader in the areas of budget preparation and union negotiations. He brought particular attention to his predecessor while he was serving in the position of assistant superintendent for preparing him in this area. "The previous five years I was intimately involved with budget discussions and preparation."

He used this prior experience to his advantage while developing his first budget as a superintendent during a very difficult financial period. He noted that he and his chief financial officer began developing their budget in September, anticipating a \$2.5 million dollar deficit. Working on the budget early and openly communicating with the public from the start of the process enabled Dr. Lewis to successfully pass his first budget.

We were transparent, we communicated. I think we did an incredible job communicating internally and a decent job communicating externally. We involved people in the decision making process. We did program evaluations to determine where we wanted to

go with cuts and what we wanted to hold on to. I don't know that it could have gone any better. We did a [smaller] tax increase than we were permitted by law to do, yet enough of a tax increase that we were able to balance [our budget] and only use a limited amount of fund balance in the process. Plus you built the base. That's so important to build the base. When you do a zero percent [tax increase], not only do you deal with that this year, you deal with it every year on out. The night we presented the preliminary budget we had probably 80 people in the board room, 60 of which were staff and 20 I'm guessing from the community. Not one person got up and spoke. When the board voted on the preliminary budget, they clapped. That was pretty cool.

Dr. Lewis also credited his prior experience within the district for helping him with managing union relations. He had relationships established with many of the union leaders and was able to use these positive relationships to produce positive outcomes with union issues.

The value of being in the district previously, the gentleman who was the association president was my building rep when I was high school principal. We had a very good relationship when I was high school principal and that just extended up through my role as superintendent. So the association and I worked very closely together right out of the gate. I don't think it could have gone any better.

Job Effectiveness as an Educational Leader

Dr. Lewis identified educational leadership as his most important role in leading a public school system. Once again, he felt that his prior experience helped him in this role, particularly the five years he spent within the district as chief academic officer. When addressing his role as educational leader, Dr. Lewis stated;

This is my passion. This is why we exist as an institution. Everything else is extraneous to this. [The previous superintendent] sent that message when he was here and I absolutely believe in that message. As chief academic officer for five years, our staff did some amazing things in this area. The district continues to improve every year. I am beginning to wonder, where it's coming from. How can you continue to get results the way you are? But the staff does.

Dr. Lewis noted the district's impressive results on the PSSA assessment at various grade levels and the improvements that have been made over recent years.

This year as an example, 97% of our sixth grade students were proficient or advanced and the school didn't make AYP because of a special education sub group. It's inherently unfair. But it's the game we're playing right now, so I will not publicly complain about it. I also have to make sure my teachers understand they are not going to get the AYP plaque and you're going to have to do a school improvement plan but you realize 97% of your sixth graders made And I keep using that number -- 90% of the seventh graders and 92 % of the eighth graders. It's just unreal. In our high school numbers, six years ago I think we were at 56% in math, 60% in reading. They both hit 80% this past year. Yes, this is a really exciting area. Again, knowing the people in the system, knowing the system itself, respecting the traditions along the way have helped me tremendously.

He went on to mention that, despite ascending to the superintendency and no longer working with curriculum on a daily basis, he still played an active role in the educational progress of his district. He felt the articulation of his educational vision was so important that he discussed it with all teachers in the district during his first in-service day. He emphasized his goal of maintaining the district's commitment to academic excellence.

The advantage of coming up through the district and completely buying into and believing what the previous superintendent did. My message to our 500 staff members the first day was it's not going to change. We're still about student achievement. Our goal was still 90% of our kids on grade level. They've known that goal for years and it's not going to change. That morning when we talked about what are the goals for the district this year, it was the exact same three goals as the previous year – exactly. And they thought that was great.

Challenges of First-Time Superintendents

Dr. Lewis presented a unique perspective when reflecting on the challenges of first-time superintendents. While he emphasized the benefit of being hired from within a successful district and having the advantage of a supportive community and board of directors as helpful, establishing his own identity as the leader of the district was a challenge.

So I walk into a situation where I have a supportive community, a supportive board, the district's moving in the right direction. It's a matter of maybe moving from the co-pilot's seat to the pilot's seat, but that's the extent of the change. Moving into that position and establishing yourself as, this individual is now the leader, may be the biggest challenge because you've had those relationships along the way. Do people now truly view you as you are the one in charge? So that may be a little bit of a challenge.

Dr. Lewis added that if he had the opportunity to do it all over again he would sit down with the board to clarify their expectations of him and articulate his vision for the school district.

Better Prepare First-Time Superintendents

Dr. Lewis opined that it is difficult to prepare someone for the unique challenges that each superintendent position presents. He suggested that the process should be on-going learning and training experience through the first year of the superintendency.

I think it should be ongoing. I don't think one and done is a good approach. I do believe there is value in knowing in general what's coming at you. For instance, you know in general you're going to get your PSSA results basically right when school starts. In addition to that you better have your staff in place and all those fundamental kinds of things. As a first year superintendent, you might not be thinking of all those pieces that need to fall into place. So, kind of like you do with new teachers. Here's what you can expect in that first month of the school year starting. And then you get into the fall and you know anymore budget really begins in October or November. I mean truly. And so, conversations about that and board relations, those are all the different areas I believe are really important to have conversations about. I don't know that there are answers, but the reflection and the conversation is so vital.

He went on to comment on the importance of communicating with mentor superintendents throughout the year as being very helpful with specific situations that arose throughout the year.

To be able to commiserate with other people going through the same situation was invaluable for me. To have a network of five to seven superintendents that I knew at any point I could pick up the phone and call them and feel very comfortable listening to their advice including the former superintendent in this school district. That was very helpful too. Other superintendents become an invaluable resource for you through the process, because it is lonely. I respect my assistant tremendously, but at the end of the day I'm

her supervisor. So how far can I go with spilling my guts to her? I'm supposed to be the leader here. You can't be talking about how much I dread this budget. But you need to be able to do that with someone.

Case Study B - Ms. Lucy Wilson

Superintendent, Red Valley Area School District

My interview with Ms. Lucy Wilson took place in her office at 1:00 p.m. on a sunny summer morning. I arrived at Red Valley Area School District at approximately 12:45. I was greeted by a secretary and directed to the superintendent's office which was located on the second floor of the high school. Ms. Wilson greeted me promptly and invited me into her office. We sat at a large table for the duration of the interview. Following the interview, Ms. Wilson treated me to a tour of the newly constructed high school.

District Demographics

The Red Valley Area School District is a suburban school district located in eastern Pennsylvania with 5,788 students (2009-2010 school year). The National Center for Education Statistics identifies twelve distinct urban-centric locale code categories based on location, population, and the demographic make-up of an area. Red Valley is labeled with a locale code of 21; suburb, large. The descriptor for this locale code is a "territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population of 250,000 or more". The district consists of seven K-5 elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. The Red Valley Area School District has a total operating budget of \$81,368,000. Per pupil expenditure is \$13,974. The district's aide ratio is .55 with 74% of its revenue generated locally (NCES, 2011).

Participants Career Path

Though being promoted from within and spending the entirety of her public school professional career in the Red Valley School District, Ms. Wilson was not originally from the area. She grew up in western Pennsylvania and graduated with an undergraduate social studies degree from a nearby university. Due to a shortage of job openings in her degree area, she made the decision to pursue her master's degree in sports administration at a prominent university in eastern Pennsylvania. She taught and coached (as a graduate assistant) at the university for five years while working on her master's degree. It was at that time that she made the career decision to pursue a teaching position in public education.

I realized I couldn't continue to work below the poverty line so I applied for a teaching job at Red Valley and got a contact back to set up an interview. I got hired as a social studies teacher at the high school.

Ms. Wilson spent her first five years in the district teaching high school social studies and coaching 9th grade volleyball. It was during this time that she realized her interest in exploring instructional initiatives and discontinued her coaching career to pursue this path. It was this calling that motivated her to pursue an administrative certification.

Right off the bat we were moving into technology when I first started teaching, and that was a big initiative. Then we were doing at risk students and cooperative learning and there were a lot of initiatives that were taking place those first five years including making the job of a classroom teacher in forty two minutes very difficult, teaching in three different classrooms five different subjects. I'm trying to do all of these good instructional practices. At the same time we started to look at intensive scheduling. At that point, I started to pursue my administrative certificate.

She accepted her first quasi-administrative position as the dean of students after only five years of teaching. She was in charge of discipline and attendance for two grade levels. She also continued to teach one class. It was during this time that she completed her administrative certification. After two years in this position, the district was faced with the abrupt retirement of the superintendent for health reasons. In addition, the high school principal retired as well, creating the possibility of job advancement for Ms. Wilson after only seven years in the district.

There was a lot of turnover. There was shifting of administrative personnel. One of the assistant high school principals became the high school principal, so they were looking for two high school assistants to work with. I applied for the assistant principalship.

Ms. Wilson was granted the assistant principalship at the high school and served in this position for five years. At this time, the district, once again, was faced with change on the administrative team. With the retirement of the director of personnel and the high school principal, opportunities for advancement once again occurred for Ms. Wilson. Though she indicated her first choice was the principal position, she was encouraged to accept the central office position of personnel director by her superintendent.

I walked over to see the director of curriculum. We were working on an in-service and I wanted to give her some paperwork and the superintendent happened to walk in. He said when you have a second stop by my office. So I came in here. He said, "Have you thought about applying for the central office job." I said I never gave that a thought. I realized how horrible the job of personnel is. It has many more negatives than it does positives. He said "I really think you should think about that. It will give you more time to work on your doctorate and give you a chance to work with the school board. It will give them a chance to get to know you better, and if you get your letter of eligibility this

would be a good thing.” At no point in time was any of that ever in my mind. But I also know what that means here because I know the culture of this district, and that meant that the decision was made who they were going to make principal of the high school and it wasn’t going to be me. So when they posted it, I did the formality of writing my letter, but I included both positions in my letter, building principal and central office. We never interviewed. We just did straight forced transfers and were put in our positions.

The superintendent’s advice turned out to be prophetic. Ms. Wilson held the position of personnel director/board secretary in the Red Valley School District for eight years. Throughout that time, numerous shifts in the organizational structure of the administrative team occurred. Ms. Wilson’s job description evolved from personnel director to assistant to the superintendent for personnel. Later, additional responsibilities were added related to support services. When the other assistant to the superintendent retired his position was not filled. This left Ms. Wilson as the sole assistant to the superintendent. Throughout this job transformation, Ms. Wilson was exposed to a wide variety of experiences that prepared her for the job of superintendent. She emphasized the importance of her central office experience in preparing her to be an effective leader.

Job Effectiveness as a Political Leader

As with Dr. Lewis, Ms. Wilson felt strongly that the political nature of the position was greatly enhanced by the timing of her first year with federal, state, and local budget constraints creating a politically charged atmosphere. Ms. Wilson first experienced the political nature of the position during the interview process. Despite having been employed with the district for twenty years, she was still seen by some as being “an outsider”. The hiring process emphasized

the importance that the Red Valley community placed on the *one of us* mentality and promoting from within.

The outside political people whom I did not have a lot of contact with did not know me. That was a barrier to my getting the position as well. There were politicians outside of this district from the local community who were concerned about my becoming superintendent even though I was twenty years in [the district]. There were some political favors and back scratching that we believe took place. Promises were made. Someone forgot to include the school board in that. To massage some of those outside political voices, they wanted to be reassured that there would be someone who they felt they could trust. Quite honestly, it had to be a man. It was interesting to me that I didn't get to pick who the person was. Had I had the choice, I would have picked the same person. I live in the community. The person who took my position grew up here but no longer lives in the community, and he has a strong family name. That calmed the local politicians' nerves because there was somebody they could call. What's been interesting during this first year is they have had to work with me and have gotten to know me. It's not as bad as they thought. Fear of the unknown. I was an outsider and they had no experience working with me.

Once hired, Ms. Wilson went to great lengths to further establish herself as a credible and respected player in the political arena. She initially sent letters to her state senators (who represent a portion of her school district) as well as the local state representatives. Her twenty years of experience in the district and community enabled her to establish relationships with some of these individuals which worked to her benefit during a tough political year.

The political aspect of this job has come into play much more than it has in the past.

With my two state reps, I have a great relationship. They have been very supportive through this whole budget process. One of our state representatives I knew when he was a cop in the community. Now that he is a state representative it is an interesting dialog when he calls me from the capitol from the house floor, I have a question for you...it is a different conversation.

Ms. Wilson also felt that her relationship with the school board went well through her first year. She emphasized the positive relationship that has long existed with the school board and the district administration, a relationship built on trust and support. Her prior experience in the district and the familiarity that was established has allowed for that positive relationship to continue.

We have a very supportive board. They don't micromanage. They like to be on top of things, but they believe that they hire us to do the work and they let us do our jobs. We are there to make recommendations to them. I have been pretty fortunate in my first year. Every vote was a 9-0 vote. It's not that every vote wasn't talked about; they believe that whenever possible it should be a 9-0 vote. They truly have the interest of this community and school at the heart of all their decisions. I can't say that is the case everywhere. We are considered a very conservative community. My board theoretically is all Republican. This election we had five seats up. All were running unopposed on both tickets. I can't explain it. It's interesting to me that you have a lot of saber rattling here but when it comes to this school district, as conservative as the area is, we are allowed to be as progressive as we are.

Job Effectiveness as a Managerial Leader

Ms. Wilson credited her eight years of experience in central office prior to becoming the superintendent as giving her an understanding of “the big picture” in regards to managing the district, in particular district finances. The previous superintendent had a background in district finances, having previously served as a business manager. He was the primary individual responsible for developing and managing the district budget with the assistance of the business manager.

Ms. Wilson’s intent was to move the managerial/budget responsibilities back to the business office. However, seven days into her superintendency the business manager was diagnosed with a terminal illness. Fortunately, the retired superintendent, as well as the former business manager, was available and willing to offer assistance through the budget process. Ms. Wilson felt that, despite the challenges, the budget process for her first year went well.

We cut 2.2 million dollars. We had fourteen professional positions cut. Ten of the fourteen we lost through attrition with retirements. The other four positions, we had some demotions from full time to part time. We dipped into fund balance. We said seven hundred fifty [thousand dollars] then we ended up getting a six hundred fifty [thousand dollar] temporary increase in the final budget that came through but in the past two years we have always put in the budget five hundred thousand and never used it so we are going to see how this plays out. We played a little tighter on the budget this year than we have in the past. Going into my budget I was not sure I was getting a 9-0 vote, but when not one person from the public got up to speak at the meeting, it was a 9-0 vote.

Managing personnel and union relations posed another challenge for the first year superintendent. The teachers’ union contract expired June 30th without an agreement in place. It

was Ms. Wilson's prior experience in the district as the personnel director that allowed her to address the situation in an effective manner.

I have been in on teacher contracts before as the director of personnel. In the past, somebody always rode in on the white horse whether it was the superintendent or the board president. They would come in and say this is what we are going to do and both sides would say "ok". I chose a little different approach this time. I taught them how to negotiate because essentially what would happen is one group would come in and say, "We think this is nice," and the other side would say "We think this is nice," and nobody would say, "Let's work off this one," and "Why do we want to make these decisions,"... There have been some good conversations that have happened, to learn how to negotiate a little bit better. We are very, very close to settling. The negotiations continue. There has been good dialog. I meet with the director of personnel and the association president and vice president once a month. They bring all of their complaints that they feel they can't resolve. It is a good working relationship.

Job Effectiveness as an Educational Leader

Ms. Wilson's prior experience in the district at various levels (teacher, building administrator, central office administrator) provided valuable insight to the educational needs of the district, specifically the administrative team.

Coming in I knew I needed to do more for the administrative team, specifically the building principals. Conceptually, they understand about being that instructional leader. They find it difficult understanding how to get themselves out from the managerial tasks. We ended up meeting as a leadership team. The cabinet used to meet with the principals by level. It was the same meeting three times [elementary, middle, high school].

Nothing was getting done. What I saw when I looked systems thinking wise, the culture in the district really created a bunch of islands. Each school was their own isolated island, and I wanted to break down the isolation. So we met as a leadership team, every administrator.

Once she had established her administrators as one unified team, she changed the focus of the administrative meetings from a “talking memo” that was directed by the superintendent to a more collaborative approach, designed to initiate change and educational improvement across the district. She established professional learning communities (PLCs) within her administrative team as a way of generating discussion on educational improvement.

I wanted to look at our meetings as a way to foster change in practice in terms of the isolation. I found that they don’t know each other as people. I had an advantage. At some point in my career I have worked with every administrator in the district.

I put every administrator in the district on a PLC. During my first year it was a book club. The way the PLCs were set up, they each had a central office administrator, an elementary, middle, and a high school administrator. They had to choose a book from a list; two books during the year and a book review at the end of the year. We used the PLCs for some of the activities in the leadership team meeting so they would engage in discussion. In the past, we would do a lot of managerial things at these meetings but we had little professional discussion. Our administrators now have a better sense of how to manage the teacher PLCs and how to make them more effective.

Ms. Wilson emphasized the importance of her administrative team being leaders of change. In order to accomplish sustained educational improvement across the district, Ms.

Wilson knew that her administrative meetings needed to be a collaborative, active learning experience.

If I can type or write it down I'm not going to spend meeting time going over it. Our first leadership meeting we went over emergency plans. I went in with a table top scenario. I had them problem solve in PLCs, what would you do. We talked about our emergency plan. As it turned out, we had to use our emergency plan a little more than expected. Not all of the meetings were run by me. For example, when we did the teacher evaluation meeting, my curriculum team ran it. We are going to have one hour meetings every three weeks with fifteen minute segments. I want them to be learners.

Ms. Wilson also used her prior experience in the district to identify the building administrator evaluation process as being an area in need of attention. She placed more emphasis on encouraging the administrators to choose personal goals that focus on an area of need.

In the years I was a principal I never saw written feedback on my performance evaluation, no one has. That changed this year. They had to pick two goals. I had district goals that I had planned out. We would then come to an agreement what two personal goals they would focus on. The high school principals all focused on the ninth grade failure rate. And we saw some phenomenal improvement based on what they looked at this year. They never really looked at it from that perspective in the past. It made a definite impact.

Though Ms. Wilson felt that everyone in the district and community was dedicated to providing a quality education to the children of Red Valley School District, she felt strongly that

there was something lacking. She saw the opportunity to articulate in her vision the need for the district to commit to continued improvement and growth.

That was something that I felt was lacking. I really believe in the mission of this district, and I understand the culture of this community so my vision is we need to grow because there is so much more we could be doing. I know the wealth of talent we have here.

There is still so much more that we could be doing. I needed to articulate that. At the opening of school meeting I presented my goals for the year and my vision.

I met with all of the district groups at the start of the year and midyear as well. I met with the faculty, with the secretaries, with the paraprofessionals, and with the transportation department. I did a PowerPoint presentation because I think they need to know what your vision is and at the same time, remind them along the way. That was a key piece to what I needed to do going in and I feel it was a success.

It was Ms. Wilson's previous experience in the district that enabled her to identify what she needed to accomplish as an educational leader, thus allowing her to establish a seamless transition to her leadership tenure, emphasizing a commitment to growth and sustained improvement across the district.

Challenges of First-Time Superintendents

Ms. Wilson indicated that she felt prepared for the various expected duties/challenges of the superintendent in the Red Valley School District large in part due to her twenty years of experience there, particularly the eight years she served in central office. It was the unexpected events that she was not prepared for. She felt that, regardless of an individual's preparation program including her job succession, an individual could never be totally prepared for the unique challenges that each position will present.

We have had things happen in this district in my first year that have never happened like the business manager having terminal illness, four kids hit by a hit and run driver, having to deal with that. The next week we had another car accident where a guy was going the wrong way and hit a group of kids. Actually the week before the first car accident the lead in our musical fell in the opening number and hit her head on the stage. A former elementary teacher, he had some mental health issues, went off the deep end and robbed some houses. The police called to tell me they were going to talk to the press. The press was outside of our building. Dealing with that type of non-educationally related things are challenges that kind of popup. Your ability to be flexible is important based on how quickly things change. It really is the speed at which people expect us to react [that was the challenge for me].

Better Prepare First-Time Superintendents

When asked to reflect upon what could better prepare first-time superintendents for the job, Ms. Wilson emphasized the importance of experience in the field, giving the aspiring superintendent the opportunity to gain experience, not only with the “big picture” of how district decisions differ from building decisions as well as the various job responsibilities of the superintendent but also the myriad of scenarios that will likely “pop-up” during a new superintendent’s first year on the job.

The more opportunities people get within the field is important. That is an advantage I had, especially when I came to central office. I had more opportunities to see the big picture. I don’t think everybody had those big picture opportunities. That is one of those things I am trying to give to my administrators now. Trying to get them to have more of a big picture view because they are a piece that fits into the big picture and while they

need to advocate for their piece, they also need to see how that fits in with everybody else and that it is not just about your little world it really is how what we do here impacts everything.

Case Study C - Ms. Kimberly Thomas

Superintendent, Clark County School District

My interview with Ms. Kimberly Thomas took place in her office on a sunny, hot August afternoon. I arrived at Clark County School District administrative offices at approximately 1:15 p.m. The administrative offices were located on the bottom floor of the district's elementary school building. I was greeted by a secretary who, after a brief wait, directed me to the superintendent's office. At approximately 1:30 p.m., Ms. Thomas greeted me and welcomed me into her office. Ms. Thomas sat behind her desk for the interview.

District Demographics

Clark County Area School District is an urban school district located in south central Pennsylvania with 899 students (2009-2010 school year). The National Center for Education Statistics identifies twelve distinct urban-centric locale code categories based on location, population, and the demographic make-up of an area. Clark County is labeled with a locale code of 42; rural, distant. The descriptor for this locale code is a "territory that is more than five miles but less than or equal to twenty-five miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than two and a half miles but less than or equal to ten miles from an urban cluster". The district consists of one K-6 elementary school and one 7-12 junior/senior high school. Clark County Area School District has a total operating budget of \$9,188,000. Per pupil expenditure is \$10,053. The district's aide ratio is .64 with 39% of its revenue generated locally (NCES, 2011).

Participant's Career Path

Though promoted to the superintendency internally, Ms. Thomas's professional career began in Maryland. She started her teaching career as a first grade teacher. After one year she moved to fifth grade where part of her experience was teaching the gifted population. While in her fifth year of teaching, she decided to explore an administrative position. The state of Maryland has a program that provides the opportunity for any teacher who may have an interest in administration to apply for an administrative intern position.

You would be paid teacher pay and you would work the calendar as a teacher, but they would put you in very difficult schools as more or less a vice principal. So I could still help administer discipline, but again, I was an administrative intern. I wasn't a principal. I wasn't an assistant principal, but those were the duties that I had. It was more or less a learning curve to help us make a decision that maybe this is an area that you want to go into.

Ms. Thomas applied for and was granted the position. She was assigned to a "pretty rough" school in an urban setting within the large county she had been teaching. Though she described her experience as rewarding, it was also an eye-opener for a young teacher who had previously taught in a rural setting.

It was really an eye opener. It was a privilege and an honor because I had no idea. I just remember the discipline issues I had to deal with. I was so far removed from reality until I had that position. I remember going into an apartment building, and this is no lie, there were cockroaches going up the side of the wall. I just could not believe the living conditions and the environment and the homes that some of these students were coming from. So it was an eye opener.

Following this experience, Ms. Thomas returned to the classroom teaching fifth grade. It was at that time that she heard of an elementary principal position available in the Clark County School District across the state border in Pennsylvania. She had recently completed her administrative certification, so she applied for the job and was granted the position in May of that year.

I had four or five weeks to get to know the faculty and staff and students before the school year ended. At first, I looked at that as being an inappropriate time for me to start, but it was a perfect time because I got to assess the situation for four to five weeks to see what changes I wanted to make for the next school year. So it was really a great time for me to start.

This began Ms. Thomas's administrative experience in the Clark County School District. She served five years as strictly the elementary school principal. Prior to her sixth year, the district board of directors added the responsibility of K-12 curriculum director. Her duties included conducting observations in both elementary and middle/high school buildings, leading curriculum evaluations and textbook adoptions, and overseeing the vo-tech. After two years in this position, she was reassigned as assistant superintendent. Ms. Thomas served in this capacity for a very short time. It was during her first year as assistant that the superintendent of the district announced his retirement.

The former superintendent gave his notice of resignation in September the year before he was leaving, which would have been June 30th. So we had months, and months, and months that the board knew. So as soon as he gave his letter of retirement that would be effective June 30th they immediately posted, and I was hired in November. I wasn't taking over until July 1, but I was hired in November of that year.

Job Effectiveness as a Political Leader

Ms. Thomas noted the unique challenges to establishing communication with the community when your school district is located in such a rural area. The district covers over 220 square miles and does not have a community center or gathering area to address large numbers of residents at a time. In such a rural community, it is essential to find ways to inform district residents about developments in the school district. One effective way was to establish community relation teams in each building.

We do have a community relations team in each building; one for the high school, one for the elementary. I sit in on both of those, and those committees are made up of business people in the community as well as any PTA people and maybe a couple of parents. It's more or less just to give them more of an in-depth understanding about what's going on in the district and also to let them know if they hear something to please give us a heads up so that information can be addressed.

Ms. Thomas has also established frequent communication with the local ministerium. This enables her to share information about the district in hopes that they will relay this information to their congregations, increasing the likelihood that factual information is spread throughout the community rather than information based on rumors.

Despite her efforts, Ms. Thomas expressed some frustration regarding the apathy of the community. Despite having only fifty community members attend a board meeting where she presented a detailed PowerPoint about the state of the district's budget, she felt the presentation was well received by those in attendance.

My board directed me to give a community presentation back in March. This wasn't something, at least to my knowledge, that had never been done since I've been here [nine

years]. We only had about 50 people that showed up, but every comment I heard was extremely positive. The community was like, “I had no idea” of the challenges that we faced as a district.

Despite having been familiar with the school board serving in various administrative positions in the district for the past nine years, Ms. Thomas experienced highs and lows during her first year as superintendent. With the assistance of the executive director of the local intermediate unit, Ms. Thomas had two board training meetings, one that was held prior to her first board meeting. The solicitor presented an overview of pertinent school law issues. The superintendent/board relationship was also a topic of discussion. The focus of the second meeting was special education law. The meetings were held Saturday mornings and were well received by the board.

Though starting off on the right foot, a number of issues arose during Ms. Thomas’s first year as superintendent that strained her relationship with the board. She was very clear to point out that an individual’s relationship with the board changes drastically from when she was a principal or curriculum director to when she was the superintendent.

Even though I knew the board well and I think they knew me well, I would have never guessed this. When you take that chair, it’s so different. I don’t know how to put it into words. I feel at times like I have nine puppet strings that I’m trying to juggle because they each have their own agenda. When you’re elementary principal or when you’re high school principal, you’re responsible for that building. The buck stops with you when you’re the superintendent. No matter what goes well or not well in either building, it’s your fault. I had no idea the phone calls and the emails I would get from board members, and to me, I guess, the very minute things that seem to concern them that wouldn’t

concern me. I did not have a clue. I don't know if there's anything that could prepare you for that. I'm serious. I don't know if there's any amount of training that can prepare you for how to really work with the board unless you do it.

One particular point of frustration was with the board policy manual. Two different incidents occurred during the school year when Ms. Thomas had a disagreement with a board member on board policy.

How can any superintendent, and I'm not blaming anybody, it's my job; but how can any new superintendent know what is in all of those policies? So now that we're starting to go through and revise these policies, the board is not agreeing with all of these changes that PSBA is recommending. So I feel like I sit there looking like a bump on a log and like some uneducated person, but I don't know the case law behind why PSBA is advising these changes. That's frustrating for me, because I haven't been here long enough to get familiar [with all policies]. It's my job to know board policy, and I don't know them all.

Ms. Thomas went on to state that sometimes she feels that the board and administration are not on the same page. She noted that all nine board members are male while her entire administration is all female. The poor communication between the two groups was the cause of frustration throughout the year. Ms. Thomas summed it up well when she stated, "It was a tough year to have your first year of superintendency, politically."

Job Effectiveness as a Managerial Leader

Ms. Thomas indicated that the managerial aspect of the job, specifically budgeting, is not one of her strengths. In her previous administrative positions, she did not have a lot of hands-on

experience dealing with the budget. Despite her limited experience, she was able to institute various measures to ensure an effective budget process in a difficult and demanding budget year.

That [budget] is my weakest area. I'm going to be honest with you; I think I had one course in terms of budget. The previous [superintendent] used to tell me that most superintendents lose their jobs because of mismanagement of funds. That's really scary to me because that is not my area of strength at all.

Despite her apprehension, Ms. Thomas felt her first budget process was successful.

I felt that it really did go pretty well; it really did. I divided my administrators up into two nights. I think the first night it was special education, maintenance, and elementary. The second night it was technology, high school, and athletics. Basically, I had each of them come, and we more or less went line item by line item. If they had a question about baseball we tried to have [the answer]. This is how much it would be for supplies, etc. We just had more information for them, and I thought that it went well. So that was a positive thing.

Once the budget was developed, the board requested that Ms. Thomas present the budget to the community at the March board meeting. "Every comment I heard was extremely positive. The community was like, I had no idea of, I guess, the challenges as a district that we faced. So that was very positive." The emphasis on transparency and collaboration with the board of directors proved to be a successful combination.

I felt with the changing times and all the issues of the governor cutting the budget, my board really needed to have as much information as possible to make sound decisions, so we gave them as much as we could. I did hear from a couple board members that this

was the best process and the most information that they had ever been given. So that was a positive thing.

Although having limited experience with developing a district budget, there were other managerial areas where Ms. Thomas's in-house experience served as a benefit. One of those areas was union relations. Ms. Thomas inherited a difficult situation with her teacher union who had been working without a contract for over a year. The relationships she had previously established with many of the teacher leaders as building principal and curriculum director helped her in this area.

I think that is one thing about moving within, being promoted within. My elementary staff, I worked with them for eight years. I feel they knew me so well and I knew them so well. Again, I think it went back to the expectations that I had as well as the expectations they had for me. As the elementary staff, we were just on the same page. I don't think my elementary staff really felt I was going to deviate much from that when moving to superintendent. I knew the high school staff somewhat in being curriculum director. I really felt that it was a rather smooth transition. It's not like someone new coming in that had to really get attuned to the expectations and the guidelines of the district and that type of thing. I felt that was a positive from moving within. It just seemed to go pretty well. I think most of the staff was pretty supportive of me.

Ms. Thomas used the familiarity and trust she had established over the past eight years as she worked with the union on various issues throughout her first year as superintendent.

We just had an open door policy, and they came to me with suggestions on alternative education, how we could cut money for that, how to get charter school students back. So we met, not often, but whenever they requested, I met with them. Also, I incorporated

something new this year. I remember what it was like to be a teacher, and I don't ever want to forget that. But I know sometimes that teachers have concerns, and maybe they don't air them like they should, and I also know they have great ideas. So I initiated what I call round table discussions twice a year. I met with them. I had ground rules. I said, "You're not here to bash somebody, but if you have a legitimate concern ..." I set about four or five ground rules. I picked two dates for the support staff to share their concerns and gripes with me and two dates for the professional staff. I wanted their ideas of how to cut things from the budget. It was just an open communication, so I really feel that we did well on that this year with personnel and with the union.

Job Effectiveness as an Educational Leader

Ms. Thomas expressed her disappointment at not being able to devote more of her time to being an educational leader. With her background in curriculum, she thought she would be able to focus the district's attention on curricular initiatives, thus moving the district forward. She was surprised and disappointed with the many menial tasks that occupy a superintendent's time, particularly in a smaller school district with fewer central office administrators to share the managerial burden.

I was doing two jobs. I was so excited to be superintendent in regards to, "Man, I can really focus on some curriculum issues, because I had that experience." The superintendent before really didn't want to have anything to do with it. He just left that to me. I felt 90% of what I did [as a first year superintendent] had nothing to do with the education of students. I was very disappointed. I was dealing with policies, which I hate. I was dealing with budget. I was dealing with a grievance last year. That was so disappointing to me.

Despite the managerial burden of a first-time superintendent in a small, rural school district, Ms. Thomas was determined to find time to dedicate to her role as educational leader.

So what I had to do to be an educational leader was get myself out of this office, meet with my administrators regularly so that they could keep me updated on what was going on, make sure that observations were being done. They would give me updates from their curriculum meetings, and we would talk about things that were said there. Of course, I attended the superintendents' meeting, and sometimes they shared curriculum things which I could share with my team. I have to be in tune with what is going on in both of these buildings. I have to for my sanity. I want to know what my teachers are doing. So I walked with my principals along with my special education director, and we would walk into the classrooms three to five minutes. Again, it's not to spy on them, but I wanted to know what they were doing. I want to applaud them for doing great work.

Ms. Thomas understood the importance of articulating and developing a shared educational vision with her faculty and staff. At the conclusion of her first school year she was asked to present a summary of the year's highlights to the board of directors. This summary included a preview of the district goals for the following year. Ms. Thomas planned on presenting those goals to the teachers at the start of the new school year.

A number of other initiatives were started to focus the teachers on the district's educational vision including a monthly newsletter to faculty and a *make a difference* theme.

What I did do this year to help communicate with my faculty, which had never been done, is I created a monthly faculty newsletter. So I kept them up-to-date every month. It only went to my faculty and staff, my entire staff. Things that were going on with the budget, things that were going on around the state, just so that they were well aware... I

wanted them to be informed. We started last year with a theme. I gave everyone a ribbon that said *I can (or I do) make a difference*. I wanted each of my staff members to know, and I gave each of them three ribbons. Their task was to keep one and give two away to somebody else – in terms of, we make a difference in the lives of everybody we come in contact with. I just wanted them to realize that they do make a difference. So basically to be a team and be positive, it was really hard, especially without a contract.

Challenges of First-time Superintendents

The primary challenge identified by Ms. Thomas was superintendent and school board relations. Despite having been familiar with the school board prior to ascending into the position of superintendent, Ms. Thomas was shocked at how that relationship changes when you are the one in the superintendent's chair. She went to great lengths to train her board on proper meeting protocol and was frustrated when that protocol was frequently not followed.

I just feel like the communication is pretty one-sided, and that's difficult for me. Call me and tell me if you have major concerns. If you hear something, let me know. Neither one of us likes surprises. At our public meetings, it could be an item that is not even on the agenda. Well, I heard so and so teacher, she didn't even show up ... Oh yeah. It doesn't matter how much training, it doesn't matter how much literature I send home in my weekly correspondences, they still do it. It doesn't matter.

Better Prepare First-time Superintendents

Ms. Thomas, without hesitation stated that the most important ingredient to preparing aspiring superintendents is on the job training. Despite having the privilege to work in the district and become familiar with many of the daily operations of the district and duties of the superintendent, nothing can substitute for the experience that is gained working in that position.

Ms. Thomas commented on the unique challenges that each position poses, which makes it nearly impossible for graduate level coursework to prepare you for.

It was like the course work doesn't tell you a lot. I realize, I guess, if we really had to take the course work we needed, we probably would never get where we needed to be. I think it is on the job training all the time. We are going to have to unfortunately learn from our mistakes. I don't like to say that. I despise making mistakes. But it is continual on the job training. No amount of course work is going to prepare you.

Ms. Thomas also mentioned the importance of mentors for first year superintendents. In any other administrative position, there are peers within the district who can offer advice with difficult decisions that a novice administrator is confronted with. When an individual becomes the superintendent, there is no one in-house to confide with when a decision must be made.

If I need to vent, I called the executive director, or I called a couple of other superintendents that I trust and said, "Hey, what would you do in this situation?" So I really did have to reach out and seek answers from some other people. You need to have that level of trust with some people that you can confide in and reach out to.

Case Study D - Mr. Kirk O'Brien

Superintendent, Cooper County School District

I met with Mr. O'Brien in his office which was located in the high school complex of this rural central Pennsylvania school district. I arrived for my 10:00 interview at 9:50 and was greeted by the secretary. The secretary stated that Mr. O'Brien was in the building and that she would attempt to locate him. At 10:50, Mr. O'Brien arrived in his office and welcomed me in. He sat behind his desk for the interview. The interviewer noted that the participant appeared guarded at first and seemed to become more comfortable with the interview as time passed.

District Demographics

Cooper County Area School District is an urban school district located in north central Pennsylvania with 763 students (2009-2010 school year). The National Center for Education Statistics identifies twelve distinct urban-centric locale code categories based on location, population, and the demographic make-up of an area. Cooper County is labeled with a locale code of 33; town, remote. The descriptor for this locale code is a “territory inside an urban cluster that is more than thirty-five miles of an urbanized area”. The district consists of one K-6 elementary school and one 7-12 junior/senior high school. Cooper County Area School District has a total operating budget of \$8,662,000. Per pupil expenditure is \$10,432. The district’s aide ratio is .69 with 35% of its revenue generated locally (NCES, 2011).

Participant’s Career Path

Mr. O’Brien was hired as superintendent of Cooper County School District from outside the organization. He had a very non-traditional ascension to the position of superintendent. He began his professional career as an English teacher of ninth grade students in an at-risk program within the Wilmerton-Staplefield City vocational-technical system. After nine years of teaching, Mr. O’Brien became the cooperative education instructor. His duties focused on getting students jobs during school hours as part of their chosen career path. While in this position, Mr. O’Brien pursued his administrative director’s certification for the vocational system.

Within weeks of getting the certification, within days frankly, I applied for a position of administrative director at the Morgan County/Johnsonville Career and Technology Center and I won the position and my wife and I moved down there to Logantown. I worked that job for years. The board that I was working with in Morgan County started out great. The board changed and it became a real nasty situation where they wanted to

rip the school apart. [They wanted to] hog the money for their own districts' not support the school properly. It just became not a good place to be.

While serving as the administrative director, Mr. O'Brien pursued his superintendent's letter of eligibility. After the difficulty he experienced with his board in Morgan County, he was very selective in his pursuit as he only considered district's with a supportive board.

That administrative director's position is very similar to a superintendent's position so I had the advantage of having my own board, having my own budget, having all the problems that a superintendent has. Also, it gave me foresight in sitting down, looking to the future and imagining myself working with these nine people interviewing me and thinking is this where I want to be, and that takes me here.

It was after much deliberation that he decided to accept the offer as superintendent of Cooper County School district.

Job Effectiveness as a Political Leader

Mr. O'Brien felt that, overall, his first year as superintendent of the Cooper County School District went well with the community. He noted that it was a huge culture shift for him, coming from a more urban setting.

I made a mistake. Rural areas are very different that urban areas. Wilmerton-Staplefield City probably have a half million people between them... there are five thousand people in this county. So when you say something here it rings from one end of the county to the other. People know on the other end what you said on this end seemingly within twenty minutes. I realized I can't be as gruff as I was in the other areas. You have to pay attention to that kind of detail a little more.

One of the valuable lessons Mr. O'Brien learned from his past experience is that people are reluctant to trust an outsider. He found himself being very guarded during his first month on the job. He commented that this lack of trust may even be more pronounced in close knit, rural communities like Cooper County.

It's different when you come from outside than when you come from the inside. You don't know who you can trust. You don't know who is on your side, who is out to cut your throat. Most people are not happy to see an outsider come in and take what they perceived to be, especially in this climate in a county with 20% unemployment and only 5000 people. They are giving away a 100 thousand dollar job to a guy from Wilmerton-Staplefield. So they're not nuts about that. In my view I had to be guarded...very careful about whom I spoke to. I think I was successful at it but I was very guarded.

Despite the challenges of being an outsider, Mr. O'Brien felt that he was successful in connecting with the community. He noted the challenges to connecting with the community in such a rural setting where very few business groups such as the Chamber or Lions Club exist. He chose to make connections with the groups directly connected to the district and take his time with other community groups. Upon first arriving in the district, he made an effort to seek out and meet two groups; the board of directors and the media. His professional experience (administrative director of the vocational-technical school) as well as his family background (father was on a school board for twenty-two years, brother was on a school board) gave him confidence in working with a school board. Although he felt his first year with the school board went well, there was one board member who appeared determined to see him fail. The source of this individual's revulsion seemed to generate from his support of an internal superintendent candidate.

I have problems stemming from one board member who causes me as much difficulty as you can imagine in the community. There was a person who was trying to get this job opposite my candidacy and there was a [board] member who was really supporting this person. From what I have been able to hear from the members that became my friends and colleagues, they were willing to try to give her [the other candidate] a fair chance, better than fair chance and she didn't answer some of the questions satisfactorily and wasn't the agent of change they were looking for and didn't get the support. One board member who was very much a supporter of this person never forgave me for that, for what reason I can't tell you. He is absolutely focused on my failure to the point that at the last board meeting in closed session, other board members were screaming at him about how unjust, unfair he was.

Job Effectiveness as a Managerial Leader

Mr. O'Brien identified himself as being a strong managerial leader. The administrative positions he held prior to becoming a superintendent in the Cooper County Area School District provided him with valuable managerial experience, specifically the development of budgets and union negotiations. He noted the Wilmerton-Staplefield City area as being a liberal area where tax increases are common. In contrast, Morgan County was more conservative. Tax increases were taboo, and cuts were common.

I am fortunate to have come from the two areas that I did. In Wilmerton-Staplefield City people never get laid off. You just raise taxes and keep moving. Then I went to Morgan County where people get fired a lot. They hadn't had a tax increase in nine years before I got there. All they do is cut and cut. I learned on one side of the coin how to raise

taxes... on the other side of the coin I learned how to make cuts. Clearly, my diverse background helped me here.

Mr. O'Brien used this experience to create a budget that included no furloughs, no tax increase, and no programming cuts, all accomplished during a time when state funding was significantly reduced. Nearly \$600,000 was cut from a \$12,000,000 dollar budget. A large percentage of the saving was created through retirement incentives.

Everybody else goes and furloughs people and picks off the young guy with the new wife and a baby. I said they don't cost that much. Why don't we take some of the fund balance we have instead of putting it in the hole at the bottom, find people up at the top. So we put together really good packages, sometimes individual in nature.

The ability to pull off such a plan was possible because of one of Mr. O'Brien's other managerial strengths, working with the teacher's union. Upon beginning the superintendent's position in Cooper County, Mr. O'Brien quickly realized that the relationship between the union and the board of directors was strained. "The employees didn't trust the board, and the board didn't trust the union." Mr. O'Brien took time to establish a relationship with the union leadership. He reassured them that he was going to make his own decision on things. He cited one situation in particular where board members criticized a teacher's ability to do his job.

I looked at the situation and the background of their relationship. I found basketball problems from years ago when one guy's daughter played and the other guy coached and didn't think the girl was good enough and those kind of things build into a reputation that one guy is a bad teacher.

Mr. O'Brien added that upon his arrival, the union president was very skeptical. He spent a "great deal" of time meeting with the union leadership and their executive committee,

reassuring them that they were going to matter. Coming into the district as an outsider enabled Mr. O'Brien to start from scratch in establishing a relationship of trust with the union. This relationship was put to a test when the Uniserv representative (from the teacher's union) questioned his decision to offer individual (and varied) retirement incentive packages to union members at the top of the pay scale.

I said I want you to go back to your union members and tell this guy at the top that he had to turn down \$25,000 for the good of the order. He said, "Well, I can't do that," and I said, "Well then get out of the way." We were able to buy off eight or nine of them, give them fair stipends. People were leaving and were happy. People at the bottom were spared. It worked real well. The other point I made to the Uniserv rep was I want you to go meet with the person at the bottom who's going to get furloughed because you won't let me get rid of the person on the top. When they saw how ridiculous it sounded, they did support it. And the people in the school were happy too. It took a lot of tension out of it.

Mr. O'Brien took time to listen and learn from other groups within the district as well. As part of his one hundred day plan, Mr. O'Brien designed a request sheet that he gave to the board as well as all support groups including janitors and secretaries. The questionnaire asked them to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the district. He then compiled the forms and identified themes. "Most people appreciated being asked and felt like their opinion mattered especially when I addressed them."

Job Effectiveness as an Educational Leader

Educational leadership was an area that Mr. O'Brien admitted he is not as strong in as in other leadership areas such as managerial leadership. He addressed this as part of his

negotiations and eventual agreement with the board or directors. The board of directors agreed to allow Mr. O'Brien to choose his assistant superintendent. He had previously worked with the gentleman that he selected to fill this position. He knew him as a well-organized and hardworking young man who was very knowledgeable in educational leadership areas. At the time of hiring he was serving as an assistant principal in a neighboring school district.

Louis is more of a nuts and bolts guy. I do the work with the board, strategy...getting the money to accomplish things. Louis will come up to tell me...perfect example, we need the school reach program. I said what is that going to cost us. We ended up using that more than I ever thought we would. Louis is the kind of guy who thinks of things like that...putting in a system that organizes all student data. He does the nuts and the bolt.

As an outsider, Mr. O'Brien took time to familiarize himself with the academic strengths and weaknesses of the Cooper County School District. He quickly realized that there were both benefits and drawbacks to being such a rural, isolated community.

I don't know that we had any academic concerns coming in. This is a pretty strong district academically. One of the downsides of the area is that it is very rural and they tend to stay here in their own cocoon. The good side is that the close family atmosphere I think promotes a stronger educational system. They know all the teachers, the teachers live here, they are neighbors. Everyone knows everybody and the system benefits from that. There are better values here.

He felt his job as an educational leader coming into a new district was not necessarily to change the way things were being done, but to look at the data and talk with the teacher leaders in the district in order to identify where the deficiencies were and address them accordingly.

I went around to find the problems. I listened to the teachers as they told me what the problems were. I asked them what their desired outcome was. What I tried to do was to plug the holes and fix the problems as they emerged or as people saw them as they were perceived and thinking in my view that the rest would take care of itself until other problems emerged. I see my role here as a person who is supposed to identify weaknesses and turn them into strengths or at least get them back to par.

Challenges of First-time Superintendents

Mr. O'Brien felt strongly that a school district often brings an outsider in as superintendent to invoke change in the district. He felt one of the greatest challenges for a new superintendent, particularly one who is hired from outside the district, is to make sure you and the board are on the same page. Be very clear with what the board is expecting you to accomplish, and be certain that they are aware that with change comes controversy.

If they are hiring you from out of town, they are hiring you because they don't want somebody tied to the system. They want somebody to come in and whip the system into shape. You will become the biggest prick in that district in no time. That board needs to know that it's going to happen. I told this board that it's going to happen. We are going to go through good spots and rough spots. When it gets rough it's going to get very rough and ultimately, what a new superintendent had to remember that when it gets too rough the board will turn on you no matter how good it is in the beginning. They will completely forget that they brought you in and asked you to do the very things you did. When it turns, they will turn on you. These jobs are like baseball managers. I am the hero here now, a couple of years from now I will be not looked at in such a positive way.

Another challenge of first-time superintendents hired from outside the district is trust. Mr. O'Brien states that finding someone you can trust within the district is a challenge for an outsider.

You have to find somebody that you trust or bring somebody with you. I learned that the hard way. I've had people come in and sit down to discuss problems and I walked out the door walking right behind the lady and she was talking to someone about what we had just talked about in my office that she said she would [keep confidential]. So that is huge, huge as an agent of change.

One of the mistakes I made [as the administrative director at Morgan County Career and Technology Center] was I took over there and assumed that everyone was going to work well with me in good faith, but I was very wrong. I went into the situation, trusted the locals and my first assistant that was working underneath me who was a local cut my throat. He was out to get my job. He was out saying things that weren't true. I felt they were closing in on me. The big lesson I learned there that I brought here was I'm bringing one guy with me that I can talk to and trust.

Better Prepare First-Time Superintendents

Mr. O'Brien noted that providing first-time superintendents the opportunity to get together with other superintendents is invaluable. So often a superintendent finds himself in a situation and does not have a contemporary nearby to offer input on how to address the issue. He sees great benefit in allowing first-time superintendents the opportunity to share issues they are faced with and then have more experienced superintendents offer advice on how to address the issue.

When they pull all superintendents together they should spend more time listening to what the newer superintendents have to say. The other new superintendents may better identify with the problems of a contemporary rather than someone who served 15 or 20 years ago.

Case Study E - Dr. Jerry Manning

Superintendent, Green Mountain School District

My interview with Dr. Jerry Manning took place in his office at 10:00 a.m. on a sunny summer morning. I arrived at Green Mountain School District administrative offices approximately 9:45 a.m. The administrative offices were located on the first floor of the junior/senior high school building. I was greeted by a secretary who had me take a seat. At approximately 10:00 a.m., Dr. Manning greeted me and welcomed me into his office. We sat next to each other in padded chairs for the interview.

District Demographics

Green Mountain Area School District is an urban school district located in central Pennsylvania with 670 students (2009-2010 school year). The National Center for Education Statistics identifies twelve distinct urban-centric locale code categories based on location, population, and the demographic make-up of an area. Green Mountain is labeled with a locale code of 31; town, fringe. The descriptor for this locale code is a “territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to ten miles from an urbanized area”. The district consists of one K-6 elementary school and one 7-12 junior/senior high school. Green Mountain Area School District has a total operating budget of \$8,591,000. Per pupil expenditure is \$12,727. The district’s aide ratio is .76 with 19% of its revenue generated locally (NCES, 2011).

Participant's Career Path

Dr. Manning was hired as an external candidate. He followed a non-traditional path to his first superintendency. He graduated from college and began his professional career in the Jackson City School District. He was their head wrestling coach for four years. During this time, he was also a substitute teacher for the district. When he realized that no one in the area was hiring in his certification area, he accepted an offer to travel to a southern state to interview for a coaching position.

I was fortunate enough to hit a couple of job fairs down there and their job fairs are immense compared to what we see [in Pennsylvania]. So I had some job offers. I actually signed a contract when I was down there. I drove back home and I told my parents, "Hey, I'm moving south." So I packed up my bags, moved down south, and started as a classroom teacher, teaching fifth and sixth grade math and science.

While teaching in the south for five years at the elementary level, Dr. Manning completed his master's degree as well as his principal's certification. He then moved into an assistant principal position at the elementary level as well. He served in this capacity for eight years. While working on his superintendent's credentials, he decided to apply for and accept the position of transportation supervisor within the district he was currently working.

It gave me an opportunity because not being on the campus my schedule was a little freer in the position I had taken. So it was an opportunity not only to move into something closer to the central office position, but it also freed up some of my time. It wasn't the late nights, open houses, book fairs, those kinds of things.

Once Dr. Manning had his superintendent's credentials, he began applying for central office positions within the state.

I applied for a lot of positions down there. It was not unlikely if you posted a superintendent's position you had 40 or 50 applicants. I hadn't fulfilled that pre-requisite that most school districts were looking at – I hadn't been a high school principal. The only high school experience I had was coaching back in the early nineties in Jackson City, so that was sort of a black mark or a strike against me.

It was at that time that he decided to look into a possible return to Pennsylvania. He noted a desire to reconnect with his aging parents and to pursue a "slower pace". After an extensive interview process, Dr. Manning was offered the superintendent's position at Green Mountain School District.

I was fortunate enough that we were able to do a transition period. I actually started April 4 and we had April, May, and June to do the transition period. [The outgoing superintendent and I] worked side by side initially; then he started phasing out and I started phasing in so that when July 1 came, we shifted everything over to me, which was very beneficial.

Job Effectiveness as a Political Leader

Dr. Manning, though originally from the region, considered himself as being an outsider having never lived in the Green Mountain community. He used this to his advantage as he established himself as the political leader of the district and change agent that the school board hired him to be.

When you live in the district or when you have those very close community ties, it tends to weigh on your decisions. Being a superintendent in the first year not knowing anyone, I understand the culture, but it doesn't impact my decisions. I've told my teachers, I've told the union, I've told my board, my decisions are based on what's best for my

students. However, I believe decisions in the past have been made on the community type thing. When you are born and raised in the community, you tend not to want to rock the boat. I'm a new guy. I'm an outsider. I don't know anyone. I can make decisions more openly.

Although being an outsider allowed Dr. Manning to implement change without the political ties within the community impeding the process, he found himself putting his goal of establishing himself in the community on the back burner for more pressing issues. He noted the time issue as being one of the prominent challenges of a first year superintendent.

I think involvement and community communication is very important. I'd also say I didn't have as much involvement as I wished I could have. One of the components, I did a 60-day plan. Basically, it was within the first 60 days of my being hired, here's what I want to accomplish, and community was a very big part of it. As a first year superintendent there's so much on your plate that community sort of falls to the back burner. Have I been involved with the community as much as I've wanted to? Probably not.

Despite these challenges, Dr. Manning was determined to maintain an open door policy throughout his first year as superintendent. Most of the issues he dealt with involved people questioning changes that he had implemented.

Most of the time, you don't hear the good things as a superintendent when you make changes, adjustments, things of that nature. It's those people that are uncomfortable with change that are either coming to my door or calling and expressing a concern. I've always made it a point, even with complaints, to make time for those people. I've not put them off. If I [don't have] the answer immediately in front of me, I explain to them I

understand your concern. Usually by the time I follow it up they've come to understand what was going on. Most of the issues that arise are people that are uncomfortable with change or don't see the purpose for the change. Part of my responsibility is to educate them ... here's why.

Prior to officially taking over the reigns as superintendent, Dr. Manning was afforded the opportunity to shadow the outgoing superintendent. He credited this experience for his positive first year with the board. His predecessor shared information about each board member and where his/her stance is on political issues. He noted that this background along with his efforts to constantly communicate with his board members has enabled him to establish a positive relationship with the board of directors.

Part of that transition was those types of things, giving me a feel for the background of the board members, what their purpose is for being on it. So that transition buffer was very good in that perspective. But working with the school board, I've made it a point to communicate with them. I'll send out emails. Just to keep them up to date, keep them involved, keep them in the loop. It's taken them probably six to eight months to become comfortable with me. Some of them still aren't after a year. I think as a new superintendent you have to keep them updated, keep them involved, even if it doesn't involve a vote or anything like that. Let them know what is going on. Here's what we're working on; those types of things. I think my board relations have been very successful.

Dr. Manning credits his support and positive relationship with the board to the reason why he was brought into the district in the first place, to initiate change. He felt that the board has seen changes being made in the district and has supported him for moving the district forward.

Job Effectiveness as a Managerial Leader

When asked to assess his effectiveness in managing the finances of the district specifically the development of the district's budget, Dr. Manning noted the benefit of having an experienced business manager in the district upon his arrival. The current business manager has been with the Green Mountain School District for twenty-seven years and helped him become familiar with the budget process. He quickly learned that Green Mountain had a very lean budget, a result of twenty-nine consecutive years with no tax increase. Compounding to the challenge of maintaining this expectation was the drastic cut in state funding. Despite this financial nightmare scenario for a first-year superintendent, Dr. Manning thought his first budget was a success.

I inherited a good system financially. Like I said, they were very lean and they only spent money when they needed to spend it. I don't have extra teachers sitting around. I don't have extra programs that we're operating and running. We're running, for a lack of better sentence, a bare bones operation here and we don't have extra teachers. If I would have to get rid of a teacher, I would have classrooms of 40 and 50 students, because we are very lean. We have to pull some money out of our fund balance. From my perspective, taxes probably should have been raised each year even going to the max of what it was because that all compounds.

Another aspect of his managerial leadership role did not start out as smoothly. Dr. Manning was at a slight disadvantage with his lack of experience in dealing with teachers' unions coming from a southern state that had no unions. He admitted to coming in with a preconceived plan on how to handle the teachers, an idea that he now sees was the wrong approach. It was during this learning process that he realized the importance of communication.

I'll admit we started off a little rocky because there was a lack of communication. There were grievances, things of that nature, where rather than working together I took the stance of I'm the proponent, I'm the outsider. If I had said, "Hey, let's work together on this. We need to fix the issue" it probably would have worked out. But after a good heart to heart with a couple people, we came to realize, hey, even in bad situations, we need to communicate. We need to work together. So I've grown in that area and that's one of the things that you really don't know how to approach until you learn the personality and the persons that you are dealing with.

Dr. Manning found that, once again, communication was the key. He committed time to become familiar and communicate with the union leadership to identify their issues. He also analyzed the teachers' contract in an effort to determine areas that needed addressed. He noted that it had become precedent in the district to extend teacher contracts without negotiations.

Learning and understanding what the union wants, and learning and understanding the people, I guess having an understanding of what their background is, and what they're bringing to the table, and why they're bringing it to the table. Becoming very familiar with them as [people], why they're bringing to the table what they're bringing has been probably very beneficial. Learning the teachers' agreement was something I had to become familiar with because I needed to know what I was legally permitted to do and what I couldn't do within the confines of that contract. There really hasn't been a lot of communication district to union because, for the most part, teachers' contracts have been extended. There hasn't been a lot of negotiation. There have been no formal negotiations for years in the district. They extend the contract; raise benefits, the whole thing.

Job Effectiveness as an Educational Leader

Dr. Manning indicated that he had been cautious with his approach as an educational leader. He had taken his first year to articulate with his teaching staff where he envisioned the curriculum going, his educational vision. He had used this time to become more familiar with the curriculum of the district, enabling him to establish his priorities for curricular improvement.

As an educational leader coming into an organization that has been status quo, set in its ways, you've got to know when to push and when to back off. So it's sort of touch and go as far as an educational leader goes. I've put enough out there to let the staff know where I want to go with curriculum.

As with all school districts in the Commonwealth, Green Mountain School District has been affected by the increasing demands of the PSSA assessment and making adequate yearly progress. Dr. Manning stated that the district has always done well on the assessment. As a result, he took a "hands-off" approach through his first year, choosing to focus more on the mapping of K-12 curriculum.

We've always made AYP; it's never been an issue. We don't even have any subgroups.

I don't want to say I've taken a hands-off with PSSAs but PSSAs were not my main focus. In my philosophy, being successful in PSSAs is something that happens along the way as we are preparing our students for graduation. I think if you focus on PSSAs, you lose focus on a lot of educational dynamics that should be going on in the classroom.

I've seen good teachers focus on tests, and once that student left their classroom and walked out the door they were clueless about the subject matter. So I've tried to make that my focus, and I think that has been evident through us initiating a scope and

sequence mapping of our curriculum K through 12 of getting that consistency. We are in its infantile stages and it's probably a three to five-year stint before we get it all laid out.

Generally, Dr. Manning felt that his performance as an educational leader was effective but emphasized his approach of developing his vision gradually in an attempt to increase teacher buy-in.

Overall, we've been effective but then again when you start making changes educationally, curriculum-wise it's a give and take knowing how to ease into it, just like with the grading policy. I've backed off on that just to give you an example, because we're switching the software that the teachers are using for grading. I don't want to overburden them with, "Okay it's a new program, now I'm changing the policy on you." Realizing that the teachers are in the trenches doing what they're doing, so with change let's congratulate their change.

Challenges of First-Time Superintendents

Dr. Manning did not hesitate when asked to describe the most significant challenge for first-time superintendents. As a new superintendent coming into a district that he is not familiar with, taking time to understand the culture of the district is vital. Examining the history of the district and existing issues is essential for a new superintendent to get started on the right foot. Similar to other study participants, Dr. Manning addressed the importance of having someone familiar within the district to confide in, to give needed background on situations as they arise.

I think coming in as a new superintendent you need to understand the culture, dynamics, and where the district has been. Without those two components you cannot formulate a plan to get where you want to take the district. I think the biggest thing is just sitting back. I did a lot of observing, a lot of listening. My secretary just retired who's been

here for probably 20 some years; no actually she retired with 32 years. They are pretty on the money when they say the superintendent's secretary knows everything. Anytime I needed like, "What's the history of this? Why are they acting this way?" It's not unusual that I get this long elaborate story as to why someone was behaving the way they were behaving. But now I still have my business manager who's a fall-to-guy that I can say, "Hey, what's going on?" So I think the biggest challenge is knowing the history, knowing why things have been done the way they've been done. You may not agree with why they were done or the way they were done, but having an understanding [person] help you to determine how you are going to approach this. So it's understanding the past, and what worked in the past may not necessarily be the best approach now.

Dr. Manning noted his shadow experience opportunity which allowed him to observe the outgoing superintendent in various leadership roles and to become familiar with the history behind the issues. He gave the example of district policy. Sitting in on the policy meetings led by the outgoing superintendent allowed him to understand why policy was written a certain way.

I went through our policy meeting and sort of got a feel. When I had questions as to why this was done, he was able to shed some light on those types of things. But that is really something that every district that you go into, you are going to have to read up. And that's one of the things that gave me an opportunity during the transition period to read all the contracts, read the policy manual, those types of things, and if I did have questions I could come back to my predecessor and say, "Hey, explain this to me. Why is it the way it is?"

Better Prepare First-Time Superintendents

Dr. Manning brought a unique perspective to the question on superintendent development as the only participant trained out of state. The superintendent certification program in the southern state in which he worked is dissimilar to Pennsylvania's program. There is much more emphasis on practice as opposed to theory, a point of criticism of Pennsylvania's program by other study participants. Dr. Manning felt this state's system prepared him well for the challenges he faces as a first-time superintendent.

I think the exam I took was very beneficial because it outlined the finances, the day-to-day operations, everything. It [the superintendent certification] exam was two-fold. One was a scenario school district. They gave you all the data for the school district. They gave you, for instance, a stack of *to do* lists, and you had to prioritize based on the standards that we were supposed to have acquired through our classes. The other part was law, typical educational issues. I know it was very detailed. I was exposed to the use of a budget spreadsheet. We actually had to do a budget spreadsheet. We knew the ins and outs of the school budget before we got our certification. It was part of our exam as well.

Case Study F - Dr. Jason Livermore

Superintendent, Hummeltown School District

My interview with Dr. Jason Livermore took place in his office at 10:00 a.m. on a rainy summer morning. I arrived at Hummeltown Area School District administrative offices approximately 9:45 a.m. The administrative offices were located in a former school building. I was greeted by a secretary who directed me to the waiting area outside of the superintendent's

office. At approximately 10:10 a.m., Dr. Livermore greeted me and welcomed me into his office. We sat at a large table for the duration of the interview.

District Demographics

Hummeltown Area School District is a suburban school district located in western Pennsylvania with 2,806 students (2009-2010 school year). The National Center for Education Statistics identifies twelve distinct urban-centric locale code categories based on location, population, and the demographic make-up of an area. Hummeltown is labeled with a locale code of 21; suburb, large. The descriptor for this locale code is a “territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population of 250,000 or more”. The district consists of two K-2 primary buildings, one 3-5 intermediate building, a middle school, and a senior high school. The Hummeltown Area School District has a total operating budget of \$37,198,000. Per pupil expenditure is \$13,038. The district’s aide ratio is .71 with 52% of its revenue generated locally (NCES, 2011).

Participant’s Career Path

Dr. Livermore followed a traditional path to the superintendency. He began his professional career as a health and physical education teacher and coach. After thirteen years of teaching, he was awarded his first administrative position as an assistant principal in a suburban Philadelphia school district. Dr. Livermore emphasized the value of this experience, large in part due to the leadership of his superintendent who, knowing he aspired to one day be a superintendent, exposed him to a wide variety of administrative duties in addition to those normally assigned to an assistant principal.

After five years in that position, he returned to western Pennsylvania for his first principalship at a suburban high school. He remained in this position for seven and a half years,

during which time Dr. Livermore returned to school to receive his superintendent certification. While serving in this position, he was once again exposed to central office duties in addition to the duties of a principal.

Dr. Livermore's official central office experience began in another western Pennsylvania suburban school district as an assistant superintendent, a position he remained in for four years. Although his responsibility was primarily curriculum, the superintendent allowed him to gain valuable experience in other areas as well which enhanced his preparation for the superintendency.

He then was hired as the superintendent at Hummeltown Area School District. He served for one year as assistant superintendent with the agreement that the next year he would become superintendent.

They had an interim superintendent who was a retired superintendent and was here fifteen years ago. He was here a year before I got here and then he was going to be here one year to help me transition.

Dr. Livermore emphasized the importance of his experience in helping him to be a better superintendent. He strongly believed that following the traditional pipeline to the superintendency, from teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, to superintendent allowed him to gain valuable experience and knowledge in dealing with the duties of each position. It is that knowledge and experience that enabled him to earn instant credibility with his board and employees.

The traditional approach really does help you. It makes you a better leader. When I came into this position, I knew about a lot of things. So when it's talked about in the board room, you can intelligently talk about it because you've been through it. Or you

can use the experience you had. You know about a lot of stuff. You've experienced it. People will talk with me about things because they know I've done it. I will go over and talk with the high school about scheduling because they know I've done all that. I know I've worked with some superintendents if you asked them to do a high school schedule they would have no idea how to do it. So it gives you credibility. You can help people. It gives you the opportunity to be out there and visible.

Job Effectiveness as a Political Leader

Being a political leader within a community that he was new to was a challenge to Dr. Livermore. What made this aspect of his job more difficult was the existing climate of the community. Dr. Livermore was quick to mention that the Hummeltown School District is a very depressed area.

It is a difficult culture. It is pretty depressed. There are a lot of angry people around here for different reasons whether it be economic...the union mentality is extremely strong here. A lot of these folks are children of former steel workers who got laid off and many of them are out of work.

He made it a point to be visible in the community. Although he does not live in the community, he prioritized getting to as many community activities as possible. Once people saw him and got to know him, the fear of the unknown began to fade and the acceptance process began to take hold.

Being visible made people in the community more at ease with me. I think most people would feel comfortable around me because of my visibility. That got into the community. When there were community events I was usually there...Relay for Life and things. They would see me out there walking around. Just being around and letting

people see you. It is almost like that humanistic thing. They look at you more as just a person.

Dr. Livermore also saw the value in getting involved with the local business community. As an outsider new to the Hummeltown community, he knew that he would need the support of the businessmen and businesswomen as he navigated his first year in the superintendency.

I got on the board of directors at the YMCA here. I'm good friends with the director now. I'm on the Chamber of Commerce board. I guess I'm a member of the Lions though I don't go to a lot of their meetings. Being involved with the Chamber gets you out with the business folks. I tell them about stuff that goes on in the district. Just being there is good for me. What I noticed was, when we went through these difficult times, the last several months and these board meetings with these big crowds, several of the people there were Chamber of Commerce people who I would see at these meetings; so just the fact that I've been there and they have gotten to know me. They didn't come to the board attacking me, they came with interest. Some of them stood up and had suggestions. I just think that goes a long way to being a part of the community especially when you don't live here.

The community was not the only area that Dr. Livermore found to be a challenge to his political leadership. The school board in the Hummeltown Area School District had the reputation of being a very tough group. The pattern that had formed of how the district handled former superintendents was intimidating to say the least as explained by Dr. Livermore.

There is a reputation here of getting rid of superintendents. They have a track record.

Even the guy who was the interim here who had been here fifteen years ago was fired.

They will talk about no superintendent who worked here ever retired or left on their own

terms. They always got fired. I don't know if that could wind up happening. I don't see that at this point in time but it is early yet.

Dr. Livermore went on to describe the contentious nature of the current board. He was shocked to see this first hand through his year as assistant superintendent. Board members frequently had heated verbal exchanges both at executive and public sessions.

The board is crazy. People used to come to the board meetings because it was entertainment. They would scream at one another. They would fight and bicker...

When I came to the first couple board meetings as assistant I was amazed because I had never been in board meetings like this. When I came to the first couple meetings here at executive session they would be screaming at each other, calling each other names.

Dr. Livermore used his year as assistant superintendent to analyze the superintendent/school board relationship. He deduced that the leadership style of his mentor may have been contributing to this disputative culture.

The previous superintendent would try to hoodwink [the board] all the time. He would tell them certain things and not give them all the information. They would find out things later on and then get ticked and it would cause these arguments.

He knew that improving the productivity of the board was imperative. He went about improving this relationship by establishing improved communication. His first task as superintendent was to establish an understanding of good boardmanship. He had each board member sign a good boardmanship document signifying that they understood their responsibility. Through his first year as superintendent he noticed a drastic reduction in the amount of arguing that occurs at all board meetings. He credited the improvements in communication as preventing a lot of controversy.

I have really tried hard to give them as much information as I can even if I know they are not going to like it, I'm going to give it to them. They can't say that I am ever trying to railroad something through because I want it. I don't try to give them too much minutia. I tell them this is what we are going to do or this is what we would like to do. I'd like to have your blessing on this. This is why we are doing it. So part of it is being really up front with them. So I think my relationship with the board is pretty good right now. It can get better. I know it needs to get better.

Job Effectiveness as a Managerial Leader

Dr. Livermore cited his past experiences in preparing him well to be a managerial leader. Despite the challenges of a difficult budget year, he led the Hummeltown School District in the development of an acceptable budget that accommodated the drastic budget cuts of the state.

As a high school principal I was in charge of budgeting for an entire building. When I was at Shawville (as assistant superintendent), Dan (Superintendent) got me involved in the budget, sitting in on meetings.

Dr. Livermore was forced to make some difficult decision to make up for millions of dollars in reduced funding from the state. After scrutinizing district expenditures, he discovered that there were areas, particularly in staffing, that could withstand some reductions.

I will tell you this, looking at our enrollment and our staff, we had too many teachers.

They kept hiring and hiring while the enrollment was dropping and dropping. It probably should have been cut ten years ago and they didn't. They hired a whole staff of behavior specialists (five). They were basically aides in the alternative classroom. They are paying them \$35,000 a year. Those were hires that were not necessary. As I looked at our last budget and the staffing, even if we didn't go through this [budget crisis], we

probably would have had to look at making some cuts. Teachers don't understand that. Principals don't understand that. Unfortunately, we had to furlough twenty-two teachers and twenty support staff. With those twenty-two furloughs, we are probably where we should be right now. We had physical education classes with fourteen kids in them. And this was consistent throughout the district. The majority of the staff cuts were in the elementary schools.

Dr. Livermore went on to explain that no programs were cut. What contributed to the ability to cut so many teaching positions was the redistricting of the elementary school buildings. Where previously the Hummelstown School District had four kindergarten through grade five buildings, a more cost effective structure of two kindergarten through second grade schools and one grades three through five building was implemented. This move enabled the district to reduce buildings, save money on support staff, and reduce teaching staff; difficult decisions that saved the district a large sum of money.

One negative outcome of the successful budget process and the drastic cuts in staffing was to fallout with the teacher's union. The union was obviously not pleased with the furloughing of twenty-two employees. Despite Dr. Livermore's attempts to work with the union, they refused to take a pay freeze. Their salary schedule offer of a pay freeze paired with a one year contract extension was rejected by the board. Dr. Livermore cited the union leadership as being a roadblock to progress.

I thought I was getting along with the union leadership, but it's all falling apart through all this. The reason being is they have a vice president who does all the talking. The president is like a puppet. They have their little fiefdom, their welfare committee that makes all the decisions as to whether they would take a pay freeze. A lot of times the

rank and file doesn't even hear. They make all the decisions. I really tried to work with them along the way to help them. But their leadership is so poor. It's almost like they [union leadership] just want conflict. What they have also done is filed some grievances now. Yesterday I got three grievances from the union officers. They are trying to be difficult. They have a five year contract. The previous superintendent negotiated an early bird with them. They are in the first year of a five year contract.

Job Effectiveness as an Educational Leader

The progress that Dr. Livermore, with the support of his administrators and teacher leaders, has made in his first year as superintendent in the area of curriculum is quite impressive. Once again, Dr. Livermore credited his past experience in preparing him as an educational leader. Through his years as a high school principal, he garnered experience leading secondary curriculum teams in various subject areas. One of his duties as assistant superintendent at Shawville School District was to supervise the elementary buildings, a level in which he had no previous experience.

Dr. Livermore referred to coming to Hummelstown as "starting from scratch" in regards to curriculum. He soon realized the need for a districtwide curriculum evaluation after completing a needs assessment.

The district had no goals. There were several curricular areas, for example guidance, that had no curriculum. Most other areas hadn't rewritten their curriculum for fifteen to twenty years. I asked to see the district's strategic plan and nobody knew where it was at. As I went through it, I found that the key person responsible for each goal was the same person. It was a former assistant superintendent who was no longer here. I asked to see the curriculum guides. Nobody had any curriculum guides.

Benefitting from past experience, Dr. Livermore initiated the balanced scorecard method developed by the Harvard Business School.

I did some research in the Atlanta Public Schools; a huge school district that was failing. The superintendent came in and took a business approach and developed this balanced scorecard for the district. It's goal setting and things like that. It is a more simplistic way of meeting goals, laying out expectations, having timelines and objectives. It was very successful. In five years the district totally turned around. They started meeting their academic goals. What we did with our balanced scorecard, we developed a curriculum writing plan. We had objectives, targets, and timelines with who was responsible for what. So we started with our language arts, mathematics and guidance. We updated all the other curriculum areas. This year we have social studies, science, and art. Within three years the curriculum will be up to date. We do it during the school year. We meet monthly as a committee. We had committee meetings at each school and we developed district goals. We have five district goals. Every classroom has the district goals posted. Everything we do within the balanced scorecard is related to those district goals. We have streamlined everything to give us focus. So from a curricular standpoint, we are moving in the right direction.

Not only did Dr. Livermore identify weaknesses in curriculum and initiate a detailed curriculum evaluation, but he also identified a lack of attention given to data analysis. He was shocked to find that there were no data teams upon his arrival at Hummelstown. He immediately established data teams in all buildings. In-service time was devoted to identifying areas of poor performance as revealed by the data. This information, in turn, helped identify what areas of the

curriculum needed attention. The Ed Insight data management program was then used to track all data and curriculum.

We established data teams in all buildings. We spend a lot of our in-service getting data teams together. That helps when we update the curriculum. With Ed Insight you can upgrade it at any time. A lot of schools would have a five year curriculum cycle. This is really ongoing. We are continually updating it. I used Ed Insight when I was at Shawville. Bringing that here helped. Having a tool to manage the curriculum and data [is important]. Everything is at one place now.

Challenges of First-time Superintendents

Dr. Livermore cited working with the school board and working with the teacher's union as the two greatest challenges to first-time superintendents. Much of his time, through his first year as superintendent, was spent establishing a positive rapport with his board of directors. As a result of circumstances caused by the budget crisis, Dr. Livermore inherited a very challenging scenario with his teachers' union as well.

Better Prepare First-time Superintendents

Dr. Livermore emphasized that every district is unique in the challenges that it presents to a new superintendent. He aligned his opinion with other study participants by saying that no coursework can prepare you for the unique challenges of being a superintendent. However, throughout the interview, he focused on his past experience and following a traditional path of progression to the superintendency with giving him the exposure to different duties of the superintendent having helped him tremendously through his first year.

Nothing prepares you better than actual practical experience. The traditional approach really does help you. It makes you a better leader. I didn't want to ever get into a

position that was beyond what I could handle. When I came into this position, I knew about a lot of things a lot of people wouldn't know. So when it's talked about in the board room you can intelligently talk about it because you've been through it. Or you can use the experience you had. I thought that was important.

Dr. Livermore cautioned aspiring superintendents to take great caution before accepting a superintendency, noting that diverse challenges of each position. He added that not every position is a good match, and advised aspiring superintendents to look into the district carefully.

School boards are all so diverse. I really think as the superintendent, some people get into trouble because they take the job just because they want to become a superintendent. I think you have to be sure to take the right job. There may be jobs that once you go through the interview process you see that you aren't the right fit, or you aren't up for those types of challenges. I think sometimes a superintendent will take a job because they want to be a superintendent then they get in and find that it's not what they thought it was going to be, or the culture of the district was not what they were expecting. They find out that it just wasn't a good fit. That happens. Some superintendents just don't fit in some school districts and vice versa. Choosing the right job is important. That would help the longevity for some folks.

What you do is you learn as much about the district before you apply. I'd go on their websites, I called people I knew who were in that district. Just find out as much as you can about that district before you go in. Then when you go in and you have the interview that helps you in the interview but it also helps you determine what your expectations are. You are interviewing them as they are interviewing you. I would tell [aspiring] superintendents make sure it is the right fit for you.

Emergent Themes

The purpose of this case study research was to explore the effect that succession management strategies had on the self-perceived degree of preparation and job effectiveness of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents. Specifically, the study sought to determine if exposure to leadership opportunities an individual received within the district prior to his/her first superintendency helped to better prepare that individual for the duties of the position in comparison to a first-time superintendent who was not provided with prior leadership experience within the district. The collective case study approach was utilized, using semi-structured interviews with six participants who had recently completed their first year as superintendent of a Pennsylvania school district. Three participants were hired from outside the district while three were promoted from within. The structure of the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges and self-perceptions of job effectiveness of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents?
2. To what extent are Pennsylvania school districts identifying individuals with administrative potential within their organizations and applying succession management strategies to prepare aspiring administrators for leadership positions?
3. What formal policies/procedures have Pennsylvania school districts adopted for the purpose of developing leadership capacity within their school districts?
4. What are the self-perceptions of preparation and job effectiveness of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents who have been exposed to succession management opportunities compared to those who have not?

5. What recommendations do first-time Pennsylvania superintendents offer to address challenges and help the transition to the superintendency?

With the research questions as a guide, a cross-case analysis of the six semi-structured interviews revealed emergent themes that characterized the participants' first year as a superintendent. The threads of the emerging themes are: the positive effects of informal succession management on first year superintendents; the important role of the mentor in the development and encouragement of aspiring superintendents; and the distinction between the actions and reflections of a first-time superintendent who perceived himself/herself as being hired to maintain the status quo as compared to one who perceives himself/herself as being hired to initiate change within the district.

Impact of Succession Management

Succession management is defined as “combining succession planning and leadership development in a comprehensive process for finding and grooming future leaders at all levels of your organization” (Conger, 2003, p. 1). Of the six study participants, none were the product of a formal succession management system. The researcher has found no Pennsylvania school district that has a formal leadership development policy in place. However, among the six study participants, a wide range of exposure to informal succession management strategies existed. This common thread revealed a clear benefit of this exposure in helping prepare the participants for their first superintendency.

The three internal participants who were promoted internally had different paths to the position and, likewise, were exposed to different degrees of preparation while holding these positions. Dr. Mike Lewis was the product of a traditional path to the superintendency; teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent (chief academic officer). The final eight

years of this path were spent in the Martinsville Area School District where he was eventually hired as superintendent. He credited his prior experience and the mentors he served under for going to great lengths to expose him to administrative duties that prepared him for job advancement. He noted his superintendent during the immediate five years prior to being offered the position as preparing him for his succession.

The previous superintendent always talked to me, not as an assistant, but as superintendent in training... So, the previous five years I was intimately involved with budget discussions and preparation. His use of me as a spokesperson and leader of many of the programmatic changes was viewed by the board as a positive move, and the transition of me into the position of superintendent was seamless.

Similar to Dr. Lewis, Ms. Wilson, another internal hire, cited her exposure to the duties of the superintendent via informal succession management as being vital in preparing her for the superintendency. Her progression to the job, though all internal, was not quite as traditional as Dr. Lewis. She began as a high school teacher, moved to the dean of students, then to assistant high school principal, and then to director of personnel. This position eventually evolved to an assistant superintendent position. She noted the emphasis on the learning community concept as providing her with her first leadership experience while teaching.

It was very much a collaborative atmosphere. We started working with technology collaboratively as teachers and they (administration) asked if we could do a workshop on spreadsheets and we said sure. You were asked to do things like that ...that's what we see a lot of people doing here. I enjoyed some of the things that we were doing. I enjoyed the strategic planning and the curriculum renewal. The initiatives and collaboration we were engaged in was very enriching as a professional. That's what we

see a lot of people doing here. Taking on small projects they are encouraged to try out.

All of my administrators have come up through the system.

Ms. Wilson recognized the collaborative atmosphere in the Red Valley School District for encouraging her to pursue her administrative certification. While serving as assistant principal, she once again benefitted from the informal succession management practices of the district when she was encouraged by her superintendent to pursue a central office position.

The previous superintendent ... said as a central office administrator as opposed to a building administrator, you have the curriculum knowledge and background. He said you really need to be exposed to the business end of it. And that is why I benefited from the move to director of personnel.

Ms. Wilson credited her eight years of experience in central office as further preparation for the superintendency. Her superintendent placed her in various roles, thus exposing her to the many duties of the job.

My role expanded to include more items such as crisis intervention, community complaints, facilities, transportation, food service, and emergency management. There was not much missing about the district from my experience.

Ms. Kimberly Thomas, another participant promoted internally, was exposed to both a formal and informal succession management program. While teaching in a county school system in Maryland, Ms. Thomas applied for and was accepted into a vice-principal program. The program was part of the state's succession plan to encourage teachers to explore a career move to administration.

For any teacher that was interested in taking the administrative route, they had what was called administrative interns. You would be paid teacher pay and you would work the

calendar as a teacher, but they would put you in very difficult schools as more or less a vice principal. So I could still help administer discipline, but again, I was an administrative intern. I wasn't a principal. I wasn't an assistant principal, but those were the duties that I had. It was more or less a learning curve to help us make a decision that maybe this is an area that you want to go into.

Ms. Thomas used this valuable experience to apply for and receive her first administrative position in the Clark County School District as elementary principal. It was during her five years in this capacity as well as the two years as director of curriculum that her superintendent applied succession management strategies to begin exposing her to the duties of the superintendent.

Yes, the superintendent did encourage me probably about after three or four years to go for my letter of eligibility, and then he really exposed me to many duties once I became the curriculum director/assistant superintendent.

Despite being hired from outside the district, two of the three external candidates were also the beneficiaries of succession management through job shadowing opportunities. Upon being hired, Dr. Jerry Manning was given the opportunity to work with his predecessor who remained on as superintendent for four months.

I actually started April 4 and we had April, May, and June to do the transition period. We worked side by side initially, then he started phasing out, I started phasing in so that when July 1 came, we shifted everything over to me, which was very beneficial. One of the things that I am sure is one of your questions; you're able to learn the behind the scenes dynamics of what goes on and having that resource handy. And that's one of the things that gave me an opportunity during the transition period to read all the contracts,

read the policy manual, those types of things, and if I did have questions I could come back with my predecessor and say, “Hey, explain this to me. Why is it the way it is?” I went through our policy meeting and sort of got a feel. When I had questions as to why this was done, he was able to shed some light on those types of things.

Dr. Jason Livermore, also hired from outside the district, was given a similar opportunity. He was hired with the understanding that he would be assistant superintendent for one full year and then assume the superintendency the following year. This succession experience not only gave Dr. Livermore an understanding of the daily operation of the district, but also allowed him to identify the district’s needs.

It allowed me to become familiar with the district. I was able to complete a needs assessment that generated a wealth of information as to the strengths and areas in need of improvement in the district. It also allowed me to learn the makeup of the board and the political ramifications that existed. I was able to determine what the district needed and, as a result, develop goals and a balanced scorecard approach that impacts every facet of the organization allowing us to set objectives and timelines for continuous improvement.

Despite this mentorship opportunity, both men cited unfamiliarity with the school district as causing some difficulties through their first year. Dr. Manning noted the importance of getting to know the district. By not advancing through the system, a new superintendent is often not aware of the culture of the community. Many issues may exist that a brief shadowing experience may not uncover. Dr. Manning learned in his first year as superintendent of the Green Mountain School District the importance of taking time to become familiar with the culture of the community as well as communicating with the staff.

I'll admit we started off a little rocky because there was a lack of communication. There were grievances, things of that nature, where rather than working together I took the stance of I'm the (opponent), I'm the outsider. Had I said, "Hey, let's work together on this. We need to fix the issue", it probably would have worked out. But after a good heart to heart with a couple people, we came to realize, hey, even in bad situations, we need to communicate. We need to work together. So I've grown in that area and that's one of the things that you really don't know how to approach until you learn the personality and the persons that you are dealing with. You come in fixed on here's the approach I'm going to take, but, through the process, you start seeing other views.

Dr. Livermore also experienced some difficulties in his first year as superintendent with issues that may have been avoided with more internal exposure. His relationship with the leadership committee of the teacher's union began to deteriorate after the budget crisis forced numerous furloughs. "It's almost like they just want conflict. What they have also done is filed some grievances now. They are trying to be difficult."

Being hired from outside the district with no previous exposure to the area and no shadowing experience caused Mr. Kirk O'Brien to experience some difficulties as well. He cited unfamiliarity with the culture of the district as the genesis of a few issues that he was forced to deal with in his first year as superintendent.

I had a person calling in the office with a volleyball issue (involving) their daughter. Basically, I told them the same thing I would have told them in any other of the areas I was in. Why are you bothering me with this? I am the superintendent of schools. I don't know why your daughter is not in the starting rotation. It was a good mistake to make early. The phone started ringing with people saying, "Oh my God, you can't talk to

people like that!” I realized I can’t be as gruff as I was in the other areas. You have to pay attention to that kind of detail a little more.

He soon learned the culture of the Cooper County School District was very different from the area he had come from. He reflected upon the benefit of being provided experience within the district prior to ascending to the superintendency as being a benefit, noting that “It would be easier to take over as an assistant.”

Despite only being in their first year of the superintendency, all six study participants mentioned that they had begun to initiate some form of succession management to varying degrees. Dr. Lewis indicated that he meets with all teachers at the conclusion of their induction program. If he sees that the teacher has leadership potential, he encourages them to consider a certification in administration. He recently sat down with a promising middle school English teacher and encouraged him to consider taking graduate courses in administration. He stressed the importance of developing future leaders within your district.

I think it is critical. It’s what got me started. I believe we have an obligation to be stewards with what’s going to happen once we are gone. When you think about it, we’re only in this game for a very short amount of time. I know we’re not going to be able to keep all the people in the district too. That’s another thing. We’re not just preparing people for our district. We’re preparing people for the world of public education. We have an obligation with that I think. I believe we do.

Ms. Lucy Wilson also emphasized the importance of maintaining a distributive leadership model in which many individuals are provided the opportunity to take leadership roles within the district. The Red Valley School District is known for its leadership development emphasis, and Ms. Wilson is proud to be a product of that system.

You were asked to do things like that ...that's what we see a lot of people doing here.

Taking on small projects they are encouraged to try out. All of my administrators have come up through the system. It is really about people stepping up into informal leadership positions, to move things forward. That is something, as superintendent, I want to continue to foster. How can we make this better and more effective?

Dr. Jason Livermore benefitted from succession management opportunities in numerous school districts through his progression to the superintendency. Now that he is superintendent of Hummeltown School District, he has already initiated the succession management process, something that was not done prior to his arrival. He has encouraged teachers with leadership potential to begin taking leadership roles such as department chair, though he noted that the culture of the district does not encourage teachers to take leadership risks.

Ms. Kimberly Thomas also felt like she was fighting an uphill battle in the development of a leadership pipeline within the district. The previous superintendent added an addendum to the teacher contract that teachers must be approved by the superintendent before taking administrative courses. With the small size of Clark County School District (only two principals in the district), he found that teachers were receiving their certification and, with no internal prospect of advancement, would leave the district. As a result of the small size of the district and the policy limiting administrative certification, Ms. Thomas regrettably stated that her district does not identify individuals with leadership potential either formally or informally.

Despite the fact that the Cooper County School District does not have a formal or informal succession management policy, Mr. Kirk O'Brien took the initiative and quickly found teachers with leadership potential during his first year on the job.

There is one young man who is a science teacher and president of the union. We became pretty good friends actually. I told him you are the classic underachiever. You need to be out of that science classroom and into administration. You are really sharp. He is now registered for classes. He has the ability and talent and we can sit down and discuss an issue. If he is right I will say, “Hey, you’re right.” If he is not right I will tell him. We have no problems at all with the union. His smoothness and ability to rationalize is one of the reasons that I think we enjoy that relationship.

Although Green Mountain School District also had no formal succession management policy, Dr. Jerry Manning also began identifying potential leaders in his first year as superintendent. He made an effort to get teachers into leadership positions as frequently as possible, something that was not emphasized in the district prior to his arrival.

I’ve given opportunities for leadership positions. I’ve got two classroom teachers working on a couple district policies and procedures. Now they’ve met with some opposition from their peers because their peers are just classroom teachers and say, “Who do they think they are?” – that type of mentality. I think the more that I put teachers in leadership roles the staff will start seeing that as a growth opportunity, not as something that’s offensive to the others around them.

Much like Kimberly Thomas, the superintendent of Clark County School District, Dr. Manning’s school district, Green Mountain, is very small with only four administrators. Although he knows that the job advancement opportunities within his district are limited, he felt strongly that it is his obligation as well as the obligation of all superintendents to develop leadership capacity for the benefit of the public education school system.

Going back to building leaders within, if I can make everybody the best they can, it's only going to benefit our organization. If I've got to replace you because you take a position somewhere else, kudos to you, because ultimately people are going to find out where you came from. The more people we can get into leadership roles in other districts that originated here, I feel we've done our job; at least I've done my job as a superintendent. I've built you up to be the best educator you can be. But with us being a small district, I don't see us as being able to promote within because we've got a young staff. Most of the people I have in leadership roles are probably going to be here for another 15 or 20 years. So it doesn't leave a lot of opportunity for a teacher that goes back and gets his/her principals' papers to move up here. My responsibility is to prepare them so that they can take a position somewhere else.

The six participants in this study experienced succession management to varying degrees. The extent of their exposure had a noticeable impact on their self-perceived degree of preparation and performance through their first year as superintendent. Despite their diverse exposure, all participants recognized the importance of developing their leadership pipeline and made it a point to include leadership development in some form through their first year as superintendent.

The Role of the Mentor

Hargreaves and Fink (2006b) noted that "A good mentoring relationship is an excellent way to prosper from the past" (p. 48). Five of the six participants in the study indicated the vital role played by a mentor in preparing them for their first superintendency. Some participants like internal hire Dr. Mike Lewis and external hire Dr. Jason Livermore benefitted from numerous mentors who offered encouragement, mentorship and job advancement opportunities throughout

their careers. While others such as Ms. Lucy Wilson and Ms. Kimberly Thomas had superintendents who, prior to them being promoted from within, began preparing them for the position by giving them exposure to various duties of the job.

Dr. Mike Lewis recognized mentors at every step of his career who encouraged him to pursue career advancement opportunities in administration. He reflected on how he got his start in administration and how the recommendation of one principal started him on the administrative career path during his first year of teaching.

The building principal was in one day. He said to me what are you thinking about doing. I told him I kicked around the idea of getting into administration. He literally took me out of the cafeteria that instant, took me down to his office, we called (the local) university... that's how it started. My first year of teaching and I actually started administrative coursework. What an honor, at least from my perspective, to have your supervisor come to you and say, "Have you thought about administration? Have you thought about leadership?"

The influence of mentors continued through his administrative career. Dr. Lewis made note of the many positive mentors he had throughout his career. He even credited the superintendent of his school district while he was a student in high school as having an impact on his career. He gave particular credit to the gentleman who served as superintendent during the five years preceding his first superintendency. While serving as assistant superintendent during this time, his predecessor went to great lengths to prepare him for the superintendency.

Mr. Hurd, the previous superintendent, always talked to me not as an assistant but as superintendent in training. You're not my assistant; you're a superintendent in waiting. What a mentor; unbelievable mentor. I served as his assistant for five years. We've just

been in a real good spot and Joe Hurd deserves a tremendous amount of credit too. He was a calming effect that came into this district. It was literally I would say within six weeks to two months you could feel a complete shift in this district. It's amazing what a leader can do from that perspective, in a good direction or a bad direction. But he just had an air about him that I quite frankly envied. I've had incredible mentors along the way. I just feel blessed. I really do. I don't know how else to say it.

Dr. Jason Livermore also credited mentors along his career path for offering encouragement and exposing him to job experiences that helped prepare him for job advancement.

Previous to coming here, the superintendents that I worked with were really mentors. They really helped me. They knew my eventual career goal was to be a superintendent. They were really good people that I worked with. I've been very lucky. When I was out east, Tom Campbell was the superintendent at the time at Garrison Forge. He was really interested in me because I was a young assistant principal and he knew my aspiration was to be superintendent so he helped me with stuff. He would include me in things that he probably didn't have to just to help me see how things work. The same when I went to Biglerville. They didn't have a curriculum director of secondary, so I was kind of like the secondary curriculum director the same time I was being principal so I worked along with the superintendent. He included me in board meetings. The same when I was at Shawville. We went through a construction project. Normal things that an assistant superintendent may not be involved with like construction and PlanCon. Normally my position there was curriculum, but he included me in a lot of that stuff. Seeing how the

progress worked. There wasn't any formal process, but the people that I worked with up until coming here were very helpful.

Ms. Lucy Wilson and Ms. Kimberly Thomas also cited mentors as having a positive impact on their careers. Her predecessor encouraged Ms. Wilson to move to central office from her previous position as assistant principal. He noted that she had curriculum knowledge and building level experience but needed to be exposed to the business end of administrative operations. She complied with his request and accepted the position of personnel director, a title that eventually evolved into an assistant superintendency. It was during this time that her superintendent enabled her to gain valuable experience regarding the operation of the district, experience that proved invaluable during her first year as superintendent.

I do believe he had envisioned the possibility of my becoming a superintendent.

Personally, I had not thought about my career path leading in that direction. With the retirement of other central office administrators, the district consolidated positions and responsibilities for cost-savings, and my title shifted to Assistant to the Superintendent. My role expanded to include more items such as crisis intervention, community complaints, facilities, transportation, food service, and emergency management. There was not much missing about the district from my experience.

Ms. Kimberly Thomas also gave credit to her superintendent while she was an elementary school principal in the Clark County School District for encouraging her to make the move to central office and preparing her for advancement to the superintendency.

The superintendent was here for eight years so I got to work with him and he really would mentor me in a lot of areas. It was never a goal of mine to ever become superintendent, honestly. My superintendent pushed me and pushed me and pushed me

and said, “You can do this, you can do this, you can do this.” He was the one that pushed me to get my doctorate. He was really a defining factor, a major factor in my life really in pushing me into areas that I didn’t really feel comfortable. But he was very pushy in terms of my professional development and I just pushed myself to aspire to be more. So when I look back I say, “Wow!” He was quite a role model for me and really did inspire me, because if it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t be where I am today, really.

Continuity versus Change

As the six study participants reflected upon their first year as superintendents an unexpected theme began to surface. A clear divergence emerged between those participants who were promoted from within and those who were hired from outside the district. The participants promoted from within the district all felt confident that their district was doing well, that the school board was happy with the direction the district was going, and that they were hired to maintain continuity and the status quo. Dr. Mike Lewis noted that prior to the previous superintendent taking over the Martinsville Area School District, the district was in turmoil. He credited his predecessor for turning the district around and placing him as then assistant superintendent in a very visible role as part of this transformation.

My immediate predecessor did an amazing job turning the climate of the district to one in which the focus was student achievement... His leadership was embraced by the community and the board of school directors. His use of me as a spokesperson and leader of many of the programmatic changes was viewed by the board as a positive move, and the transition of me into the position of superintendent was seamless.

Much like Dr. Lewis, Ms. Lucy Wilson, another internal hire, felt that the board of directors of the Red Valley School District was satisfied with the direction of the district, but they also were interested in seeing continued growth.

I think their (school board) desire for “in-house” is directly related to their goal of having a stable environment for the school district. While I think they like the continuity because they are satisfied, I also believe they are always watching to be certain that the district is progressing. If an internal candidate would not satisfy them, they would look outside.

Ms. Kimberly Thomas also felt that her promotion to the superintendency from within the organization was partly due to the satisfaction the board felt in the direction the school district was moving. “I most certainly believe that I was promoted within to maintain the momentum – yes, I really feel that the board was happy with the direction of the district prior to my hiring.” Ms. Thomas, like the other internal hires, committed herself to maintaining the continuity of the district while at the same time addressing what areas could be improved to ensure continuous improvement.

All three external candidates saw themselves, to varying degrees, as agents of change. Mr. Kirk O’Brien got the sense during the interview process that the Cooper County board of directors wanted their new superintendent to change the direction of the district. He knew from past experience that being a change agent was not an easy road.

If you are going in as an agent of change, you need to make sure the board understands that with change comes controversy. Having a thick skin... If they are hiring you from out of town, they are hiring you because they don’t want somebody tied to the system. They want somebody to come in and whip the system into shape. You will become the

biggest [*expletive*] in that district in no time. That board needs to know that it's going to happen. I told this board that it's going to happen. We are going to go through good spots and rough spots. It is a rugged path when you are a change agent.

Dr. Jerry Manning also felt there was some validity to the change agent theme. He expressed that the Green Mountain School District is a community built of tradition. There is not a lot of mobility; the population of the area is fairly stagnant with many second and third generation families living within the community. Dr. Manning noted that the population dynamic makes the community very resistant to change.

That's been probably one of the biggest challenges across the board. In fact, so many of our community members are graduates of Green Mountain, and their ... mentality is it was good enough for them when they went through the system, why isn't it good enough for now? So overcoming that we've always done it that way, it was good enough for me type thing with the community. Most of the issues that arise again, like I said, are people that are uncomfortable with change or don't see the purpose for the change. Part of my responsibility is, I don't want to say educate them, but put in front of them, here's why.

Dr. Manning felt the board of directors brought him to the district for this purpose. He noted that through the interview process and his first year as superintendent, he had board members indicate they want change. While initiating this change process, he was confident the board was behind him.

Typically the board won't come out and say, "We want you to change everything." But when you start making changes, and you've got full support, it's reassuring to say, "Yeah, that's why they got me here." They want to move forward, they want changes, they're not happy with what's been going on. I've got nine board members to support

what I'm doing as far as change goes. But going back to bringing an outsider in, most times I think that what they're looking for is someone to come in and make changes.

They're not happy or content with the status quo, they want to move forward.

Dr. Jason Livermore also got the impression that the Hummeltown School District was looking for a change from the status quo. One particular area noted was the issue of board and administrative collaboration, something that was devoid with the previous superintendent.

Yes, I think they were expecting change. I think they were tired of the reputation that they were a controversial board and that they fought all the time. I talked a lot about collaboration and lateral accountability and those kinds of things...about working together. I think they were looking for someone with that kind of attitude. We need to work together; we need to get some collaboration here. There were some crazy things that gave the district a black eye. They were on the news. They wanted somebody who was going to eliminate those things. I think that is what they were looking for in me.

Like other external hires, Dr. Livermore met with some resistance from his constituents regarding the difficult budget decisions that he was forced to make during his first year as superintendent. He described the emotional strain placed upon him after making the decision to furlough staff.

Here it was tougher emotionally because some thought that being from outside I did not care which was totally false. I care deeply about the people here and the direction of the district but no matter what you tried to do, there were those that felt you did not care.

Summary

This chapter presented a review of the data collection and analysis process. Data were collected from interviews with six first-time Pennsylvania superintendents. Data were analyzed,

coded and classified according to the established theoretical framework. Themes emerged relative to the participants' preparation for the position and the impact this preparation had on their perceived performance through their first year as superintendent.

The next chapter will relate the data analysis to the research questions of this study. The research findings will be summarized. Recommendations and suggestions for further study will be provided.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education act (ESEA) of 2001, commonly referred to as *No Child Left Behind*, public education has been under intense scrutiny as the 2014 deadline approaches for all students to be proficient on statewide assessment tests (NCLB, 2010). In addition, the recent economic recession has forced national, state and local governments to scrutinize spending, the impact of which has been felt by school districts across the state as they struggle to maintain a quality education amidst dwindling resources. At no other time in public education has the importance of strong leadership been so critical.

The impact of leadership in business has been well documented as having a significant effect on the success of an organization (Collins, 2001; Drucker, 1992; Heifetz and Linsky, 2002; Tichy and Bennis, 2007). Recognizing this connection, leading corporations for decades have gone to great lengths to develop the leadership capacity within their organizations to ensure sustained improvement and viability. This strategy of identifying and developing future leaders within the organization is termed succession management.

The practice of succession management has been applied much less frequently in education. Research confirms not only the benefit for school districts to cultivate leadership potential within their districts, but the positive impact that succession management can have on the quality of leadership and sustained improvement of the districts that apply this practice (DeVita, 2007; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Johnson, 1996; Levitz, 2008; Wallin, 1999).

Additional research has supported the importance of developing leaders within an organization to ensure sustained growth and avoid discontinuity of direction and systemic failure. Studies have shown the benefit of developing a learning community, a collaborative

culture of vision in which leadership is developed (Charan, Drotter & Noel, 2001; Fullan, 2005; Levitz, 2008; Reeves, 2002; Schlechty, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact that exposure to informal succession management strategies had on the self-perceived performance of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents. The chapter begins by addressing the research questions that guided the study. Next, a synopsis of the six case studies is provided. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and recommendations for further study.

Summary of Findings

Research Question One - What are the self-perceptions of preparation and job effectiveness of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents who have been exposed to succession management opportunities compared to those who have not?

As noted by all six study participants, no coursework can prepare you for the unique challenges that are presented by each superintendent position. The degree of preparedness for the specific challenges of the position they were in was affected greatly by the amount of succession management opportunities, both internal and outside the district that each participant was exposed to. All participants noted that no coursework could ever prepare an aspiring superintendent for the specific challenges that lie ahead.

Political leadership. As noted by all participants, their first year as superintendent couldn't have come at a more challenging time. School districts across the nation are being forced to address the effects of a slow-recovering national economy, drastic cuts in state budgets, and the elimination of federal stimulus funds (Samuels, 2011). National surveys administered to veteran superintendents indicate school board relations as the number one cause of superintendent dissatisfaction (Glass, 2001). Despite the challenges, most candidates indicated a

positive first year politically regarding board and community relations. Five of the six participants cited their prior experience within the district as helping them establish a positive relationship with the school board.

Insiders. Dr. Lewis noted his eight years with the district as a principal and chief academic officer allowed him to establish a positive relationship with the board. Various leadership duties he was assigned enabled the board to become comfortable with him as well. This enabled Dr. Lewis to make a seamless transition to the district leadership position. He also made note of the benefit of not only being in the school district for the past eight years, but living in the district as a benefit to establishing himself politically. Making both formal (with local representatives and community groups) and informal (with community members at the events of his children) contacts helped him to establish positive connections in the community.

Ms. Lucy Wilson spent her entire 20 year career in the Red Valley School District. Like Dr. Lewis, her career path within the district enabled her to establish a positive relationship with the school board. When it came time for her to ascend into the role of superintendent, she had already established positive relationships with board members, legislative representatives, and community members.

The third internally promoted candidate also cited the benefits of her internal experience. Her eight years in the district as elementary principal, K-12 curriculum director, and assistant superintendent as well as the supportive role played by her predecessor allowed her to establish positive relations with the school board.

Despite noting the political benefit of being promoted internally and having familiarity with the school board and community, all three internal participants mentioned challenges that this internal promotion caused as well. Ms. Thomas struggled with the change in relationship

with her school board, noting that the relationship changes drastically when you move the superintendent's seat. Dr. Lewis supported this claim when alluding to his regret for not establishing himself as the district leader by having the board clarifying their expectations and clearly stating his own expectations of them. Ms. Wilson was surprised that, despite having spent the last twenty years in the district, community members not close to district operations were reluctant to trust her and still looked at her as an outsider.

Outsiders. Two of the three externally promoted participants also saw the benefit of informal succession management in regards to their political leadership. Dr. Jerry Manning was afforded the opportunity to shadow his predecessor for three months before his first official day as superintendent. He credited this experience for allowing him to become familiar with the school board. His predecessor shared information with him regarding the background and political affiliation of each board member. Dr. Jason Livermore also recognized his yearlong shadowing opportunity (as assistant superintendent) as being vital to his political leadership preparation in how to handle a very hostile board of directors. Both men cited the shadowing opportunity for helping them to establish themselves in the community as well.

All three externally hired participants noted at some time during their interview about being hired as an agent of change for the district. Filling this role can cause difficulty politically as different community groups begin to resist the changes that you were brought in to implement. Mr. Kirk O'Brien made note of one board member in particular, who happened to support another (internal) candidate for the job, as fighting him on every issue. He also mentioned a transition period where he had to take time to become familiar with the climate of the rural district, noting the dichotomy that existed between the Cooper County School District and the districts for which he had previously worked.

Managerial leadership. Participants were asked to reflect upon their job effectiveness as a managerial leader, focusing on two specific areas; budget preparation and union negotiations. Prior experience had a significant impact upon each participant's self-perceived effectiveness in this area.

Insiders. Once again, the three participants promoted internally credited their prior experience in the district as helping them be successful managerial leaders in their first year. Dr. Lewis, while serving five years as chief academic officer, was intimately involved with the budget process. Ms. Wilson credits her eight years in central office for giving her an understanding of the budgeting process at the district level. Ms. Thomas, despite her limited experience in working with a district budget, felt her first budget process went well. She emphasized transparency with the board and community throughout the process, a strategy that was also emphasized by Dr. Lewis. All three internal candidates, despite significant cuts in state funding, perceived their first budget adoption as being a success.

The internal participants also noted their past experience as being a benefit when working with the teacher union. Ms. Thomas used the relationships she had previously established as a building principal and curriculum director within the district to help with union issues. Ms. Wilson's prior in-house experience as personnel director gave her valuable experience with teacher contract negotiations, experience that helped her settle an overdue contract. Dr. Lewis also credited relationships he had previously established with many of the union leaders to producing positive outcomes with union issues.

Outsiders. The three externally hired participants also noted prior experience, though outside the district, as helping them with managerial issues. Mr. O'Brien's past experience as director of a vo-tech gave him valuable budgeting experience. Dr. Livermore also noted his past

experience as an assistant superintendent in another district provided valuable experience with budgeting. All three external candidates were faced with difficult decision regarding budget cuts. It was the need to furlough staff that caused Dr. Livermore's relationship with the union to become contentious. Dr. Manning also noted a rough start with the union, a relationship that gradually improved by the end of his first year through a recommitment to communication.

Educational leadership. Following the pattern established in the previous two sections, study participants cited prior experience for having a significant impact on their self-perceived success in the area of educational leadership through their first year as superintendent.

Insiders. A noteworthy advantage of being promoted from within is familiarity with the curriculum and the academic strengths and weaknesses of the school system. This was certainly the case at Martinsville Area School district where Dr. Lewis used his past experience as chief academic officer enabled him to maintain the academic momentum while addressing the district's instructional needs. Ms. Wilson found her in-house experience to be beneficial as well, providing valuable insight to the educational needs of the district. Ms. Thomas made mention of the disadvantage of becoming superintendent of a small school district, having to sacrifice time to devote to educational issues for managerial items that may, in larger districts, be reassigned to an assistant.

Outsiders. Research on the topic of hiring a district leader from outside an organization has shown the need for the new leader to take time to become familiar with the district. This familiarization is referred to as organization socialization (Fink, 2010). The externally hired participants in this study took time to become familiar with the organization. They acknowledged taking a cautious approach to educational issues in an effort to become more familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the staff and curriculum. Only one of the three

participants, Dr. Livermore, noted significant gains in this area after initiating a district wide curriculum evaluation. He was able to identify this need after completing a needs assessment survey during his yearlong job shadowing experience.

Research Question Two - To what extent are Pennsylvania school districts identifying individuals with administrative potential within their organizations and applying succession management strategies to prepare aspiring administrators for leadership positions?

All six study participants reported that at some point in their careers they were the recipient of informal succession management, typically through the guidance of an administrator serving in a supervisory role.

Insiders. The three participants promoted internally all noted that at some point in their professional careers they were not only encouraged to advance professionally but were also exposed to various duties that prepared them for job advancement. Dr. Lewis, Ms. Wilson, and Ms. Thomas all credited their predecessors for exposing them to the responsibilities and duties of the superintendent while serving their assistantships. Additionally, all three reported similar opportunities that were afforded to them at other points in their careers. Ms. Thomas was the only participant to take part in a formal administrative leadership development program during her tenure in Maryland. All internal participants report these leadership opportunities as being pivotal to their leadership development.

Outsiders. Exposure to succession management strategies was not as consistent with the external participants. Dr. Livermore cited numerous occasions in his professional development when a supervisor familiar with his desire to advance to the superintendency provided leadership opportunities to garner experience to prepare him for the next step. Both Dr. Livermore and Dr.

Manning experienced the benefit of succession management via a job shadowing opportunity with the outgoing superintendent.

Application. Despite only being in their first year as a superintendent, all six study participants saw the value in developing leaders within their own organization. Informal application of the succession management strategy include identifying teacher leaders for curriculum committees, policy evaluations, or in-service presentations, encouraging administrative certification, or serving as department chairs. All three external participants indicated that succession management was not something that was implemented within the district prior to their arrival.

Research Question Three - What formal policies/procedures have Pennsylvania school districts adopted for the purpose of developing leadership capacity within their school districts?

Many states have identified the importance of educational leadership and the integral role it plays in student achievement. Neighboring states such as Maryland and Delaware have committed substantial resources to the development of leadership succession planning guides to aide school districts in establishing succession plans to ensure strong administrative leadership for generations to come. School districts across the country are beginning to develop formal board policies to address the issue of succession management, ensuring leadership development and sustainability at all levels of the organization (Vasudeva, 2009).

The state of Pennsylvania currently has no policy in place addressing leadership succession. Much emphasis has been placed in the Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership Program (PILS), a statewide standards-based continuing professional education program for school leaders focused on developing leadership capacity to improve student achievement (PDE, 2011).

The researcher is aware of no Pennsylvania School District that has adopted a formal policy addressing leadership succession.

Research Question Four - What are the challenges of first-time Pennsylvania superintendents?

Many similarities have been noted between the study participants who were hired both within and outside the organization. However, a divergence of opinion exists when asked to reflect on challenges of first-time superintendents.

Insiders. All three participants promoted internally felt it was a great advantage to be familiar with the community and the board of directors. Two internal participants felt that this familiarity and being promoted from within causes challenges as well, the greatest of which is establishing your own identity. More often than not, individuals are promoted from within to maintain continuity (Geisel, 2003; Kowalski et al., 2011). The school board may assume that the new superintendent has the same goals and educational vision as his/her predecessor. This may not be the case. The internal participants caution against failing to establish your own identity with the school board.

Those hired internally also commented that despite their familiarity with the districts, they were still not prepared for the unexpected events that always arise. Examples cited were teacher arrests, student deaths, and staff grievances. They added that nothing could fully prepare you for these challenges and the best advice is to remain flexible.

Outsiders. A common challenge addressed by those hired externally was ensuring that the school board was on the same page in regards to the change they felt they were hired to make. One participant cautioned other externally hired superintendents to be very clear with the board about what is expected of you.

All three externally hired participants cited the unfamiliarity they had with the school district as being an initial challenge. They advised taking time to understand the culture, values and traditions of the community were helpful in setting improvement priorities.

Being new to the district, the issue of trust was a challenge to the external participants. It was essential to find as much information about the background of an issue as possible before making a decision on how to act. Finding someone who had been around the district and who had unbiased knowledge of the reason a situation existed was a challenge.

Research Question Five - What recommendations do first-time Pennsylvania superintendents offer to address challenges and help the transition to the superintendency?

Internally and externally hired study participants had similar answers regarding recommendations to better prepare aspiring superintendents for the job. One participant mentioned the progression to the superintendency, noting the benefit of following the traditional path (teacher, principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent) in preparing a candidate for the position.

Five of the six participants (both internal and external) cited the importance of a mentorship for first-year superintendents. All three internal candidates had an informal mentorship opportunity as assistant superintendents. Two of the three externally hired candidates had a mentorship opportunity as well with the outgoing superintendent. The participants saw the value in that experience and felt that the mentorship should not stop there, recommending first-year superintendents be assigned to a veteran or retired superintendent to confide with throughout the year.

The most common recommendation made by study participants to better prepare first-year superintendents was hands-on training. All six participants noted the importance of

presenting different scenarios to aspiring superintendents as part of their certification training, shifting the emphasis from theory to practice.

One study participant presented a unique perspective having received his superintendent certification from another state. He noted the emphasis this state's program has on practice as opposed to theory, adding that the requirements of the program provided hands-on experience with numerous job requirements.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to assess the effect that exposure to succession management strategies had upon first-time Pennsylvania superintendents. All six study participants revealed that their prior administrative experiences helped them effectively perform their duties throughout their first year on the job. The researcher went to great lengths to analyze participant input in an attempt to quantify the value of each unique experience.

The Benefit of Prior Experience

Previous research has shown the value of following a traditional career path to the superintendency (Johnson, 1996). Experience as a teacher, principal and central office administrator has been shown to help with the preparation of first-time superintendents (Culotta, 2008; Geisel, 2002; Regan, 2003). All three internally hired participants served as assistant superintendent prior to ascending into the district leadership role. They were unified in their belief that this experience was a great benefit to them as they had prior exposure to many of the duties and scenarios they were faced with through their first year as superintendent.

The externally hired participants also gave recognition to their prior experience for preparing them for their first year as superintendent. Two of the three external participants were provided a mentor opportunity in which they acted as the assistant superintendent to their

predecessor. Both cited this experience as providing valuable hands-on training for specific challenges they later faced as the district leader. The third external participant had previously served as the director of a vocational-technical school, experiencing similar job responsibilities as a superintendent. A rapidly expanding body of research supports the benefit of hands-on experience as the best way to prepare aspiring superintendents. First-time superintendents in previous studies recommend case study, practical approaches, and real life experiences as essential components in preparation for the superintendency (Culotta, 2008; Orr, 2002). Job experience, in this case a traditional progression to the superintendency was beneficial in preparing all study participants for their first superintendency.

The Benefit of a Mentorship

Another conclusion of the study is the importance of a mentor in the development of aspiring superintendents. All six study participants indicated being mentored throughout their professional career. They were in agreement that this mentorship had a significant impact upon their career progression as well as their self-perceived performance through their first year as superintendent. Two of the internal participants from larger school districts (3,724 and 5,847 students) were encouraged by a supervisor to pursue administrative degrees and advance to a central office position. These mentors also exposed the participants to duties normally reserved for the role of the superintendent. Two of the externally hired participants were offered a mentorship where the outgoing superintendent provided a hands-on orientation of three to twelve months.

Research indicates that nearly half of those superintendents serving in small school districts of less than 3,000 students noted having no previous central office experience prior to becoming superintendent. Of 500 Pennsylvania school districts, 318 had fewer than 3,000

students during the 2009-2010 school year (PDE, 2011). Providing mentorship opportunities is a challenge for smaller school districts with limited resources. Of the six participants in this study, three were superintendents of school districts with fewer than 1,000 students. One received a formal mentorship opportunity when her predecessor agreed to stay on for an additional six months following his retirement announcement in order to mentor his protégé.

All study participants noted the benefit of having a peer to consult with on daily operational matters related to legal, ethical, or operational matters. Research has shown the benefit of a mentor for first-time superintendents (Chapman, 1997; Culotta, 2008; Orr, 2002). The Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) utilizes an executive coaching program for first-time superintendents. Superintendents are assigned a peer coach (often a retired superintendent) who has been formally trained using a corporate executive model. Personal and professional profiles are used to ensure a successful coach/client match. Coaches are available throughout the school year to offer assistance to the novice superintendent on an as needed basis (Virginia Association of School Superintendents, 2011).

The Benefit of Hiring Within

In general, the externally hired participants in this study felt that they were successful in their first year as superintendents. Their progression through a relatively traditional path to the superintendency as well as the benefit of mentors along the way prepared them for a positive experience.

One theme that was consistent with these participants was that it took some time for them to become familiar with the culture of the district as well as the operational and educational strengths and weaknesses. Research has shown the temporary disruption that is caused when hiring an individual who is not familiar with the school district. Fink referred to this breaking-in

period as organization socialization, the time when the new superintendent becomes familiar with the operational procedures and culture of a district (Fink, 2010). All three externally hired participants in this study felt that they were brought in by the school board to evoke some type of change. Fullan warned of the danger in “discontinuity of direction” and recommended the establishment of a learning community that develops and nurtures leadership capacity within the organization (2005, p. 27).

The internally hired participants indicated their feelings that their respective districts were headed in the right direction and that they were hired to maintain momentum. The practice of hiring within decreases the chances of disruption caused by leadership transition (Geisel, 2002). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) suggested hiring an insider may move a district from good to great, for he/she is familiar with the district’s weaknesses and can address them promptly. In order for all districts to take full advantage of internal leadership advancement, a system that is conducive to leadership development must be in place.

The Benefit of Succession Planning and Learning Community Development

The effectiveness of developing the leadership capacity within a school district via the application of succession management strategies is contingent upon the strength of the learning environment that exists there. A clear separation was uncovered during this study, revealing two distinct groups. Two of the internally promoted superintendents, Dr. Mike Lewis and Ms. Lucy Wilson were promoted through a larger school system that emphasized distributed leadership. Their predecessors were individuals who empowered others within their organizations to take on leadership roles with an emphasis on collaboration (Marzano et al., 2005). The four other participants noted no formal or informal leadership development within their districts prior to their promotion to the superintendency.

To ensure systemic growth and sustainability, research has shown the importance of establishing a professional learning community where educators at all levels work collaboratively in inquiry and research in order to constantly improve the educational process (DuFour et al., 2006). Schools districts of all sizes have the resources to implement a professional learning environment led by distributed leadership theory, thus building the district's leadership capacity. Once this system is in place, succession planning can begin as well by giving potential administrators leadership opportunities in order to assess their ability to lead. The benefits will be seen as leaders are cultivated and sustained systemic advancement embraced by all.

Recommendation for Further Study

The population of this study was limited to only six participants. School districts were selected from a wide geographical area from across the state. Size of the districts also varied from small rural to large suburban. Future studies may expand on the number of participants or focus on one geographical or locale code. By taking a more direct focus, the researcher could determine the effects that the application of succession management strategies has on a specific population as compared to others. For example, smaller school districts have very different administrative structures than larger school districts. The challenges of developing the leadership capacity in a smaller district with limited resources may present additional challenges.

Another possibility for additional study would be a more in depth analysis of one case. This research study analyzed the topic of succession management from one perspective, that of the first year superintendent. Additional studies could analyze the perspective of veteran superintendents. In addition, a future study may look at the issue from numerous perspectives within the same district by including teachers, lower level administrators, and school board

members. These individuals could offer a different perspective regarding leadership development, distributed leadership, and the hiring practices of the district.

Summary

Public education is under intense scrutiny as a result of the accountability movement and a national economic downturn that has caused historic funding cuts. District leadership has taken on added importance as districts attempt to navigate through turbulent educational waters. Continuous systemic improvement is essential for a school district to meet these arduous demands.

This constant improvement can only be obtained through the establishment of a professional learning community, one in which all employees focus on professional growth and a distributive leadership approach is used. This approach encourages the nurturing of the institution's leadership capacity by identifying those with leadership potential and placing them in leadership roles throughout the district. Once this system is established, a succession management system can be put into place where future administrators are developed within and sustainable growth is achieved.

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Appendix A

PA Framework and Guidelines for Superintendent Preparation Programs

Best Practice	Evidence
Extensive field-based work with well-guided internship requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Describe how the college or university selected the field-based experiences in collaboration with school district partners. * Describe how the field-based experiences are part of a cohesive program to prepare PA's school and district leaders. * Describe how the quality, appropriateness and relevance of each field experience are assessed. * Describe how mentors are selected for the field experience/internship. * Identify requirements for mentors and supervisors. * Show how project required of candidate has the potential for substantial improvement in teaching and learning in the school district.
Coherently sequenced, comprehensive curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provide rationale for sequence. * Provide evidence that curriculum addresses the standards.
Uses problem-based learning to connect theory and Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provide authentic engagement in problems of practice throughout the program. * Provide examples of authentic assessments that ensure a candidate's competency in applying theory in practice. * Describe the strong linkages between content and methods and how this enables candidates to understand and practice what they are learning.
Best Practice	Evidence
Blended faculty of academics and practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * See Faculty Qualifications guidelines. * Describe how the college/university selects, trains, supports and assesses cooperating administrators and supervisors * Provide evidence of regular review to ensure qualifications are current. * Provide evidence that program is administered effectively
Careful selection of highly qualified, promising participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Demonstrate that admission criteria includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Recommendations from partner school districts o Portfolio o Essay of how superintendents shape learning in school districts o Problem based learning activity (given at orientation session) o Compliance with state requirements (experience) o Evidence of leadership potential (other leadership roles) o Ability to give an oral presentation o Educational philosophy o Assessment of candidate potential from outside the education department

Emphasis on the superintendent's role as an instructional leader	* See Guidelines for Core and Corollary Standards.
Includes an internship	* Minimum of 360 hours of participation. * Minimum of 180 hours must be completed while the school is in session. * Completion of identified role expectations and competencies.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education specifies that the institution must document each candidate's successful attainment of knowledge, skills, and competencies found in the core and corollary standards listed below:

Core Standards

1. Knowledge and skills to think and plan strategically creating an organizational vision around personalized student success.
2. An understanding of standards-based systems theory and design and the ability to transfer that knowledge to the leader's job as an architect of standards based reform in the school.
3. The ability to access and use appropriate data to inform decision-making at all levels of the system.

Corollary Standards

1. Creating a culture of teaching and learning with an emphasis on learning.
2. Managing resources for effective results.
3. Collaborating, communicating, engaging and empowering others inside and outside the organization to pursue excellence in learning.
4. Operating in a fair and equitable manner with personal and professional integrity.
5. Advocating for children and public education in the larger political, social, economic, legal and cultural context.
6. Supporting professional growth of self and others through practice and inquiry.

The following five performance-based assessment vehicles are to be used to assess the standards listed above are attained.

Evidence/Measurement Processes

1. Action-based research project designed to improve student achievement
 - Design of a standards based instructional systems model
 - Design of a performance-based teacher evaluation system

2. Development and implementation of a curriculum project focused on improving student achievement
 - Integrate federal, state and district requirements and policies
 - Include scheduling, budgeting
3. Tools project (application of current tools endorsed by and made available by PDE)
 - Focus on student achievement
 - Use of tools (currently tools provided by PDE)
 - Link to classroom practice
4. Multiple measures of data project focusing on student achievement
 - Integrate other measures beyond the student test data
 - Link to improved or enhanced student achievement
 - Link to school reform
5. Case study focusing on improving student achievement
 - Choose a school district; research all relevant information about the district; identify strengths and weaknesses of school district; then present a 5-year plan to improve the student achievement in that district.
 - Research district strategic plan focusing on ways to increase student achievement.
 - Include a plan for collaborating, communicating, and engaging others inside and outside the organization to improve student achievement.

Appendix B

Maryland Outline for Succession Planning

The following is an outline based on the Catalyst for Conversation. The purpose of the outline is to provide a guide for system leaders to develop a leadership succession plan. The overall intent of the plan is to increase the quantity and quality of potential candidates for the positions of principal and assistant principal.

I. Current Status Descriptions

A. Philosophy

1. The school system's philosophy of leadership and leadership development
2. The system's view of the job of the principal, assistant principal, aspiring leaders, and potential leaders

B. Identification

1. The attributes the system needs in school leadership candidates
2. Where the system finds the majority of the candidates and how they are identified
 - a. Demographics (gender, geography, race/ethnicity, level)
 - b. Self-identification
 - c. Internal identification
3. How the system creates a pool of candidates

C. Development

1. How the system develops aspiring and potential principals through leadership coursework and in-house professional development
2. Who makes the decisions for the focus of leadership development in a given school year
3. Who is responsible for the implementation of leadership development during a given school year

D. Promotion

1. The current promotion process
2. The time of year when leadership succession decisions are made and why decisions are made at that time

E. Movement

1. The system's philosophy regarding movement of school leaders, including the frequency with which they should be moved
2. The process for movement of current principals in the system
3. The degree of choice principals have in accepting or rejecting an assignment

F. Retention

1. Data showing the stability of the principalship in the school system in terms of average length of time of service, number of principals who choose to leave the principalship before retirement, and the number of principals who leave to take positions in other local systems
2. Current retention efforts for principals

II. Succession Considerations

A. Philosophy

1. How the *Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework* influences what the system will do to build leadership capacity and defines the expectations for instructional leadership
2. The elements of a positive, ethical, supportive, proactive culture that sustains leadership
3. The actions of the system that demonstrate the commitment required to ensure a comprehensive, transparent succession plan
4. The system's explanation to stakeholders of why leadership succession is both important and cost effective
5. A structured public relations campaign to promote respect for the principalship communicate the importance of the position to the overall mission of the school, and explain to stakeholders why leadership succession is both important and cost effective

B. Identification

1. The interdependent roles and responsibilities of executive officers, principals, human resource personnel, instruction/curriculum personnel, and professional development specialists in the identification of leadership candidates
2. The incentive structure that encourages self-identification for leadership
3. Why and how all identified candidates, those who aspire to lead schools and those who have potential but have not expressed an aspiration to be a principal, are receiving differentiated professional development
4. Why and how the "pool" approach to identification and training is being redefined to implement a systemwide, capacity-building approach rather than a narrow group of potential replacements
5. The updated/upgraded role of technology, through the use of databases, in identifying candidates, monitoring their career paths, and tracking their professional development
6. How the system communicates its identification processes to all stakeholders
7. How the system considers external candidates only after a structured review process ensures that no internal candidate will be an effective match for a given school

C. Development

1. The mechanisms that are in place to assess needs, determine interests, and provide access in order to differentiate leadership development opportunities
2. The process for including both potential and aspiring principals in the design and implementation of leadership development initiatives
3. The process for providing constructive feedback to both potential and aspiring principals who are participating in the design and implementation of professional development and by whom
4. How the *Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework* is integrated into leadership development experiences
5. The potential funding sources and processes to support leadership development

6. How the system communicates to internal and external stakeholders the processes used to support candidates for the principalship
7. The mechanisms to establish and sustain the culture for a professional learning community of aspiring and potential principals
8. Partnerships with colleges and universities to assure the alignment leadership development experiences with the *Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework*
9. The processes that are in place to ensure that principals provide opportunities for assistant principals to observe teachers, provide constructive feedback, conduct professional development, chair committees with an instructional focus, and meet regularly with the principal on strategies to improve student achievement

D. Promotion

1. The procedures that ensure equity, consistency, and transparency of the promotion process
2. The interdependent roles and responsibilities of executive officers, principals, human resource personnel, instruction/ curriculum personnel, and professional development specialists in the promotion of leadership candidates
3. How and by whom constructive feedback is provided to unsuccessful candidates regarding their performance during each stage of the promotion process
4. The timeline that allows for planned succession and effective transitions
5. The mechanisms that ensure a successful transition to the position of principal
6. How this new promotion process is communicated to internal and external stakeholders

E. Movement

1. How the movement of principals is connected to an overarching philosophy of succession planning
2. The research that supports the system's rationale for the frequency of movement of school leaders
3. The interdependent roles and responsibilities of executive officers, principals, human resource personnel, instruction/curriculum personnel, and professional development specialists in the movement of principals and assistant principals
4. The procedures for self-initiated movement by school leaders
5. The procedures for the acceptance or rejection of an assignment by a potential principal or a principal
6. How the school system matches a principal to a school based on the specific needs of the school and the specific strengths of the principal
7. The attractive incentive structure that encourages highly qualified principals to move to challenging schools
8. The process for involving the school community in the selection of the candidate for a specific vacancy
9. How the school system stabilizes a school that has an unexpected vacancy in the principalship

10. How the process for movement of principals is made transparent and communicated to stakeholders

F. Retention

1. The needs assessment that identifies what the system's most talented people want in terms of retaining them
2. How the system determines what aspiring and potential leaders believe should be included in leadership succession initiatives
3. Career opportunities that place value on the accomplishments of potential and current principals throughout their careers
4. Distributed leadership opportunities to impose a sense of fairness and purposeful challenge
5. The strategy for providing career counseling and support for potential school leaders
6. An attractive incentive structure that encourages leaders to remain in the system
7. The system's plan for compensating principals at a level commensurate with their responsibilities and increased level of accountability
8. The system's plan for phasing in the building manager position to reduce managerial responsibilities and increase time for a focus on instruction
9. A structured recognition and celebration of accomplishments
10. How a transparent and well-communicated process assists in retention of principals and potential principals by increasing understanding, building trust, and promoting morale

Appendix C

First Year Superintendent Survey

Q7 Please list your name, school district, and current position.

Your Name

School District in which you are currently working

Number of students in district

Type of district (rural, urban, suburban)

Q1 When did you begin your current position as superintendent (month/year)?

Q2 What career path did you follow to the superintendency?

- ☐ teacher, building principal, superintendent
- ☐ teacher, building principal, central office administration, superintendent
- ☐ other (please specify) _____

Q3 What was your last job title before you became a superintendent?

- ☐ Assistant Superintendent
- ☐ Associate/Deputy Superintendent
- ☐ Curriculum Director
- ☐ High School/Middle School Principal
- ☐ Elementary Principal
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

Q6 Were you promoted from within or hired from outside the district?

- ☐ Promoted from within
- ☐ Hired from outside the district

Q8 While serving in your previous administrative position(s), did your current district provide you with hands-on training to prepare you for the superintendency?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q7 While serving in your previous administrative position(s), did your district provide you with exposure/training in the following areas?

	Hands-on Training	Limited Informal Exposure	No Training or Exposure
Public/Community Relations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School Board Relations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Analyzing, Updating, and/or Writing District Policy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
District Budgeting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personnel and/or Union Relations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
District Curriculum Alignment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supervising Instruction, Assessment, and Data Analysis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strategic Planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Establishing an Educational Vision for the District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8 What were your greatest challenges as a first year superintendent?

- ☐ Public/Community Relations
- ☐ School Board Relations
- ☐ Analyzing, Updating, and/or Writing District Policy
- ☐ District Budgeting
- ☐ Personnel and/or Union Relations
- ☐ District Curriculum Alignment
- ☐ Supervising Instruction, Assessment, and Data Analysis
- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☐ Establishing an Educational Vision for the District
- ☐ Other _____

Appendix D

Informed Consent Letterhead

Dr.
1415 Sixth Avenue
Altoona, PA 16602

Dear Dr. ,

You are cordially invited to participate in a study to be conducted by Mr. Robert J. Gildea under the supervision of Dr. Joseph F. Marcoline education professor in the Administration and Leadership Studies Program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The study intends to interview first-time Pennsylvania superintendents in order to identify their exposure to various job responsibilities of the superintendent within the district that they are currently working prior to taking the position and to determine the degree to which that exposure affected their self-perceived level of preparation and job effectiveness. It is the intent of the researcher to determine whether or not a relationship exists between a superintendent's self-perceived level of preparation and job effectiveness and the extent to which he/she is exposed to the various duties of the superintendency via succession management strategies prior to ascending into the position.

The interview should take approximately 45 minutes and involve a series of questions focused on the circumstances regarding how the superintendent was hired, the degree of preparation the participant received prior to taking the position, and the impact those opportunities had on his/her job preparedness and performance.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and no known risks are involved. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time. Even if you chose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying the project coordinator or the primary researcher identified below. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence. Your response will be considered only in combination with those from other participants. The information obtained in this study may be published or presented at conferences, but your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Despite confidentiality measures, please keep in mind when responding to the questions that only four superintendents from school districts within a sixty mile radius of the researcher will be included in the study.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the voluntary consent form below and return it using the stamped return envelope. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have concerning participating in this worthwhile study.

Best Regards,

Robert J. Gildea

Primary Research

Robert J. Gildea
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Project Coordinator

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Indiana, PA 15705
P: 724-357-2419

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730).

Appendix D

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VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the above Informed Consent Form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this Informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT) _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Phone number where you can be reached _____

Email address _____

Best days and times to reach you _____

(Do not write below this line, for Primary Researcher's use only)

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this study, and have answered any questions that have been raised.

Date

Primary Researcher's Signature