The Treatise Committee for Annette Maria Villerot certifies that this is the approved version of the following treatise:

SUPERINTENDENT ENTRY PLANS: DO LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES

FOR ORGANIZATIONAL STABILITY MATTER?

Committee:

_____

Rubén Olivárez, Supervisor

_____

Edwin Sharpe

_____

Patricia Somers

_____

Jill Siler

_____

Susan Lofton

SUPERINTENDENT ENTRY PLANS: DO LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES

FOR ORGANIZATIONAL STABILITY MATTER?

by

Annette Maria Villerot, B.S. Ed; M.Ed.

Treatise

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

The University of Texas at Austin

May, 2014

Dedication

I dedicate this to my loving and supportive family. Your abundant love and support have been a source of strength. Thank you for your faithful encouragement.

Mom, thank you for being my role model. You have modeled determination, so I am determined. You have modeled perseverance, so I persevere. You believe in me, so I believe in myself. You are truly the wind beneath my wings.

Dad, you gave me self-confidence. You taught me to "never lower my standards for anyone, and to make others to rise to my standards." As a result, I set high expectations for myself personally and professionally. You have always been my hero.

Suzie, thank you for being my sister and best friend. Although you have looked up to me as your older sister, I look up to you as a woman. Not only are you a brilliant professional, you are also a wonderful sister, wife, daughter, and mother. Thank you for your reassurance throughout this process.

To my niece, Angelina, I dedicate this to you, so that when you get older you will know that you are capable of anything. I hope to show you what grandma and grandpa taught your mother and me about never giving up. You are smart, beautiful, intelligent, and important. Set your goals high and reach for them.

Lastly, I dedicate this to my husband, my rock. Thank you for loving me, believing in me, and being proud of me. Your support has kept me moving forward when I felt like I could not take one more step. I cannot thank you enough for keeping our home together during this process. Mostly, thank you for insuring that we prioritized

each other during hectic times. You are the most loving and caring husband in the world.

I love you.

made this process so much smoother than it otherwise would have been. Hortensia, thank you for your patience and guidance. You put the puzzle pieces together for me even when I was missing crucial pieces. Thank you both for that support, kindness, and patience.

Lastly, I would like to thank my committee. Dr. Suzy Lofton, thank you for encouraging me to apply to this program. Dr. Jill Siler, thank you for being my role model before you even knew you were. Dr. Edwin Sharpe, thank you for giving me a truly authentic learning experience to help me grow during my first year as an assistant superintendent. Dr. Patricia Somers, thank you for setting me on the course to complete my treatise and for taking the time to teach me the process. Finally, Dr. Ruebén Olivárez, thank you for molding me into the leader I am today. Your mentorship has served to be that "voice in my ear" and confidence within. I am forever grateful for being your student and know that wherever this path takes me, it will be largely because of you.

SUPERINTENDENT ENTRY PLANS: DO LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES

FOR ORGANIZATIONAL STABILITY MATTER?

Annette Maria Villerot, Ed.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: Rubén Olivárez

The public school superintendent has been studied since the early 1800s. Throughout history, the role of the superintendent has evolved into an increasingly challenging role. Between 1860 and 1960, school boards categorically selected superintendents who met a predetermined set of characteristics. White middle-aged males dominated the field. During the 1960s and 1970s, superintendents sought advanced degrees and preparation programs. Mentorships became integral components of the preparation programs that were designed to prepare prospective superintendents to meet the increasing demands of the job. During recent history, superintendents have been plagued by a multitude of academic, societal, and political challenges that are threatening the position of the school superintendent. Increased turnover rate and a declining interest in the field, compounded with the issues of financial management, staff recruitment, instructional leadership, communication, school governance, and strategic planning, are affecting the organizational stability of school districts. Upon entry, the superintendent must balance decision-making responsibilities with leadership strategies regarding the multidimensional functions of the school district. The literature is rich with studies regarding these compounded challenges within the organization of

the school district, and research demonstrates that superintendent longevity is linked to organizational sustainability. However, the research literature lacks qualitative research studies focusing on superintendent entry plans, associated superintendent sustainability, and organizational stability.

Table of Contents

xi

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

The role of the American public school superintendent has been under study since the position was first established. Historians such as Raymond E. Callahan (1962, 1966) have traced the administrative duties of school chiefs back to the 1800s, and historians have produced a number of narratives about individual superintendents (Tyack, 1976). Much of what was written about the public school superintendent of the 19th and early 20th centuries focused on homogeneous characteristics and how those characteristics influenced hiring practices and long-term position sustainability. The research literature suggests that early 19th-century public school superintendents simply needed to conform to the expectations of their school boards in order to maintain tenure. In contrast, the contemporary public school superintendent must now possess many diverse leadership skills necessary to overcome the obstacles that prevent longevity in the position. Superintendents must possess positional power, relational power, and political power (Yukl, 2013). Research literature suggests that successful school reform takes at least five years of the superintendent's efforts to produce change and maintain organizational stability (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). In addition, superintendent stability is linked to increased academic achievement. Waters and Marzano (2007) explained:

> The positive correlation between the length of superintendent service and student achievement affirms the value of leadership stability and of a superintendent remaining in a district long enough to see the positive impact of his or her leadership on student learning and achievement. (p. 16)

Consequently, superintendents who remain in their position for at least five years, promote not only organizational stability, but also increased student achievement.

Callahan (1962) proposed the vulnerability thesis that advanced the widely accepted notion that superintendents of the 1900s were extremely vulnerable to public criticism and pressure. His thesis punctuated a common conception that school boards and community members controlled the majority of the superintendent's decisions. Alsbury (2006) explained:

> The vulnerability thesis suggests that public pressure and criticism of the local school is applied most often to the superintendent, who, being in a position of vulnerability, often lacking tenure or contractual protections, will naturally be pressed to respond to the public or fiscal pressures by appeasing the critics. (p. 1059)

Callahan concluded that superintendents of the early 1900s were "vulnerable dupes" who maintained their position by appeasing their school boards (Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2010). In the early and mid-1900s, superintendents accepted the understanding that they ceded their power to school boards (Tyack, 1976). By relinquishing this power, superintendents gave up much of their positional authority and allowed school boards to maintain a stranglehold over the superintendency.

However, recent scholars (Alsbury, 2008; Burroughs, 1974; Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006; Eaton, 1990; Tyack, 1972) have rejected Callahan's thesis with regard to the behavior of contemporary superintendents. They contended that behaviors of modern day superintendents are deliberate and purposeful and vary based on experience,

expertise, political influence, positional power, and relationship skills. These scholars explained that contemporary public school superintendents are cunning, and intelligent political realists who must respond practically to social situations (Kowalski et al., 2010). Superintendents' knowledge, professional stature, time in office, and preparation all seem to reinforce their ability to navigate these political situations (Sofo, 2008). These scholars also supported the idea that powerful superintendents possess discreet skills that allow them to maintain control of their positional power rather than acquiesce to the arbitrary pressures from their school boards. By identifying these skills, many scholars hoped to generalize strategies for long-term superintendent tenure and organizational stability.

The contemporary superintendent continues to be studied in order to differentiate the skills that allow the long-term superintendent to meet the countless demands and increasing complexities associated with public school district functions. Superintendents are faced with multiple challenges in the many functions of the public school district that ultimately affect student achievement. Therefore, it is critical for the contemporary public school superintendent to have a profound understanding of each of these functions.

Kowalski et al. (2010) identified five conceptualizations of the school superintendent, four of which were derived from Callahan (1962, 1966). They are (a) business manager, (b) teacher-scholar, (c) statesman, and (d) social scientist. After analyzing the impact of effective and ineffective communication, Kowalski et al. (2010) added a final conceptualization, superintendent as communicator. Each

3

conceptualization can be narrowed down even further into the 10 functions of the school district or functions of the superintendency. These functions include: (a) governance operations; (b) curriculum and instruction; (c) elementary and secondary campus operations; (d) instructional support services; (e) human resources; (f) administrative, finance, and business operations; (g) facilities planning and plant services; (h) accountability, information management, and technology services; (i) external and internal communications; and (j) operational support systems: safety and security, food services, and transportation (Olivárez, 2010). The superintendent must learn to address each of these functions, often simultaneously.

The depth and extent with which the superintendent understands and executes these functions upon assuming the position greatly influence his or her continued success (R.D. Olivárez, personal communication, November 5, 2013). Alsbury (2008) and Byrd et al. (2006) explained that student achievement could be influenced by the success with which the superintendent executes school district functions, such as staff recruitment, budget planning, instructional leadership, engaged learning, and strategic planning.

The strategies used by superintendents within each of these functions warranted further investigation to determine which practices lead to job retention and organizational stability. This study addressed these areas. This chapter includes the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, definition of terms, limitations, delimitations, assumptions of the study, significance of the study, and a summary of the study.

Problem Statement

The complex role of the contemporary superintendent has resulted in increased turnover among superintendents (Pascopela, 2011). The research literature revealed that superintendent sustainability is a key factor in achieving organizational stability. Yee and Cuban (1996) found that abbreviated tenure and frequent turnover contributed to organizational unmanageability in urban school districts. The problem that this study addressed is whether leadership strategies of a superintendent entry plan lead to organizational sustainability in a school district. Specifically, are there common components in the entry plans of superintendents who have remained in the same district for five years or more? How do superintendents prioritize leadership strategies in an entry plan? Do these strategies lead to organizational sustainability? What role does the Board of Trustees play in identifying the needs of the district? What role do other stakeholders such as parents, community members, and teachers play in identifying these needs? Do entry plan leadership strategies change over time?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the entry plans of superintendents who had been in a district for five years or more and to identify leadership strategies that have led to long-term organizational stability. The overarching goal of the study was to relate superintendent entry plans to sustained tenure and organizational sustainability.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

- How did superintendents with five or more years in their position prioritize the leadership strategies in their entry plans?

- Among superintendents with five or more years in their position, what were the common characteristics of their entry plans and how were they used?

- How did superintendent entry plans impact the longevity of the superintendent and overall organizational stability of the district?

Overview of Methodology

This phenomenological qualitative study used a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with three superintendents who had served in a school district for at least five years. Also referred to as an in-depth-interview, the semi-structured interview process allows the participants to structure the process of the interview. This type of interview evolves with each participant. Hays and Singh (2012) explained the process:

> Even with those that do include a protocol, every interview question does not have to be asked, the sequence and pace of the interview questions can change, and additional interview questions can be included to create a unique interview catered to fully describing the interviewee's experience. (p. 239)

During the study an interview protocol served as the basis of the interviews, while further questions evolved during the interview process.

Superintendents in this study were chosen from one mid-size suburban school district, one large urban school district, and one small rural district, and their interviews were triangulated with archival documents, field notes, and reflective journals. Studying superintendents from suburban, urban, and rural districts provided a well-rounded representation. A requisite criterion for superintendents included in this study was that they have had an average of five years of experience as a superintendent in the same school district.

Definition of Terms

Entry plan – A superintendent entry plan is a strategic set of actions developed to address the district-wide needs assessment within a new school district (Watkins, 2003).

Long-term – In this study, long-term is identified as five or more years: "Research concluding that successful systemic school reforms take 5 or more years of a superintendent's focus" (Grissom & Anderson, 2012, p. 1147).

Mission – The mission statement describes the purpose of the organization in terms of the type of activities to be performed for constituents or customers (Yukl, 2013).

Short-term – In this study, short-term is identified as less than five years: "Research concluding that successful systemic school reforms take 5 or more years of a superintendent's focus" (Grissom & Anderson, 2012, p. 1147).

Strategic plan – Strategic planning is a process of determining the vision, mission, and goals of an organization and the strategies for achieving those goals.

Strategic planning bridges the gap between the present and future (Organizational

Learning Strategies, n.d.)

   Superintendent – The chief executive officer of a school district is the

superintendent.

   Vision – An effective vision explains what the activities of the mission mean to

people (Yukl, 2013).

Limitations

   A limitation of the semi-structured interview process is that it allows the

researcher to begin with a set of interview questions, which then evolves during each

interview, depending on the nuances of each individual interview. This means that each

subject was not asked the exact same questions as the other superintendents throughout

the interview process. Although a semi-structured interview process does not maintain

consistency of questioning across all participants, the benefit is that it allows for deeper

understanding of each participant, provides increased participant voice, and yields a

clearer picture of the phenomenon being studied (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 239). Another

limitation of this study was the small sample size of the research base. However, the

small sample size allowed for depth and breath during the interview process.

Delimitations

   Although there are superintendents across the United States in urban, suburban,

and rural districts, this study exclusively focused on the superintendent entry plans in the

state of Texas. The study only examined school superintendents' perspectives of their

own entry plans. It did not examine the perspectives of school board members, district administrators, campus administrators, teachers, or community members.

Assumptions

The study commenced with the following assumptions. The researcher assumed that all components of the superintendents' entry plans were implemented. The researcher assumed that all interviewees were candid and transparent when responding during the interview process. Finally, the researcher assumed that the superintendents welcomed sustained tenure in the district for both personal stability and organizational stability.

Significance of the Study

This study documented school superintendents' perceptions of the components within their entry plans that led to their long-term retention and stability in their school districts as organizations. The definition of long-term retention for the purposes of this study was based on longevity of at least five years. Grissom and Anderson (2012) identified five years as the reference point of long-term retention, while Yee and Cuban (1996) determined 5.8 years as the mark of long-term retention. Because organizational sustainability is linked to superintendent longevity, it is imperative to determine which factors drive turnover and identify entry plan leadership strategies that prevent it. "The importance of the district superintendent and the potential consequences of superintendent exit make understanding the factors that drive superintendent turnover a key topic for empirical research" (Grissom & Anderson, 2012, p. 1148). The significance of this study was to substantiate the theory of components within entry

plans that lead to organizational sustainability. Grissom and Anderson (2012) contended that superintendent turnover impacts organizational stability by hindering reform and improvement. However, little research was available regarding leadership strategies within superintendent entry plans that led to superintendent retention and organizational stability.

Summary

Chapter one introduced the study, including background information, a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, and an overview of the methodology. Also included were the definition of terms, limitations and delimitations of the study, assumptions, and significance of the study.

Chapter two is divided into three sections, and provides a review of the existing literature on superintendent entry plans. Section one provides an overview of the history of the superintendency. Section two reviews reasons for superintendency turnover, which ultimately impact organizational sustainability. Section three summarizes the research literature related to executive level entry plans, and the absence of studies detailing leadership strategies in superintendent entry plans associated with sustained tenure and organizational stability.

Chapter three contains a detailed explanation of the research methods and procedures used in this the study, as well as provides a description of the study design. This chapter also outlines sources of data, site and participant selection, procedures for data collection, and methods of data analysis.

Chapter four presents the findings for each of the three research questions, and addresses additional findings. The chapter begins by outlining the perceptions of the public school superintendents included in this study. The data gathered from the participants are presented, along with the results of the research questions. This section explains how superintendents with five or more years of experience prioritize leadership strategies in their entry plans, identifies commonalities of entry plans among these superintendents, and describes how superintendent entry plans impact the longevity of the superintendent and overall organizational stability of the district. Additional findings are also reported is this section.

Chapter five presents the overall findings from the study. It reviews the purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, and data analysis. Implications based on the results are reviewed in this chapter, and well as areas for future research.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

History of the Superintendent

The American public school superintendent has evolved from the one-dimensional leader of the 19th century to the multifaceted leader of the 21st century. As the role of the superintendent has changed throughout history, so have the demands of the 21st-century leader. These growing demands are outlined below under Callahan's (1962, 1966) and Kowalski's et al. (2010) role conceptualizations of the superintendent, and Olivárez's (2010) 10 functions of the district. This linkage provides an explanation of how the changing role of the superintendent has influenced the requisite skill set needed to manage the dynamic functions of a school district. An explanation is given detailing how these increased challenges impact superintendent turnover and cause organizational instability. Research literature is presented to explain the importance of superintendent entry plan leadership strategies necessary to maintain organizational stability. Finally, a gap in the research is identified pertaining to specific leadership strategies in superintendent entry plans that lead to superintendent sustainability and organizational stability.

The superintendent of the early 1900s. A review of the literature outlines the evolution of the superintendent beginning in the 1800s. "Despite the constraints on superintendents, the educational leaders of the mid-twentieth century had come a long way in the century from 1860-1960" (Tyack, 1976, p. 285). During this time period superintendents were virtually all White, middle-aged, native born, married evangelical males between the ages of 56-60 (Kowalski et al., 2010). "In short, they were

quintessential Victorians: evangelical Protestant, British-American, bourgeois" (Tyack, 1976, p. 258). Because evangelical Protestants led the common school crusade, it was almost impossible to disentangle religion from politics and economic life. Since the true citizen was a moral individual rooted in a Christian community, the leader in education as in political life was expected to be an exemplar of that state of mind (Tyack, 1976). Not surprisingly, communities expected the school superintendent to mirror this image.

As Tyack (1976) indicated, an interesting dichotomy existed between the public school superintendent and the student population in the early 1900s. In 1910, public school superintendents were still predominately native-born, Anglo-Saxon men, whereas the United States' population was comprised of approximately 40% first- or second-generation immigrants. Superintendents were overwhelmingly Protestant, yet they were in a public service where the separation of church and state constitutionally prohibited religious distinctions. Most were from rural origins, yet the country was experiencing rapid urbanization. Young teachers and students surrounded the predominately middle-aged superintendents.

There were many anomalies in the early public school system. Not only did the profile of the typical superintendent contrast from the characteristics of the student body, but also the system itself contrasted with the needs of the students. The system was created from an elitist philosophy that aimed to educate only the most advantaged students. Students who were not destined for higher education were placed on a separate track. Sofo (2008) explained:

The notion that schools must prepare all students for high levels of academic success was scarcely imagined when our nation's current K-12 system was conceived and refined in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Our public schools and learning environments within them were not originally designed to maximize every student's opportunity for academic achievement. Schools groomed an elite few for higher education and prepared others for low-skilled employment. (p. 391)

Those students who were not destined for higher education remained unsupported and were expected to fail academically (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Though this stratified system did not match the varied needs of these diverse learners, it did provide a homogeneous, uncomplicated approach to education.

The superintendent qualifications and characteristics commonly required by school boards did not include educational and organizational leadership skills necessary for the position (Tyack, 1976). Kowalski et al. (2010) explained, "At the time, neither academic degrees nor courses in educational administration existed" (p. 103). Unfortunately, school boards had little understanding of the scope and responsibilities of the public school superintendent and did not know exactly what the job should entail. Consequently, the main goal of the school board was to ensure that the incoming superintendent matched the image they wished to project onto the position. "The actual duties of superintendents usually depended on the expectations of school boards and the drive and personality of the school officials" (Tyack, 1976, p. 261). School boards

perpetuated the status quo by choosing superintendents with this predetermined set of characteristics.

This historical evolution of the superintendent led to Callahan's (1962, 1966) conceptualization of the superintendent as manager. This top-down hierarchy was a management system rather than an instructional leadership system. The expectations of the school board were imparted upon the superintendent, who then managed those expectations throughout the school district.

The superintendent of the mid-1900s. Throughout the 1900s, the range of responsibilities of the superintendent continued to change. A transformation began to take place in the superintendency. Tyack (1976) explained, "Towards the end of the nineteenth century the specifically Protestant character of the superintendents' rhetoric changed, and they increasingly invoked the language of science and business during the twentieth century to justify educational leadership" (p. 261). A period of specialization and certification began during this era of the 20th century and the perception of the school superintendent continued to expand. Modernism and social gospel were moving toward a technical society punctuated with compulsory education (Tyack, 1976).

Whereas the superintendent's authority in the late 1800s and early 1900s resulted from the demographics of White, middle-aged Protestant leaders, beginning in the 1920s, superintendents sought a more legitimate type of authority. University courses in educational administration were nonexistent prior to 1910 (Cubberly, 1924). "Educational administrators turned to graduate education for degrees to state

15

departments of education for certification that would legitimize their authority" (Tyack, 1976, p. 279). However, the certification programs varied widely in content.

In the 1920s, many superintendents did not earn a bachelor's degree until they taught for five or more years and subsequently did not receive masters' degrees until at least the age of 34 or 35. In the 1930s, school boards continued to hire superintendents without regard to specialized training. In the 1940s, the Great Depression caused an over-supply of educators that lowered the standards of educational admission requirements. Tyack (1976) explained:

> Intellectual disarray, low admission standards, sporadic course-taking, and marginal importance of professional training to most school boards, then, meant that specialized training in administration did not do a great deal to legitimize their authority. (p. 281)

Though the superintendent sought advanced degrees, the legitimacy of his or her role of an instructional leader was lacking.

Kowalski et al. (2010) explained that although Callahan characterized the superintendent as a lead educator during this era, the term was applied loosely, as the superintendent continued to serve as a subordinate to the school board and merely managed the teachers. Thus, superintendents maintained a managerial role. As other role conceptualizations emerged, the role of manager was the dominant conceptualization over the next 30 years (Kowalski, 2005).

Between the 1930s and 1950s, two additional conceptualizations arose. During the 1930s, the idea of the superintendent as a statesman surfaced (Callahan, 1962, 1966)

and was anchored in democratic administration. During this era, the political dispositions of the superintendent became apparent. Dissatisfaction resulted from the previous era, and many believed that democratic administration was too idealistic (Kowalski, 2005). As a result, the superintendent as a social scientist emerged and focused on external, legal, political, social, and economic systems (Getzels, 1977). These conceptualizations would be the last to emerge for two decades.

The contemporary superintendent. During the 1980s, Hoyle (1989) found that superintendency preparation programs lacked adequate components to prepare executive school leaders for the complex demands faced by superintendents. His study of superintendent preparation programs revealed that many university programs had haphazard, disjointed curricula. Hoyle (1989) recommended mentorship through residency programs that would create "teaching hospitals" in public schools. This approach would include mentors to support resident superintendents. At that time, mentorship programs were among the key elements lacking in superintendency preparation programs.

Tyack (1976) observed that Rose's (1969) dissertation highlighted the benefits of mentorships and contributed to the rise of sponsorship programs in superintendency preparation curricula. The mentor and mentee relationship was reciprocal. Sponsors taught and counseled future leaders, and the mentee helped recruit students, helped notify the professor of vacancies, helped place graduates, and kept the sponsor in touch with the field. A major component to the success of this model was the partnerships with school districts. The professional association for superintendents first known as the

17

Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association (NEA) later became the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), and was yet another resource for superintendents who lacked powerful sponsors.

A current example of this type of mentorship program is the Cooperative Superintendency Program (CSP) at The University of Texas at Austin. "At the outset of the program, each CSP fellow is assigned an active superintendent who serves both as a mentor and a field supervisor throughout the duration of the program" (Olivárez, 2013, p. 13). This model supports future leaders through the experience of veteran executive leaders.

Through this mentorship, aspiring superintendents learn the importance of two-way communication. Kowalski (2005, 2006) added the conceptualization of communication to Callahan's (1962, 2966) previous four conceptualizations. "Kowalski (2001, 2005, 2006) contended that a fifth distinct role conceptualization for superintendents be institutionalized – the superintendent as effective communicator" (Kowalski et al., 2010, p. 2). The conceptualization of communication rounded out the all-encompassing dynamic of the public school superintendent.

Summary of superintendent history. In summary, the history of the public school superintendent documents the scarcity of non-White, non-traditional superintendents in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Many early superintendents were not hired based on expertise, but rather because they conformed to school boards' preconceived notions of a school superintendent. As superintendents' roles evolved, however, they personally sought specialized training to authenticate their authority.

Subsequently, preparation programs began to emphasize the provision of mentors and sponsors for superintendents as salient features in leadership preparation programs. Doctorates then became the preferred degree for superintendents (Tyack, 1976) and superintendent certification became a job requirement for the position in districts across the country (Connelly & Rosenburg, 2003).

The contemporary functions of school systems have evolved from the responsibility of providing essential and rudimentary instruction in a one-room school house that focused on voluntary acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills for an elite few, to the mandatory modern multi-classroom system responsible for the total psychological, cognitive, intellectual, social, linguistic, physiological, emotional, and cultural development of all school-aged children in every community of the United States. The evolution of these functions in the public school system has contributed to the changing roles of the superintendent.

Challenges in the Superintendent's Roles

The research literature documents the historical transformation in the roles of superintendent. Researchers also cited the need to address the multiple functions of school while responding to these roles (Fast, 1992; Pascopella, 2011; Sofo, 2008). It is critical for the contemporary public school superintendent to have a profound understanding of the 10 functions within a school district (Olivárez, 2010). Fast (1992) concurred:

> In response to a changing society, superintendents must develop a new set of
> skills involving knowledge of fiscal management, school law, management

systems, human resources, curriculum, educational research, and policy

development, among others. (p. 4)

It is critical for the superintendent to understand how to navigate and prioritize these

functions.

It is a delicate balancing act for the superintendent to simultaneously address all

of the functions of the district. However, an effective superintendent must continuously

confront issues within each function. Pascopela (2011) quoted Superintendent Alberto

Carvalho of Miami-Dade Public Schools and president-elect of the Association of Latino

Administrators and Superintendents:

A school superintendent's job is typically full of juggling various tasks,

including dealing with teacher issues, student achievement, equity for all

students regardless of income, race or ethnicity, new federal guidelines on

funding and programs, and new accountability demands. (p. 34)

When these functions are unaddressed, they lead to dysfunction and contribute to

turnover in the superintendency (R. D. Olivárez, personal communication, July 26,

2013).

A review of the literature indicated that several functions are most challenging

for the present day superintendent: (a) finance operations, (b) curriculum and instruction,

(c) campus operations, (d) human resources, (e) internal and external communications,

and (f) school governance. Each of these functions are categorized below under

Callahan's (1962, 1966) four conceptualizations of the superintendent as (a) business

manager, (b) teacher-scholar, (c) statesman, and (d) social scientist, and Kowalski et

al.'s (2010) fifth conceptualization of the superintendent as a (e) communicator. These functions within each conceptualization have been outlined to provide an overview of the demands placed upon the superintendent, and the need for him or her to have a systemic overarching entry plan. Each aforementioned role conceptualization is outlined below with specific school district functions that pose the greatest challenges.

The superintendent as a business manager. The role of the superintendent as a business manager emerged after 1910, when superintendents were hired for their managerial skills (Kowlaski et al., 2010). Four of the 10 functions of the school district lie within this conceptualization: (a) human resources, (b) finance operations, (c) facilities planning and plant management, and (d) operational support. However, a review of the literature identified human resources and finance operations as the two predominate areas within this function that influence superintendent turnover.

Human resources. The function of human resources management poses challenges for the superintendent because the specific characteristics of this function within public schools are unique (Kowalski, 2006). Within this function, the superintendent must oversee employment practices, human resources development, professional development, employee management, and employee relations. The human element of the school system also contributes to the challenges of this function. The human-intensive nature of schools and the human interaction of teaching and learning are unlike any other organization's human resource system (Kowalski, 2006). These characteristics create a dichotomy where the superintendent must balance the needs of the students and respect the autonomy of the teacher.

21

Federal and state laws focusing on employment practices and discrimination also confound this function, which complicates recruitment practices. "Topics such as equal employment opportunity, sexual harassment, and age discrimination became cogent issues for superintendents" (Kowalski, 2006, p. 255). Because the human resource function is discreetly different in public school districts from any other organization, the school superintendent must understand all facets of this function.

Finance operations. The function of finance operations is one function that links all other district functions together but is often influenced by politics. Marland (1970) observed, "Politics control the allocation of funds and, to an increasing degree, programs" (p. 369). As a result, superintendents must make student-centered decisions, while concurrently balancing the political tide. Recent budget cuts have made it difficult to reduce class sizes, provide adequate resources, manage student growth, maintain current technology, and plan for additional facilities. Pascopela (2011) explained:

> Top superintendents agree that they have even greater challenges as they, as well as the nation, have struggled to continue to produce successful students while seeing funding plummet or, at best, stay the same. Doing less with more is the standard. (p. 34)

Consequently, the superintendent must be immersed in this function and manage the current finances and budget for the future (Olivárez, 2010). Often the tightened school budget is the result of unfunded mandates that place additional stress on the already constricted budget.

Unfunded governmental mandates affect a superintendent's ability to ensure academic success. Federal and state governments consistently place demands on districts, yet academic expectations remain the same (Kowalski et al., 2010). These state and federal mandates pose additional challenges to superintendents. Kowalski et al. (2010) explained that districts are increasingly losing more local control because of federal and state standards and assessments and court interventions. Not surprisingly, superintendents view this as a barrier to academic success.

Superintendent as teacher-scholar. In contemporary times, the conceptualization of the superintendent as a teacher-scholar is often referred to as an instructional leader. Four of the 10 functions of the school district that fall under this teacher-scholar conceptualization are (a) curriculum and instruction, (b) campus operations, (c) instructional support, and (d) accountability. The concept of the superintendent as a teacher-scholar dates back to 1865, when superintendents were meant to simply oversee campus operations and ensure consistency of instructional delivery. Spring (1990) described that, "the intent was to have a person work full time supervising classroom instruction and assuring uniformity of curriculum" (p. 141). However, the contemporary superintendent must act as an instructional leader and demonstrate a hands-on approach under the functions of (a) curriculum and instruction, (b) campus operations, (c) instructional support, and (d) accountability (Olivárez, 2010).

The superintendent must ensure that the curriculum is aligned to the state-adopted standards and accountability system and is delivered to the campuses in a timely manner (Olivárez, 2010). The curriculum scope and sequence provides campuses with a

23

roadmap for instruction. Curriculum and instruction directly impact campus operations, as both are functions of "systemic coordination and integrated focus on the overall educational mission" (Olivárez, p. 16). The superintendent needs to demonstrate instructional leadership and support campuses with effective instructional methodologies and instructional support programs. Cuban (1976) explained:

> It must be made his [or her] high duty to train teachers and inspire them with high ideals: to revise the course of study when new light shows that improvement is possible, to see that pupils and teachers are supplied with needed appliances for the best possible work; to devise rational methods of promoting pupils. (p. 16)

The authentic instructional leader gains credibility when he or she understands curriculum and campus operations with the depth and magnitude of principals and teachers.

Effective superintendents are identified as vital to academic success efforts; however, many of these outside pressures from the government and community prevent superintendents from staying in their positions long enough to realize positive outcomes. Olivárez (2013) contended:

> Among these are the increased diversity in student populations and the public expectation for alternative instructional delivery systems that address varied and complex student learning needs guaranteeing high school graduation and college readiness skills for all students. (p. 11)

Waters and Marzano (2007) stated, "These combined pressures result in rapid turnover in district leadership…even though research has indicated that superintendent longevity is linked to improvement in student achievement" (p. 11). Effective superintendents are identified as vital to academic success efforts; however, the overarching pressures thwart sustainability in the position.

Superintendent as a statesman. The conceptualization of the superintendent as a statesman originated after World War II and changed the operational function of school governance. "After World War II, population growth, school consolidation, and research in the social sciences sparked new ideas about school governance and administration" (Kowalski et al., 2010, p. 3). This paradigm evolved to a model of representative democracy. Callahan (1964) asserted that the superintendent's role was to be rooted in democratic administration. Howlett (1993) described this role as one that requires the superintendent to rally community members for support of public education.

However, a consideration for the superintendent is that preparation programs do not include standards to prepare superintendents for this role (Kowlaski et al., 2010). The preparation programs that do include this topic do so from a theoretical perspective rather than from a context of application. Kowalski et al. (2010) explained, "the conceptualization of the superintendent as a democratic leader appears to have been more philosophical than substantive" (p. 104). Again, this lack of preparation contributes to challenges for superintendents within the function of school governance.

School governance is arguably one of the most important functions of the superintendent. "Superintendent relationships with school boards were found to be a

decisive element of superintendent tenure" (Byrd et al., 2006, p. 3). Novice

superintendents may have difficulty building relationships with school board members

upon entry, hindering their long-term tenure.

Building positive school board relations is one of the most complex components

of the school superintendent's job. Conflict with the Board of Trustees is a common

reason for superintendents leaving a district. Pardini and Lewis (as cited in Olivárez,

2013) explained that, "district leaders also must effectively manage change in highly

complex, politically charged, and often contentious system[s]" (p. 11). While

superintendents list board relations as the number two reason for their decision to leave a

district, school boards list it as their number one reason for non-extension of a

superintendent's contract (Byrd et al., 2006). Byrd et al. reported that 65% of

superintendents speculated that school boards wanted a superintendent they could

control, and 80% reported feeling frustrated with politics and bureaucracy. Because

school boards are the sole evaluators of the superintendent, a high-quality working

relationship among the board members and the superintendent directly influences the

tenure of the superintendent.

Superintendent as an applied social scientist. The conceptualization of the

superintendent as an applied social scientist relates to the politics of school governance

and the community at large. Issues related to education, diversity, and the community all

influence the superintendent as an applied social scientist (Kowalski et al., 2010). The

superintendent must be aware of social issues within the community that may ultimately

impact relations with the school board. The underlying intent of the fourth role was to

develop superintendents who possessed "a greater sensitivity to the large social problems through an interdisciplinary approach involving most of the social sciences" (Kellogg Foundation, 1961, p. 13). However, once again, many superintendents are ill-equipped to function is this role and need to be cautious of not becoming "high-level technicians, expert in keeping their organizations going but not equipped to see or understand where they are going" (Callahan, 1966, p. 227). Consequently, within the function of school governance, the superintendent must act not only as a statesman, but also as a social scientist.

The politics of school governance also influences the success of the school superintendent. The superintendent must be able to navigate the political ecosystem of the school system. Marland (1970) explained, "Effective superintendents are political animals, with or without party affiliation. Their party is the school system" (p. 370). To effectively manage the school district, superintendents must manage political perceptions.

Superintendents' effectiveness depends greatly upon how they maneuver the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Pascopela (2011) asserted:

> When the relationship between a board and a superintendent sours, the source is almost entirely political, sometimes involving the composition of the board. Maybe the new members of the board ran for a particular agenda, which was different from what the superintendent supported. (p. 40)

Because hiring the school superintendent is one of the school board's most important functions, the high attrition rate of selected leaders has created interest in examining the

political causes and effects of superintendent entry success and sustainability. A review of the literature has demonstrated that for successful management and control of the typical social-political organizational environment encountered in school systems, superintendents must employ precise strategies during the entry period that will endure and overcome resistance to systemic change.

The superintendent as communicator. Historically, superintendents acted as top-down commanders and did not encourage two-way collaboration. These early superintendents operated with a classical model of organizational communication that discouraged community input and encouraged school faculty to work in isolation (Kowalski, 2010). This paradigm has shifted in recent years and cultivates a more inclusive communication system. The benefits and challenges of this communication process are outlined in the next paragraph.

Transparent and consistent internal and external communication is an essential function of the school district. Superintendents who create a reciprocal communication system among staff and community members are more likely to garner support and commitment from their stakeholders. This means that superintendents need to facilitate collaboration among school employees, parents, students, and community members (Björk, 2001; Murphy, 1994). This two-way communication process is both an asset and a challenge to superintendents.

In contrast to the superintendent of the early 1900s, who discouraged community feedback (Blasé & Anderson, 1995), the contemporary superintendent is expected to develop a relational model of communication (Kowalski et al., 2010) that is consistent,

open, shared, and benefits all participants (Burgoon & Hale, 1984; Grunig 1989).

Kowalski (2005) explained, "experience arising from the current school reform

movement demonstrates that relationship-enhancing communication rather than top-

down dicta are necessary for advancing educational agendas" (p. 101). The

superintendent must foster a culture that values and embraces input from all

stakeholders, regardless of positional authority. Relational communication replaces

authoritative demands with on-going reciprocal dialogue (Burgoon & Hale, 1984). This

process empowers participants and creates stakeholder buy-in throughout the district.

However, shared communication does not come without challenges. The stakes

are high for superintendents and the consequences of effective communication are

important. Unfortunately, many lack formal communication training in relation to the

superintendency (Osterman, 1994). Kowalski (2005) reviewed studies by Beverage

(2003) and Peterson (1999) on superintendent evaluations, and Davis' (1998) study on

administrator dismissals and found that penalties result from inconsistent and

incompetent communication. Consequently, communication is a crucial determinant of

superintendent sustainability.

Managing the multiple roles of the superintendent. The multitude of

expectations placed on superintendents is disproportionate to the support they receive

from the school district. This prevents superintendents from being able to fully embrace

each role and address the varied needs within the 10 functions of the school district.

Many superintendents are doing good work; but because of the countless problems

facing public schools, many areas of concern remain unaddressed (Hoyle, 1989).

Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, and Ellerson et al. (2010) concurred:

> The work portfolio of America's superintendents is increasingly diverse,
> encompassing not only student achievement, but [sic] the diversification of
> student and staff populations, the explosion of technology, expanded
> expectations from the government, the school board and the community, and the
> globalization of society. (para. 4)

These varied factors converge and often create unrealistic demands of the
superintendent.

  Superintendency in a state of crisis. Research studies throughout the decade
demonstrated a sense of urgency surrounding the declining number of school
superintendents. In 2003, the Council of Great City Schools (GCS) conducted a survey
on superintendent turnover. Average tenure for urban superintendents was reported as
2.75 years. However, the mean tenure for the immediate past GCS superintendents
averaged just over four years (Byrd et al., 2006). Further, turnover rate within the first
three years of superintendency is on the rise. "Among 215 superintendents studied in
2006, 45 percent exited within three years" (Grissom & Anderson, 2012, p. 1146).
Superintendents agree that retention of qualified executive leaders in the profession is
steadily declining. Olivárez (2013) explained, "In 2001, in a report by the Education
Commission of the States, a survey of 175 superintendents judged nationally by their
peers to be outstanding indicated that 71 percent agree that the superintendency is in a
'state of crisis'" (p. 11). This crisis is compounded by the multifaceted complexities

surrounding the superintendency. Issues of high poverty of students, increased accountability standards, minimal support of new facilities, and lack of support from school governance are all factors related to superintendency turnover.

However, a review of the literature suggested that the media may inflate the representation of superintendent turnover, and the statistics may not be so grim. Much of the data used to address this issue is based on individual high-profile cases that are not representative of the average district. Grissom and Anderson (2012) explained:

The popular conception of the modern superintendent as a chronic mover in continual public disharmony with conflict-ridden school boards is one developed by media portrayal of prominent cases in the nation's largest district, whose experiences may not be representative of those of suburban and rural districts that make up the majority of local governments – or even the average urban district. (p. 1147)

In 2000, the AASA conducted one of the most comprehensive studies on the subject and had similar findings (Byrd et al., 2006). The survey was based on the responses of 2,262 superintendents and found that the average tenure of superintendents was estimated to be between five and six years.

Byrd et al. (2006) explained that the contradiction in the research might have to do with results representing extended tenure within a given district connected with more veteran superintendents, contrasted with abbreviated tenure associated with novice superintendents. Newer superintendents may not persevere beyond the first five years in a new school district, when disruptive changes present the biggest obstacles. Turnover in

the superintendent's office prevents organizational stability and systemic processes become an organizational challenge (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). Nonetheless, the literature demonstrated that superintendents with less than five years of tenure have high turnover rates that negatively influence organizational stability.

Superintendents also list weakness of preparation programs and heightened criticism as factors contributing to leaving a superintendency (Byrd et al., 2006). Superintendents have reported that preparation programs lack hands-on application and poor linkages to common practices. Furthermore, they reported that supervisory leadership programs were not aligned to the practical nature of what is needed to lead today's public schools. Because the job is public service-oriented, superintendents are under increased scrutiny, and there will always be dissatisfaction among stakeholders (Byrd et al., 2006).

Superintendents must be adaptable, resilient, and have the fortitude to rise among negative undertones. They must respond to the needs of the diverse learner, the frustrated teacher, the demanding community, and the political school board (Marland, 1970). As the public school system continues to change, so must the role of the superintendent. Unfortunately, these complex demands continue to contribute to the increased turnover that thwarts organizational stability.

The Importance of Superintendent Entry Plans

One of the most important responsibilities of the school superintendent upon entry is to identify school district priorities shared by stakeholders during the pre-entry process. As a new leader, the success or failure of the superintendent rests, to no small

degree, on this ability to diagnose the situation, identify characteristic challenges and opportunities, and fashion promising action plans (Watkins, 2003). Upon entry, the superintendent then continues to affirm the stakeholders' awareness of the condition of the school district. A more formalized needs assessment early in his or her tenure will identify focus areas of improvement within school district functions. The school superintendent's entry plan will sharpen the vision toward sustained organizational effectiveness.

The entry plan provides a bridge to honor the past and build a common understanding among stakeholders.

> Preparing an entry plan for assuming a new superintendency not only helps the new district leader better understand the prevailing conditions in the district, it serves as a guide for sharing and discussing that information with the school board, administration, staff, and community. (Neely, Berude, & Wilson, 2002, p. 30)

With increasing demands placed on superintendents and school boards, entry plans enable superintendents to lead the district with intentional purpose, interactive relationships, and positional influence. A strong superintendent entry plan establishes a clear vision that researchers agree is a critical component to success in times of high superintendent turnover (Freeley & Seinfeld, 2012).

The literature in business and industry supported the supposition that entry plans provide benefits to easing a chief executive officer's transition into a new complex organization. This further supports the literature in the superintendent's role within the

context of public school leadership settings. "For a superintendent, a positive entrance into a new position and community is critical" (Binkley, 2007, p. 46). Superintendents use entry plans to focus the vision and create a strategic plan. Superintendent entry plans include a roadmap for reaching goals set in the first 90 days of entry. Binkley (2007) explained, "You can raise the likelihood of accomplishing your goals with a well-crafted entry plan that lays out a process for learning about the school system and its surroundings" (p. 46). This plan provides a vision and sets the expectations of the community at large.

When a school superintendent enters a new school district and community, he or she needs to learn how to contextually understand the organizational culture and history of the organization. In addition, he or she must recognize and understand the political framework of the district. "Leaders need to be 'contextually literate' that is, able to read organizational culture, history, and micropolitics" (Lytle, 2009, p. 9). A new leader not only needs to do this because of the importance of relationship building, but also to learn about the political underpinnings of the organization.

Lytle (2009) found a common initial step in superintendent entry plans, which was to "conduct a series of stakeholder interviews beginning immediately after appointment by the board" (p. 9). By asking questions, a leader manages perception politically, symbolically, and humanistically. "A way to demonstrate credibility as a new leader is to ask a lot of questions about how things work. After all, to politically minded others, it is only natural and prudent to check out the scene" (Cohen & Bradford, 2005, p. 267). Bradt, Check, and Pedraza (2011) mirrored this philosophy in their book for

practitioners where they explained that the new leader has a responsibility to get to know each person as an individual within the first few weeks in a new organization.

There is a small window of opportunity for a new leader to establish relationships and set the tone for the organization. It is critical for a new leader to take time to build relationships with the new staff. The communication process yields great historical, cultural, and political perspectives for the incoming superintendent. Taking the time to learn the context of the organization suggests how future decisions will be made, perceived, and implemented. It also has a great deal to do with increasing the potential of the superintendent's long-term success (Lytle, 2009).

In the first three months, a key goal is to build personal credibility and create momentum within the organization. This is accomplished through early "wins" or successes that leverage the energy of the superintendent and expand the potential scope of subsequent actions (Watkins, 2003). During initial stages of implementation, accolades should be given for small successes, as well as any movement toward the goal. "Management should reinforce any significant movement in the right direction" (Bruckman, 2008, p. 216). Celebrating small success creates momentum and motivation among the team and instills the sense of shared purpose. Early wins or small milestones allow the team to know how they are doing along the way. They also give the superintendent the comfort to let the team run toward the goal without his or her involvement, as long as the milestones are being reached as planned (Bradt et al., 2011, p. 172). Early wins should serve two purposes. First, they establish short-term credibility

and second, they ensure that the foundation is laid for long-term success (Watkins, 2003).

Research supported that building this groundwork, common among many superintendent entry plans, provides a springboard to begin strategic planning that energizes and focuses all stakeholders. "A team that has internalized its vision, mission, values, and objectives will have developed a keen sense of mutually assured success. Having done this, the team will have built a real foundation for true tactical capacity, and do what it takes to succeed" (Bradt et al., 2011, p. 172). The plan provides the structure for capacity building among the team that will transcend during transitional periods. Transitions and change are inevitable within the 10 functions, and superintendents must take care to create a deliberate plan of entry that is sustainable, well articulated, and clearly communicated.

The importance of a prioritized, well-organized entry plan is clearly documented. However, research literature lacks studies that describe the leadership strategies used by long-term superintendents to prioritize, organize, and develop a superintendent entry plan that leads to sustained tenure and organizational sustainability.

Theoretical Framework

A visual representation of the theoretical framework for identifying entry plan components that lead to organizational stability is illustrated in Figure 1. The framework shows that superintendent entry plans will be studied to identify categories of commonalities among entry plans. Commonalities will be categorized into three areas: (a) strategic planning, (b) other factors identified in the study, and (c) leadership

strategies. These categories will be analyzed to determine if they are associated with

long-term superintendent tenure and ultimately lead to organizational stability.
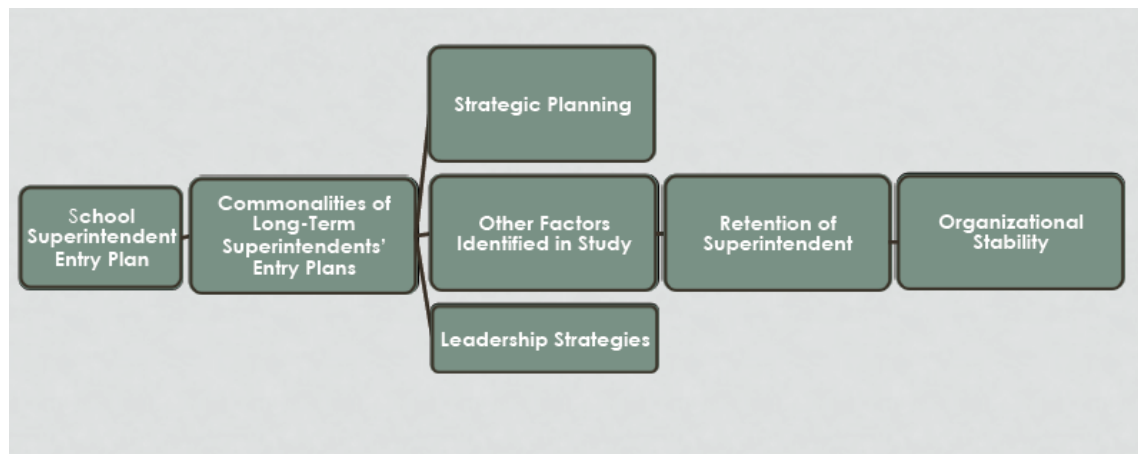
Figure 1. **Theoretical Framework for Identifying Components of Superintendent Entry Plans**

Discussion

The review of the literature substantiated the changing complexity of school

systems and the expanded leadership role of superintendents. With the ever-increasing

demands placed on superintendents and the political tension within the governance

function of school boards, research suggests that superintendent turnover rates will

increase by 2015. This reinforces the importance of the superintendent's entry strategy

and its effects on organizational stability. Superintendent tenure is an increasingly

important factor in organizational stability and improvement in student performance.

However, tenure is greatly impacted by the diverse demands placed upon the school

superintendent. Callahan (1962, 1966) conceptualized the complex roles of the

superintendent as a manager, teacher scholar, applied statesman, and social scientist.

Kowalski et al. (2010) and Kowalski (2005, 2006) described the increasing demands of

the superintendent's role through each of these conceptualizations and added a fifth

conceptualization, the superintendent as a communicator. Olivárez (2010, 2013)

provided greater specificity of the demands of the superintendent through the 10

functions of the school superintendent. A review of the literature revealed that the role of

the public school superintendent is in the midst of a crisis, and more research is needed

to identify specific leadership strategies in superintendent entry plans that impact student

achievement, sustainability, and organizational stability. In addition, there is a gap in the

literature related to superintendent entry plan leadership strategies that address the 10

superintendent functions within the five conceptualizations of the superintendency.

Conclusion

The public school superintendent's role has slowly transformed throughout

history until it has reached its current state. The role of the school superintendent is

multi-dimensional, and he or she must serve as an instructional leader, as well as balance

political and societal demands. Many school superintendents are leaving the field

because of the pressure due to local governance issues and state and federal mandates.

Decreased funding, increased student diversity, globalization, and societal pressure are

additional stressors faced by superintendents. Although superintendents have to do more

with less, community and school board expectations remain high. While many studies

outlined the reasons for superintendent turnover, few studies were available to identify

superintendent entry plan leadership strategies that respond to these demands. To gain

further insight into strategies that have been associated with achievement and

organizational stability, research was needed to learn more about how superintendents

prioritize entry plan strategies.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Procedures

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology and procedures used in this study. Included are the purpose of the study, research questions, and a rationale for the selected methodology and design. This chapter also outlines the sources of data, description of the sample, procedures for data collection, methods for data analysis, and strategies to promote trustworthiness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the entry plans of superintendents who have been in a district for five years or more and to explore goals and leadership strategies that led to long-term organizational stability. The overarching goal of the study was to relate superintendent entry plans to organizational sustainability.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

- How did superintendents with five or more years in their position prioritize the leadership strategies in their entry plans?

- Among superintendents with five or more years in their position, what were the common characteristics of their entry plans and how were they used?

- How did superintendent entry plans impact the longevity of the superintendent and overall organizational stability of the district?

Research Methods

Analytical paradigm. The analytical paradigm used in this this study was the interpretivist frame. The ontology underlying the interpretivist frame resides in the personal, interactive approach that interpretivists take in terms of data gathering. Blaikie (1993) explained that interpretivism "entails an ontology of an ordered universe made up of atomistic, discrete, and observable events" (p. 94). "Interpretivists generally take a nondeterministic view of things and adopt instead the view that each person can determine his or her own behavior" (Willis, 2007, p. 193). At the heart of the interpretivist paradigm is the idea that one's point of view is built upon past experience, and consequently, multiple perspectives bring about greater understanding of a situation. "The principle of multiple interpretations requires the researcher to examine the influences that the social context has upon the actions under study by seeking out and documenting multiple viewpoints along with the reasons for them" (Willis, 2007, p. 193).

The goal of this research study was to provide insight into the following questions. Are there common components in the entry plans of superintendents who have remained in the same district for five years or more? How do superintendents prioritize leadership strategies in an entry plan? Do these strategies lead to organizational sustainability? What role does the Board of Trustees play in identifying the needs of the district? What role do other stakeholders such as parents, community members, and teachers play in identifying these needs? Do entry plan leadership strategies change over time? The interpretivist paradigm allowed an inclusive approach

41

to take multiple perspectives of superintendents into account when analyzing the components of entry plans.

Qualitative research methodology. The purpose of this research study was to identify the components of superintendent entry plans that resulted in superintendent retention of five or more years, and consequently lead to organizational sustainability. The need for a qualitative study was based on the lack of data grounded on multiple perspectives and assessments from superintendents. This called for a dynamic interview process using "methods that allow the researcher to reflect on an individual's experience in a social context" (Willis, 2007, p. 94). A qualitative study allowed for a personalized and customized interview based on each superintendent's specific entry plan. Willis (2007) explained, "People have their own interpretations of reality, and interpretivists choose methods that encompass this worldview" (p. 94). The research study used phenomenological theory, which focused on the significance of the superintendents' experiences and assessments of those experiences. Hays and Singh (2012) explained that phenomenological theory is based on the deep understanding of participants' lived experiences within the context of those occurrences. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. One advantage of this form of interview was that the depth and breadth of each participant's individualized perspective was revealed (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 239). Each superintendent's perspective and assessment of his or her entry plans had personal experiential intensity.

Case study site selection. Three Texas public school districts served as sites. The locations for the study took place in offices of three different superintendents. Participants were selected by snowball sampling through the Texas Association of School Administrators. Snowball sampling refers to the researcher choosing a participant and then asking that participant for additional participants who meet the criteria of the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). Snowball sampling provides quick access to participants. One site was a midsize suburban school district, the second was a large urban school district, and the third was a small rural school district. This mixture was purposefully designed to study districts with varied diversity and culture. The rationale was to determine if commonalities existed across entry plans, so that if commonalities did exist, they could be generalized and replicated in rural, urban, and suburban school districts.

Sampling and participants. The participants chosen for this study were superintendents from one rural, one urban, and one suburban school district. Each participant had at least five years of experience as a school superintendent in the same district. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted in each superintendent's office. The first interview established background information, and the second interview focused on leadership strategies associated with entry plans.

Sources of Data

Sources of data included interviews conducted with each superintendent. Artifacts, such as archival documents, field notes, and reflective journals were used. Participants were asked to share calendar appointments and agendas when applicable.

Procedures

       Institutional approval. To ensure that appropriate steps were taken to protect the rights, privacy, and welfare of participants, the researcher applied for review and approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Texas at Austin. The researcher contacted the selected participants and completed all necessary paperwork required to conduct external research.

       Interviews. Once the University granted consent to conduct the research, the researcher solicited interviews from study participants. To facilitate the interview process, the researcher met with participants in their offices. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. This afforded the researcher an opportunity to deeply interact with the participants.

Data Analysis

       Data analysis for this study was an ongoing process that began with the initial data collection. Interview transcripts were coded using prefigured categories and emergent categories. "Prefigured codes [a priori codes] or categories often limit the analysis to the prefigured codes rather than opening up the codes to reflect the views of participants in a traditional qualitative way" (Creswell, 2007, p. 152). Therefore, additional codes were added to the coding scheme as they emerged during the analysis.

       Three types of coding processes were used for data analysis: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding provides a general type of analysis for wide review. Axial coding narrows open coding and identifies relationships of open coding. Selective coding provides more specificity to axial coding. Hays and Singh (2012)

44

explained that selective coding, the most complex coding method, identifies patterns, processes, and sequences among axial codes to produce a theory about a phenomenon. These three coding techniques worked together to refine the data analysis process.

Identifiable information from participant responses was assigned codes to ensure that respondents were not linked with their responses and that those superintendents were not identifiable. Data obtained from the study were stored in a locked file. To maintain the confidentiality of data, codebooks, and all participant data were stored in separate locked files.

Strategies to Promote Trustworthiness

This study also used the following strategies to promote trustworthiness of research findings:

Peer debriefing was used to allow for a calibration of findings from a third party. Hays and Singh (2012) explained, "While they are supportive of the clinician or educator's research efforts, they also serve as another vehicle to challenge the findings" (p. 211). This process validated the researcher's conclusions.

Four sources of data were triangulated for analysis. Semi-structured interviews, archival documents, field notes, and reflective journals were triangulated to ensure accuracy of findings. This triangulation allowed for cross-referencing.

Participant checks were conducted after each interview. This process is the cyclical discourse with participants to verify that the data analysis accurately represents their intended meanings. Guba and Lincoln (1989) described this strategy as an important tool in establishing trustworthiness.

It is imperative for the researcher to keep adequate notes and reflections throughout the research process. "A reflective journal includes thoughts about how the research process is impacting the researcher" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 205). These were kept in an electronic and paper journal. Notes included reactions to participants' responses and settings involved in the research. These journals were kept for auditing purposed. These notes were used as reminders as to why specific questions were asked and why themes were coded in a specific way (Hays & Singh, 2012). These journals provided additional insight into the interviewees' responses.

Need for Qualitative Research

Thick, rich descriptions were useful for this qualitative study because they allowed for assumptions regarding transferability (Creswell, 2007). "It goes beyond the basics of facts, feelings, observations, and occurrences, to include inferences into the meaning of present data" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 213). This allows the researcher to capture the meaning or message through thick, rich descriptions.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research design, procedures for data collection, the process for data analysis, strategies employed to promote trustworthiness of the study, and the need for a qualitative research study. Chapter four presents the discoveries from this phenomenological study.

Chapter Four: Findings

Chapter three described the methods and procedures used to identify public school superintendents' perceptions of entry plan leadership strategies that led to sustained tenure and organizational stability. This chapter presents the findings garnered from the study. This phenomenological study used a combination of semi-structured interviews, data collection, archival notes, reflective journals, and thick, rich descriptions.

Pseudonyms for the superintendents and sites have been used to protect the anonymity of all participants. David Garcia was superintendent for five and one-half years at Whitmore ISD, a large urban school district in northern Texas. For the past six years, Robert Smith has been the superintendent of a Lakeland ISD, a midsize suburban school district in southern Texas. Finally, Michael Johns spent six years serving as superintendent of the small rural east Texas district of Easton ISD. Participants and sites will be referenced by these pseudonyms throughout the study.

This chapter details the leadership strategies that these superintendents employed during the first 90 days in a new school district, and it describes the common characteristics of the participants' entry plans. Because each of the participants had five or more years experience in the same district, this chapter presents a description of how each superintendent perceived the influence of their entry plan leadership strategies on sustained tenure and organizational stability. Findings about community relationships are also presented at the end of the chapter.

Prior to interviewing each of the participants, the researcher developed a list of prefigured, or a priori codes listed in Table 1. Parent a priori codes, or major codes are listed on the left hand side of the table. The parent codes provided a generalization for the interview protocol and aligned with the research questions. Child a priori codes, or subcodes are listed on the left hand side of the table. The child codes provided specificity to the parent codes and allowed the researcher to uncover driving factors leading to overarching themes. Figure 1 lists the a priori parent and child codes that guided this study.

Table 1

Parent and Child a Priori Codes

A Priori Codes	Child Codes						
Entry Plan	First 30 Days	First 60 Days	First 90 Days				
Goals	Board	Academics	Admin	Student Needs	Teachers	Long-term	Short-term
Leadership Strategies							
Organizational Stability							
Retention / Tenure							

Emergent codes were identified during the coding process that evolved as the data were analyzed. These emergent codes were identified as the researcher searched for uniformities in the data through constant comparison. Constant comparison is when previously collected data are constantly compared to current data to develop additional

emergent concepts or themes (Hays & Singh, 2012). Table 2 provides a list of emergent

codes that evolved during the data analysis process.

Interview transcripts, reflective journals, field notes, and archival documents

such as entry plans, and strategic plans, action plans, and transformational plans were

coded for occurrences of a priori and emergent codes. A priori and emergent codes were

collapsed to yield emerging themes. Open coding was used to identify generalizations of

the findings. Axial coding was used to determine which, if any, associations existed

among the findings. Finally, selective coding was used to identify the patterns and

sequences of the axial codes. This comprehensive coding method helped to identity the

theory behind superintendent perceptions about entry plans' influence on organizational

stability.

Table 2

A Priori and Emergent Codes

A Priori Codes	Emergent Codes
Entry Plan: • First 30 Days • First 60 Days • First 90 Days	
Goals: • Board • Academic Achievement • Administration • Student Needs • Teachers • Long-term • Short Term	**Goals:** • Community Needs • Short-term Goals: Quick Wins

Leadership
Strategies
	Leadership Strategies:
	• Ten Functions of the School District: Academic Performance
	• Ten Functions of the School District: Communication
	    o Communication: Board Engagement
	    o Communication: Community Engagement
	    o Communication: Staff
	    o Communication: Culture
	• Ten Functions of the School District: Different Strengths from Predecessor
	• Ten Functions of the School District: Facilities
	• Ten Functions of the School District: Finance
	• Ten Functions of the School District: Governance
	• Ten Functions of the School District: Human Resources

Organizational **Stability** **Retention /** **Tenure**	
	Shared Vision **Years of Experience** **Experience: Same District** **Reasons for Choosing District** **Years as Superintendent in Same District**

The Word Cloud below in Figure 2 provides another viewpoint to easily identify the most predominant themes. This cloud was also used to further analyze the dominant themes. After analyzing the word cloud and identifying major themes, child codes were deconstructed and merged with parent codes.
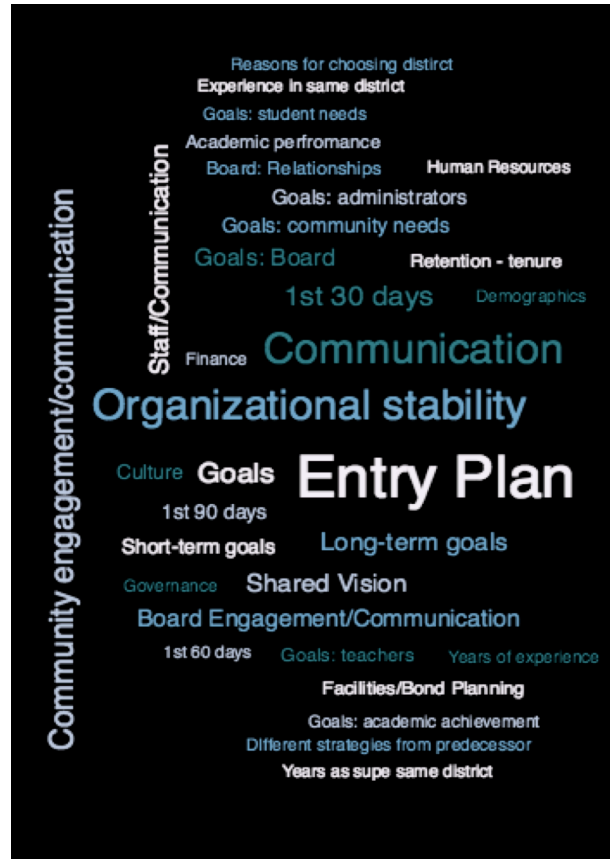

Figure 2. **Word Frequency Word Cloud**

Codes were condensed into overarching themes that yielded the phenomena of priorities, commonalities, and organizational leadership strategies of the entry plans. Codes were merged and themes were chosen based on occurrences as indicated in Table 3. The words and phrases associated with each major theme are also listed.

51

Table 3

Keywords and Phrases Sorted by Theme

Major Themes	Key Words	Totals
Entry Plans	First 30 days, first 60 days, first 90 days, first 100 days, first 3 months, first months, entry, beginning, first days, first weeks, entering, starting, establish, leadership strategies	1,837
Communication	Two-way dialogue, communicate, listen, understand, noted, talked, visited, viewpoint, build trust, listen, relationships with stakeholders, reciprocate with integrity, meetings, entry conferences, honest communication, surveys, phone calls, newsletters, informal visitations, input, videos, build informal relationships, consistent communication, relationship building, public appearances, join social organizations, people waiting to talk with you, good speaker, speak with humor and honesty, presentations, news story, planning meetings, one-on-one's, leadership strategies	662
Board Communication	Communication codes + Board of Trustees, Board members, Board trust, personal/individual relationships with each member, collaborative relationships with the whole Board, built trust with Board, governance, stakeholders, Board entry conferences	251
Community Communication/ Relationships	Communication codes + community, infuse yourself in the community, attend community events, community's viewpoint, community trust, approachable, visit with banks, visit with mayor, visit with county judge, parents, students, families, stakeholders, Chamber of Commerce, city address, rotary, public	503
Staff Communication	Communication codes + teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, administrators, communicate with every employee within the 10 functions, superintendent support, attend holiday events, cabinet, stakeholders, staff entry conferences	90
Shared Vision	Vision, shared vision, mission, strategic plan, long-term plan, collaboration, all stakeholder input, needs assessment, strategic plan, compass points, focus areas, goals, five reaches, 3L Plan, action plan, leadership strategies, transformational plan	285
Early Wins	Quick wins, early wins, easily attainable goal, overcoming predecessor's areas of challenge, opposite strengths of predecessor, strengths, early success, leadership strategies	222
Organizational Stability	Long-term tenure, stability, organizational sustainability, systemic, long-term, consistent, long-term implementation, alignment, aligned, foundational, system, out lived my tenure, continues, continuous improvement, assimilation, leadership strategies	704
Totals		4,554

Prioritizing Leadership Strategies

During the study, a major theme emerged addressing how superintendents prioritize leadership strategies during their first 90 days. This common theme was the importance of communicating with all stakeholders, such as the Board of Trustees, administrators, teachers, staff, and community members, which included students. The participants collectively asserted that this leadership strategy set the course for not only the future of a superintendent's tenure but also for the organizational stability of the district.

Communication. All superintendents emphasized the importance of building relationships with every stakeholder through constant communication during the first 90 days. They asserted that the first 90 days are a critical time to build trust and be seen throughout the community. Early relationships help build trust, support, and eventual long-term sustainability. These leadership skills for communication include strategies used with the Board of Trustees, community members, and staff.

Communication with the board of trustees. Communication with the Board of Trustees emerged as the initial priority during the first 30 days. A new superintendent must establish trust with each Board member as an individual. They are collectively a team, but each member also has to build personal relationships with the new superintendent. Meanwhile, the superintendent must use team building leadership strategies to cultivate a synergy with the Board.

53

David Garcia spent five and one-half years as superintendent of the large urban

district of Whitmore ISD. He described the importance of this synergy:

> The Whitmore Board is strong and understands their role, and they understand
> the role of the superintendent. Immediately upon hiring, there was a spirit of
> synchronicity, and that point of synchronicity had availed itself the full five and
> [one]-half years. I could tell you, obviously, as a superintendent you have to
> work with board members…and it takes some time with each board member. But
> I can tell you, as a result of that communication, the relationship for the full
> board and the superintendent was amazingly great in Whitmore ISD.

Garcia explained that his entry plan began with Board member discussions, as it was

crucial for him to know the priorities of each member. He met with each Board member

and asked a series of questions to identify those core priorities.

> I would say that I had my first entry conference with the board president on my
> first day. It took, like I said, a week to visit with them. The first step upon entry
> is to listen, so I did a lot of listening, scheduled a lot of conferences. I asked,
> 'What is the most important expectation you have of me?'…so that I know what
> they're expecting of me. 'What are your goals and aspirations?' I get to know
> what they see. Then, 'If you were in my shoes, what one key area issue would
> you focus on?'

This process allowed him to prioritize the Board's expectations in his entry plan, while

building individualized relationships.

Robert Smith echoed this belief by explaining how he approached

communication with the Board of Trustees as a team of eight, and individually, during

his first 30 days of entry into the mid-sized suburban district of Lakeland ISD, where he

has been superintendent for six years.

> All I wanted to do was get to know each board member. I wanted to get to know
> the board as an entity…get to know the board individually.

In addition to building informal personal relationships, he also had a formal process to

identify Board priorities.

> The second most important thing I did was…two or three super-cold board
> retreats, specifically around 'What are you all looking for?' We used these tools
> to delve down deep…where is the root cause of what you're really looking for.
> We ended up with three areas the board was really looking for from me.

These priorities eventually aligned with other stakeholder needs.

When asked what he perceived as the most important leadership strategy during

the first 30 days entry, Michael Johns explained that individual and collective Board

relations were of most importance. He emphasized the need to build trust through

consistent communication with each Board member. Spending six years as

superintendent of the small rural district of Easton ISD, Johns felt that knowing each

Board member on a personal level was key to his long-term tenure.

> Well, you address the pieces that you are most unfamiliar with…and those pieces
> are school board relations, because you don't know the school board that
> well…and the superintendent has to treat all board members the same, give them
> all communication. Don't tell one board member one thing and not tell another
> the same. That's why you communicate.

He further explained that this communication demonstrates integrity and authenticity,

which he believes are the cornerstones for superintendent longevity.

Communication with community. Communication with the community was

highlighted consistently as one of the most important leadership strategies

superintendents employed during the first 90 days and beyond. Community support was

cited as one of the major factors that contribute to superintendent longevity, and thus

organizational stability. The community's support leads to harmony in the school

district.

Garcia believed that all stakeholders need a voice during the needs assessment

phase of entry. This allowed the superintendent to get to know the perspectives of the

community on an intimate level.

> I think you've got to know the lay of the land. You've got to know who are the
> dynamic individuals who can assist you in the role of educating students. So very
> quickly through my entry conferences – one of the questions that you asked,
> 'Who are some external stakeholders that we must have to support our district?'
> …Then you start meeting and scheduling coffee with them as well and get to
> know the community. You have to have community input, stakeholder input,
> staff input, and it was a comprehensive system.

Spending time with stakeholders early in the entry plan was an investment toward the

future, and Garcia's short-term goal was to become part of the community.

> My short-term goal was to get to know the community, get a flavor. I wasn't
> from that area; I was in Dunmore ISD [a larger city]. Big difference…but
> nonetheless to get to know the community was my short-term goal and try to get
> an accurate read.

He took advantage of community meetings outside of the district, and did not miss an

opportunity to meet with community members to strategize.

> What I was able to do – at every chamber of commerce, every city address, any
> rotary, anything that I would do – was always strategic…whether a strategic
> point, or a strategic place, or a strategic time in our state's history. As a result we
> took strategic action to continue this trek together.

As an outsider of this very close knit community, Garcia's early leadership strategies

centered around building community trust and assimilating into the community.

Smith described the process of involving the community in his entry plan needs

assessment.

My needs assessment was that I was out in the community in a variety of places talking, having community meetings, talking to teachers, talking to parents, talking to community leaders, you name it. The phase was, go out in the community and meet as many human beings as possible, then it was working the plan.

He explained that building community relations must be authentic, and that inauthenticity can lead to abbreviated tenure.

You'd better love it; you'd better love where you're going because you need to get intimate with that community, and that means being there for them on their time, not your time. So you're not going to schedule a meeting for parents at 9:30 a.m. You're going to schedule it for 7:30p.m. and have food there because that's what they need at that time.

Smith asserted that honesty and integrity are observable and superintendents must take care to demonstrate those qualities with the community.

Part of why my big plan was to get out and build public trust, was they just wanted to get to know me, they wanted me to be open and honest with communication. A lot of times superintendents just try to surface-level these things…then just don't do it, because it's an insult. There's nothing worse than saying 'I do care, I want to listen to you,' but you really don't care, and you don't want to listen. The person who's speaking feels it every time, and if you bring that to your entry plan, it is a recipe for a very short tenure as a superintendent, in my humble opinion.

Smith contended that open communication and community trust are major factors that contribute to long-term superintendent tenure.

Smith explained that he conducted his entry needs assessment with the community as a qualitative research project. To that end, he even interviewed students to insure that their voices were captured in the needs assessment.

I talked to a lot of students, at-risk students, focus groups, [and] special education parents… I used it as if I was conducting a qualitative research project on the school district and asked, "What can we do based on that?" Yeah, that was my L3Plan [Listening, Learning, and Leading Plan], and that was my needs

57

assessment, six months worth of going out into the community. I even coded things. I'm telling you it was a qualitative study. Part of what I looked at was what organization do we need to have in terms of the organizational structure of the district.

These community entry meetings served as the basis for Smith's Listening, Learning, and Leading Plan (L3 Plan), as shown in Figure 3. The input from these meetings provided the foundation for the long-term organizational structure of the district.

Listening, Learning, and Leading Plan

Goal 1: Develop and ensure effective and positive board-superintendent relations.

Item No.	Activity	Sponsor	Comments/Results	Status
1A	Schedule meeting with Board President to discuss broad goals and objectives for retreat and future board meeting agenda items.			
1B	Work with the board to establish two to four areas of focus - and measures tied to those areas - to be used to guide improvement in the district and to be used by the board to evaluate me.			
1C	Schedule individual meetings with each board member for one-on-one discussions.			
1D	Establish regular communications systems with the board.			
1E	Establish procedures for the construction of the board meeting agenda, information in the board packet, and standards for board presentations.			

Goal 2: Continue to build public trust, commitment and confidence in the district through open, honest communication.

Item No.	Activity	Sponsor	Comments/Results	Status
2A	Gather feedback on what's going well and what needs attention from principals, other administrators, focus groups of teachers, and focus groups of parents.			
2B	Utilize the Harris Survey results to help determine areas of strength and areas for improvement.			
2C	Meet individually with each principal and director about great things on their campuses and departments and areas that need attention.			

Goal 3: Evaluate organizational effectiveness, ensuring a focus on student learning.

Item No.	Activity	Sponsor	Comments/Results	Status
3A	Initiate the construction of the Superintendent's Briefing Documents from each department and division. Documents will include areas of major responsibility, major initiatives underway with projected timelines, significant or potential problems, and major decisions that need to be made in one month, three months, six months, and one year. Use these documents to assess the current status of each department's goals, and analysis of the critical issues and work priorities for the upcoming year, and the proposed plan of action to address each.			
3B	Establish a schedule to meet with all direct reports and key staff to discuss future plans, program review, and performance review.			
3C	Work with the National Center for Educational Accountability (Just for the Kids) to conduct a best practices audit on instructional practices in LISD.			
3D	Review district curriculum, instruction, and assessments for high expectations, alignment to standards, and appropriate interventions for struggling and excelling students.			
3E	Review student data for all student populations, including data by campus.			
3F	Analyze and evaluate the conditions of underperforming student groups, subjects, and schools, and evaluate the current courses of corrective action.			

Goal 4: Continue organizational culture of trust, learning, students-first, continuous improvement, and failing forward.

Item No.	Activity	Sponsor	Comments/Results	Status
4A	Identify key staff to assist with the transition within the organization, and ensure that the staff members provide feedback and advice as the transition occurs.			
4B	Work with principals and other administrators to ensure that Tuesday admin meetings are productive and valuable enough to pull principals away from their campuses.			
4C	Ensure that staff members and I attend conferences that will help expand the district's current strategies for improvement.			
4D	Use the Continuous Improvement Conference to reassure employees that holding on to the foundation of our district - our guiding documents and our culture of thinking kids first, continuous improvement, relationships and trust - is a goal that undergirds my vision and philosophy, even as we continue to reach further to take our district to even greater heights. Also, clarify the priorities of the district, such as the Four Challenges, Big Five, etc., so everyone knows how these expectations are aligned.			

Figure 3. **Sample Pages from Smith's Listening, Learning, and Leading Plan**

Johns also conducted an all-encompassing needs assessment to garner

stakeholder input.

> We did community surveys, teacher surveys, student surveys, [and] parent
> surveys. We tracked submittals and rewarded high percentages by classrooms
> with rewards for students trying to get our numbers in. We did a great job on
> that, our response rate was in the 90s.

He used this feedback from the community at large to develop district goals with the

District Educational Improvement Council (DEIC), which is made up of community

members, teachers, administrators, and students.

> We formed a committee and processed the survey questions through our DEIC.
> We took out domains and flushed the domains. First of all, we decided
> perception-wise, with the board's input, what we needed to look at most closely,
> and then we [addressed] those areas.

He also went out into the community to build relationships as part of his entry plan,

which was also largely part of his bond plan.

> Ironically, the entry plan was the bond plan. There's [sic] a lot of similarities
> there. When you infuse yourself in the community, you speak at different places
> [and] you go to coffees or the [women's community] groups. Those pieces are
> part of what strengthens your entry plan because it strengthens your bond
> program, so they kind of go hand in hand.

Johns also believed that it was vital to build relationships with other community leaders.

> The first meetings were more of informal visitations, talk to both bank
> presidents, sit down with the mayor, city council, city manager, [and] county
> judge. You do a lot of one-on-one meetings that first month because everybody
> wants a piece of you and you line them up and get it done.

He believed that building community relationships early in his tenure provided him with

long-term job retention.

Communication with staff. The superintendents in the study explained that communicating with staff was an extremely important leadership strategy that began in the first 30 days and continued into the first 60 days, and 90 days of entry. Communication with staff was a priority for several reasons. It gave staff an opportunity to explain what they were already doing, which allowed the superintendents to honor the past. Early staff entry conferences gave teachers and administrators the chance to speak candidly about district and student needs. Finally, the superintendents were able to gather this information to put an action plan in place and communicate the *why of why things were changing*.

Garcia explained how entry conferences with teachers and administrators early in his first three months of tenure influenced the needs assessments that ultimately resulted in the superintendent action plan. He noted that for the entry plan to lead to the action plan, a key leadership strategy is the art of listening. "The first step upon entry is to listen, so I did a lot of listening, scheduled a lot of conferences." After setting up conferences with the Board of Trustees, he met with each member of his cabinet. "The second phase of listening then is to schedule my cabinet conference, and there were eight members." He then expanded his entry conferences to his campus administrators. "So seven board members, eight conferences [individual cabinet conferences], and then principal [conferences] after that…so you can see that grew." This communication plan involved meeting with the principals on their campuses.

> Phase one, which was the first 30 days…that's the visiting of schools and
> consists of listening, learning, and relearning. Wherever I had the conference I
> would go to them rather than they come to me because then I could tour their

campus during that summertime that I was there. That's my first step, and then there are phases.

These conferences yielded the information he would then build into the district's needs assessment, which bridged the entry conferences with the action plan.

The action plan included hiring curriculum specialists, creating a full-day kindergarten program, and developing a systemic bilingual program. After learning that principals needed curriculum support, Garcia added this to the needs assessment, which became part of his action plan.

> 'More curriculum support is needed. I don't have many people to turn to at the district-level. More curriculum specialists are needed.' So each campus eventually, when in the second year…with some of the stimulus funding we ended up having…all elementary campuses had an instructional support specialist.

These entry conferences with administrators resulted in full-day kindergarten.

> They had half-day kindergarten and they said, 'We need more time.' That was a low-hanging fruit as a result of the entry conference. After the entry conference, that next spring…we had full-day kindergarten after my first year as a result of my entry conferences.

Finally, these conferences yielded an early consistent district-wide bilingual program model. Though Garcia would have preferred a dual language model, he allowed the teachers and administrators to build upon what they felt they needed for organizational stability.

> 'We do not have a true bilingual plan to follow district-wide. Each campus addresses bilingual education individually.' That's powerful, and guess what? They now have an early exit model but it's the model that allows for two-way dual language academies that are part of the transformation plan.

Leadership strategies are not only about actionable strategies, they are just as much about taking the time to listen and actually hear each stakeholder. This is the reason Garcia insured he listened to his stakeholders and allowed them to create a model of long-term sustainability.

Smith used similar communication strategies upon entry. He discussed the importance of communicating with staff when the needs of the district were at cross-purposes with the wants of the teachers and staff. "Many great things were happening in Lakeland ISD, but what I learned was that the arrows were pointing in all different directions." The district needed alignment, but Smith needed to employ leadership strategies to fuse district alignment with teacher autonomy.

> There were parts of them that were like, 'We need to keep our academic freedom, let me do the art of teaching.' Of all these pieces, that was the one that had the most opportunity to be at cross-purposes with some of the other things we were doing, because how do you have…'Protect my art of teaching, protect my academic freedom,' and…'Go with alignment, alignment, alignment.'

His leadership skills in listening and communicating helped turn a difficult situation into a positive situation.

> So there was some tension in that, not necessarily negative tension. As a matter of fact I think we turned it into positive, so it was just a matter of how do we navigate these waters, and I think we've landed in a pretty good spot with it ultimately.

When asked how he was able to navigate these waters, Smith explained:

> I was able to manage everything and insure that what I ended up from [district staff priorities] aligned with [Board priorities], and [those priorities] aligned with the community. You just massage it all and bring it together.

This alignment had been sustained during his tenure of six years.

Johns used his winter holiday entry as an opportunity to build informal relationships before delving into curriculum issues.

> We had an open house at central office and all the staff came out and grabbed something to eat, so I got to do one-on-ones with everyone in the district over that two or three day period…so it was a perfect time to get in and meet the staff and community…[I] built a lot of trust with the staff and they came back [after the holiday], built trust within the community, and circled to the board of trustees.

He built relationships early, which allowed him to get honest answers throughout his tenure. When asked if open communication was important he answered:

> I think that's part of the problem with schools that stagnate…there's no open communication for fear of reprisal, and if you're not sharing information of how you feel, what you think, your perception of campus, where are you going, what are you doing? The superintendent sure doesn't have the same perception that you do.

The trust, open communication, and candid feedback allowed Johns to have some crucial conversations with teachers about academics.

> I made [all decisions] based on data…with a smile, and I ranked us in the region. Total passing scores. I'm doing exactly what TEA is doing now, might I add. Then I ranked each department, and those that were not up to the district ranking, then they had to go to curriculum boot camp. It was an impressive system that weighted each student expectation according to importance, and it was based on the number of times it [the standard] was tested across the state, and how many times it was missed.

Teachers trusted Johns and attended the boot camp to improve their teaching craft because he clearly articulated the *why* of *why we are doing this*. He had also banked trust with early investments of meeting with each teacher. This trust ultimately yielded large gains. "When I left the district…the district was exemplary and all three campuses were

63

exemplary, and we'd just been nominated for a blue ribbon high school." Consequently, long-term organizational sustainability resulted from early communication efforts.

The superintendents of the study clearly identified communication as a key-contributing factor that led to their long-term tenure. Another significant finding was that early communication with Board members, community members, and staff resulted in organizational systems that were sustained during each superintendent's tenure and beyond. These systems are evidence of the link between the leadership strategy of effective communication and long-term tenure and organizational stability.

Common Characteristics in Entry Plans

Three common characteristics were present in each superintendent's entry plan. The first, communication, which was detailed in the previous section, was the core of the entry plan. It was the strategy whereby the other strategies emerge. The second characteristic concentrated on the importance of setting a clear, shared vision based on stakeholder input. Finally, the third characteristic articulated the need to demonstrate early wins within the first 90 days.

Communication. A commonality of each superintendent's entry plan involved communication. Communication was described repeatedly as the single most important component of the entry plan. Communication means two-way dialogue, and for the new superintendent, it means listening more than talking. Each superintendent described listening as an important leadership strategy when communicating with stakeholders.

For example, Garcia's entry plan was to meet with stakeholders in the first 90-120 days. Although his entry plan included action plans, he believed that the greatest investment came from phase one, listening.

> I used the first 90 days, but in reality it was probably 100-120 days…because conferences can extend sometimes, as well as your visits to campuses or talking at district functions…because it's not just conference time, you still have to do your job. But the investment is phase one, listening and learning. phase two is the readiness; and phase three is the development of action plans.

Smith's entry plan was about communication in and of itself, and he too referenced listening to stakeholders as an integral part of the entry plan.

> I drafted this plan based on a plan out of North Carolina, and it really covered as many stakeholder groups in my mind as I could think of…so the Board, central office staff, principals, teachers, parents, students. I wanted to create a plan that gave me a very broad overview of everything that was going on with the district, with the idea of hearing where we needed to go next and framing it that way.

Finally, Johns explained that communication builds trust by just listening to stakeholders. "During months one and two, it's all about establishing a personality, becoming approachable, and listening." Artful listening, leads to skillful learning, and both are cited as powerful leadership strategies.

Communication was a key factor in each superintendent's entry plan. Strategic plans, focus areas, and district visions emerged from the early communication that took place with the superintendents. This leadership strategy was identified repeatedly as a major leadership skill that influences long-term tenure and organizational stability.

Shared vision. A shared vision was clearly articulated as a commonality in every participant's entry plan. The shared vision was not built in isolation, but rather with stakeholder input. Board members' priorities, entry conference feedback, and needs

assessment data influenced the district's shared vision. It is noteworthy that each

superintendent believed that it was important to communicate the vision to every

stakeholder at every opportunity.

Garcia said that the vision must evolve with input from all stakeholders. The

vision is something that emerges from communication with Board members, central

office staff, campus administrators, teachers, parents, and students. It is more than the

vision of the superintendent. It is the shared vision of the community at large.

> When I'm asked in an interview 'what is your vision?' I say, 'That's great. My
> vision is to allow for us to have a shared vision through an entry plan of 100
> days.'

When asked how the shared vision evolves, Garcia explained that he framed questions

during conference visits to determine if the current vision and mission support what is

actually happening in the district.

> My long-term goal was to develop action plans and determine if the current
> vision and mission that were already [adopted were supported by all of the
> information I gathered during conferencing and visits]… because if they weren't,
> then obviously we needed to work with that.

He learned that the vision and mission were not aligned to the district needs and

stakeholder expectations.

However, when Garcia entered the district, the district team had just completed

the strategic plan. So he did not want to dismantle all of the team's work.

> The other thing…that I really, strongly believe in is honoring the past. I knew I
> wasn't going to make a lot of changes to how we do things, but my long-term
> goal, eventually, was to determine how we move into a possible strategic plan or
> readiness for long-term change in the district. They had just gone through a 5-
> year strategic plan, so I had to honor that. What I had to do was determine what
> was working from the strategic plan and what wasn't.

He created a shared vision with buy-in. He was careful not to insult the work of his

predecessor by saying, "This isn't working." Instead, he relied on his leadership strategy

of communication and referred back to his entry plan conference.

> What I was able to do is say, 'Hey, from the standpoint of my entry conferences
> and my entry plan, here's where we are as it relates to the things that we need to
> do.' Again, the strategic plan, believe it or not, was something that was already
> in place but I aligned it to fit the entry conference.

When asked how he made the strategic plan fit his entry conferences, he explained that

he organized the stakeholders' feedback into what he describes as *compass points*.

Rather than create new goals, the compass points became the focus areas for the district.

> In my conferences I wrote the report and used those [feedback from the entry
> conferences] as compass points rather than say, 'These are the goals,' because
> then people would say, 'We already have goals.' So I didn't want to get into that
> kind of an argument or even show disrespect. I wanted to say these are our
> compass points, which means our focus.

In this way he was able to marry the existing strategic plan with the new focus areas. In

other words, he was able to honor the past, while building for the future. This process

created buy-in and allowed for the whole organization to internalize and own the

strategic plan and embedded compass points.

The compass points from Garcia's entry plan are outlined in Figure 4. Each of

the compass points served as a focus area with accompanying action steps and

leadership strategies. The first compass point focused on governance; the second

compass point addressed instruction; the third compass point concentrated on safety and

security; and the last compass points highlighted the district's culture and climate.

Whitmore Independent School District Compass Points	
	Compass Point 1: A governance framework highlighting an effective and positive Board/Superintendent Relationship focused on student achievement **Compass Point 2:** An aligned coherent instructional program that provides all students with intervention and enrichment opportunities to increase achievement for all students and close existing achievement gaps **Compass Point 3:** Optimal learning environments that are safe and secure **Compass Point 4:** Establish a supportive, positive, and effective district climate and culture singularly focused on student achievement
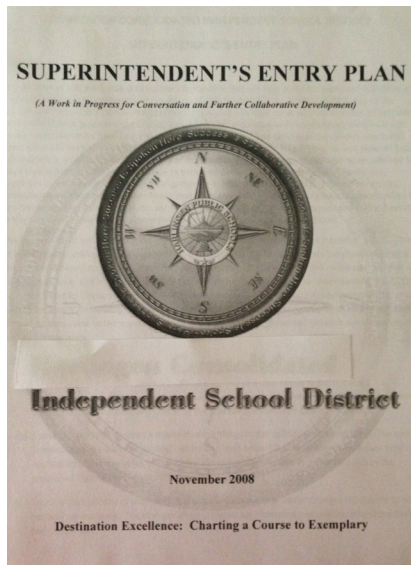
Figure 4. **Entry Plan of Whitmore ISD's Superintendent, Dr. David Garcia (Stakeholder quotations are cited under each compass point with an accompanying action plan)**

Smith also had a clearly defined shared vision that provided goal focus for the entire district. Much like Garcia's compass points, Smith's *five reaches* provided focal points to align the district vision.

> I had this document called Five Reaches, which was an initial document that outlined things I thought would end up in our ultimate vision. I keep doing this [holds hand out with fingers spread] because it was literally a picture of a hand, and I had five things on it…I'm very big on visuals.

Smith is very passionate about visuals because he feels that they help communicate a consistent message that transcends all stakeholder groups. Lakeland ISD's vision was branded in multiple visuals and these documents still hang in every teacher's room and at every campus. "So, I did the *five reaches* and simultaneously rolled out…the 3L Plan

– Listening, Learning, and Leading Plan." These documents led to the district's long-term shared vision.

The shared vision evolved from short-term goals and long-term goals that were based on the findings of the entry plan conferences and interviews.

> I would say that the short-term and long-term goals that spun out of the plan were…the short-term goals were that we needed to have a shared vision in the school district. This is going to sound corny, but my short-term goal was to have a long-term goal. So it was clear that we needed to take a big view…based on the feedback…roll out this shared vision and start working the plan.

Most important, Smith wanted to have an opportunity to roll out the vision to all staff at one time.

> I wanted it to be done [by] late spring because we have a huge three-day retreat with all of our administrators and I wanted to roll out my findings there, in order to roll out the final vision at the welcome back in August. That was kind of my entry plan timeframe – from February 1st to August 15th.

Johns had the advantage of serving in a small school district. Consequently, he marketed the vision to teachers, administrators, staff, and community members, often in one-on-one communication. He believed that if the community could get behind the vision, the district could move forward as a united front. "I think a lot of people focus a lot on the Board, even these entry plans that I've looked at…and don't get me wrong they are important, but face-to-face communication sells the vision." An interesting point he made was that a superintendent's one-on-one communication has to be so strong that his or her stakeholders can then communicate the vision to the constituents. "I'm good one-on-one, but am I good enough one-on-one to let these people convince others that I'm that good, and that's what's impressive." By the end of his first 90 days

in the district, the shared vision was branded. "They knew the vision, they lived the vision, and they believed the vision."

Early Wins. Communication and a shared vision were identified as the first steps toward long-term organizational stability. However, another commonality in all entry plans was the need to establish early wins or short-term successes. These successes give the Board of Trustees, staff, and community reasons to celebrate. They also help build confidence in the superintendent. A key point here is for the early wins to focus on the individual strengths of the participants, particularly those that differ from their predecessors.

Garcia explained that early successes were necessary as he built long-term sustainability with the entry plan compass points. The compass points in Figure 4 emerged as a result of the entry plan conferences. "So those are things that as you assess, you can't just go in and change in one year; you've just got to know that it's on your radar screen." Meanwhile, early wins helped create momentum in the district.

> There were some things that provided opportunities, those were items and activities that were quick wins that turn into quick support, and wow this superintendent is really looking at what we're doing and what we can do.

These *quick wins* were based on the information Garcia gleaned from his entry conferences. "The very first quote here is from an elementary principal…'It's important for the district to offer full-day kindergarten for all students.'" By truly listening to the needs of the community he was able to deliver an early win and garner administrator, teacher, and community support.

Knowing that, half-day kindergarten is a very quick win, in that we're going to create a full-day kindergarten program within a year. That will be more aligned with what we're expecting for early literacy and all the things that go with that. You've got to look at some quick wins.

The Board and community are often looking for leaders with a skillset quite different from their predecessors, so Garcia explained that it was important to highlight his unique skillset.

I don't think any longer you can keep doing the same thing, and you can't say, 'I'm going to do it the way [my predecessor] did it.' You're your own leader and you employ the things that you need to show your strengths.

Delivering a resolution to a universally identified need was Garcia's beginning to long-term tenure in Whitmore ISD.

Smith humbly credited his ability to follow great leaders as part of his success. However, he also acknowledged most often superintendents are hired based on the weaknesses of their predecessors. As a result, it behooves an acting superintendent to play to his or her strengths, especially if those strengths are in areas that challenged his or her predecessor.

My predecessor…was wired...to 'go slow to go fast.' He would say that over and over and over again. We all know that's a seriously important leadership maxim that drives people crazy…but it's true. I came in and said, 'You know what, sometimes we go fast to go fast.' And I use that same strategy here, and while I wasn't making radical changes, it was that energy and enthusiasm that I brought to the thing that people felt like we were doing something different.

He described that this energy was exactly what the district stakeholders were looking for at that time. This was an early win for Smith, as the Board of Trustees and staff felt that things were too stagnate prior to his entry. Smith's energetic entry created a momentum that caught on while rolling out the vision and focus areas.

Johns felt that early wins needed to be purposeful and detailed in a plan of entry.

These wins must make the superintendent stand apart from his or her predecessor.

> You always want to shore up the weaknesses of your predecessors. Obviously, I've got lots of weaknesses, but I'm going to make sure that the weaknesses of my predecessor are not my weaknesses. That has to be done, because that's what people are looking for. What have you done for me lately, and how are you better than the previous person?

When the superintendent is able to demonstrate this, it establishes an early win, which

goes a long way in promoting superintendent tenure.

> The Board of Trustees was looking for someone to build on the weaknesses of my predecessor: community involvement…community engagement. My predecessor did a pretty good job of window dressing community engagement – but what hurt him in the community is in a small school your staff is your community. He did not have a good working relationship with his staff…and he wasn't seen as a servant leader…more as a CEO. That is my strength, so I highlighted those leadership skills for early wins with the staff, which was also the community.

Not surprisingly, Johns attributed this early win with the staff and community as a major

factor toward his long-term tenure. In addition, he was able to build upon this and

sustain staff and community support.

The three common leadership strategies in each superintendent entry plan were

employing communication strategies, developing a shared vision, and establishing early

wins. Communication was not a leadership strategy used in isolation. It is the strategy

each of these long-term superintendents used consistently to solidify each district's

vision and short-term success, also called early wins. Early wins led to long-term

achievement, and these leaders communicated every gain. The end result of

organizational stability was to a small degree influenced by these leaders'
communication skills.

Entry Plans, Tenure, and Organizational Stability

When asked if the superintendents perceived entry plans to influence longevity
of the superintendent and overall organizational stability, they replied with a resounding,
"Yes." They attributed a strong entry with sustained long-term tenure, and agreed that
this in turn resulted in organizational stability. Though they provided different examples,
each shared instances where the entry plan directly resulted in a long-term strategic plan
for organizational stability. Two shared examples that outlasted their tenure.

Garcia used his entry plan as the foundation for the district needs assessment.
This led to the creation of superintendent's action plan, which progressed into his
transformation plan, and finally became the strategic plan. He strongly believed that his
comprehensive entry plan was essential in the culmination of the strategic plan.

> If you do an entry plan, and it's comprehensive, it does your strategic plan for
> your entry. I would also say that this entry into the district, for me, allowed for
> the entry plan to be a part of the framework for strategizing for the future.

When asked if his entry plan influenced organizational stability, Garcia explained,
"I think it assisted in organizational stability because I held pretty true to what came
out." His entry plan actually outlasted his tenure, which speaks volumes about
organizational stability in Whitmore ISD. "Before I left, we knew we needed to go into a
comprehensive strategic plan, but the entry plan actually became the strategic plan."

Garcia described that the entry plan detailed goals that were about innovation,
which is what the strategic plan was built upon.

73

So it led to innovation. It led to what we call transformation. That was all based on the fact that that's where they [stakeholders] wanted to go, based on the questions from the entry conferences and the final plan that we had…the entry plan became the strategic plan.

The entry conferences served as the needs assessment process that led to goal setting. Chang (2008) contended that the first step of the strategic planning process must include analysis where the critical issues of the current system are identified and analyzed. Garcia and his team executed, managed, monitored, and reviewed strategies. The linkage between the entry plan and the strategic plan sustained the district beyond Garcia's five and a one-half years as superintendent.

When asked to identify indicators of strong organizational stability, Garcia answered:

A strong indicator of success for me is…I just talked to the board president from Whitmore ISD today, and the board president from today has noted, 'David, so much of the strategic plan and all the things that came up are your vision,' and I had to correct him…'It was our vision, it was our shared vision from a collective standpoint.'

He not only has the evidence that there is organizational stability from the Board president, but also his successor.

Now, [new superintendent] is the superintendent, but when you talk about stability, guess what he had to take? The transformation plan that led to where we were in the strategic plan. That, in itself, is evidence not only for progress but evidence that the entry plan was not only foundational. This was systemic. He evaluated the processes and continued assessing needs.

His systemic approach had allowed his successor to build upon an already stable organization.

Smith followed his entry plan 100% and his artifacts demonstrated that he completed every action. When asked if this entry plan influenced organizational stability, he explained that everything he did was with that end in mind.

> We took on the structure of the organization with an eye toward insuring it was stable. We basically had the same organizational structure except for one huge change, which nobody except my executive team and a few people in central office knew that it was huge…that was bringing the campus supervisors into cabinet. That was a hugely important change, and actually I think it helped with organizational stability, as well. It brings the principal's voice into everything that we do.

Referring back to Smith's passion for collaboration, he explained that having the principal's voice at the table insures organizational stability. This was an idea that came out of his entry plan conferences.

Another practice to maintain organizational stability is meeting with teacher and student focus groups. Again, this leadership strategy emerged from Smith's entry plan conferences.

> I've kept up that notion of focus groups with teachers and students throughout my superintendency, so every year I do at least one of each of those just to hear what's going on. We call it a plus delta, what's going well, what do we need to improve, and what do you think? That is the most important…hearing the actual voice of the students, particularly in groups. Students and teachers as separate items, would be the most valuable I would say.

The organization has become so stable that Smith actually has students conduct teacher observations to provide reflective feedback.

When asked if there was one component of his entry plan that has contributed to his long-term tenure, Smith referred to his communication plan.

> Yes, I would say that community trust certainly was enhanced, people got to know me…they saw me out there. I did some things spinning out of that that

were part of the communications improvement plan that we created, and it had a variety of things… One has turned into something great, which is my webcast that I do once a month, maybe twice a month, and they go to staff… I do short three-minute videos; celebrate something that's going well in the school district. It gets my face in front of every employee in the district, so they know who I am.

This communication plan keeps the district staff informed, and he also creates these

videos for the community several times a year.

When asked if an entry plan influences organizational stability, Smith agreed that

it did.

Yes, I think an entry plan sets a foundation for the possible longevity of a superintendent. I think there are a lot of factors that go into the longevity of a superintendent, some way beyond the superintendent's control, but all the things a superintendent can control, a solid plan for entering the district, establishing a foundation of community trust, is essential to success…I would not be the superintendent I am today without the entry plan that I created. It also gave me, as a new superintendent, and the board, a very clear picture of what I was doing in those first 90 days, and then that built trust among the board. The entry plan was a qualitative research, needs assessment that led to the long-term plan we have today.

The second part to that question was did he perceive superintendent longevity to be a

contributing factor to organizational stability.

Yeah, it's got to be. The notion of organizational sustainability is the same thing as…I think of it like this, the superintendent evaluation is not an evaluation of Robert Smith. The superintendent evaluation is an evaluation of your organization. And just like superintendent longevity isn't Robert Smith being here a long time; it's the organization surrounding Robert Smith that is sustainable and doing good things, etc. So I think they're one in the same thing.

Consequently, the shared vision of Dunmore ISD continues to thrive well beyond the

months of the entry plan.

So, our shared vision beyond…our shared vision is that every student exits our system with the same passion for learning when they entered our system without economics determining success. We rolled out four priorities tied to that. The

76

four priorities that we've been working on since that time, and our 10-years from now plan, revolve around closing the achievement gap, insuring students own their learning – the development of our seven student learning behaviors – college and career readiness success, and insuring that we're addressing the whole student at every turn.

The shared vision that emerged from Smith's entry plan has evolved from a 10-year plan to a 5-year plan, which has systematically linked one year to the next.

Opening Doors (2011)

Building Bridges (2009)

Creating the Future...
This Day

Planting Trees (2008)

Share the Capel (2012)

Ten Nine Eight Seven Six *Five* Years From Now...

Paving Paths (2010)

Vision
Students will exit our system with the same passion for learning they had when they entered, without economics determining success. **Every Option Open.**

Growing Cotton (2013)

Our Challenge
In order to accomplish this vision, we must:

- Give students ownership in their learning, with the **Seven Student Learning Behaviors** anchoring every classroom.
- **Close the achievement gap.**
- Ensure students exit our system **college and career ready.**
- Focus on the **whole student**, ensuring that every student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged.

Figure 5. **Easton ISD's ~~Ten, Nine, Eight, Seven, Six,~~ Five Year Plan**

Smith's qualitative entry conferences served as the needs assessment to create the goals for long-term planning. Chang (2008) explained that effective strategic planning requires goals to be set for planning and operationalization based on analysis of

the needs assessment. Smith continues to manage and monitor these goals, as evidenced

by Easton ISD's ~~Ten, Nine, Eight, Seven, Six,~~ **Five Year Plan.** This reflective process

is recursive and has led to sustained organizational stability.

Johns credited the entry plan for Easton ISD's long-term district improvement

plan, which was also based on the entry plan.

> The pieces of the comprehensive needs assessment that I reviewed a year later
> were nowhere to be found in the district improvement plan. So that needed to be
> added to the district's plan, so that the needs were reflected in the district's
> plan… and the goals had to be reviewed and evaluated. They used our template
> for the Region Center. That was in 2005-06. It was 181 pages, because we had
> survey results, systems, and an action plan. It was over the top.

This district improvement lasted throughout Johns' tenure and beyond.

He also credited the ability to pass a bond during his tenure to the organizational

stability created during the entry process.

> This is a gauge of trust that I'm pretty proud of. When we had our first bond
> election to retire the debt, I want to say it was like 3.5 million; it wasn't a whole
> lot but it was a lot for a little bity school. The vote was 2 to 1 in favor of
> buildings that had already been built. Six years later, we do the first TRE for a
> tax swap… We took our interest and sinking and put it in our M&O and made it
> a TRE. So the tax rate didn't go up, but you got more money from the state…
> The moral of the story was, we had…1200-1300 people vote in that first bond
> election. There's [sic] only 2000 people that live in that community…it was 800
> to 400. The TRE…76. They trusted me.

Johns pointed out that during his last year, he garnered so much community support that

he was able to pass a TRE, which he equated to community trust that was built during

the first bond issue. The first bond process encapsulated much of his entry plan, which

maintained organizational stability throughout his tenure.

Organizational stability results from a purposeful deliberate plan that originates upon entry. Three superintendents who experienced long-term tenure, as defined as five or more years, attributed much of their position longevity to a smooth entry into the district and community. They used entry plans as needs assessments to prioritize leadership strategies, and develop long-term strategic plans. Furthermore, they believed that this longevity not only contributed to organizational stability, but also in many instances caused organizational stability.

Community Versus Board Relations

An additional finding that surfaced from the study is that superintendents often focus so much on Board relations upon entry, that they do not monitor the culture and climate of the community. This often results in community members running for Board positions because of disagreements with the agenda of the superintendent and Board. This is another reason that the superintendents emphasized the need for a solid entry plan that involves all community stakeholders. Garcia explained:

> The beautiful thing about the organizational stability is that the board, whoever they hired after me, was going to have to fit…they ended up hiring my deputy for transformation and school support, but had he not ascribed or believed in that, because the board wanted to move faster than the community and the staff did because it's a very educated board in Whitmore.

Because of the organizational stability that was created by Garcia, Whitmore's Board and new superintendent were able to manage the community perception and continue on a path of trust.

However, Smith and Johns cautioned future superintendents about moving too quickly without the support of the community. They also provided recommendations to avoid the pitfall unknown to many new superintendents.

When asked what he recommends when a new superintendent is faced with competing interests from the Board and the community, Johns explained:

> That's a whole other issue, and a lot of times that happens…and it happens because the board is made up of primarily parents and the community is made up of retirees, so that is an issue here that you have to wade through. I have groups out there that still look at me like, 'I'm still not trusting you, but I'm working on it.' If they're at odds with the community, at the end of the day you give them examples, conversations, etc.… You have to help sway them.

He believed that it is the superintendent's responsibility to educate the Board on community perceptions.

> My philosophy has always been you have to be strong with the community. If you're strong with the community, the board takes care of itself. And there's never a debacle…so you never get the wild ones on your board running against others because they are unhappy. You basically recruit your board members… Even big school district superintendent's talk about the board, the board, the board… You've got to have your relationship with the board, but at the end of the day if you have a relationship with the community…the community provides you with solid board members.

Johns believes that community perceptions need to be shared with the Board at all times and the community needs must be a priority.

Smith echoed Johns' perception. When asked if you were entering a district and you felt the community perception was different from the board's perception, would you take the time to educate them, Smith responded:

> You have to! You have to! Absolutely, real quickly. The reality is, we work for a board and part of my task is to…just like I rely on them to educate me about what the public is feeling, if I got the sense in all of my work with them that I felt

like the community was not aligned, they would hear from me first. I mean, I am in front of that as much as I possibly can. I have a great relationship with our Board in terms of bringing the brutal facts. That works either way.

He explained, however, that reciprocal trust could be established through continued dialogue and explicit transparency both with the community and with the Board.

Summary

Chapter four explored findings from a qualitative research methodology. The participant's feedback discussed communication as the leadership strategy used to prioritize entry plans actions. The study yielded three commonalities of the leadership strategies in the superintendent entry plans used in the study. The commonalities included employing communication strategies, developing a shared vision, and establishing early wins. The study also found that superintendents put a high premium on entry plans as a means toward long-term strategic planning, sustained tenure, and organizational stability. Additionally, research findings indicated that many new superintendents do not take competing interests of Board members and the community into consideration when creating their entry plans. Chapter five will discuss these results further and provide recommendations and implications for superintendents entering a new district.

Chapter Five: Findings, Implications, and Recommendation

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The qualitative methods of this study described in chapter three were used to arrive at these results. The depth of the interview process, which included thick, rich descriptions, reflective journals, archival documents, and field notes allowed for a culmination of comprehensive findings. In addition, the semi-structured interview process allowed for a dynamic individualized approach, used to identify the discreet perceptions and lived experiences of each superintendent. Because of the comprehensive design of the study and because each superintendent represented a small rural district, mid-size suburban district, or large urban district, multiple perspectives were represented. The findings are presented in three parts. First, a summary of the results of the research questions is presented. The next section offers implications for practice. Recommendations for further research and a summary of the study conclude the chapter.

Problem Statement

The complex role of the contemporary superintendent has resulted in increased turnover among superintendents (Pascopela, 2011). The research literature revealed that superintendent sustainability is a key factor in achieving organizational stability. Yee and Cuban (1996) found that abbreviated tenure and frequent turnover contributed to organizational unmanageability in urban school districts. The problem addressed by this study is whether entry plan leadership strategies of superintendents with five or more years of tenure led to organizational sustainability. Specifically, were there common components in the entry plans of superintendents who have remained in the same district

82

for five years or more? How did superintendents prioritize leadership strategies in an entry plan? Did these strategies lead to organizational sustainability? What role did the Board of Trustees play in identifying the needs of the district? What role did other stakeholders such as parents, community members, and teachers play in identifying these needs? Did entry plan leadership strategies change over time?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the entry plans of superintendents having been in a district for five or more years and to identify leadership strategies that have led to long-term organizational stability. The overarching goal of the study was to relate superintendent entry plans to sustained tenure and organizational sustainability. The research questions provided the context for framing the semi-structured interview protocol and a priori codes, although emergent codes also evolved during data analysis.

Methodology Overview

This phenomenological qualitative study used a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with three superintendents who had served in a school district for at least five years. Also referred to as an in-depth-interview, the semi-structured interview process allows the participants to structure the process of the interview. This type of interview evolves with each participant. Although an interview protocol was used, some questions were not asked, others were expounded upon, and additional questions were added (Hays & Singh, 2012). The evolution of the questioning structure progressed to fit the context of each unique interview.

83

Superintendents in this study were chosen from one mid-size suburban school district, one large urban school district, and one small rural district, and their interviews were triangulated with archival documents, field notes, and reflective journals. Studying superintendents from suburban, urban, and rural districts provided a well-rounded representation. A requisite criterion for superintendents included in this study was that they have had an average of five years' experience as a superintendent in the same school district.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was an ongoing process that began with the initial data collection. Interview transcripts were coded using prefigured categories and emergent categories. "Prefigured codes [a priori codes] or categories often limit the analysis to the prefigured codes rather than opening up the codes to reflect the views of participants in a traditional qualitative way" (Creswell, 2007, p. 152). Therefore, additional codes were added to the coding scheme as they emerged during the analysis.

Three types of coding processes were used for data analysis: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding provides a general type of analysis for wide review. Axial coding narrows open coding and identifies relationships of open coding. Selective coding provides more specificity to axial coding. Hays and Singh (2012) explained, that selective coding, the most complex coding method, identifies patterns, processes, and sequences among axial codes to produce a theory about a phenomenon. These three coding techniques worked together to refine the data analysis process.

Identifiable information from participant responses was assigned codes to ensure that respondents were not linked with their responses and that those superintendents were not identifiable. Data obtained from the study were stored in a locked file. To maintain the confidentiality of data, codebooks, and all participant data were stored in separate locked files.

Limitations

A limitation of the semi-structured interview process is that it allows the researcher to begin with a set of interview questions, which then evolves during each interview, depending on the nuances of each individual interview. This means that each subject was not asked the exact same questions as other participants during the interview process. Although a semi-structured interview process does not maintain consistency of questioning across all participants, the benefit is that it allows for deeper understanding of each participant, provides increased participant voice, and yields a clearer picture of the phenomenon being studied (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Another limitation of this study was the small sample size of the research base. Because the participants of this small sampling entered districts that were devoid of dysfunction, their lack of attention to all of the 10 functions of the district may differ if they had entered a district with dysfunctional systems. Each superintendent entered a culturally and structurally functional school district, and the entry strategies may not represent leadership strategies or approaches used when entering a less functional organization. However, the small sample size allowed for depth and breath during the

interview process of superintendents from three distinctly different demographic regions.

Significance of the Study

This study documented school superintendents' perceptions of the components within their entry plans that led to their long-term retention and sustainability in their school districts as organizations. The definition of long-term retention for the purposes of this study was based on longevity of at least five years. Grissom and Anderson (2012) identified five years as the reference point of long-term retention, while Yee and Cuban (1996) determined 5.8 years as the mark of long-term retention. Because organizational sustainability is linked to superintendent longevity, it was imperative to determine which factors drive turnover and identify entry plan leadership strategies that prevent it.

The study uncovered several key findings. The findings were based on the perceptions of superintendents regarding the influence of entry plans on sustained tenure, defined as five or more years, as well as organizational stability. The superintendents in the study perceived effective communication to be the leadership skill most essential in prioritizing entry plan strategies. Three common leadership strategies were identified in each of the subject's entry plan. These included employing communication strategies, developing a shared vision, and establishing early wins. The superintendents perceived entry plans to indeed influence long-term tenure and organizational stability. Additional findings indicated that many entry plans do not account for competing interests between the community and the Board of Trustees,

86

which could result in abbreviated tenure of the superintendent. The findings also demonstrated the need for recursive application of these leadership strategies.

Summary of Results of Research Questions

This phenomenological study used an interpretivist paradigm to answer the following research questions. Overarching themes are outlined to present prioritized entry plan leadership strategies, common characteristics present in all entry plans, and the influence of entry plans on superintendent longevity and organizational stability. These themes are presented in order to answer each of the following research questions.

1. How did superintendents with five or more years in their position prioritize the leadership strategies in their entry plans?

2. Among superintendents with five or more years in their position, what were common characteristics of their entry plans and how were they used?

3. How did superintendent entry plans impact the longevity of the superintendent and overall organizational stability of the district?

Priorities and commonalities in entry plans. Each superintendent prioritized communication as the major leadership strategy in his entry plan. The entry communication plan included entry conferences with multiple stakeholders. These conferences provided the participants with qualitative data points needed to prioritize short-term entry plan strategies and long-term action steps. Communication was also identified as one of the three common characteristics present in each superintendent's entry plan. The second characteristic present in all entry plans was the articulation of a clearly defined shared-vision. In all three plans, this shared-vision was derived from

stakeholder input. The third common leadership strategy was the deliberate

demonstration of *early wins.* These *wins* were based on the feedback the superintendents

gathered during entry conferences.

    Communication. A major finding was that each participant identified

communication as a key leadership strategy necessary to prioritize all other leadership

entry strategies. The school district organizational structure is comprised of 10 functions.

These functions include: (a) governance operations; (b) curriculum and instruction; (c)

elementary and secondary campus operations; (d) instructional support services; (e)

human resources; (f) administrative, finance, and business operations; (g) facilities

planning and plant services; (h) accountability, information management, and

technology services; (i) external and internal communications; and, (j) operational

support systems: safety and security, food services, and transportation (Olivárez, 2010).

Although the superintendents in this study did not specifically identify each of these 10

functions in their entry plans, they did have a communication plan to address the

stakeholders from each of these areas. The superintendents scheduled entry conferences

to meet with representatives from each of these stakeholder groups, either to learn more

about the responsibilities in each of these functions or to compile information for the

needs assessment. They collectively explained that by addressing each of these 10

functions during entry conferences, they gained important information to mitigate

potential issues in the future. Therefore, the leadership strategy of communication

allowed the superintendents to collect information necessary in making informed

decisions to prioritize short-term entry action strategies and long-term action plans.

Effective communication was perceived by the participants to be the most important leadership strategy for superintendents during entry and beyond. Freeley and Seinfeld contended, "The most critical aspect of the superintendency today is communication" (p. 94). Strong communication skills allow the superintendent to build relationships in a variety of settings. Positional power, relational power, and political power are all power roles of the superintendent (Yukl, 2013) and the superintendent with effective communication skills can deliver a consistent message in each of these domains. Effective communication means delivering a consistent authentic message in a variety of contexts (Bradt, et al., 2011).

A leader needs to develop a consistent message, and then repeat the message to multiple stakeholders to demonstrate authenticity. Kowalski (2005) asserted, "Both professionally and politically, relationship enhancing communication is a more effective alternative for administrators who must initiate and sustain change" (p. 108). This consistent communication was also perceived as a contributing factor of long-term job retention. Moreover, consistent communication established early in the entry process was linked to organizational stability. This leadership strategy was not only the most important strategy used during entry, but also the most effective for long-term organizational stability.

Communication with the Board of Trustees. The study demonstrated that frequent, transparent communication took place explicitly during the first 30 days of entry. In addition, entry conferences with the Board of Trustees were the first priority and often took place on the superintendent's first day. Examples of frequent, transparent

communication included weekly emails, frequent phone calls, formal meetings, and informal gatherings. In addition, the participants agreed that all Board members must receive the same consistent message, and that the message given to one Board member, must be shared with all. Each participant believed that a new superintendent must develop individual relationships with each Board member, as well as cultivate a synchronized team. The study revealed that consistent, transparent communication demonstrates integrity and authenticity, which were perceived as the cornerstones of superintendent longevity.

Communication with the community. The study revealed that superintendents received community support early in the entry process and viewed this support as an investment toward the future. Examples of communication with the community included developing webcasts, sending newsletters, attending formal public meetings, holding informal meetings, scheduling stakeholder meetings, visiting with public figures, listening at parent meetings, and creating student meetings. It was important for the superintendents to be highly visible at these events, and they discussed the importance of arriving early and staying late. Community involvement led to community support, which impacted superintendent longevity.

Enthusiasm was also cited as a communication strategy that motivated the community and staff. Yukl (2013) explained, "The ability to understand and influence emotions in others will help a leader who is attempting to arouse enthusiasm and optimism for a proposed activity or change (p. 152). This continuous communication built trust with community members, which was also reflected in the Board members'

ongoing support. The culmination of long-term support resulted in long-term tenure and organizational stability.

Communication with staff. A communication plan to meet with staff was detailed in each entry plan. The staff entry conferences provided much of the necessary information for the needs assessment. For example, the superintendents were able to determine if resources were allocated equitably and if programs matched the needs of the students. These conferences created opportunities for staff to be heard and feel validated in their work. All superintendents referenced the importance of the art of listening, and one even branded Listening, Learning, and Leading (Figure 2) to demonstrate the importance of leading by listening. Staff support also led to positive feedback from the community and the Board of Trustees, which was also perceived to influence long-term tenure.

Consistent communication with staff was central to set the vision of the district and to communicate district goals. The communication was constant, coherent, and repetitive. Repetition is essential to reinforce the leader's message (Bradt et al., 2011). The consistent messaging insured alignment across each district. Although the 10 functions of the school district were not explicitly identified in the entry plans, each superintendent created communication plans which addressed the 10 district functions. This alignment was attributed to the organizational stability of the district.

Effective communication transcends all stakeholder groups. It is the strategy that sets the foundation for future success. Bradt et al. (2011) contended, "Effective communication is hard work. But it will be one of the most important and most enduring

things you do" (p. 145). These superintendents ascribed the same theory and sustained long-term tenure and organizational stability as a result.

Shared vision. A shared vision was common in each entry plan. Board priorities provided the initial basis for the shared vision. Stakeholder feedback garnered from entry conferences and needs assessment meetings was also used to build upon Board priorities. Clear communication was attributed to clear expectations and aligned focus areas across each district. At a time when superintendent turnover is high, developing a shared vision is a leadership strategy that superintendents can use to encourage success (Freeley & Seinfeld, 2012).

Consequently, each superintendent believed that the shared vision led to his long-term tenure and sustained organizational stability because the vision was branded across the districts. One district had visual representation of the vision in every classroom, another insured that every stakeholder lived by the vision, and the last began every meeting by articulating the vision. Bolman and Deal (2008) asserted that successful leaders create an uplifting vision and communicate the vision repeatedly through words, actions, and visual representations. These were strategies employed by the superintendents in the study, and were perceived to set the focus, create alignment, and maintain organizational stability during and beyond their tenure.

Early wins. Purposeful, well-planned, and quick early wins were the third leadership strategy in each entry plan. Early wins create momentum in the organization (Bradt et al., 2011). One method of gaining an early win is by addressing a low hanging fruit, or easily attainable goal in the needs assessment. This demonstrates that the new

superintendent listened and valued stakeholder input, as well establish credibility (Bradt et al., 2011). Early wins also demonstrate leadership and self-confidence, which are both important during the entry process (Freeley & Seinfeld, 2012).

The participants all believed they needed to set themselves apart from their predecessors. By identifying their predecessors' areas of challenge, they were able to play to their own personal strengths. The superintendents each perceived that Board members hire superintendents with a skillset that is opposite that of their predecessor. Consequently, a predecessor's weaknesses will most often be the new superintendent's strengths, and vice versa. Thus, the study found that a superintendent could generate an early win by demonstrating success in an area that was a deficiency for the previous superintendent.

Entry plans influence on organizational stability. Throughout this chapter the findings described superintendents' perceptions of leadership strategies that influenced long-term tenure and organizational stability. This section discusses superintendent perceptions directly related to entry plans and their influence on long-term tenure and organizational stability.

Yee and Cuban's (1996) study on superintendent tenure demonstrated that long-term tenure was associated with systemic reforms in urban school districts. Because long-term superintendent tenure has been linked to organizational stability, it is important to determine which factors contribute to long-term tenure. The study participants believed that their entry plans set the course for their long-term tenure and organizational stability. The entry communication plan, shared vision, and early wins

93

collectively poised these superintendents for long-term tenure, which in turn led to organizational stability.

They also believed that consistent long-term implementation of the entry strategies was the key to this stability. The entry plan only provided the initial phases of implementation, which were indeed crucial to establish long-term tenure and organizational stability. However, long-term, systemic implementation was also found to be an essential factor. Grissom and Anderson (2012) found that systemic organizational stability occurs when a superintendent has been able to consistently focus his or her efforts for at least five years. The study revealed seven steps of planning that led to sustained implementation. The steps included (a) conduct a needs assessment through entry conferences, (b) set goals, (c) execute strategies, (d) manage, (e) monitor, (f) evaluate, and (g) review. Chang (2008) explained that there is not one perfect way to conduct strategic planning and that each institution will have a unique interpretation of strategic stages and steps. However, he identified eight stages to strategic planning, which mirrored the steps used by the study participants. He identified (a) evaluation, (b) feedback, (c) analysis, (d) appraisal, (d) planning, (e) operationalization, (f) implementation, (g) monitoring, and (h) review. Since this study involved participants with five or more years of experience, this continual, systemic, strategic process was also found to be a factor in long-term organizational stability.

Additional findings. Another finding of the study was that superintendents must be prepared for competing priorities between the Board of Trustees and the community. The participants believed that superintendents could thwart this potential issue by

94

interacting with multiple stakeholders and by actively listening to community discourse. It is also the responsibility of the superintendent to educate the Board of potential conflicts in the community. The educational dialogue needs to be reciprocal and the Board must also keep the superintendent informed. This dynamic is mitigated through constant transparent communication with stakeholders in the community at large and the Board of Trustees.

Revised Theoretical Framework

Figure 5 illustrates the theoretical framework that emerged based on the data collected during the study. For this reason, the framework has been revised from the version presented in chapter three. This framework depicts the influence entry plans had on superintendent tenure and organizational stability when effective leadership strategies are employed during the entry phase.

The framework demonstrates the priority of communication as a major leadership strategy upon entry. Entry conferences are conducted with stakeholder conference participants. This feedback evolves into a needs assessment that allows the superintendent to prioritize leadership strategies. Common leadership strategies that were identified as contributors to long-term tenure and organizational stability are detailed. These include mitigating Board and community conflicts, developing a shared vision, and creating early wins. All leadership strategies include communication as a key strategy that bridges the entry plan with the strategic plan. These three leadership strategies converge at strategic planning, which insures that the entry plan transforms into a long-term systemic plan. The strategic plan includes seven steps for long-term

planning. These steps are (a) conduct a needs assessment through entry conferences, (b) set goals, (c) execute strategies, (d) manage, (e) monitor, (f) evaluate, and (g) review. Long-term strategic planning leads to both superintendent tenure and organizational stability.

The framework may serve as a reference point for future studies regarding other factors that influence superintendent tenure and/or organizational stability. It can also be used to for further studies on needs assessment strategies, transformational planning strategies, action-planning strategies, and strategic planning strategies. This framework would be useful to continue future studies on how new superintendents address the ten functions of the school district, particularly when the new district is operationally dysfunctional. The framework may serve as a guide to future leaders entering into a new school district, and can be used as a roadmap to navigate the context of not only the school district, but also the community at large.
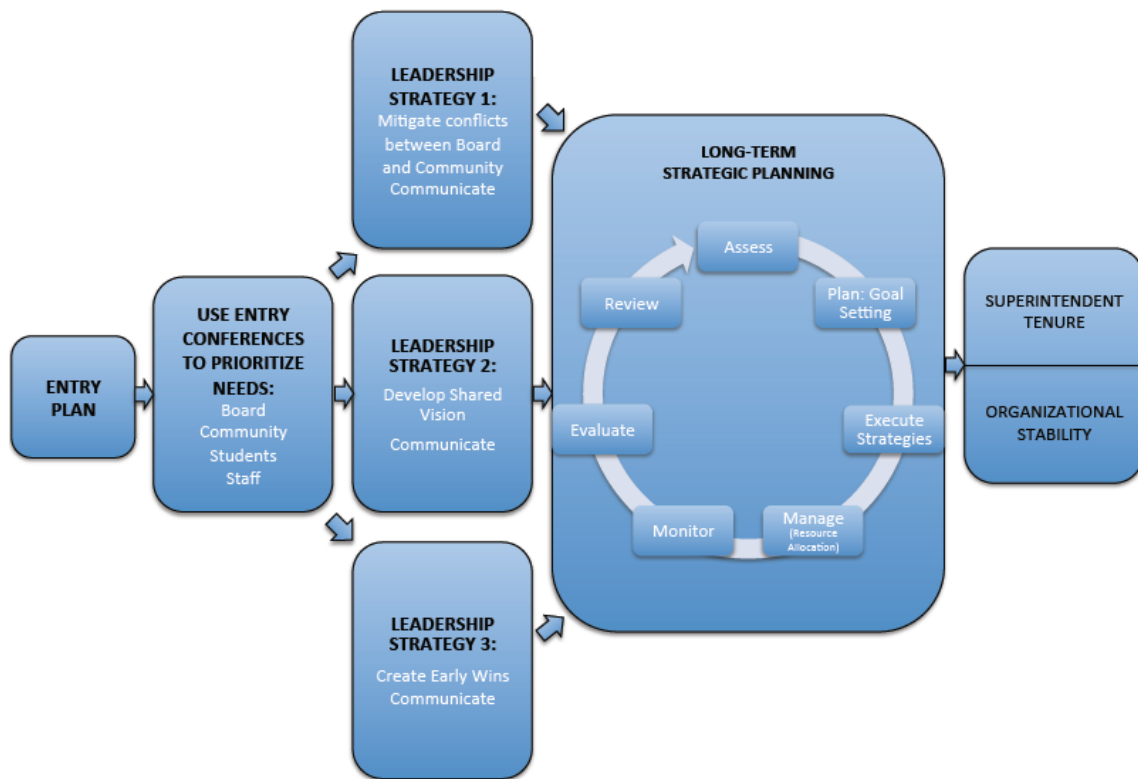
Figure 6. Revised Theoretical Framework

Implications for Practice

At a time when the role of the superintendent is in a state of crisis, this study provides future superintendents with actionable leadership strategies during the first 90 days of entry. If implemented effectively, the entry plan could become a systemic part of the organization through strategic planning toward long-term results. Since long-term superintendent tenure is associated with organizational stability, it behooves future superintendents to employ a strategic entry plan. This study suggests that strategic planning is influential when the entry plan conferences are used as a needs assessment

for goal setting. The superintendent then needs to execute, manage, monitor, evaluate and review the strategic plan.

Superintendents must develop a plan to communicate with representatives from all stakeholder groups. This should be done through a set of entry conferences. The first stakeholder group that the superintendent needs to meet with is the Board of Trustees. Relationships with Board members need to be cultivated both collectively and individually. Community members and staff members need to be met with simultaneously beginning in the first 30 days and extending into the first 90 days. Meanwhile the superintendent needs to be visible at formal public meetings, political functions, and informal gatherings. These early relationships build trust and provide the superintendent with investments toward the future.

A needs assessment should be developed based on these entry conferences, and all stakeholder input should be considered. The superintendent should take advantage of opportunities for small successes or early wins based on the needs assessment. He or she should also highlight strengths that were lacking in his or her predecessor. This instills confidence and creates momentum with Board and community at large. Throughout this process communication must continue and a formal communication plan should be developed.

A shared vision should also be developed in the early stages of entry to create organizational alignment and establish a unified goal focus. Again, a key to the successful rollout of a shared vision embeds input form stakeholder groups and insures clear communication. Communication needs to be consistent, repeated, and transparent.

98

This process creates the branding of the superintendent's message, which then becomes systemic, and contributes to long-term organizational stability.

New superintendents need to monitor the overall climate of the community to insure that the priorities of the community are not in conflict with those of the Board of Trustees. If the superintendent determines that there is a conflict he or she must quickly educate the Board about these issues. The superintendent then should develop a clear, transparent communication plan to mitigate any further issues. Failure to do this effectively may result in community members running for Board positions with the intention to change the Board agenda or change the superintendent. Thus, communication plays an integral part in monitoring this potential pitfall.

These early efforts will reveal themselves if the superintendent remains in the position for at least five years. At this point, the entry plan will evolve into a long-term strategic plan, programs will have evolved into pillars of education, and procedures will become systemic. In other words, the district will reach a state of organizational stability.

Recommendations for Further Research

Few studies exist examining entry plan strategies that have led to superintendent long-term tenure. However, there is a dearth of literature research studying the influence of entry plans on superintendent tenure and organizational stability. Three superintendents were purposefully chosen for this qualitative study to provide depth of understanding regarding leadership strategies that were perceived to lead to long-term tenure and organizational stability. Because all of the superintendents were from Texas,

this study could be replicated in other states to determine if transferability is possible outside the state of Texas.

Future studies could include (a) perceptions from community members regarding superintendent leadership strategies that influence longevity and stability in an organization, (b) Board members perceptions regarding a superintendent's successful entry into a school district, (c) perceptions from the Board of Trustees regarding superintendent leadership strategies that influence longevity and stability in an organization, (d) strategies used by superintendents to bridge the gap between the community's priorities and Board members' agenda, (e) components of a communication plan that leads to long-term tenure, (d) developing a strategic plan to meet the needs of all stakeholder groups, and (e) studying superintendent leadership strategies to address the 10 functions of the district when entering a district lacking these systems.

Summary

This study was conducted to determine if leadership strategies for organizational stability matter. Superintendents with five or more years of experience were specifically chosen to identify the approaches used to prioritize entry plan leadership strategies and to discover common characteristics of entry plans developed by long-tenured superintendents. Superintendents who maintained tenure for five or more years were able to share their perceptions and experiences related to the influence of entry plans on long-term tenure and organizational stability.

The study participants used the leadership skill of stakeholder communication to prioritize entry plan leadership strategies. Stakeholder communication included formal and informal dialogue with stakeholders such as Board members, community members, parents, students, teachers, support staff, and administrators. Communication was repeatedly listed as the most important leadership strategy to effectively prioritize entry plan action steps and long-term strategic plans. Communication with all stakeholders enabled the superintendents to align the needs assessment with the entry plan, and then to align the entry plan with the long-term strategic plan. Communication with stakeholders of each of the ten functions of the school district provided further information to incorporate the ten functions into the long-term strategic plan.

Three commonalities present in all of the participants' entry plans were a) employing communication strategies, b) developing a shared vision, and c) establishing early wins. Not only was communication identified as the most important strategy used to prioritize entry plan needs, but it was also embedded in every entry plan leadership strategy identified in this study. Superintendents listed communication as a means to mitigate conflicts, develop a shared vision, and establish early wins. In addition, the seven steps to strategic planning enabled the study participants to continuously assess needs, set goals, and execute action steps for sustainability. They managed, monitored, evaluated, and reviewed well-defined action steps that aligned with the shared vision. Thus, the leadership strategies of mitigating conflicts, developing a shared vision, establishing early wins, as well as developing a long-term strategic plan were identified as critical leadership strategies common in the entry plans of all study participants.

Additional findings suggested that superintendents must account for competing interests between the community and the Board of Trustees. Failure to address these competing interests could result in shortened tenure and Board turnover. The participants explained that many novice superintendents do not account for this phenomenon upon entry, and fail to educate their Board members about the community climate. By communicating with the community and educating the Board about community perceptions, priorities are aligned and a shared vision is realized.

The superintendents believed that the entry plan leadership strategies that were identified in this study influenced their extended tenure. Furthermore, they perceived that the length of their tenure allowed for processes, procedures, and aligned strategic action plans to become systemic. This in turn was believed to affect the overall organizational stability of their districts during and beyond their tenure. The superintendents believed that continued use of these leadership strategies was necessary to maintain long-term organizational stability.

Superintendents who are entering a new district can use the strategies outlined in this study to develop an entry plan that not only leads to long-term tenure and organizational stability, but also builds a culture of collaboration and two-way communication. It helps create an aligned shared vision and provides all stakeholders with a deliberate goal focus. Finally, it allows the superintendent to build trust with all stakeholder groups, establish credibility early in the entry process, and poise the district for long-term success.

Consent for Participation in Research
Title: Superintendent Entry Plans: Do Leadership Strategies for Organizational Stability Matter?

Introduction

  The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part.

Purpose of the Study

  You have been asked to participate in a research study about your perception about the influence of superintendent entry plans on organizational stability. The purpose of this research study is to examine the association of superintendent entry plans on school district organizational stability. Your participation in the study will contribute to a better understanding of the influence of superintendent entry plans on school district organizational stability.

What will you to be asked to do?

   If you agree to participate:
- You will participate in 2 interviews about superintendent entry plans and their influence on superintendent longevity and district organizational stability.
- Each interview will take approximately 60 minutes of your time.
- You may be asked to provide artifacts such as superintendent entry plans, calendar appointments, and agendas.
- A total of eight Texas public school district superintendents will participate in the study.
- Your participation will be audio recorded.

What are the risks involved in this study?

  There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

  You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, your participation may help future district superintendents identify leadership strategies associated with increased job retention and organizational sustainability.

Do you have to participate?
　　No, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin (University) in anyway. If you would like to participate you will receive a copy of this form.

Will there be any compensation?
　　You will not receive any type of payment participating in this study.

How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected if you participate in this research study?
　　This study is confidential. You may choose not to answer any question for any reason. A code will replace your name on the audiotape, data, and the transcripts. Recordings will be kept for six-months and then erased. The identifiable information and the list linking you to the code will be destroyed upon completion of the study. No one else will have access to the data besides the researcher. Future published work will be in aggregate format.

　　If it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review the study records, information that can be linked to you will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order. The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate it with you, or with your participation in any study.

　　If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for six-months and then erased.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?
　　Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher, Annette Villerot at 512-608-5730 or send an email to annette.villerot@yahoo.com for any questions or if you feel that you have been harmed.

　　This study has been reviewed and approved by The University Institutional Review Board and the study number is **[STUDY NUMBER].**

Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?
　　For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Participation
　　If you agree to participate, please contact Annette Villerot at 512-608-5730.

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Please keep this form for your records. Documentation of written consent has been waived to protect your anonymity.

_____ I agree to be audio recorded.
_____ I do not want to be audio recorded.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits, and the risks involved in this research study.

_____
Print Name of Person obtaining consent

_____   _____
Signature of Person obtaining consent   Date

The University of Texas at Austin
Institutional Review Board – Revised July 2013

Appendix B

Annette M. Villerot
Doctoral Candidate
Cooperative Superintendency
Program
University of Texas at Austin

Superintendent Interview Questions
District Size: _____ (indicate number of students)

District Type:

___ Suburban
___ Urban
___ Rural

Interview 1

1. Please explain your past experience prior to becoming a superintendent.
2. How long have you been a superintendent?
3. How long have you been a superintendent in this school district?
4. What degrees to you hold?
5. What certifications do you hold?
6. Why did you choose this school district?
7. What are the demographics of the school district?
8. Have the demographics of the school district pose any challenges?
9. What is the district academic rating?
10. What was the district's academic rating prior to your arrival?
11. What is the district's FAST rating?
12. How did you conduct a needs assessment upon entry?
13. What were the priorities of the Board of Trustees upon entry?
14. What were the priorities of campus and district administrators upon entry?
15. What were the priorities of the community upon entry?
16. What were the priorities of the teachers upon entry?
17. Were any of these competing interests?
18. What was your main priority?
19. How did this align with your entry plan?
20. How did the entry plan align with the district's strategic plan?

Please provide any additional information you would like to share

Annette M. Villerot
Doctoral Candidate
Cooperative Superintendency
Program
University of Texas at Austin

Superintendent Interview Questions

District Size: _____ (indicate number of students)

District Type:
___ Suburban
___ Urban
___ Rural

Interview 2

1. What were your first steps upon entry?
2. What were the phases or stages of your superintendent entry plan?
3. What was the most important phase of your entry plan?
4. What were your short-term and long-term goals as superintendent?
5. What components of the entry plan led to short-term goals?
6. What components of an entry plan led to long-term organizational sustainability?
7. What are the three actions a superintendent must take within the first 90 days?
8. What components of your entry plan focused on academic achievement? Did it lead to increased academic achievement? How? Do you think this impacted the length of your tenure?
9. What do you think the school board members identify as successful entry into a school district? Did you account for this in your entry plan?
10. Do you think superintendent entry plan are associated with superintendent tenure longevity in a school district? Why?
11. Do you believe that superintendent longevity is associated with organizational sustainability? How?
12. Was there any component of your entry plan that you associate with your long-term tenure in the school district?
13. What leadership strategies did you employ to address organizational stability? Were these strategies in your entry plan?
14. How did you build relationships with stakeholders?
15. Did you follow your entry plan?
16. How did you deviate? Why?
17. Did your priorities change upon entry and when you actually implemented the plan?
18. How has your entry plan influenced organizational sustainability?
19. How do you think your entry plan with maintain organizational sustainability after you leave?
20. Is there anything in your entry plan you would have added given what you know now?
21. Did the entry plan evolve or change over time?
22. Did you add or delete leadership strategies from your entry plan? Why?
23. Did the leadership style of your predecessor influence your entry plan? How?
24. Did your entry plan address the 10 functions of the school district?
25. How? Why?

References

Alsbury, T. L. (2006). Vulnerability thesis of superintendents. In F. W. English (Ed.),

    Encyclopedia of educational leadership and administration (pp. 1059-1061).

    Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Alsbury, T. L. (2008). School board member and superintendent turnover and the

    influence on student achievement: An application of the dissatisfaction theory.

    Leadership and Policy in Schools, *7*(2), 202-229.

Binkley, N. (2007, August). Navigating your entry in a new community. *School

    Administrator*, *64*(7). Retrieved from

    http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=6556

Björk, L. G. (2001). Institutional barriers to educational reform: A superintendent's role

    in district decentralization. In C. C. Brunner & L. G. Björk (Eds.), *The new

    superintendency* (pp. 205-228). New York, NY: JAI.

Blaikie, N. (1993). *Approaches to social inquiry*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Blasé, J., & Anderson, G. (1995). *The micropolitics of educational leadership: From

    control to empowerment.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2008). *Reframing organizations* (4th ed.) Hoboken, NJ:

    Wiley & Sons.

Bradt, G. B., Check, J., & Pedraza, J. (2011). *The new leader's 100-day action plan.*

    Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.

Bruckman, J. C. (2008). Overcoming resistance to change: Casual factors, interventions,

    and critical values. *Psychologist-Manager Journal*, *11*(2), 211-219.

Burgoon, J. K., & Hale J. L. (1984). The fundamental topoi of relational communication.

    Communication Monographs, 51, 193-214.

Burroughs, W. A. (1974). *Cities and schools in the gilded age.* Port Washington, NY:

    Kennikat.

Byrd, J., Drews, C., & Johnson, J. (2006, August). Factors impacting superintendent turnover: Lessons from the field. *National Council of the Professors of Educational Administration*, *7*(2). Retrieved from http://cnx.org/content/m14507/latest/

Callahan, R. E. (1962). *Education and the cult of efficiency: A study of the social forces that have shaped the administration of public schools*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Callahan, R. E. (1966). *The superintendent of schools: A historical analysis*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED010410)

Chang, G.C. (2008). Strategic planning in education: Some concepts and methods. *Directions in Educational Planning: Symposium to Honour the Work of Françoise Caillods.* Retrieved from *http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Research_Challenges_and_Tr ends/pdf/symposium/ChangGwangChol.pdf*

Cohen A. R., & Bradford, D. L. (2005). *Influence without authority.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.

Connelly, V., & Rosenburg, M. S. (2003). *The development of teaching as a profession: Comparison with careers that achieve full professional standing*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cuban, L. (1976). *The urban school superintendent: A century and a half of change.* Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

Cubberly, E. P. (1924). *Public school administration*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Eaton, W. E. (1990). The vulnerability of school superintendents: The thesis reconsidered. In W. E. Eaton (Ed.), *Shaping the superintendency: A reexamination of Callahan and the cult of efficiency* (pp. 11-35). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Fast, R. (1992). The superintendent's challenge: Keeping the focus on education. *Education Canada, 32*, 4-20.

Freeley, M. E., & Seinfeld, L. (2012). Attaining and sustaining the superintendency: The perspectives of four successful retirees. *A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas*, *85*(3), 93-95.

Getzels, J. W. (1977). Educational administration twenty years later, 1954-1974. In L. Cunningham, W. Hack, & R. Nystrand (Eds.), *Educational administration: The developing decades* (pp. 3-24). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.

Grissom, J. A., & Anderson, S. (2012, October 10). Why superintendents turn over. *American Educational Research Journal*, *49*(6), 1146-1180.

Grunig, J. E. (1989). Symmetrical presuppositions as a framework for public relations theory. In C. H. Botan (Ed.), *Public relations theory* (pp. 17-44). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth-generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Howlett, P. (1993). The politics of school leaders, past and future. *Education Digest, 58*(9), 18-21.

Hoyle, R. J. (1989). Preparing the 21st century superintendent. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, *70*(5), 376-379.

Kellogg Foundation. (1961). *Toward improved school administration: A decade of professional effort to heighten administrative understanding and skills.* Battle Creek, MI: Author.

Kowalski, T. (2005). The evolution of the school superintendent as communicator. *Communication Education, 54*(2), 101-117.

Kowalski, T. (2006). *The school superintendent: Theory, practice, and case* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kowalski, T., McCord, R., Peterson, G., Young, I., & Ellerson, N. (2010). 10 Year study on the American school superintendent released. *AASA: The School Superintendents Association.* Retrieved from http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=17280

Kowalski, T., McCord, R., Peterson, G., Young, I., & Ellerson, N. (2010). *The American school superintendent: 2010 decennial study*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Lytle, J. H. (2009, May). The context of superintendent entry. *School Administrator*, *66*(5), 8-13.

Marland, S. P., Jr. (1970, July-August). The changing nature of the school superintendency. *Public Administration Review, 30*(4), 365-371.

Murphy, J. (1994). The changing role of the superintendency in restructuring districts in Kentucky. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 5*(4), 349-375.

Neely, R. O., Berude, W., & Wilson, J. (2002, October). The entry plan. *School Administrator*, *59*(9), 28-31.

Olivárez, R. (2010). *Cooperative superintendency program field experience guide.* Austin, TX: The University of Texas, Department of Educational Administration.

Olivárez, R. (2013, Summer). Preparing superintendents for executive leadership: Combining theory with real world applications. *Insight, 28*(2), 11-14.

Organizational Learning Strategies. (n.d.). *Strategic planning*. Retrieved from http://www.humtech.com/opm/grtl/ols/ols5.cfm

Osterman, K. F. (1994). Communication skills: A key to collaboration and change. *Journal of School Leadership, 4*(4), 382-398.

Pascopela, A. (2011, April). Superintendent staying power. *District Administration*, *47*(4), 31-40.

Sofo, R. (2008). Beyond NCLB and AYP: One superintendent's experience of school district reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, *78*(2), 391-409.

Spring, J. (1990). *The American school: 1642-1990* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Longman.

Tyack, D. (1972). The One Best System: A historical analysis. In H. Walberg & A. Kopan (Eds.), *Rethinking urban education* (pp. 231-236). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Tyack, D. (1976, Autumn). Pilgrim's progress: Toward a social history of the school superintendency, 1860-1960. *History of Education Quarterly*, *16*(3), 257-300.

Waters, T., & Marzano, R. (2007) Primacy of the superintendency. *The School Administrator, 64*, 10-16.

Watkins, M. (2003). *The first 90 days: Critical success strategies for new leaders at all levels*. [Kindle Edition]. Retrieved from https://www.read.amazon.com

Willis, J. W. (2007). *Foundations of qualitative research Interpretive and critical approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Yee, L., & Cuban, L. (1996, December). When is tenure long enough? A historical analysis of superintendent turnover and tenure in urban school districts. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 32*, 615-641.

Yukl, G. (2013). *Leadership in organizations* (8th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Vita

Annette Maria Tielle Villerot attended Old Forge High School, Old Forge, Pennsylvania. In 1988 she entered Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. In 1992, she earned a Bachelors of Science degree in Elementary Education with a minor in Early Childhood Education, and was named Bloomsburg University's "Student Teacher of the Year." After graduation she began her career as a third grade teacher at Delaware Valley School District in Milford, PA. In 1996, she received a Masters of Education Degree and a K-12 Reading Specialist Certification from East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania. In 2002, she became a district reading specialist for Delaware Valley School District, and remained in that position until 2005, when she relocated to Texas and became the reading specialist for Round Rock ISD's Stony Point Feeder Pattern. She was promoted to district Literacy Curriculum Specialist in 2006. While in Texas, she obtained her Texas State Principal Certification. In 2007, Annette became the director of professional development and special programs in Manor Independent School District and was then promoted to executive director of curriculum. In 2012, she began her doctoral work in Educational Administration at the University of Texas at Austin as a member of Cooperative Superintendency Program Cohort 23. In 2012, Annette was named assistant superintendent of curriculum and academics at Comal Independent School District, where she is currently employed.

Permanent Address: 2516 Charolais Court, Round Rock, TX 78681

This manuscript was typed by the author.