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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED BY SUCCESSFUL
CALIFORNIA SUPERINTENDENTS IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership Administration and Policy

by

Candi Clayton-Clark

May 2012

Robert Barner, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Candi Clayton-Clark

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Committee:

Robert Barner, Ph.D., Chairperson

June Schmieder-Ramirez, Ph.D

Eric Todd, Ed.D

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	vii
DEDICATION	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ix
VITA.....	xi
ABSTRACT.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Problem	1
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Purpose of the Study	7
Research Questions	7
Significance of the Study	8
Definition of Terms.....	9
Assumptions of the Study	11
Delimitations and Limitations of the Study	12
Summary	12
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	14
Introduction.....	14
Theoretical Framework	15
Impact of Leadership on School Systems	20
Educational Leadership.....	21
Educational leadership at work.....	21
Principal and Teacher Leadership.....	23
Role of the Superintendent.....	24
Impact of Superintendent Leadership on School Systems.....	25
Example of superintendent standards	27
Effective Superintendent Leadership	29
Challenges Faced by Superintendents	30
Resource allocation	31
Superintendent tenure	32
Superintendent turnover.....	33
Board relationships	35
Superintendents as change agents	37
Impact of Superintendent Leadership on Organizational Culture and Change	38
Case Studies	40
Examples of dysfunctional schools.....	40
Examples of successful reform	41

California schools are meeting AYP and API growth targets	45
Recent exits of program improvement.....	45
Summary	46
CHAPTER 3: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	47
Research Design.....	47
Rationale for the Methodology	48
Philosophical foundation	49
Population	50
Sample.....	50
Data Collection	51
Reciprocity	52
Participants.....	52
Instrumentation	54
Interview protocol.....	55
Data Analysis	60
Summary	61
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA.....	62
Introduction.....	62
Participants.....	64
Superintendent 1	65
Superintendent 2	66
Superintendent 3	66
Superintendent 4	66
Superintendent 5	67
Ensuring Trustworthiness	67
Qualitative Analysis	68
Analysis of Data.....	70
Presentation of Data.....	70
Governance	71
Culture.....	72
A new beginning - reset, re-bench regroup and roar	74
From adult focused to student focused	74
Service oriented	76
Professional learning communities	76
Adult belief system	77
Systems	79
Capacity building	79
Principal, administrator and teacher support	81
Curriculum and instruction	82
System-wide approach to goal setting	83
Resources to goals alignment.....	85
Collaboration and information sharing	86

Accountability.....	87
Focus on outcomes.....	88
No excuses for student failure.....	89
How will this action impact kids	89
Expectations based on district goals and student data	90
Relationships.....	91
Summary.....	92
 CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	94
Introduction.....	94
Major Findings.....	94
Culture.....	96
Systems	97
Accountability.....	98
Relationships.....	99
Theoretical framework.....	100
Governance	102
Political environment.....	103
Conclusion	103
Recommendations for Future Research	104
Summary.....	105
 REFERENCES	107
 APPENDIX A: BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT RESPONSIBILITIES.....	120
 APPENDIX B: FCMAT INDICATORS OF FISCAL DISTRESS.....	121
 APPENDIX C: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION	122
 APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION	123
 APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	125
 APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT REVIEW LETTER.....	126

LIST OF TABLES

3.1. Superintendent's Ability to have an Impact on Student Academic Achievement.....	54
3.2. Relationship between Research and Interview Questions	56
4.1. Superintendent and District Data	64
4.2. Superintendent Leadership Style	92

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my incredible grandmother, Geneva Clayton, and great-grandmother, Trudie Hawkins.

Mama, thank you for conveying your knowledge and wisdom to me. I think you were right; I am, in fact, a “chip off the old block.”

Mama Trudie, thank you for having the courage and wisdom to ensure that the generations that followed you had more opportunities than we could imagine.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although my name alone appears on this document, the journey has not been a solitary one; it has been filled with family, friends, colleagues, and professors. First and foremost, I want to acknowledge my ancestors. Through the oral stories of my family, I have grown to understand that I descend from a long line of courageous and resilient African Americans. A special acknowledgment is given to my grandmother's generation, who built a strong family foundation rooted in high expectations and excellence in education. Her generation defied the odds of a segregated U.S. society by demanding nothing but excellence from themselves and from family members. My grandmother held firm to the motto, "If I believe it, I can achieve it" and proved many wrong. She exemplified how the human spirit can triumph over any obstacle.

My grandmother taught us to never hate any member of the human race but rather to strive to educate those who do not understand our people and make them aware that education is the only way out of poverty. I would not be the woman that I am today had it not been for the personal, educational, and professional bar that my family set. Over the years, I have often wondered whether I could live up to the standards set by this generation. Only on this day can I honestly say that this doctoral degree is an achievement of which they would be proud. Although they are all in heaven, I know that they are smiling down on me.

Alexander, Ashanti, Amaya, and Eddie, III, you are the greatest joy that I have. I know that our journey has not been an easy one. I recognize that I have been a student since the four of you were born. Thank you for putting up with me while on my educational and professional adventures. I also want to thank my mother, Eunice Bell, for being there to support me as I progressed on this journey. Only with your support

was I able to make this goal a reality. You can officially brag to the “Lady Bugs” that your daughter is finally a doctor!

Words cannot express the love and gratitude that I have for my husband, Eddie Clark, Jr. You have been my biggest fan and supporter from the very beginning. Only a real man’s very first gift to a lady would be a textbook! I realize that you have made many sacrifices on this journey. Thank you for loving and supporting me.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the individuals who have worked to help me produce this final document. My life has been enriched by having so many caring and dedicated individuals around me.

VITA

Personal Profile

- Senior Executive with 10+ years of leadership experience in government/education administration
- Effectively manage community college and district revenue apportionments in excess of \$ 2 billion dollars annually
- Develop and manage agency budgets in excess of \$120 million annually
- Extensive experience in planning and directing the business and administrative services division
- Effective leader with a transformational leadership style and a reputation for system reform and capacity building
- Results oriented achiever with a track record for ensuring transparency, responsiveness, inclusiveness, sustainability and fiscal accountability
- Sees the big picture across agency divisions with the ability to understand impacts/constraints on result achievement

Experience and Strengths

- Responsible for fiscal oversight and support to over 24 community colleges and school districts
- Effectively manage departments including: Finance and Business Services, Accounting, Grants, Maintenance, Information Technology, Facilities, Attendance Accounting, Risk Management, Transportation, Food Service, Warehouse and Contracts
- Prepare annual budgets and monthly, quarterly, and annual reports; summarize and forecast business activities and financial positions in the area of income, expenditures and earnings based on past, present and future operations
- Solid planning and organizational skills in coordinating all aspects of projects from inception to completion
- Strong team builder and facilitator; fosters an atmosphere that encourages highly talented professionals to balance high-level skills with production
- Effectively communicate financial information to non-financial agency stakeholders
- Oversee district-wide multi-million dollar new construction and modernization projects

Achievements

- Successfully restructured a school district's operations to balance the budget and save over \$2.5M in ongoing costs
- Developed and implemented a benefits plan that saved a government entity over \$5.3M in ongoing costs
- Implemented a 5 Year Facilities Master Plan that built and modernized outdated school sites
- Established and facilitated a general obligation bond oversight committee
- Restructured a general obligation bond payment structure to save citizens over \$2.6 M
- Restructured a government division that yielded a net financial savings to the agency green technology, increased productivity and accountability

- Implemented a county-wide professional development program for county school district chief financial staff
- Provided hands on technical support and advice to a school district that saved a district over \$1.5M and moved the district from a qualified to positive budget financial status

Career History

- 1/2010-Present - Monterey County Office of Education - Executive Director, Finance & Business Services
- 11/2007-1/2010 - McFarland Unified School District - Chief Business Official
- 1/2007-11/2007 - Manteca Unified School District - Fiscal Budget Supervisor
- 11/2005-1/2007 - Contract Employee - Financial Analyst
- 8/2003-11/2005 - University of the Pacific - Business Manager
- 1/2001-4/2003 - University of Mississippi - Senior Accountant
- 8/1997-8/2000 – Mississippi State Community & Junior College Board – Accountability & Support
- 8/1994-7/1997 – Superior Cleaning – Business Manager

Professional Committees

Monterey County Workers Compensation JPA	<i>Board of Directors</i>
Monterey County Property/Loss JPA	<i>Board of Directors</i>
CA County Office of Education Area IV, V & VI District Advisory Committee	<i>Monterey County Representative</i>
Monterey County School Insurance Group	<i>Monterey County Alternate</i>
California Association of School Business Officials	<i>Past Board of Directors-Central Region</i>
Monterey Fiscal Director’s Group	<i>Chairman</i>
<i>Monterey Health Insurance Committee</i>	<i>Chairman</i>

Education and Qualifications

• Ed.D (5/12)	Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA	2012
•		
• MBA Accounting	University of Phoenix, Phoenix, AZ	2006
•		
• BBA Business Administration	Belhaven College, Jackson, MS	2001
•		
• CBO Chief Business Official	CASBO	2008

ABSTRACT

Throughout U.S. history, numerous policies have shaped our government and the lives of individuals, both nationally and internationally. For three decades, there has been much debate over academic achievement in U.S. public primary and secondary schools as well as in colleges and universities. Demand for funding has been placed on the federal government as “cash-strapped” states continue to reduce financial apportionments to school districts, community colleges, and other institutions of higher learning. However, with more funding came more accountability. The *2001 No Child Left Behind Act* reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* to include accountability measures, identification of schools that fail to narrow the racial achievement gap, and testing in each state of all students in grades 3-8.

Reform efforts have been underway in American public schools for over 50 years (Lunenburg, 2011). Now with *No Child Left Behind* at the forefront of school accountability, superintendents are being pushed to hold teachers accountable for student academic achievement. Although superintendents are important to a school’s performance, there is limited research on how their leadership affects student academic achievement. Considering the magnitude of school reform, the research that is available suggests that superintendents, indirectly and directly, affect instructional quality and student outcomes. In cases of high-performing districts, Lunenburg’s research noted that superintendents have been found to have a comprehensive understanding of organizational purpose, a greater willingness to keep decisions tightly controlled, and the ability to shift human and financial resources into alignment with a school district’s mission, vision, and goals (Lunenburg, 2011). Research also has shown that components of superintendent leadership requires the use of non-instructional strategies such as

networks of policies, procedures, programs, tasks, and traditions to affect student academic achievement. As this research will focus on superintendent leadership and its impact on student academic achievement, we will explore what determines good superintendent leadership, in terms of knowledge and understanding. Although this area of research has been expanding, it still merits further research.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of superintendents as a means to document resource allocation methods, leadership challenges, and leadership styles that have a positive impact on student academic achievement. This study searched to understand effective superintendent leadership as it relates to exceptional school practices.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the role that the United States federal government has played in public education, federal funding for public education, and reform efforts. The chapter begins with the background of the problem, followed by the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the significance of the study. It also includes the definition of terms, assumptions of the study, and the delimitations and limitations. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Background of the Problem

The federal government became involved in public education as early as 1777, when there was a growing concern about the United States Military and its members. During this time, there was growing concern that the members of the U.S. Army lacked competency in math and military procedure. To respond to the federal government's belief that the country's security required a company of highly trained and skilled military professionals, national leaders joined forces to establish the first U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1802 (Simon, 1963).

Throughout U.S. history, educational policies have been created to influence the lives of individuals, from the 1785 Congressional Ordinance that set aside land for the endowment of schools to the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling that overturned the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson separate but equal* ruling. The historic 1983 report, *A Nation At Risk*, revived a great debate over the future of public schools in the U.S. The report noted that the nation's public school systems were producing functionally illiterate 17-year-olds at a rate of 13% as well as causing an overall drop in SAT scores and a need

for more student college remediation courses (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2008).

Twenty-five years after *A Nation at Risk* was released, the USDE (2008) published *A Nation Accountable: 25 Years After A Nation at Risk*. According to this report, “Of 20 children born in 1983, six did not graduate from high school on time in 2001; of the 14 who did, 10 started college that fall, but only five earned a bachelor’s degree by spring 2007” (USDE, 2008, p. 1). As of 2011, the quality of public education in U.S. public primary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities is still seen as a matter of urgency (USDE, 2008). Greater demand for funding has been placed on the federal government as states continue to reduce financial apportionments to school districts, community colleges, and other institutions of higher learning (USDE, 2008).

Since the publication of *A Nation Accountable: 25 Years After A Nation At Risk*, the education community and state and federal governments have been working hard to develop content standards and assessments that will demonstrate the knowledge base of U.S. school children as set forth in federal aid contingences of the 1980s and 1990s (USDE, 2008).

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the largest elementary and secondary funding mechanism into law, the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA), also known as Title I, in 1965, providing funding to support programs for economically disadvantaged youth. Over the years, the funding has had several reauthorizations and overhauls, most notably in 1994 and 2001. The 1994 reauthorization required states to establish content-standards and tests for academic performance, evaluations, and accountability.

Reauthorized by Congress again, in 2001, ESEA was modified and became known as the *No Child Left Behind Education Act* (NCLB). ESEA has moved their focus from supplemental support for poor and disadvantaged students to educational reform for all publically educated students (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2003). Not only does NCLB redefine the federal government's role in K-12 education, but it also seeks to close the achievement gap. Involving 45 different programs totaling over \$19 billion in 2003-2004, the law requires that schools involve parents in improving student academic achievement by sending them information regarding their child's level of achievement, along with an annual school performance report. This law includes a means for identifying local educational agencies that are unsuccessful in reducing the achievement gap. The law also requires every state to assess all students in grades 3-8 on a yearly basis.

Schools in all 50 states must improve student academic achievement in four areas: Helping students meet challenging academic standards in reading, math, science and testing students in those areas; making Adequate Yearly Progress by annually demonstrating that all students are meeting state goals for reading and math; collecting and reporting student achievement data; and ensuring that all teachers are highly qualified. (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2003, p. 1)

ESEA continues to evolve from a financial resource to a nationalized program with specific educational performance objectives. Since 2008, ESEA has been up for reauthorization under the Obama Administration. Sweeping changes are planned for the law that will modify some of the requirements of NCLB, with the hope of creating a program that supports local educational agencies across the country who will be more

focused and who will identify specific accountability measures (Brookings Institute, 2011). According to Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, with the reauthorization of NCLB, part of the plan is to preserve the important contribution of data breakdown in identifying low-performing students. More specifically, Duncan wants the program to have clear goals and high standards, yet be flexible (Rotella, 2010). Additionally, the plan to reauthorize NCLB is to look at a broader range of milestones to include such items as graduation rates (Rotella, 2010).

With the implementation of NCLB, school district leaders are now being pushed by federal requirements to have a greater focus on low-performing students and strategies to improve academic access (USDE, 2008). The core focus of a district is often articulated in the mission statement, which establishes the direction for the superintendent in fulfilling the mission of his schools. However, the *A Nation Accountable* Commission expressed a concern that America is not producing leaders who are equipped to lead American school systems (USDE, 2008). The Commission also articulated that resources must be invested to develop the next generation of superintendents and principals (USDE, 2008). However, at the time of the publication of the report, the American economy began to experience a slowdown.

In 2007, the U.S. began to experience one of the worst economic recessions since the Great Depression (Willis, 2009). Since that time, states have struggled with declines in revenue, slow or no economic growth, and a collapsed housing market. As a consequence, school districts, community colleges, and other institutions of higher learning have experienced reductions in revenue from state and local sources. In an effort to respond to the recession, the federal government, through the American Recovery and

Reinvestment Act of 2008 (ARRA), infused \$840 billion into the United States economy (“Track the Money,” 2011), and over \$6 billion of this funding was allocated to public schools in California to offset reductions in revenue due to economic shortfalls (Legislative Analyst Office [LAO], 2010a). California public schools also have had spending restrictions relaxed on over 40 categorical programs. The intent of consolidating over \$4.5 billion (LAO, 2010b) in state funding was to reduce layers of reporting requirements and give more flexibility to districts as to how to use funding to meet district needs (School Services of California, 2008). Now that both categorical flexibility and ARRA funding expire in September 2011 and June 2014, (LAO, 2010b) respectively, California’s educational system will need to identify strategies to cope with increased demands on accountability and student academic achievement with fewer resources.

Statement of the Problem

Since 2002-2003, English Language Arts and Math Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) consistently have increased across California; however, even after spending over \$51.6 billion on K-12 education in 2008-2009, the state did not meet its AYP growth targets (LAO, 2008). The 2010-2011 AYP report showed that, of the 3,890 California schools in program improvement, 86 exited during the year (California Department of Education (CDE), 2011a), and 37% are in year 5 of program improvement (CDE, 2011a). Overall, California schools are improving and moving toward reaching the NCLB proficiency requirements. The pressure from NCLB continues to increase on Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to provide academic accountability and improve student academic achievement, even though LEA fund balances and available reserves continue

to decline. In a time of fiscal constraint, however, fiscal accountability and effective allocation of resources is important.

A report regarding academic achievement (Togneri & Anderson, 2003) states that some schools are doing better at improving student academic achievement than others who were in the same low academic performing classification. At the same time, some publications show that resource allocation is linked to student academic achievement (Odden & Archibald, 2001; Odden & Picus, 2008). In one report of an examination of 104 Colorado school districts, a study found that student academic achievement is affected not only by hiring qualified front line staff, but also by effectively allocating resources (Bidwell & Kasarda, as cited in Mitchell, 2011). Professional development, administrator mentoring, and standards-based curricula are other ideas discussed (Cuban, 1984) to facilitate raising student academic achievement.

As the instructional leader, it is the superintendent's responsibility, in conjunction with the school board, to ensure the academic achievement of students within a school district. Even though Cuban (1984) states that a small amount of attention is being placed on superintendent leadership's connection to student academic achievement, several other studies maintain that this connection has been scarcely researched (Mitchell, 2011). Although these researchers reviewed the superintendent's leadership impact on student academic achievement from different angles, ranging from organizational and structural distinctions to tenure and achievement and district overall performance, they all noted that this is an area that can be researched further. For instance, according to Bridges:

The superintendent stands at the apex of the organizational pyramid in education and manages a multi-million dollar enterprise charged with the moral and technical socialization of youth, aged 6-18. Despite the importance of this administrative role to education and society, less than a handful of studies analyzed in this review investigate the impact of the chief executive officer. (Bridges, as cited in Mitchell, 2011, p. 35)

As the superintendent is the district instructional leader, and we have little research to show how someone in this position can have an impact on student academic achievement, it is clear that more comprehensive and detailed information is needed to understand how the quality and characteristics of the superintendent directly and indirectly effect student academic achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to document resource allocation methods, leadership challenges, and leadership styles that have a positive impact on low-performing schools through the lived experiences of superintendents. This study attempted to find documented cases of effective superintendent leadership and exceptional school practices. The goal of this investigation was to gain additional knowledge about the non-instructional implications for student academic achievement in American public schools.

Research Questions

1. What, if any, are the demonstrated leadership practices among superintendents that positively affect student academic achievement in schools designated by the No Child Left Behind Act as Program Improvement?

- a. What themes emerge regarding the decision making process of academic strategies implemented at the district level delivered from the superintendent to administrators?
- b. What are the common experiences surrounding how each resource, financial and human capital, is aligned to district priorities, goals, and objectives?
- c. What themes emerge regarding the role superintendent leadership plays in student academic achievement?

Significance of the Study

The characteristics that determine good leadership are expanding in terms of knowledge and understanding. However, the quality that is provided or not provided by school superintendents needs to be researched further (Education Writers Association [EWA], 2003).

As *No Child Left Behind* has emerged at the forefront of school accountability, superintendents are being driven to hold teachers accountable for student academic achievement. Regarding the demands associated with high-stakes accountability, there is limited research on practice and organizational design in high-performance school districts (Lunenburg, 2011).

By analyzing how financial resources are being utilized, this study may assist educational leaders in determining whether their resources are aligned with what the district believes are the priorities, as laid out in the mission statement, and what steps are necessary to change the organizational culture regarding funding allocation in low-performing schools.

The perceptions and leadership style of the superintendent are pivotal to the allocation of resources. Because the superintendent represents the instructional leadership of a school district, his/her leadership style has a direct impact on the manner in which resources are allocated, as the superintendent may choose to delegate this responsibility to others, such as an assistant or associate superintendent, take a leadership team approach, or personally decide how to allocate resources. Each strategy can yield a different result because a successful implementation is based on the ability of the individual with the authority to make decisions. Further, the effectiveness of the resource alignment process and the ultimate academic achievement of the student also are only as good as the knowledge and ability of the decision maker.

Definition of Terms

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). The ARRA is legislative action that allocated funds to states with the intent to save jobs, upgrade infrastructure, and stabilize the economy.

Academic Performance Index (API). According to the CDE, “The API is a single number, ranging from a low of 200 to a high of 1000, which reflects a school’s, an LEA’s, or a subgroup’s performance level, based on the results of statewide testing. Its purpose is to measure the academic performance and growth of schools” (CDE, 2011a, p. 4).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is related to specific goals set forth by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The goal for each state is to have all students proficient in English and math by 2014 (CDE, 2011b).

Board Superintendent Relationship. For the purpose of this study, board superintendent relationship will refer to the manner in which the superintendent and the school board interact and deal with district-related issues.

Human Capital. Human Capital is defined as “the collective sum of attributes, life experience, knowledge, inventiveness, energy, and enthusiasm that its people choose to invest in their work (Weatherly, 2003).

Indicators of Fiscal Distress. The Financial Crisis Management and Assistance Team, which is an extension of the California Legislature, developed key identifiers that signal that a school may be at the point of a fiscal crisis that could lead to insolvency. At the point of insolvency, the State of California may intervene and take control of the entire district.

Local Educational Agencies (LEAs). For the purpose of this study, LEAs will refer to California public school districts, including charter schools.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The NCLB is a federal reform act designed to refine the role of the federal government in K-12 education. It is an overhaul of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The goal of NCLB is to close the achievement gap between minority and disadvantaged students (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2003).

Program Improvement. This determination is made using two years work of data for a local educational agency that receives Title I funds. If a local educational agency fails to meet performance indicators for two consecutive years, the local educational agency (LEA) is deemed to be a program improvement LEA (CDE, 2011).

Resource Allocation. To realize district goals, the superintendent and school board must allocate human capital, money, materials and supplies, and time to different areas of the district operations. For the purpose of this study, resource allocation is performed at the district and school sites (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

Student Academic Achievement. For the purpose of this study, student academic achievement will refer to a student's demonstration to meet or exceed the AYP as identified in the NCLB, which is to have all students proficient in English and math by 2014 (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2003).

Assumptions of the Study

For the purpose of this phenomenological study, it was assumed that the superintendent is the primary decision maker for the district and, therefore, has the authority to make key decisions that affect the district as a whole. Some school districts have curriculum and instruction departments that are headed by an assistant superintendent who has the ability to make academic decisions independently. Information can be obtained from the superintendent as an information item after decisions are made. For the purpose of this study, the assumption was made that the superintendent is aware of decisions prior to their implementation. It was also assumed that surveys and interviews are valid forms of data collection and that participants are honest in their responses to questions posed in surveys and interviews. Dishonesty in the survey would skew the results of the findings on the part of the superintendents who participate in this research.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This study was delimited to the individuals who have agreed to voluntarily participate. The data collected was affected by the information that the districts shared. Therefore, all pertinent information may not be presented.

This study was delimited to the geographic location of California. Because this study pertained to decisions based on California standards, information gathered here might not be compatible with practices in school districts outside the state.

This study was delimited to the five district superintendents who were interviewed. Within those districts, five superintendents will participate. The districts were not chosen randomly; therefore, the data collected cannot be considered a generalization to be applied in other school districts or states.

The study was limited to the perceptions of the participants at one point in time. The study was limited to opinions expressed in the interviews, and it was not assumed that the opinions expressed are of equal value.

The validity of this study was limited to the trustworthiness of the instruments used to collect data and the level of honesty of the participant. The interview information was based on the personal reflections and memories of the participants.

Summary

The intent of this phenomenological study was to examine the relationship between the superintendent of a school district and student academic achievement. It is important to note that this study focused only on California superintendents and school districts. With the superintendent at the helm of the state's public school districts, and limited research on this position's impact on student academic achievement, further

research is necessary to understand the relationship between the superintendent and student academic achievement.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Chapter 2 reviews the literature regarding the role of the superintendent and factors that may impact his or her leadership ability. The chapter begins with an introduction, followed by the theoretical framework. It includes discussions on the impact of leadership on school systems, the role of the superintendent, and the challenges that superintendents face. The chapter continues with the superintendents' impact on the organizational culture and presents case studies regarding dysfunctional school systems as well as successful reform examples. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Introduction

In an era of increased concern over student performance, accountability is a priority for school leaders who are being driven to increase teacher accountability that effects student academic achievement. There is a widely accepted belief that educational leaders have an ability, either directly or indirectly, to influence instructional quality and student academic achievement. Literature reviews provide cases of effective leadership and exceptional school practices that are allowing schools and/or districts to thrive nationally (Leithwood, 2005; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Taskforce on Developing Research in Education Leadership, 2003; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Waters & Marzano, 2006; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). According to the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA, 2011), strong leadership is a vital component to academic achievement in highly effective schools. Similarly, "School leadership is a key factor in recruitment and retention of quality teachers; teaching quality, in turn, profoundly influences improvements in student learning and achievement" (Center for

the Future of Teaching and Learning, 2009, p. 1). Effective leadership also provides efficient and quality services and goods; a sense of vision and direction that is aligned with the environment; and a tool for invigorating organizational culture while stimulating creativity within the organization (Van Wart, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

Leadership theories have changed since the pre-1900s. In the early 1900s, it was believed that leaders were born, not made, as indicated by the Great Man Theory (Van Wart, 2002). From the 1940s through the 1970s, theories progressed to reflect the importance of natural or individual traits and then to behaviors of individuals (Van Wart, 2002). From the late 1970s to the present day, three theories of leadership have emerged: transformational, servant, and multifaceted (Van Wart, 2002).

Transformational leadership focuses on leaders who create change in structures, processes, and cultures; servant theory asserts that leaders have ethical duties to followers; and multifaceted theory focuses on integrating major theories such as transformational and transactional (Van Wart, 2002). According to Burns (1978), transactional leaders perform tasks and use a reward/punishment system to deal with performance. This is in contrast to transformational leaders, who use motivation for efficient and effective performance (Burns, 1978).

Transformational leaders must be able to provide: “(1) charisma or idealized influence, (2) inspirational motivation, (3) intellectual stimulation, and (4) individualized consideration or individualized attention” (Stewart, 2006, p. 5). This type of leader also emboldens high achievement collective standards with a sense of resolve and a common mission and vision (Pedraja-Rejas, Rodriguez-Ponce, Delado-Almonte, & Rodriguez-

Ponce, 2006). Similar to transformational leaders, transactional leaders motivate staff to accomplish assigned tasks through the use of specified benefits (Bass, 1985). This leadership style depends on negotiations between both leaders and staff. Transactional leadership plays a significant role in shaping organizations by allowing the leader to transform others by increasing task importance and value; focusing on organizational goals instead of self interest, and initiating higher-order needs (Burns, 1978). According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders have the ability to communicate a sense of purpose and focus on long-term visions. For the purposes of this research, transformational leadership will be used to gauge superintendent leadership.

Some studies show that the decision-making process and the effectiveness of an organization can be influenced by diversity, leadership style, and top management team size (Carpenter & Fredrickson, 2001; Pelled & Xin, 1999; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; Simonds, Pelled, & Smith, 1999). Beginning in the 1980s, leadership research centered around leader characteristics and their impact on the organization (Bass, 1985; Kanguno, 1990; Tichy & Devanna, 1990). Understanding the differences in leadership styles is important because the different leadership styles influence staff, and leadership behaviors can yield reward mechanisms that influence individual behavior within the organization (Shamir et al., 1993).

Ogbonna and Harris (2000) found that organizational leadership influences performance style, which, in turn, influences an organizational culture. Because Burns (1978) introduced the terms transformational and transactional leadership, it is important to note that his research does not show opposition to either, rather a belief that the best leaders have transformational and transactional characteristics. According to Burns, “For

leaders to have the greatest impact on the 'led,' they must motivate followers to action by appealing to shared values and by satisfying the higher order of needs of the led, such as their aspirations and expectations" (as cited in Homrig, 2001, p. 1). Although the two styles are complementary, transformational leadership is ineffective in total absence of a transactional leadership relationship between leaders and staff (Liu, 2007).

There are theoretical and practical implications for how transformational leadership influences creativity (Jung, 2001). Jung's research demonstrates that different leadership styles influence both group and individual performance, including creative thinking and behavior. The implications of this study may give guidance to managers who wish to increase staff creative behavior. According to Amable (as cited in Jung, 2001), "Creativity can be enhanced through different ways, such as changing organizational cultures where employees are encouraged to freely discuss and exchange ideas" (p. 193). The assumption is that, if managers are trained to employ behaviors such as transformational leadership, staff may be assisted in becoming more motivated to put forth additional effort to attempt new and creative problem-solving approaches (Jung, 2001).

Page and Miller (2002) summarized modern leadership composition and its applicability to the Marine Corps (the Corps). Recently evolved leadership models are related to strategic vision and transformation, also known as "leader and follower schools of thought" (Greenberg, as cited in Page & Miller, 2002, p. 1). Page and Miller focused on the concept that, when leaders help subordinates progress towards goals, subordinates respond positively. Page and Miller concluded that being achievement oriented, along

with setting goals, building relationships, and sharing decision making, is key to being a good leader.

As a leader matures and adds to his or her life experiences, his or her ability to lead is enhanced and improves over time (Page & Miller, 2002). As a leader's development increases and moves to higher development levels, the ability to handle more complex issues also increases (Page & Miller, 2002). In the Corps, this approach transforms subordinates into leaders and lifts the organization to greater achievement (Page & Miller, 2002). Further, the ability to lead and follow is in every Marine (Page & Miller, 2002). Although Page and Miller's study focuses on the Corps, transformational leadership strategy can correlate to educational leadership.

The idea of transformational leadership involves the mutual connection that links leaders and subordinates (Page & Miller, 2002). Ibarra, Santamaria, Lindsey, and Daly (2010) found that transformational leadership is connected to increased organizational outcomes and creates "conditions for individuals to confront existing values and norms, compared to transactional leadership that manages the current belief and values system while applying fixes to problems bound by existing paradigms" (p. 32).

Page and Miller's (2002) findings are also in alignment with Fullan's (2005). Fullan stated that, when leaders pursue in-depth change, building a coalition of leaders is essential, and leaders improve their conceptualization through feedback, reflection, and refinement (Fullan, 2005). Page and Miller's findings are also similar to Leithwood and Riehl's (2005) study regarding leadership in schools, specifically, that superintendent, principal, and teacher leadership team-based structures can prevail over hierarchical

structures, allowing for more attention to the types of leadership that can be distributed across many school roles and functions.

Collins (2001) stated that leaders should first assemble the right people in the right positions, and together the leader and the team can decide the organization's direction. Collins stresses that vision creation occurs only after the team is organized. Collins took the idea to another level as he urged leaders to remove individuals who do not benefit the organization and replace them with the right people in the right positions. An effective leader has the ability to create the necessary team momentum to move an organization into the right direction (Collins, 2001). Fullan (2005) noted that school site level distributive leadership requires multiple leadership with teams of individuals who establish and follow coherent and clear strategies.

Goleman (1998) identified emotional intelligence (EI) components as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, and researched EI effective performance connections, primarily in leaders in terms of how EI manifests on the job. Goleman sought to determine whether an individual has high EI and, if so, how to recognize it. Goleman found that EI was twice as important as other leadership characteristics for jobs at all levels. His research also demonstrated that EI could be developed when people take the right approach to training programs. Goleman (1998) pointed out that finding the right approach to EI is important because leadership requires effective relationship management and that, although technical ability is necessary for a leader, EI completes the equation regarding effective leadership and performance.

Impact of Leadership on School Systems

During the last 20 years of K-12 educational change, experts have acknowledged the school system's significance (district and state) of moving educational reform agendas forward. Systemic change or whole-system reform may not have been in the forefront of reform agendas due to the attention focused on teacher quality as well as on soaring standards; but it was always on the minds of education researchers and policy setters (EWA, 2003). Fullan stressed that schools are effective when "connection, coherence, and collective-capacity building characterize the entire system—classroom, district, and state" (2005, p. 12). This effectiveness is expressed in Fullan's seven big ideas for whole-system reform:

All children (95%), except the severely disabled students, can learn to a high level of critical reasoning and problem solving; select a few core priorities; resolute leadership/stay on message or target with focus even during hard times; collective capacity-collaboration that is disciplined; strategies with precision; intelligent accountability where policies and procedures increase individual and collective capacity; and all means all—whole-system reform cannot be pieced together. (Fullan, 2005, p. 4)

Over the past decade, when whole-system reform has been taken seriously, significant student academic achievement has resulted (Fullan, 2005). Fullan reviewed three cases of large-scale reform and noted that, in all cases, district/school leadership was identified as being vital to successful reform (Snipes, Doolittle, & Herlihy, as cited in Fullan, 2005; Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Educational Leadership

The evidence regarding the administrator's instructional leadership shows that the administrator's ability to influence instruction is relatively small when he or she is consistently engaged in direct instructional leadership activities (E

Imore, 2000). Research supports those strong leaders who can lead effective schools through collaboration and teamwork, effective learning and teaching cultures, and empowerment of teachers, while including them as part of the decision-making process (ACSA, 2011).

Effective leaders serve as change agents, inspire unified action, and move all stakeholders in the direction of high student achievement (University of Oregon, 2009). Additionally, there is a movement away from individual leadership to a distributive leadership model that spans a variety of pertinent leadership team structures at the local, regional, and state levels (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2009). Leadership is not the work of one individual, but rather the collective capacity of multiple individuals who work toward the same goal of student academic achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Effective leaders have the ability to create shared efficacy for student success through the alignment of common goals. This, in turn, links all levels of the school system together. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) researched school leadership and found that leadership, second to curriculum quality and teacher instruction, has a significant impact on student learning.

Educational leadership at work. The findings are clear that the teacher makes a difference in student academic achievement (Bridges, 1982). However, literature in terms of other educational positions is not as settled, as the validity of the relationship

between educational leadership and student academic achievement has come into question (Bridges, 1982). Bridges further stated that, of the 322 documents he reviewed, the majority focused on aspects of administration rather than on student learning.

Another student achievement study found that principals indirectly affect student achievement through their actions regarding the school climate (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996). An additional study, from 1986 to 1996, searched for a direct link to student academic achievement but found no evidence of a connection between educational leadership and student academic achievement (Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003).

The Taskforce on Developing Research in Education Leadership (Taskforce, 2003) presented findings on the American public school system and leadership at work within the system. In a synthesis of the leadership report, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) stated that, through galvanizing efforts around purposeful goals and creating an atmosphere that helps students succeed and support teachers, school leaders can influence learning.

Additionally, the Wallace Foundation (2011) found that leadership is often overlooked in failing schools. For the first time, strong evidence supports that educational leadership can influence student academic achievement (Wallace Foundation, 2011). The Wallace Foundation also noted that there are virtually no known cases in which distressed schools improve exclusive of the involvement of a strong leader, and that the most deprived schools benefit the most from the impact of good leadership.

Described as a function as opposed to a role, leadership is expected of an individual who fills a formal authoritarian position, encompassing core functions that

may be performed by numerous people within a school environment (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). As one who can hold various school positions, a school leader not only provides direction but also exercises influence with the intent to reach school goals (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005).

The Taskforce (2003) found that school leaders can motivate other people to achieve targeted meaningful goals and concluded that, as a person's actions generally are based upon his or her understanding of a situation, educational leaders assist in the creation of a common meaning and understanding that can support a school's vision. Effective educational leaders (a) influence human resource development; (b) set goal- and value-centered examples for staff and others to follow; and (c) consider internal and external processes and relationships when aspects of the school organization require attention (Taskforce, 2003).

Principal and Teacher Leadership

The formal leadership of school principals and teachers is the focus of much research. Lunenburg (2011) noted that school leaders must take part in commencing change and in managing change resistance. An enormous amount of attention is focused on classroom reform. The rationale is that committed, highly skilled teachers can increase student academic achievement, even in a chaotic environment; however, teachers work under the direction of a principal who provides a combination of support and autonomy (EWA, 2003). The Taskforce found that "Principals exert leadership through constellations of actions that coalesce around different 'models' of leadership, including transformational, instructional, moral, or participative leadership" (as cited in Leithwood & Riehl, 2005, p. 5).

A growing body of research (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) looks at teacher's leadership practices as either formal or informal in positions such as department chair, coordinator, or master teacher. As team-based approaches emerge and prevail over hierarchical school structures, particularly in site-based management, more attention is being focused on leadership types that can be dispersed across multiple school roles and functions (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). To provide sustainable leadership, critical masses of leaders are needed at all system levels (Fullan, 2005). However, transformation efforts that depend solely on the work of individual teachers and principals are simply not enough to bring about necessary reform (EWA, 2003).

Role of the Superintendent

Historically, the superintendent role began in the early days of the New England states, when a 1642 Massachusetts Ordinance required all towns to choose a group of men to manage schools, employ teachers, set wages, levy local taxes, and establish the length of the school year (Sharp & Walter, 1997). As other states began to follow suit, the practice eventually led to the establishment of elected school boards and the selection of headmaster to exclusively manage the schools. As time progressed, the title shifted to principal, and ultimately, to superintendent (Sharp & Walter, 1997). This shift occurred primarily because elected school boards recognized that they were unable to handle the daily school operations.

Over time, the school superintendent's role evolved from simple office responsibilities into an instructor/intellectual, supervisor, leader, and chief executive role (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005; Kowalski, as cited in Edwards, 2007). Superintendents, in addition to being extremely familiar with instructional methodology,

student learning, and management, must have an understanding of leadership abilities and practices related to improving performance and effectiveness (Firestone & Riehl, 2005). Hoyle et al. stated that, “The role of the superintendent has changed from the less visible manager to a highly visible chief executive who needs vision, skills, and knowledge to lead in a new and complex world” (as cited in Edwards, 2007, p. 4).

In an era of accountability, the rising superintendent’s instructional leadership role is one of a collaborator that can benefit all children (Bjork, 1993). However, little attention has been paid to the role of the superintendent. Cuban (1984) suggested that little or no attention has been paid to the school district’s chief executive officer, yet the position is critical to maintaining and promoting district effectiveness.

Impact of Superintendent Leadership on School Systems

As the leadership role of a superintendent changes to fulfill district needs and meet the increasing demands for greater accountability in student academic achievement, educational leaders should know the research related to school leadership (Waters et al., 2003). However, there is little research that investigates how the superintendent’s leadership role influences performance outcomes for students and/or the district (Leithwood, 2005).

Duke (2010) stated that, because the superintendent is so removed from the classroom, it becomes difficult to connect his or her leadership with student academic achievement, especially if the superintendent bases his or her effectiveness in terms of goal achievement. Although there is some research that connects superintendent work and student academic achievement, the perspectives vary from study to study (Mitchell, 2011). For example, some studies focus on organizational and structural differences

compared to student academic achievement (Mitchell, 2011). Tenure and student academic achievement are the focus of other studies, and still others use factors in high achievement districts as a gauge for success (Mitchell, 2011). However, there is research on what superintendents can accomplish in terms of district student academic outcomes (Mitchell, 2011).

Changes in rules, roles, and relationships, as well as changes in commitments, meanings, beliefs, values, and traditions, are required as a part of systemic change (Schlechty, 2005). Superintendents use systems of practice indirectly to design, influence, shape, enable, and maintain organizational and instructional outcomes (Halverson, 2003). To provide individual opportunities and shape instruction that will affect academic achievement outcomes, superintendents use a network of policies, procedures, programs, tasks, and traditions. That network can include:

- District goals/standards aligned with curriculum (Leithwood, 2005);
- Identified campus/district needs aligned with personnel, time, and money resources (Bjork, 1993; Waters & Marzano, 2006);
- Policies that allow all relevant stakeholders to be engaged in collaborative goal setting (Waters & Marzano, 2006); and
- Principal supervision and staff recruitment (Bjork, 1993).

The factors that determine good district leadership are increasing in terms of knowledge and understanding. The leadership quality that is provided or not provided by school superintendents and boards can be researched further (EWA, 2003).

Murphy and Hallinger (1986) noted, from their interview of 12 superintendents from 12 California school districts, that leadership functions included (a) establishment of

standards and goal setting; (b) employee selection as well as staff evaluation and management; (c) focus on instructional and curricular issues; and (d) consistency in curriculum and instruction as standard that is evidenced through monitoring. However, Murphy and Hallinger (1986) found that the methods used by superintendents to manage these functions varied in their small sample. Waters and Marzano (2006) completed a meta-analysis on the influence of district superintendents on student academic achievement and the characteristics of effective superintendents and concluded that there were significant correlations between district leadership and student academic achievement. Waters and Marzano also found that, when all pertinent stakeholders, including site administrators, district office, and board members, were engaged in effecting student academic achievement, the superintendents were most effective in establishing district goals. In addition, Waters and Marzano (2006) found that, when the superintendent implemented system-wide curriculum standards, districts experienced improved performance on benchmark tests.

Example of superintendent standards. A research-based approach has been taken by the Board of Education in North Carolina for setting standards for superintendents (North Carolina State Board of Education [NCSBE], 2007). NCSBE identified seven standards for superintendent leadership and their connection to improved school district leadership, based on research by Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, and Gundlach (2003), and by Waters and Marzano (2006). These seven standards are (a) strategic leadership, (b) instructional leadership, (c) cultural leadership, (d) human resource leadership, (e) managerial leadership, (f) external development leadership, and (g) micropolitical leadership. The purpose of the standards is to assist higher education

programs in developing content standards and requirements for degree programs that lead to the superintendent licensure; to focus local boards of education's goals and objectives as they evaluate, support, and monitor executive staff's performance; to guide professional development for superintendents and senior staff; and to provide a tool for coaching, developing, and mentoring senior level executives (NCSBE, 2007).

The North Carolina superintendent standards (NCSBE, 2007) are based on ten philosophical beliefs:

- Proactive leaders must possess a sense of urgency to ensure that all students graduate and are prepared for twenty-first century life.
- School district leadership's primary goal is to transform school systems to have continuous, large-scale, and sustainable improvement that is imbedded into the basic way of doing, thinking, and being.
- School district leadership's moral purpose is to create schools where all students learn and the achievement gaps are greatly diminished so that all students are prepared for successful futures.
- Leadership is neither position nor person, but rather a collection of practices embedded at every juncture within the school system.
- School district leadership's work is inclusive of all people through a social act whereby people are the change medium.
- School district work is not completed alone, but rather through creating systems and processes where high levels of proficiency are evident in all completed tasks.

- District leadership is dependent upon the superintendent's ability to identify and develop senior staff whose strengths and abilities complement and promote the seven standards.
- Leadership is complex and systematic by nature. It cannot have isolated components because one would miss the power of holistic thinking. Leadership requires the knowledge to understand what, why, how, and when to do tasks.
- School districts have sub-leadership systems that include school boards, district offices, and classrooms. A successful superintendent must ensure that all systems are aligned and are mutually supportive of each other.
- School superintendents accept executive positions. It is important to match school district leadership context to the superintendent leadership characteristics to ensure mutual success.

For North Carolina, the majority of the seven standards are non-instructional in nature, yet have an enormous impact on the school system as a whole. Although the standards are not all-inclusive, they are designed as a tool to aid in the development of school leadership (NCSBE, 2007). The NCSBE recognizes that the mission of public education has changed and requires a new type of school leader. The goal for this state is to have an executive rather than an administrator who leads their public schools (NCSBE, 2007). The statement is very much in alignment with the role shift of the superintendent position over time.

Effective Superintendent Leadership

Prior to 1982, there was little research on the roles of superintendents related to effective leadership. The evolution of standards for superintendent performance roles

has evolved from that of managerial roles (Hoyle & Commission on Standards to Superintendency [CSS], 1993) to instructional leadership and, most recently, to a bottom-up leadership managerial style that promotes shared decision making among all school stakeholders such as district staff, parents, the community, and businesses (Hoyle & CSS, 1993).

Higher-level leadership should provide the encouragement, drive, know-how, and staying power that are necessary to change America's schools and increase student performance (CCSSO, 2001). However, in a study on principal preparation programs, Hess and Kelly (2005) noted that the programs lacked emphasis in performance-based personnel decisions, school improvement based on data or technology, and accountability and application of results-based management.

The USDE (2008) also noted in its report, *A Nation Accountable: 25 Years After A Nation At Risk*, a grave concern that the United States is not developing sufficient leadership essential to lead world-class school systems. In addition, although management and supervisory skills are required, superintendents must also have the ability to persuade, set goals, and develop community consensus (USDE, 2008).

Challenges Faced by Superintendents

Systems of legislated accountability, such as state and national testing, and methods of assessment, such as school report cards, have labeled school systems as successes or failures based on scarcely defined performance indicators; and an even more scarcely defined understanding of the outcomes add to the issues that are facing superintendents (Bracey, 2003). The reemergence of attention in public education accountability that necessitates expected district outcomes follows a lengthy past of

process-oriented *top-down* public education bureaucracy (Firestone & Shipps, 2005). Educational leaders were previously expected to create student learning with effective organizational, political, and fiscal management (Firestone & Riehl, 2005). This view has shifted: To meet the serious national changes, leaders will be required to maximize public funds based on the best known educational practices to meet short- and long-term educational needs (Wallace Foundation, 2011).

Resource allocation. Loeb, Bryk, and Hanushek (2007), when asked how they would disburse financial resources to improve student academic achievement, cited that superintendents, principals, and teachers were, in general, positive that supplementary financial resources, if disbursed in certain ways, could improve student outcomes. However, they further stated that meeting expectations or demands will not be accomplished only by adding more financial resources into a current system; it is the way that available or new resources are utilized that matters the most (Loeb et al., 2007).

Similar resources in schools did not yield similar student outcomes; and, if extra financial resources were injected into the current system, significant gains in student outcomes associated with stated goals should not be expected (Loeb et al., 2007). This report is supported by Fullan (2010), who concluded that current school district practices not only permit massive waste of resources on ineffective remedies, but also sustain ineffective practices and cause dysfunctional outcomes. Further, successful outcomes will not be realized when using resources without appropriate whole-system reform (Fullan, 2010). However, when current resources are used with greater focus, successful outcomes can gain additional resources (Fullan, 2005). The goal is to work smarter, not harder, to gain well-deserved resources that allow schools to move further along (Fullan,

2005), and the allocation of these resources should be seen as a means to accomplish goals (Spillane & Regnier, 1998). This is in contrast to E.A. Hanushek who states that a large portion of analysis does not support resource policies leading to discernable improvements in student academic achievement (Hanushek & Welch, 2006). Hanushek's research does not mean that additional resources do not matter, but there is insufficient data to determine where and when the situation occurs (Hanushek & Welch, 2006, p. 38). Hanushek's findings do show that, "refined policies that go beyond simply adding resource with no concomitant sets of policies and incentives still have high payoffs..." (Hanushek & Welch, 2006, p. 38).

One critical role that a superintendent must assume is the responsibility for clear and open communication regarding the district's budget; a dedicated and sharp focus on this process reaps enormous benefits and establishes credibility for the superintendent and the board (Townsend et al., 2002). The superintendent must be front and center in the process (Townsend et al., 2002). In addition, in collaboration with the school board, the superintendent should decide the type of process to be used in building the district's budget; this decision should be made in accordance with the district's beliefs and policies (Townsend et al., 2002).

Superintendent tenure. In dealing with the increasing demands of the *No Child Left Behind Act* and rigorous state accountability standards, school public superintendents have faced tremendous pressure to improve student academic performance (United States Department of Education (USDE), 2002). However, student academic progress does not happen with luck; whole-system sustainable reform takes place primarily when effective leaders have time to implement reform efforts (Fullan, 2002).

In Waters and Marzano's (2006) meta-analysis of district leaders in relation to student performance, superintendent tenure is reported to absolutely correlate to student performance. According to this report, a positive impact can be noticed within a superintendent's first and second year on the job (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Waters and Marzano's correlation is in alignment with Whittle's (2005) assertion that the length of a CEO's tenure in major corporations, much like that of a superintendent in a school district, is vital to the organization's success. Whittle concluded that a superintendent's short tenure accounts for the student's poor performance in the school districts that he researched. Waters and Marzano's meta-analysis corroborates Whittle's conclusion that there is a positive relationship between superintendent stability and the achievement of students. However, these efforts to affect student academic achievement may generate sub-standard outcomes, and some professionals consider rapid superintendent turnover to be a severe problem for effectively managing schools and education reform (Kerr, 1988; Murphy, 1991).

Superintendent turnover. Several statistics have confirmed a significant turnover rate at the superintendent level in the past few years (Giles & Giles, 1990; Hall & Difford, 1992; Wilson & Heim, 1984). The rural Kansas turnover rate in 1984 was approximately 13% (Wilson & Heim, 1984); the turnover rate of the California districts, numbering at more than 1,000, averaged above 16% for the preceding six years (1990); and the annual national average for superintendent turnover was 13.5% (Hall & Difford, 1992). However, the most staggering turnover rate (16% average) occurred nationwide in smaller schools that enroll 350 or fewer students (Hall & Difford, 1992).

Czaja and Harman (1997), in a study that included 183 professionals who left Texas superintendent positions after 1994-1995, discovered poor working relationships with school boards often lead to changes in employment. Kowalski (1995) factored effective superintendent decision making and issues were ranked and ordered as follows: (a) financial resources, (b) individual values, (c) educational studies, (d) administrative staff input, (e) socioeconomic conditions in the community, (f) school board member positions/opinions, (g) teachers' input, (h) local politics, (i) collective bargaining units positions/pressure from the teachers, and (j) challenges and dilemmas, including negotiation of local political issues, education reform initiatives responses, fiscal reductions, and school board conflict resolution, as well as average daily crises. Czaja and Harman stated that improvements are necessary in programs for superintendent preparedness and school board training. Additionally, they noted that there is a need to explore superintendent turnover (Czaja & Harman, 1997).

Hess, as cited in Elmore (2000), concluded, upon completion of his mid-sized urban school district survey, that school boards and superintendents engage in "policy churn," (p. 19) where unstable political groups push new reform as a way to appease their constituencies, move quickly to the next reform, and give no thought to the previous reform efforts. Hess also stated the political benefit is that the political groups are credited with reform enactment with no thought to their actual implementation. Hess argued that this structure created high political and administrative leadership turnover, as indicated in his study, where the average superintendent tenure was 2-1/2 years (Hess, as cited in Elmore, 2000).

According to the EWA (2003), the main reason for superintendent turnover is poor board and superintendent relationships. This was the reason that Ronald Ross, former New York school superintendent, gave for his retirement (EWA, 2003).

According to Thomas Glass, University of Memphis, “churn” or continual superintendent turnover, is indicative of a school board's dysfunction, and the need to hire superintendents every few years can have a catastrophic affect on the district (EWA, 2003). Often ignored is the derailing of continuous reform initiatives that occur with superintendent turnover, as initiatives usually take four to five years to achieve and become sustainable (EWA, 2003). These findings are especially important to school boards, as superintendent length of tenure in districts is normally decided by them (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Board relationships. The reviews of the school board’s responsibilities relative to school reform are often varied (Anderson, 2003). When school board members are split over decisions regarding goals and objectives, entangled in conflict internally and with the superintendent, constantly involved in school district administrative decision making (micromanaging), and solidly committed to representing specific district constituencies, the school board’s image in school improvement efforts is negative (Anderson, 2003). A key element to school board effectiveness is their understanding of the distinction between the board’s role and staff’s role and their need to refrain from performing functions that are not their responsibility, but rather that of the superintendent and the staff (McAdams, 2008).

The school board’s role is to lead the decision makers. This is accomplished by following established board standards while holding itself and the superintendent

accountable to board policy and district goals (CSBA, 2010). However, the CSBA notes that school boards often are tempted into micromanagement because of a lack of understanding regarding the segregation of duties between board and staff, constituent expectations, and administrative interface. To some degree, board administrative responsibilities necessitate some understanding of organizational structures and operational procedures to develop board policies; however, school boards can achieve this type of understanding through a minute amount of administrative involvement. (McAdams, 2008).

One common critique of school boards is the predisposition to mistake monitoring outcome performance with managing school system components. For example, Olson and Bradley (1992) stated that school boards spent up to 54% of their time on administrative matters and approximately 3% on policy development. The National School Boards Association (NSBA), in a study that included 55 randomly selected board member participants, showed that issues such as human resources and finance were some of the most common areas of concern, with substantially little or no time spent discussing educational policy (NSBA, 1987).

Richard H. Goodman, New England School Development Council project director, researched 10 school districts in five states and found that efficiently run districts had a greater percentage of students who go on to college, had higher skill test scores, and had fewer dropouts than inadequately run districts (EWA, 2003). Goodman's study showed that "quality governance" was characterized by a school board focus on student academic achievement, a positive relationship between the board and the superintendent, and the superintendent's ability to act as the chief executive officer and

instructional leader (EWA, 2003). Board micromanagement, conflict, poor board/superintendent communication, and respective role confusion characterized poor governance (EWA, 2003; see Appendix A). According to Elmore (2000):

A smart superintendent is one who can count the number of board members, divide by two, and, if necessary, add one. Superintendents come and go based on their capacity to maintain a working majority on a relatively unstable elected board, rather than on their capacity to focus the institution on its core functions and make steady improvements over time. (p. 8)

Eadie and Houston (2003) noted that a board-savvy superintendent has governance as a priority, which means that he or she devotes a sufficient amount of time acquiring skills to be qualified as an expert at building board capacity.

Superintendents as change agents. As a channel for improving student academic achievement, leaders are and always will be essential to school reform (ACSA, 2011). To demonstrate this type of leadership, one must understand that “leadership requires using power to influence thoughts and actions of other people” (Zaleznik, 1992, p. 15). Schein (2004) added to this viewpoint, stating, “Leadership creates and changes cultures, while management and administration act with a culture” (p. 11). Simply put, dealing with complexity is a management function, while dealing with change is a leadership function (Zaleznik, 1992). As stated in *A National Accountable* (USDE, 2008), school systems need superintendents that are leaders with an ability to bring about necessary change.

Impact of Superintendent Leadership on Organizational Culture and Change

Organizational culture and leadership are not new topics, as they are highly researched and discussed in the educational field. However, their importance in the success of a school has, in recent times, come to the forefront of current research. Schein (2004) points to three parts of organizational culture (a) organizational culture and leadership defined, (b) the dimensions of culture, and (c) the leadership role in embedding, evolving, and culture building. Culture can be defined as

a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (Schein, 2004, p. 17)

Culture is a constantly encompassing occurrence that is being performed and created by our communications with others (Schein, 2004). In addition, culture is shaped by leadership behavior, rules, routines, structures, and norms that guide and limit conduct (Schein, 2004). When culture moves through the different levels and groups within the organization, it becomes clear how culture is established, entrenched, constrained, and stabilized (Schein, 2004).

As early as the 1990s, forecasters stated that significant school reform demands the adjustment of organizational structures and culture (Fullan, 1996; Hess, 1999). This adjustment includes reform efforts that are based on the belief that organization restructures require a social system perspective (Chance & Björk, 2004; Murphy, 1991; Schein, as cited in Kowalski, 2005). “Systemic thinking requires us to accept that the

way social systems are put together has independent effects on the way people behave, what they learn, and how they learn what they learn” (Schlechty, as cited in Kowalski, 2005, p. 134).

As organizations become more competitive and volatile, major changes are more common and necessary to remain competitive and efficient. Schein (2004) identified five strengths a leader must have to be effective (a) perception and insight, (b) motivation, (c) emotional strength, (d) ability to change the cultural assumptions, and (e) ability to create involvement and participation.

Goleman (1998) stated that leaders who have empathy are doing more than sympathizing with people around them; they are using personal understanding in an effort to grow their organization in subtle yet significant ways. Armed with emotional strength, leaders should have the ability to absorb most of the anxiety that comes with change and have the ability to continue to be loyal to the organization during transition phases (Schein, 2004). Flexible and collaborative behavior rather than authoritative positions are requirements of school leaders in today’s public education system (EWA, 2003).

Ron Heifetz, founding director of the Center for Public Leadership-Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, maintained that authority relationships work fine until it is necessary to change the situation, at which time flexible thinking, collaboration, and shared decision making is required to deal with multifaceted and sometimes unexpected issues (EWA, 2003). Paul Houston, Executive Director of the American Association of School Administrators, summarized the superintendent’s changing role (EWA, 2003). Houston commented that, to be successful, superintendents must do more than deal with district leadership matters such as buses, books, budgets, buildings, and bonds; today, the

challenge is to shift the focus of district leadership to issues such as child advocacy, communication, connection, collaboration, community building, and curricular choices that lead to student academic success (EWA, 2003).

Case Studies

Fullan (2010) lists nine elements of successful school reform (a) a small number of ambitious goals; (b) a guiding coalition at the top; (c) high standards and expectations; (d) collective capacity building with a focus on instruction; (e) individual capacity building linked to instruction; (f) mobilizing the data as strategy for improvement; (g) intervention in a non-punitive manner; (h) being vigilant about “distracters”; and (i) being transparent, relentless, and increasingly challenging (p. 21).

Fullan (2010) adds that the purpose of the items listed above is to rally and engage sizeable numbers of individuals who are all committed to and effective at reaching desired results relative to essential outcomes that society values. According to Fullan, this strategy is successful because it is relentless and focused and uses the whole group’s collective energy. If the majority of people are not working together, reaching whole-system reform is impossible (Fullan, 2010).

Examples of dysfunctional schools. The Financial Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT, 2010) support Fullan’s (2010) conclusions in cases of dysfunctional schools. FCMAT is an extension of the California Legislature, whose purpose is to intervene in California’s troubled schools before state takeover is necessary. FCMAT identified 11 predictors of interventions (see Appendix B). Eight of the 11 predictors are consistently found in school districts that require a state emergency loan.

Of these eight, leadership breakdown and ineffective communication are two issues most identified in school districts that require state takeover (FCMAT, 2010).

FCMAT's (2010) report showed that the King City Union High School District board's lack of understanding of their roles and responsibilities was cited as a direct cause of the district's fiscal crisis. There were several indications that the superintendent's cabinet level was not representative of the appropriate district level departments (FCMAT, 2010). For example, the Human Resources department was not represented on the superintendent's cabinet (FCMAT, 2010). The report also listed numerous instances of board members' involvement in administrative functions that are the responsibility of the superintendent and the district level staff, such as collective bargaining negotiations, student discipline, and personnel (FCMAT, 2010). Other findings such as inadequate district office leadership, poor internal and external communication, inadequate financial and academic systems, poor superintendent/board relationship, and out-of-date board policies were also listed as reasons for the district's fiscal crisis (FCMAT, 2010).

Examples of successful reform. To ensure that more school systems provide systems to lead to student success, all those involved will need to better understand what is necessary to assist students (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). This understanding is essential, as state leaders need more information regarding strategic placement of resources to support school systems (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). In addition, district-level leaders need guidance regarding practices and policies that will improve and support high-quality instruction (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Togneri and Anderson (2003) researched five school districts in the states of Texas, California, Maryland, Minnesota, and Rhode Island. Their study included interviews with teachers, parents, and principals, state and local school boards, curriculum and instruction experts, and community, state, and national leaders. After more than 200 individual interviews, 60 focus groups, and 15 school visits, seven factors that are essential to improvement emerged across all districts:

1. Districts had the courage to acknowledge poor performance and the will to seek solutions.
2. Districts put in place a system-wide approach to improving instruction—one that articulated curricular content and provided instructional supports.
3. Districts instilled visions that focused on student learning and guided instructional improvement.
4. Districts made decisions based on data, not instinct.
5. Districts adopted new approaches to professional development that involved a coherent and district-organized set of strategies to improve instruction.
6. Districts redefined leadership roles.
7. Districts committed to sustaining reform over the long haul. (Togneri & Anderson, 2003, p. 3)

Community and school leaders acknowledged, and accepted responsibility for, poor student performance and began searching for solutions in each case study (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). District superintendents articulated a vision that guided programmatic decisions and allocated their human and financial resources (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). School boards, principals, and superintendents carefully reviewed how

to maximize financial resources and prioritize funds to address instructional needs before funds were allocated (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). In addition, leadership was extended from traditional positions and distributed across multiple roles such as assistant principal, teachers, union leaders, district office staff, and board members (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Most district boards did not engage in the district's administrative affairs, but held the superintendent and staff accountable for progress. A board member from the California school district stated, "I am not an administrator; that is not my job....[The superintendent and her staff] are the professionals, and we say to them, 'These are the results we want to see; you are in charge of how to do it'" (Togneri & Anderson, 2003, p. 8). District office transformation resulted from the superintendent's addressing policies, structures, and human resources issues that were to guide improvement (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Though boards and superintendents led efforts, the most collaborative districts focused on working together. Superintendent turnover was minimal in three of the five districts whose superintendents sparked change; they served in their district positions for at least eight years (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

In the California school district, for example, three of the five board members who hired the superintendent remained on the board almost consecutively for eight of the superintendent's nine years. This type of leadership continuity allowed "superintendents and boards to understand each other's work and to grow together in their approaches to change" (Togneri & Anderson, 2003, p. 9). In four districts, when the superintendents left during the course of this research, the deputy superintendent was promoted to superintendent. In these instances, the initial superintendents were there to shake up the

district; however, through stable leadership, the school boards sought reform sustainability (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). These boards ensured that superintendents, principals, and other leaders shared the goal of educating all children.

Leadership was distributed transversely through the system; stakeholders usually accepted leadership roles for which they were best suited (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). There was significant collaboration among stakeholders for this type of leadership. As districts purposely searched for strategies to improve collaboration, distributive leadership structures guided communication (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). An example of this commitment is the high level of continuity amid leadership's top-level staff; this leadership continuity afforded the opportunity for boards and superintendents to develop together, addressing change while understanding each other's work (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Leadership succession was noticed, as well as was the stability of new practices, especially at the district office.

Although it may appear that the strategies posed in this research are based on common sense, these lessons are not being systematically applied in our nation's schools, underscoring why these findings are so important. When the actions in these findings are applied, it is possible for school systems in high-poverty areas to improve instructional practices and programs (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Even though the school districts earn good results, they are far from having all the answers; however, they demonstrate that, when systems support schools and plan collaboration cautiously, schools can turn their visions into a reality that translates to improved student academic achievement, school systems, and communities (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

California schools are meeting AYP and API growth targets. In September 2011, the California Department of Education released accountability statistics for California's public schools. In terms of California Standards, California schools met or exceeded API targets by 49% (EdBrief, 2011). Tom Torlakson, California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, applauded the "hard work our students, teachers, parents, school employees and administrators are doing to improve – even in the face of severe cuts to school funding" (EdBrief, 2011, p.1). However, when compared to federal NCLB standards, the state saw declines in the proportion of students meeting AYP targets (EdBrief, 2011).

Historical trends for Monterey County show that gains are being made in AYP and API in some schools (Herrick, 2011). Over the past 11 years, schools in Monterey County have moved from an average API of 580 to 736 in 2011 (Herrick, 2011). Overall, the county had managed to narrow the gap between state performance and county performance by moving from an API gap of 86 in 2000 to a gap of 42 in 2011 (Herrick, 2011). Based on the 2011 data, the largest gains were seen in the English Learner student population, which saw a growth of 23 points in the county compared to the state growth of 14 points (Herrick, 2011).

Recent exits of program improvement. Five of the 85 schools in California that exited program improvement for the 2010-2011 school year were located in Monterey County (Herrick, 2011). Three of the five schools are in districts that have new superintendents who have been in the district for less than five years. These districts have large Hispanic populations and low socioeconomic conditions, yet they met all of the requirements for AYP and API (Herrick, 2011). It is important to note that none of

the school districts is a basic aid district, and they rely heavily on state and federal funding. These school districts have experienced the same state budget cuts as other districts in the state of California (Herrick, 2011).

Summary

When considering the tasks associated with high-stakes accountability, there is limited research on practice and organizational designs in high-performing school districts (Lunenburg, 2011). The cases presented in this literature review suggest that high-performing districts share some common themes. However, the knowledge regarding guidance offered to school administrators on sustainable district-wide system design processes is limited (Lunenburg, 2011). What is known is that, in cases of successful school systems, there are strategic commonalities in terms of how districts manage themselves (Lunenburg, 2011).

Chapter 3

Design and Methodology

This chapter presents the design and methodology of the research proposal. The chapter begins with an explanation of the research design, followed by the rationale for the methodology, and a description of the population, sample, data collection methods, and instrumentation. The chapter concludes with strategies that will be used to analyze the data.

Research Design

The researcher searched to understand the superintendent's leadership characteristics, perceptions of organizational priorities, and goals and objectives, along with the alignment of the district mission statement and vision to allocated resources. In-depth interviews with qualitative research questions were used to describe the phenomenon of the superintendent's experiences.

Participants were interviewed at the central office within their district. Interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the state of California across county lines. Limited consideration will be given to elementary, union, high school, or unified school district status. No consideration was given to the racial composition of the schools, nor to the gender, race, or educational background of the superintendent. Once superintendents agreed to participate in the study during the initial phone call, a formal letter of introduction to the study was sent to the participants. Field tests were completed on interview questions to ensure the integrity of each question.

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research questions should be open-ended, evolving, and non-directional (Creswell, 2007). The central research question and sub-questions are listed below.

1. What, if any, are the demonstrated leadership practices among superintendents that positively affect student academic achievement in schools designated by the No Child Left Behind Act as Program Improvement?
 - a. What themes emerge regarding the decision making process of academic strategies implemented at the district level delivered from the superintendent to administrators?
 - b. What are the common experiences surrounding how each resource, financial and human capital, is aligned to district priorities, goals and objectives?
 - c. What themes emerge regarding the role superintendent leadership plays in student academic achievement?

Rationale for the Methodology

A phenomenological study illustrates the significance of a number of individuals' lived experiences surrounding a thought or an occurrence. This research focuses on describing the commonalities that the participants experienced and capturing the very essence of the phenomenon. The description consists of what they experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, as cited in Creswell, 2007).

Two main reasons exist for selecting the qualitative research method. First, at the time of this study, there was scarce research on superintendent leadership and its impact on student academic achievement. Second, qualitative interviews are most suitable for gleaning what the superintendents have experienced. Because the researcher searched to gain an in-depth understanding of how superintendent leadership influences schools or

districts in program improvement, phenomenological research was the most appropriate approach to gather information.

Philosophical foundation. Phenomenology draws heavily on the writings of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German mathematician (Creswell, 2007). Several other writers continued in Husserl's footsteps, leading to a variety of philosophical arguments regarding phenomenology (Brentano, 1995; Heidegger, 1982; Merleau-Ponty, 1996; Moustakas, 1994). Even across philosophical arguments, there are prevailing themes such as the study of lived experiences of persons, the view that these experiences are conscious ones, and the development of the essence of the experiences rather than explanations and analysis (Creswell, 2007). According to Stewart and Mickunas, as cited in Creswell (2007), there are four philosophical perspectives regarding the use of phenomenology:

1. The return to the traditional task of philosophy—a return to the Greek tradition of searching for wisdom,
2. A philosophy without presupposition—suspension of any preconceived ideas regarding what is fact or fiction,
3. The intentionality of consciousness—consciousness is aimed at object, and
4. The refusal of the subject-object dichotomy—the reality of an object is only perceived through the meaning of the individual experience.

The philosophical perspective that will guide this research is one without presupposition. Because the researcher seeks to understand what the participants perceive as their leadership strategies, beginning the research with any preconceived

ideas or perceptions may skew the ability to fully understand what the participants seek to share.

Population

Data from the 2006-2007 school year will be used to determine those schools that were in program improvement during that year; those schools will be compared to schools in program improvement for the 2010-2011 year. For this study, a base enrollment of 2,000 students was set as a school district large enough to be considered for this research. Schools and/or districts that successfully moved out of program improvement within the specified time frame were identified as potential target schools. Schools and/or districts that were within 20 points of exiting program improvement in 2010-2011 were identified as potential targets as well.

Sample

When the list of schools and/or districts was identified, personal calls were made to the district office in each district to determine the length of time that the current superintendent held the position of superintendent. To gain insight into how leadership has influenced student academic achievement, it was necessary for the superintendent to have held this position for a minimum of three years, as, according to Fullan (2010), whole-system reform takes approximately three to five years to become sustainable. Once the schools were identified and superintendents were confirmed to have held their positions for at least three years, superintendents were contacted to establish their interest in the study and their willingness to participate.

Data Collection

This study used a mixed methodology approach to determine a superintendent's level of success in moving a program improvement school or district out of program improvement status. Mixed methodology refers to the use of both qualitative and quantitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

Quantitative data was used to determine the superintendents whom should be invited to participate in the study. This research gathered quantitative data from the Data Quest program that is available on the CDE website (<http://dq//cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>). Program improvement data was exported to MS Excel and sorted to determine the schools and/or districts in program improvement in fiscal year 2006-2007. This data was compared to the 2010-2011 program improvement data. To validate the quantitative data set, the school and/or district Excel listing was compared to the official CDE listing of schools and/or districts that exited program improvement by fiscal year 2010-2011. These schools and/or districts were triangulated to the current superintendent's tenure. The goal of using this quantitative data was to identify at least 10 superintendents, whose districts enroll at least 2,000 students, who were in their position for at least three years during the time the school and/or district was in program improvement and exited. Of the 10 superintendents identified, five were interviewed whose districts saw the most API gains above the 800 minimum score set forth by the state and met AYP requirements.

During this process, qualitative research was used to design the interview questions. According to Creswell (2007), "Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data, reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and, lastly, representing the data in figures, tables, or a

discussion” (p. 148). During the analysis, the researcher’s goal was to understand the prevailing themes common among the participants. Tables were established to identify commonalities among participants to capture the essence of the participant’s experience(s). The intent was to determine if there were any prevailing themes among the superintendents that were perceived to have a positive impact on student academic achievement.

Reciprocity. Reciprocity is defined as “the act of giving back to participants for their time and efforts in a project” (Creswell, 2007, p. 24). The researcher recognizes that participants will make time and schedule adjustments as well as carefully listen to interview questions and to participate in this study. A small token of appreciation, such as a thank you card, was presented at the end of each interview as a way to say thank you and conclude the interview. An opportunity to have a summary of the completed study mailed to each participant was offered at no charge.

Participants. Participant selection approach. Hermeneutical and transcendental are two types of phenomenology. Hermeneutical phenomenology can be described as research oriented toward lived experiences and understanding the “texts” of life (Van Manen, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 59). Researchers look at a phenomenon because of an interest that drives them. Transcendental phenomenology is geared more toward experience descriptions and less toward the researcher’s interpretations. This form of research seeks to understand the experiences of the participants in terms of the condition, situation, and context of the essence of the experience. The goal of this research is to convey the overall meaning of the encounter.

Overall, phenomenological research provides the researcher with an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon as expressed by research participants. This type of understanding can prove to be valuable to individuals that are seeking to influence a phenomenon. However, one must have a broader understanding of the philosophical assumptions that the researcher will eventually identify. Careful consideration will be given to participants so that only those individuals who experienced the phenomenon are selected to participate in the research.

Participant selection. Not all superintendents were selected to participate, as some did not meet the minimum three-year job status requirement. By using purposeful sampling, the researcher was able to isolate superintendents who were in districts long enough to complete three fiscal years in a district.

Participants were eligible to participate in this study only if the following criteria were met:

1. The superintendent of the school district held this position for at least three years.
2. The superintendent did not hold another position in the district, such as a combo superintendent/principal position.
3. In 2006-2007, the school or school district was identified as a program improvement school.
4. In 2010-2011, the school or school district exited program improvement or was within 20 points of exiting.
5. The district's enrollment was at least 2,000.

Instrumentation

An interview was used as the instrument in this phenomenological study to evaluate the characteristics of the superintendents, including cultural beliefs regarding goals, objectives, and resource allocation, to understand the leadership strategies that are utilized to affect gains in student academic achievement.

The interview questions were based on the empirical findings from three studies that identified how superintendents influence student academic achievement, both directly and indirectly (Campbell, Fullan, & Glaze, 2006; MacIver & Farley, 2003; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Based on these findings, the researcher categorized each research component into a direct or indirect function of the superintendent. The analysis was the basis for the development of the interview questions that were presented to each superintendent. Through this process, the researcher's goal was to understand the experiences that each superintendent has encountered in these critical areas. Table 3.1 represents the grounding of the interview questions in the empirical literature.

Table 3.1

Superintendent's Ability to have an Impact on Student Academic Achievement

No.	Research Finding	Researchers	Impact
1	Hiring practices	MacIver and Farley (2003)	Direct
2	Curriculum/instruction	MacIver and Farley (2003)	Indirect
3	Principal support	MacIver and Farley (2003)	Direct
4	Professional development	MacIver and Farley (2003)	Indirect
5	Accountable for all student achievement	Campbell, Fullan, & Glaze (2006)	Direct
6	Focus on equity of outcomes	Campbell, Fullan, & Glaze (2006)	Direct
7	Student academic achievement is the gauge for measuring and monitoring effective leadership	Campbell, Fullan, & Glaze (2006)	Direct

(continues)

Table 3.1

Superintendent's Ability to have an Impact on Student Academic Achievement

8	Demonstrates support for student improvement goals	Campbell, Fullan, and Glaze (2006)	Direct
9	Align school targets with district and state goals	Campbell, Fullan, and Glaze (2006)	Direct
10	Use system and school data to make instructional decisions	Campbell, Fullan, and Glaze (2006)	Indirect
11	Is knowledgeable about effective assessment and pedagogy	Campbell, Fullan, and Glaze (2006)	Indirect
12	Engage principals and teachers in professional learning	Campbell, Fullan, and Glaze (2006)	Indirect
13	Share leadership for improvement	Campbell, Fullan, and Glaze (2006)	Direct
14	Collaborative goal setting	Waters and Marzano (2006)	Direct
15	Non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction	Waters and Marzano (2006)	Direct
16	Board alignment and support of district goals	Waters and Marzano (2006)	Direct
17	Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction	Waters and Marzano (2006)	Indirect
18	Use of resources to support student achievement and instruction goals	Waters and Marzano (2006)	Direct

Interview protocol. Table 3.2 presents the relationship between the research questions and the interview questions that was presented to the district superintendents. The interview questions support the study's objective. The questions may be slightly modified during the study to determine emerging themes.

Table 3.2

Relationship between Research and Interview Questions

Research Question No.	Research Question	Interview Question No.
1	What, if any, are the demonstrated leadership practices among superintendents that positively affect student academic achievement in schools designated as Program Improvement?	2, 3, 4
1a	What themes emerge regarding the decision making process of academic strategies implemented at the district level delivered from the superintendent to administrators?	1, 8, 11, 12, 13
1b	What are the common experiences surrounding how each resource, financial and human capital, is aligned to district priorities, goals, and objectives?	14, 15
1c	What themes emerge regarding the role superintendent leadership plays?	5, 6, 7, 9, 10

This section presents the rationale for each interview question.

1. Please describe the overall district goals regarding student academic achievement.

The intent of this question was to help the researcher obtain an understanding of what the board wishes to accomplish in terms of student achievement. This was critical, as the alignment of the board and student outcomes is vital to reform initiatives (Waters & Marzano, 2009).

2. Leadership characteristics are the primary focus of this study; therefore, how would you describe your personal belief about your leadership and its impact on student academic achievement?

This question was designed to help the researcher determine which leadership style, (i.e., transformational or transactional), of the superintendent emerges. Burns

(1978) stated that, although the two types of leadership styles are complementary, for leaders to have the greatest impact on individuals, they must be able to motivate one to action.

3. How did you come to the conclusion that your leadership characteristics were a fit for this district?

The purpose of this question was to help the researcher determine whether the superintendent is aware of how his or her leadership style influences the decision-making process. Because different leadership styles influence staff differently, leaders should understand how their leadership behavior influences individuals as well as the organization (Shamir et al., 1993).

4. In the role of superintendent, what are some of the most difficult issues you have encountered within this district?

Several studies have identified a number of factors in a superintendent's ability to have long tenure in school districts (Czaja & Harman, 1997; Flmore, 2000; Hess, 1999; Kowalski, 1995). The intent of this question was to help the researcher understand the major challenges that these superintendents have faced and have managed to overcome.

5. How do you ensure instructional focus, both in practice and in performance, to everyone in the organization?

The intent of this question was to help the researcher initiate dialogue regarding superintendent support of administrators and teachers. Today's school districts require the superintendent to have the ability to lead school reform efforts and bring about the necessary changes required to increase student academic achievement (ACSA, 2001; USDE, 2008). The researcher wanted to determine whether the superintendent leads or

manages, as “leadership creates and changes cultures while management acts within a culture” (Schein, 2004, p. 11).

6. Please describe how you hold administrators accountable for student’s academic performance.

This question was designed to help the researcher gain an understanding of how the superintendent holds his/herself and staff accountable for student academic achievement. The goal was to identify how the superintendent interfaces with administrators and conveys district goals and objectives and to gauge whether the superintendent exhibits flexible and collaborative behavior rather than authoritative behavior (EWA, 2003).

7. Can you describe how administrative staff is evaluated?

The goal of this question is to help the researcher determine how administrators are evaluated (i.e., by student progress or to a specific target), and to gain insight into how the superintendent is monitoring instruction and achievement goals (Waters & Marzano, 2006.)

8. What are some of the ways that you communicate with staff and other district stakeholders?

This question helped the researcher to directly address how information is shared with all stakeholders. As noted in Chapter 2, superintendents must do more than deal with district leadership matters such as buses, books, budgets, buildings, and bonds; superintendents must be able to communicate, connect, and build communities (EWA, 2003).

9. When hiring a new administrator, what are some of the characteristics that you look for?

Because the superintendent uses a network of strategies to effect student academic achievement and is responsible for principal supervision and staff recruitment, this question is designed to help the researcher determine whether the superintendent uses any type of effective pedagogy or assessment or the ability to disaggregate data as a criteria for being hired in the district (Björk, 1993; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

10. How often do you visit classrooms and sites, and what do you look for when you conduct visits?

This was a direct question to help the researcher determine how often the superintendent personally views what is occurring in a classroom or at a school site (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

11. How do you determine when to loosen or tighten administrative control?

This question is designed to help the researcher understand how the superintendent determines when to use discretion, based on practice and performance of administrators.

12. What strategies do you use to assist staff in understanding the perception of what the district aspires to be and what the district office is currently accomplishing?

This question was designed to help the researcher understand how the superintendent creates high performance expectations (Campbell et al., 2006).

13. How are resources, financial and human capital, used to target achievement gaps?

This question was designed to help the researcher understand how the superintendent allows resources to be used to target underserved students within the district.

14. What steps have been taken to enable the alignment of budgets with learning goals?

This question was designed to help the researcher understand how the alignment of resources has evolved over a period of time.

15. Can you describe how professional development opportunities, for both administrators and teachers, are organized, executed, and gauged for success within the district?

This direct question was designed to help the researcher understand the superintendent's perception of professional development and the benefit to administrators and teachers (Campbell et al., 2006; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Data Analysis

All data collected is considered confidential and stored on a secure external hard drive that is password protected. A digital recorder was used to document interviews. Hardcopy files were stored in a double locked lateral file cabinet at the researcher's home, and the hard drive and digital recorder were stored in a fireproof Brinks safe, also in the researcher's home. Only the researcher knows the safe code and has access to the lateral file cabinet keys. All files and hard drive will be destroyed after five years. The identity of the school districts and superintendents was kept confidential and protected by using pseudonyms. Use of pseudonyms is labeled with an asterisk throughout the study.

Interview questions were coded according to the pseudonyms, and no information regarding personnel or students was collected.

To ensure that quantitative data was sorted and isolated correctly, the researcher used MS Excel to disaggregate all data, including, graphs, tables, and charts. Pivot tables were used to compile large volumes of data into summarized formats based on the correlation factors such as district enrollment, program improvement status, and percent of points necessary to exit program improvement. Qualitative data was collected using a digital recorder. A transcriber was used to transcribe the interviews after each interview with district superintendents. Scratch notes were organized into functional field notes and recorded and categorized accordingly. An external coder was used to ensure the validity of the analysis. The goal of this data was to capture the practices used by those superintendents who had successfully led schools or districts out of program improvement. In coding interview responses, the researcher searched to find themes that were connected to this dissertation's research questions.

Summary

For this phenomenological study, five superintendents were interviewed to help the researcher gain an understanding of the superintendent's leadership style and determine their level of success in moving a school or district out of program improvement status. All participants were asked survey questions that were designed using qualitative research. The results of this study provided information on effective superintendent leadership as it relates to exceptional school practices.

Chapter 4

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Introduction

This dissertation is a study of effective superintendent leadership and exceptional school practices of California superintendents, specifically five superintendents in low-performing school districts that have exited schools out of Program Improvement. The goal of this investigation was to gain additional knowledge about how superintendent leadership impacts student academic achievement. This researcher hoped to gain a greater understanding of the abilities superintendents have to influence student academic achievement in American public schools through their reflections. Chapter 2 focused on a review of literature on superintendent leadership and practices, and Chapter 3 provided an explanation for the methodology used to collect and analyze data for this study. Chapter 4 presents the data collected in this study including the qualitative analysis that addressed the research question and sub-questions.

The research questions were designed to gain an in-depth understanding of superintendent's leadership characteristics, perceptions of organizational priorities, goals and objectives, along with the alignment of the district mission statement and vision to allocated resources. The study's research questions were:

1. What, if any, are the demonstrated leadership practices among superintendents that positively affect student academic achievement in schools designated by the No Child Left Behind Act as Program Improvement?

- a. What themes emerge regarding the decision making process of academic strategies implemented at the district level delivered from the superintendent to administrators?
- b. What are the common experiences surrounding how each resource, financial and human capital, is aligned to district priorities, goals and objectives?
- c. What themes emerge regarding the role superintendent leadership plays in student academic achievement?

All superintendents were reminded that the interview was based on his or her personal experiences and that they were free to share what they felt was pertinent. The first research question focused on the superintendent's perception of how his or her leadership has impacted student academic achievement within their respective district. Sub-question (a) focused on identifying specific leadership strategies the superintendents used during the decision-making process regarding student academic achievement. Sub-question (b) attempted to isolate the superintendent's experience around how instructional goals and priorities were translated into financial resources or human resources in each district. Sub-question (c) attempted to determine how the superintendent's role connected to student academic achievement. Some superintendents chose to share more information after the interview was completed. Additionally, each superintendent was able to decide if he or she wanted the additional information recorded and the researcher complied with each request. As a result, the additional comments may or may not directly connect to this study; however, all information was important and considered worthy of consideration in the researcher's data analysis section.

Participants

Five California superintendents participated in this study and completed interviews between March and April 2012. All superintendents were interviewed in the State of California. All superintendents were in a school district that had a school or schools identified as program improvement. All superintendents had three to twelve years experience in the school district; and all had numerous years of experience in K-12 education ranging from 12 to 34 years.

Between 2007-2008 and 2010-2011, each district superintendent has seen schools within their district exit program improvement. The districts vary from urban to rural and have a wide array of enrollment ranging from over 5,000 to over 25,000. The districts also vary in type of district including: unified, union elementary, and elementary school districts. Numerical data for each school was obtained from the California Department of Education.

Table 4.1

Superintendent and District Data

DESCRIPTION	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5
School District Enrollment	10,752	13,816	25,821	13,060	5,686
District Type	Unified	Union Elementary	Unified	Union Elementary	Elementary
Superintendent Tenure	9	3	12	3 1/2	5
Superintendent Gender	Male	Female	Male	Male	Male
Superintendent Age Range	Late 50s	Late 50s	60s	40s	50s

Although the California Department of Education's (CDE) listing of Program Improvement schools was directly connected to the superintendents identified for this study, the researcher made an attempt from the CDE listing to find superintendents from various demographic locations around this state. This approach is in alignment with Creswell (2003) who notes that qualitative study participants should not be selected at random like a quantitative study, but rather a purposeful section that will best assist the researcher in understanding the problem as well as the research question (p. 185).

In order to preserve the confidentiality of the superintendents and the school districts, the five superintendents (S) and school districts (SD) were identified as S1 and SD1, S2 and SD2, S3 and SD3, S4 and SD4, and S5 and SD5. Prior to soliciting participants, the researcher, under the direction of the committee chair, took steps to ensure that participant confidentiality was protected and minimal risk existed to each participant.

Superintendent 1

S1 is a male superintendent in his 50s and is in a rural district in the California central valley with a student enrollment of 10,752. Of the students enrolled, 71.3% are free or reduced lunch. Twenty-two point two percent are English Language Learners. The district student population is 16.9 % White, 68.9% Hispanic, 1.5% African American, 10.7% Asian, and 2% Other. S1 has served as superintendent of the district for nine years. There are 14 schools in the district and since 2005-2006, six schools have exited Program Improvement. As of 2010-2011, there were no schools in the district identified as program improvement.

Superintendent 2

S2 is a female superintendent in her 50s and is in an urban district in the California South Bay with a student enrollment of 13,816. Of the students enrolled, 88% are free or reduced lunch compared to the county average of 36.4%. Fifty-two point four percent are English Language Learners. The district student population is 2.3% White, 78.1% Hispanic, 1.8% African American, 11.4% Asian, 5.1% Filipino, and 1.3% Other. There are 28 schools, and between 2006-2007 and 2009-2009, four schools exited out of program improvement. S2 served as superintendent of the district for three years and retired in 2009.

Superintendent 3

S3 is a male superintendent in his 60s and is in an urban district in Southern California with a student enrollment of 25,821. Of the students enrolled, 25% are free or reduced lunch. The district student population is 46.3% White, 36.8% Hispanic, 1.8% African American, 11.1% Asian, and 4% Other. Twelve point six percent of the students are English Language Learners, and since 2006-2007, four schools exited program improvement. S3 has served as superintendent of the district for 12 years and will retire in June 2012.

Superintendent 4

S4 is a male superintendent in his 40s and is in an urban district in the California Bay Area with a student enrollment of 13,060. S4 has 33 years in education. Of the students enrolled, 81.7% are free or reduced lunch. The district student population is 2.3% White, 78.1% Hispanic, 1.8% African American, 11.4% Asian, 5.1% Filipino, and

1.3% Other, and since 2006-2007, four schools exited out of program improvement. S4 has served as superintendent of the district for three and one-half years.

Superintendent 5

S5 is a male superintendent in his 50s and is in a rural district in the California central valley with a student enrollment of 5,686. Of the students enrolled, 79.3% are free or reduced lunch. The district student population is 20.7% White, 68.7% Hispanic, 7.3% African American, and 3.3% Other. Twenty-six point three percent of the students are English Language Learners, and since 2006-2007, three schools exited out of program improvement. S5 has served as superintendent of the district for five years.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Triangulation of data was vetted through a process that included: checking the data against other sources, such as the district website or CDE; data comparison of literature in Chapter 2 compared to collected data from participants; and a cross comparison of other participant responses. If at least three of the five participants had similar comments around a particular subject, the researcher considered the data notable.

Each participant was given the opportunity to review, edit, or suggest changes to their own transcription. If the transcript did not convey their intended comments or meaning, each participant was given the opportunity to provide edits. As the qualitative data was analyzed, it became clear that the life experiences and perceptions of the superintendents was supported and grounded in the literature indicated in Chapter 2. Based on the data collected, certain generalizations can be formulated and will be discussed in Chapter 5; however, generalizations based on the five superintendents

should be taken as a means to continue the conversation around superintendent leadership and not applied universally.

Qualitative Data Analysis

This dissertation's research is based on a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach can include the use of interviews, documentation review, audio or visual material review, and observation (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) also notes that the qualitative research relies heavily on data collection, usually from many sources. As we begin to analyze the data, the goal is to identify what Creswell calls perspectives – be that “themes, dimensions, codes, or categories (Creswell, 2007, p. 43). Since Creswell uses these terms interchangeably, this research will use the phrase *themes*.

According to Ryan and Bernard (2003):

Theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative data. It also is one of the most mysterious. Explicit descriptions of theme discovery are rarely found in articles and reports, and when they are, they are often relegated to appendices or footnotes. Techniques are shared among small groups of social scientists, but sharing is impeded by disciplinary or epistemological boundaries. (p. 85)

Qualitative data is comprised of observations and words rather than numbers (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). In order to analyze and interpret qualitative data, discipline and a systematic approach must be taken. Because this study explores the lived experiences of superintendents, much of the data collected is narrative in form. Narrative data can come in the form of interviews, open-ended questionnaires, testimonials, individual interviews, focus or discussion groups, logs or journals, observations,

documents, stories or case studies (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). Although there is no single best way to bring order and understanding to the data, the approach to disaggregating the data will depend on the study's research questions, the researcher's resources, and the needs of individuals who may use the study's findings (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). Analyzing narrative data involves several steps:

1. Discovering themes and subthemes,
2. Winnowing themes to a manageable few,
3. Building hierarchies of themes or code books, and
4. Linking themes into theoretical models (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Morris Opler first identified themes as a key step in analyzing cultures and in 1945 established three principles for thematic analysis. Opler (1945) found that through manifestations of expressions in data are themes visible and discoverable. He also noted that although some themes are obvious and culturally agreed upon, others are more subtle and peculiar. Opler also found that cultural systems are made of sets of connected themes.

There are several approaches to identifying a theme or subtheme in texts and each approach has pros and cons and is suited for a specific type of narrative data. However absent a theme, the researcher has nothing to describe, compare, or explain (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). A theme is identified when the researcher can articulate what the expression is an example of (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

An a priori approach is a theme that emerges from both the researcher's prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon and the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Although there are several ways that an a priori theme can be identified, this study

focused on characteristics of the phenomenon that is being studied and from mutually agreed upon professional definitions grounded in literature. Although grounded in literature, a set of fixed open-ended questions is unlikely to anticipate all of the themes that arise before analyzing the data.

Analysis of Data

Transcribed interview information was analyzed and coded in order to align the data with varied themes. This researcher's research questions should be answered through the themes identified. Whenever a situation arose where the interview used different terminology, the researcher carefully reviewed the transcripts to attempt to make a connection to the themes. When an instance arose where the terminology was not connected to identified themes, a new category was established. Categories were coded and reorganized to group common themes together.

Presentation of Data

After grouping data into common themes, the researcher revisited each transcription seeking to answer questions such as, "Although the words are different, are the interviewers saying the same thing; is it the same comment, but with a different slant or perspective; are the interviewers speaking about the same thing but with contrasting opinions or experiences?" These types of questions required the researcher to go back and examine context and intention of each recording as well as transcriptions.

From the data gathered, there is evidence to support the case that when superintendents utilize key leadership practices, student academic achievement can increase. There is also evidence to support that when the superintendent is unable to lead because of governance issues, district systems can become unfocused, unstable and toxic,

and student achievement can decline. The themes that emerged through this process are in alignment with the 18 elements of the empirical literature outlined in Chapter 2 regarding how superintendents influence student academic achievement, both directly and indirectly (Campbell et al., 2006; MacIver & Farley, 2003; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Overall, there were five overarching themes that emerged during this process: governance, culture, systems, accountability, and relationships.

Governance

All superintendents talked about how board conflict or superintendent/board relationships impact their ability to lead. The majority talked about their board relationships in a positive manner and articulated how the board/superintendent relationship positively impacts their work in the district. One superintendent noted,

...particularly I think this particular district is one that allows a leader to grow and to flourish and not to be micromanaged by the board. So, I'm able to exercise my vision in this district, working in collaboration with the board, but not have a board that feels like they have to be engaged in the day-to-day operations. So, that's been a good fit for me. (S3, personal communication, March 23, 2012)

However, other superintendents shared their experiences in terms of how their predecessor left. In these instances, the impact was negative and left a void in the district's key leadership position. S1 encountered a situation in the district prior to becoming superintendent, there was no superintendent – no one accountable for two and one-half years and shared,

I didn't come here as a superintendent, I came here as an assistant superintendent. A year and a half after I came to the district, the board invited our superintendent to seek other options with her life. We'd been a meat grinder on leadership. We'd had I think six superintendents in eight years if you count the interim superintendents between departures. So the board asked the three assistant superintendents at the time if we'd lead in a collaborative model for a short period of time while they tried to figure out what they were going to do. That short period of time ended up being two and a half years. It really was more of the board recognizing, while that model had worked and served us well for that time,

they did need someone that they could point to and say now that's the person with their hand on the tiller, that's the person that's charting the course. And, knowing that they couldn't go outside of the organization, because they really felt strong they needed to stay here, they asked the three assistant superintendents, who would be interested in having a conversation with them about becoming the superintendent. (S1, personal communication, March 19, 2012)

Likewise, S2 experiences several years of turmoil in the district. In her district, turmoil became to be such an issue that she left the district for a while. S2 continued by sharing,

So, it was a constant ... every two years the Board would turn. As the Board would turnover every two years, Superintendents had a tendency to turnover as well... So, that superintendent lasted seven months. Out he went, and back, Dr. R* who had been there right before this Superintendent came, he's a retired Superintendent who came in for his second trip... Dr. R* held the ship for a year, and then Dr. A* came in for two years. So, on that June 20, 2004, I felt I needed to explore my options. So, I left to H* school district for six months, to be their Assistant Sup of Instruction. Well, Dr. A* was let go three or four months later. Dr. R* comes back in and I was asked to come back in as Deputy. I do the Deputy, and then I become Superintendent... I still sit back and wonder how they did it. How did we all do it with all this drama, with all the chaos? Ultimately what it boils down to, and I think I've grown up a little bit since I've retired, is that governance team. It's the Board and the Superintendent. If they can hold it together and provide leadership that transfers all the way down - walk your talk- then that superintendent is going to be very successful. (S2, personal communication, March 21, 2012)

In both experiences above, while governance was influx, students in both districts were failing to meet AYP and API. Yet because of the turnover and governance issues, there was no one in the district to promote student academic achievement. Ironically, both districts became Program Improvement districts during this time of turmoil.

Culture

All superintendents spoke of culture in terms of overall organizational culture and school site culture. Four of the five superintendents were heavily involved in creating a new organizational culture while one superintendent seemed to modify components of the organizational culture as needed. S2 experienced the obliteration of the district's leadership and a new start began as she indicated,

So, basically in the spring of 2001 was when the whole district was taken apart, and I mean practically everybody was fired. And, that began the turnaround of the district. So, that began the actual transformation....Initially you have a turnover of principals. There were 24 principals, only 6 returned. And so, think about a district coming undone, and the superintendent is there for only seven months, between February 1 and September 1. And so, you're trying to hire all these people that need to be in the D.O. to help you and you're trying to hire Principals. (S2, personal communication, March 21, 2012)

S1 explained the pivotal cultural shift in his district as a “day of reckoning” when the district was identified as program improvement under his leadership. According to S1 (personal communication, March 19, 2012),

...the starting point was first that day of reckoning that came when we were notified that we were one of the first 98 program improvement districts in California. And, to recognize that you're in the bottom 10 percent of school districts in the State in terms of student achievement, and that point of self-reflection where we came to realize that what we saw when we looked in the mirror wasn't necessarily the same thing others saw when they looked at us. That was that point where we realized, okay, all this aside, not one of those kids that comes to us on any given day lacks potential. That our schools aren't underachieving because of the needs of the kids, our schools were underachieving because we had failed to meet the needs of our kids. And so, it was changing that focus.

S5 shared a different experience around changing the culture in his district. The biggest challenge in changing the organizational culture was to engage in dialog and have meaningful conversations about the issue of student achievement. So for S5, creating a safe environment for the staff to engage in dialog was critical to the district's organizational cultural transformation. According to S5 (personal communication, April 2, 2012),

what happened in this district is that I definitely found out that there are a lot of elephants in the room; things were happening in the district that people didn't necessarily feel comfortable with in terms of the direction the district was going in with regards to their instruction program; management types of activities and there was a fear within the organization to talk about those things that were confounding students to move to higher levels of achievement. Once I discovered what they were, it was plain elephants in the room and it's okay to talk about them and

communicate and collaborate about them in order to shine the light on them in order to move forward in a collaborative manner.

A new beginning – reset, rebench, regroup and roar. All of the superintendents spoke of retooling the district’s thinking around student academic achievement. In all cases, each superintendent had either drastic overhaul in the curriculum delivery or identified missing components. For example, S2 found numerous inconsistencies in how instruction was being delivered at all of her 24 school sites:

... well, you know what the essential components are. There were 24 schools and each school was doing their own thing. There was a reading program that was district-adopted, and you were principal at “A” school, you weren’t necessarily implementing the district core, and your 30 teachers at your school were all implementing what they thought the district core was. Which, when you looked at it across the board there was no implementation, let alone continuity or fidelity of the program, etc. So, that became the transformation. At the time, the schools were mostly below 500, very low... In the county SD2 is the highest, in terms of the highest poverty, highest Latino, more than one language other than Spanish. We probably had at that time 20 languages. So, just typical of what you would see in a very low-achieving district. (S2, personal communication, March 21, 2012)

S2 noted that once they were able to bring about consistency and get everyone moving in the same direction, student achievement began to improve. In addition to consistency in the curriculum, four of the five superintendents stated that the re-benching of the district included setting a different bar for student academic achievement and as S4 states (personal communication, March 21, 2012),

...in setting the bar high, part of that discussion was, you know what, when we went into this profession, we didn’t say, gosh, when I’m a 3rd grade teacher, I want 40% of my students to be ready for 5th grade. Or, we didn’t say, gosh, we want 60% of my students to be ready for the next grade level. We fully expected that all of our kids were going to be ready for the next grade level. And so, part of building that culture of expectation for our District was also building an expectation of 100% proficient and advanced students that are ready and able to transition into their next grade level fully prepared.

From adult focused to student focused. During the interview process, all superintendents referenced creating or having a culture that is student focused. However,

there was some acknowledgement that this had not always been the case in some of the districts. When a student focused environment was necessary to create, the superintendents took a different approach – some more extreme than others. Strategies included engaging in meaningful dialog with staff around a student focused environment and working collaboratively to move in a different direction to the more extreme which was the firing of staff and hiring new staff. School districts that appeared to be more dysfunctional seemed to take the more drastic measures. As one superintendent (S1) explains,

Organizational culture was a huge challenge because we were a district that was very much focused on the needs of adults, at the expense of kids. And so, that has been a 13-year journey for me, reshaping the culture to an organizational culture that no matter where you serve in this organization you understand that the only reason you're here today is because there's a child that needs to have their condition of life improved. And, no matter if you're the guy that picked him up from the bus, or you're mowing the lawn, or you're teaching that class, or you're the office manager, the only reason you're here is to assist and achieve in the mission... And so, changing the adult belief system - in some cases we just change the adults, we couldn't change their beliefs. So, we found new adults who would believe the way we did. (S1, personal communication, March 19, 2012)

Another superintendent explained that her cultural shift was more confrontational due to union involvement and what may be characterized as union intimidation towards the younger teachers:

No matter how much I thought I was Superwoman, and how collaborative I'd been in all my other districts and jobs, you come to a point where that's not going to work there. And so, you say I'm going to give it my best shot. I'm still going to be collaborative. I know she's toxic and she doesn't care about the kids- it's all about the adults. And so, you intellectually know that. You work to try to make things work. But, at the end of the day I think that, because SD2 is who it is, unless all those teachers go away and there is still, every year as I explained over those ten years, every year a few of those toxic people would go away, and you bring in new blood. But now, what's happening is there's a little bit of toxic people that are left, five or seven, they are the teachers' union....So, it's very challenging as a Superintendent to work with that. I didn't have any issues in settling the Contract. We got through that ... all that worked. But, when I got to reconstituting schools, even though it was the right thing to do, I didn't care - I

just did it. It was the right thing to do; I closed two schools; I still have the markings on my back. One school took me to CTA ... and, at the end of the day I just said let's just settle it. I don't care if they win because it was the right thing to do for the kids, and that school in the next week or two is going to be visited for a California Distinguished School. (S2, personal communication, March 21, 2012)

In all cases, a cultural shift from adults to kids did happen. The length of time it took to see the focus shift also varied.

Service oriented. Four of the five superintendents spoke of working to ensure that the district was service oriented particularly at the district office. One superintendent (S2) constantly reminded district office personnel that they were in the district because of the students and that they were there to support the principals. In addition to district office staff, teachers were mentioned by three of the five superintendents as staff who had to be reminded that they were in the district because of the students. Over time, the four superintendents noted that the shift did happen.

Professional learning communities. Four of the five superintendents noted that a part of their cultural shift was to move to become professional learning communities (PLC) district wide. None of the superintendents noted a partial implementation – it was either all or none. Two of the five superintendents stated that they gave the directive to begin the transition to professional learning communities and as one indicated,

One of the starting points was that we initiated Professional Learning Communities. I heard Rick DuFour speak for the first time in May 2005. I came back and in August 2005 simply announced we're now a Professional Learning Community district, handed out a copy of learning by doing to every principal, said you've got two weeks to read the book and start the work. We're not going to form a committee, we're not going to do a plan, we're not going to do a study, we're not going to build consensus. We've got one chance to get it right for kids today; we start today. So, get it done. (S1, personal communication, March 19, 2012)

In this example, the superintendent made the decision and everyone was expected to follow. It is important to note that there was a lot of support for staff as they transitioned

to become a professional learning community. In one case, the PLC was already in existence prior to the superintendent arrival; however, he continued to support the practice (S3). One superintendent (S5) did not categorize his district's process as a professional learning community; however, he did acknowledge that their process did exhibit characteristics of a PLC.

Adult belief system. All superintendents discussed their personal beliefs around student academic achievement; however, four of the five superintendents were very candid about cultural shifts that happened with staff in the district. The other superintendent (S3) did not allude to changes in staff belief system; however, he did note specific systems that were required to be in place at the site level to monitor the success of vulnerable student populations. When issues did arise related to vulnerable student populations, support was provided to the principal and site staff as an intervention mechanism until the desired outcome was achieved.

Four of the five superintendents talked about how staff did not believe that the students could improve academically. In many instances, the staff gave reasons related to the fact that the students were low socio-economic, English Language Learners, and had poor home lives. The four superintendents spent a lot of time working to change the cultural beliefs of staff. As the cultural shift began to happen, some staff left; in other cases, staff was evaluated out or simply fired. S1 noted that staff believed that they were doing well considering their type of students:

And so, organizational culture that's been a challenge, tied to that then is the belief system that was kind of defining us, which was one of - you know really we're pretty good when you take a look at the kids we have to deal with. I mean, after all, what do you expect? Half of them, three-fourths of them are poor. One in four don't speak English very well, I mean, for heaven sakes we're teaching the daylight out of this, but what do you expect?...Our kids deserve nothing less than

great from us every day. It's the attitude we choose that determines whether or not that will be the outcome. Every child in the district needs to know today that they were in the presence of an adult that cares about them and believes in them. Because too many of them come from homes where that doesn't exist and we've got to be able to guarantee that. So, it's not just administrators, it is anybody that we are hiring. (S1, personal communication, March 19, 2012)

While S2 found that there was not only a belief that the students could not learn, but district systems supported this belief and were not designed to support the needs of the students:

Our teachers did not believe that the children could learn. They started blaming the kids for a variety of reasons - they were Tiki etc. That doesn't mean that they can't learn...The district office would put them in bi-lingual program and they did not speak Spanish, some do, but that was not their first language. 750 teachers felt that the kids didn't come prepared to learn. I just went around preaching that the kids can learn and they began to. (S2, personal communication, March 21, 2012)

S4 noted that there was historically an acceptance that their students were just low achieving and that a lot of staff did not bother to try to increase student academic achievement:

...Getting beyond the historic acceptance of lack of academic achievement. It almost was ok to just say hey, so long as I move them along a little bit further than what they came to me with, that's ok ... I've done my job. So long as I teach the content, that's my responsibility. It's the kid's responsibility to learn it. It's changing the mindset around that historic lack of academic achievement, associated with ... well, they're poor kids, and they don't know the language, and they don't have a father and mother ... and whatever those excuses were. I think there was some historic acceptance of that kind of mentality ... and that's not to say there weren't good intending people in this district and that were working really hard. But, I don't believe that systemically, throughout the district, there was a culture of high expectation for the kids. And so, if that's the fact, if that's true, then it gives me as an individual teacher a great deal of latitude in terms of what I professionally am accountable for. And so, I think that was one of the biggest challenges. (S4, personal communication, March 30, 2012)

One superintendent (S5) took it a step further and connected the belief system to parents, students, and staff:

I do believe that staff, parents and children need to have a taste of success to believe in themselves. Once they see that they can be successful, they overcome

barriers that are perceived as opposed to real. In our community is a very impoverished community. We have significant number of English language learners. We have kids coming to school that have lots of obstacles that would traditionally impede their ability to achieve at high levels. We're trying to make sure that not only students but parents and our staff believe that those obstacles can be overcome and the way we do that is by demonstrating that students can be successful and once we demonstrate that they can be successful, it takes on a life of its own and it builds upon that success. (S5, personal communication, April 2, 2012)

Over time, the four superintendents did see the staff belief system change. One superintendent (S1) commented that there were a lot of things that they needed to work on and they have done a lot of things to get to this point. As four of the five superintendents were leading major cultural shifts in the district, they all were working to create or restructure systems in the organization.

Systems

Although different with each superintendent, major system changes centered around meeting the needs of vulnerable student populations such as Special Education, low socio-economic, English Language Learners, and students with behavioral challenges. The level of change varied but most frequently included: data driven decision making, explicit direct instruction, PLCs, and district-wide goal setting tied to resource prioritization, and changes in curriculum and instruction assessments and monitoring.

Capacity building. An integral part of the system structure was capacity building in terms of cabinet and administrative leadership. All five superintendents spoke highly of their leadership teams and expressed how the team that he or she put together was vital to their work. In fact, having a solid leadership team was one of the leadership strategies expressed by all five superintendents. One superintendent tied the structure of teams to the PLC model and commented,

If I asked you to tell me what a team is, I'd put this month's paycheck down that you'd say it's a group of people working together to achieve a common goal. And that's a really good definition of team. But, in a Professional Learning Community environment we add two terms, it's a group of people work together inter-dependently to achieve a common goal, while holding one another mutually accountable. And so, it's a sense of inter-dependence and mutual accountability that really has driven that improvement in student learning, because now you and I are responsible for the learning. (S1, personal communication, March 19, 2012)

S1 went on to say that because of the nature of their work and how far they have progressed, at this point, it would be too difficult to bring someone in on their leadership team from outside the organization, because there are not many people in his area that are doing similar work. For S1, it is not just about knowing the work, it is about leading the work. According to S1, he needs someone that has a plethora of specific skills so going outside the organization is rarely an option. S1 has worked diligently to build leadership capacity from within the organization and promote from within. S2 made a similar connection stating that she always surrounded herself with people that were highly competent, organized, innovators, and that could think outside the box. In addition to these skills, S2 stressed the importance of having team members that were visionaries and demonstrated knowledge and expertise as a leader. S5 felt that he needed leaders that had fortitude and the ability to "take lumps and be able to be steadfast in where we are heading" (personal communication, April 2, 2012). S3 stressed the importance of having a leadership team with interpersonal skills and a good understanding of instruction and instructional methodologies.

Although the skills listed above are not all inclusive of what the superintendents wanted in a team, it is important to note that regardless of what each superintendent looked for in a team, none of the superintendents seemed willing to compromise on what they needed in a leadership team.

Principal, administrator, and teacher support. All superintendents spoke of systems to support primarily principals and teachers. On two occasions administrator support was mentioned, but it was more of a train the trainer model to support principals and teachers. All superintendents recognized that a key link to student academic achievement is the teacher. Many of the support models were geared towards ensuring district wide teacher support. One superintendent (S4) believed that creating systems of teacher support has been critical to increase student academic achievement in his district.

For example S4 ties this link back to his own leadership strength and explains,

what I believe I've brought to this district is building systems in our school district that are systemic, that help support that interaction between the teacher and the student. Because, sometimes we have, especially in the highly impoverished communities, you may have pockets in a school district that do well, and then pockets of a school district that do horrible. That where there's strong leadership because of solid systems and procedures and structures that are led by a dynamic leader, and absent in other places. And so, what I believe I've brought to the district in terms of leadership is systemically identifying what works for that interaction between the student and the teacher, not just in the classroom, but outside of the classroom that become a systemic impact on what happens with student achievement. And so, if you go back over the course of the years at SD 4, you'll see that there have been silos of success. And, over the course of the last three years you've seen the narrowing of that gap between the highest achieving schools and lower achieving schools. Where there's greater consistency of what happens with student achievement in terms of progress, where it's happening consistently in all schools, as opposed to just some schools. (S4, personal communication, March 30, 2012)

S4 went on to explain that systems of support cannot be created or managed in isolation nor be fragmented throughout the district; that the support must start at the superintendent level and push itself through the district office, down to the school sites. S4 also explained that the most important point of contact happens at the point of interaction between a teacher and a student, and that leadership is having a good understanding of how this complex connection works in order to support it. S4 did not make any

distinction between the types of support - professional development, understanding and analyzing data, or building collaborative learning environments.

Professional development that all superintendents referenced focused on specific targeted areas such as PLCs, the essential components of effective schools, and explicit direct instruction. The manner in which the professional development was delivered covered a wide range of delivery systems. Some superintendent's utilized in-house training while others sent staff outside to training at the county office or to specific conferences or trainings. One superintendent (S3) had a robust professional development program in his district. For example, the program consisted of a two-year Aspiring Leaders Program for teachers, a Leadership Academy for principals, and courses on personnel. In addition to this, the district had site-level training for teachers such as technology, Gate learning, and PLCs.

Curriculum and instruction. All five superintendents spoke of how the curriculum and instruction (C&I) was either modified or changed all together. These changes were designed to meet the needs of the students and provide intensive intervention or supplemental support to the most vulnerable populations of students. For example S3 pointed out,

We've identified our Special Education, our English Language Learners and socioeconomically deprived students, low socioeconomic students, and our Hispanic. We've really targeted those groups in particular. They're identified growth that would occur each year within that. It goes down to the more micro-level of each school targeting a particular goal. And then, down to the classroom level, and down to the individual student level. So, it happens in that way. We hold our schools accountable for continued growth. But, they drive it down to that classroom level. (S3, personal communication, March 23, 2012)

Each superintendent referenced a reason for the change that was tied to a district goal or an identified student need. In addition to the C&I realignment, targeted

assessments as well as specific protocol for student growth monitoring was either modified, expanded, or added with the intent being to identify students who need additional support early on in the school year. Interventions included, before, during, and after school programs, Saturday school, intercessions, and summer programs. All of the superintendents referenced “speaking a common language” within the district and using “data” as the guiding force behind decisions with the intent of improving the instructional component. One superintendent (S5) felt that by being more data sensitive and analytical and more driven in modifying the instruction program based on actual results, a heightened awareness by everybody in terms of where the district was at had occurred. S5 (personal communication, April 2, 2012) went on to say,

We have a variety of ways that we measure student academic performance on a very regular basis; there is an every other week formative assessment that math and English language at all grade levels. So every other week the students have a formative assessment. This is part of our weekly teacher collaboration so teachers know where students are performing and are talking openly about student performance. Then we have three major benchmark assessments that really mirror the CA standards test. Those results are also demonstrated to instructional and administrative staff so they know where students are and how they are performing. When you are not just guessing on how well students are performing, but you actually know their real performance levels, I think that that brings a heightened awareness of what we need to do in order to improve instruction.

System-wide approach to goal setting. Annual goal setting was an annual ritual with each superintendent. However, the process looked different in each district. In some cases, it was more top-down – from the board to the superintendent and through the organization. In other cases, it was a collaborative process where the board, superintendent, and senior management were actively involved. In other cases, the superintendent took annual goals to the board and the goals were vetted and eventually approved. Regardless of how the goals were established, they were driven down through

the organization to the classroom. As the goals emerged, conversations with administrators looked very different in each district. Two of the five superintendents had a collaborative meeting with administrators to discuss the goals and go over strategies for implementation, financial resources needed, and staff expectations. The other three superintendents had meetings, as well, but their meeting seemed to be more intense and required principals to demonstrate how they were going to attain the desired outcomes. S1 shared the most comprehensive and intense principal meeting and characterized it as a high stakes meeting not for students, but rather principals:

We publish a set of expectations every year, so as our administrators are going home at the end of this year they'll have in their hands the expectations for the next year. And, it lists the student outcomes, it lists what we expect in terms of monitoring their intervention structures supporting their English Language Learners, developing their PLCs, focusing on instruction, campus atmosphere, safe learning environment, all of those things that are typical. But, tied to that, we began a process eight years ago we call the Principal's Summit. And so, at the start of each year, every one of our principals comes in and delivers a one-hour presentation to myself and the rest of the cabinet, so it's all superintendent level. (S1, personal communication, March 19, 2012)

S1 goes on to further explain that this process is designed to focus intensively on historical student data and trends and to bring all parties together to understand what is at stake for the district.

The Assistant Sup, Associate Sup, Deputy Sup, and we bring them in, in teams of three and they do that presentation. They have to do a five-year desegregation of data, so it's not ... ok this is what my scores look like, but this is what my scores look like over time. They have to be able to identify the trends; they have to know where the strengths and weaknesses are. If they dipped they better know why, they better know, and it's an intense question and answer time. When we do that presentation, only those at the table can interact for that first hour, but in the room we've had as many as one hundred other people. So anyone in the district that is in a support role is generally there. The other Principals, especially the first Summit, almost every principal in the district will show up, mainly to find out how bad it's going to be this year. And, there's still fine-tuning there, so they're trying to steal ideas because we didn't standardize format, we just standardized structure. Each of them, their graphs will look a little different, their presentation style, their presentation format. They go over the data, they have to explain

intervention systems, they have to explain how they support the English Language Learners. Because again, one in four kids in our school district is an English Language Learner, so they're everywhere. We don't have a classroom that lacks the presence of someone who is still struggling with acquiring English as his or her primary language. They've got to talk about how they support the development of their Professional Learning Communities, they have to talk about how they support the development and strengthening of EDI, an instructional focus on their site. They have to talk about their positive behavioral intervention systems. So, it's that mirror image of the RTI Pyramid, academic on one side, and behavioral on the other. Because we realize very quickly for some kids it's not an academic gap that is in the way of their achievement gains, but rather it's a behavioral, it's a social emotional need that we've failed to support. So, we've built robust structures poured on both sides of that pyramid. That conversation, that's a high stakes conversation, and not only is it a high stakes conversation, but it also becomes the baseline for that year. (S1, personal communication, March 19, 2012)

Although this meeting can be very intense, the intent is to engage all staff so that everyone will know what is expected of them and to ensure that each administrator understands what they will need to demonstrate to the superintendents. This meeting also set the tone for administrator evaluations. Although the process looked different in each district, all superintendents stated that the administrator evaluation was tied to the district goals and priorities. Four of the five superintendents articulated that student data was used in the administrator evaluations as a tool to measure their effectiveness.

Resources to goals alignment. There was a wide acknowledgement that once goals were established, superintendents expected administrators to utilize financial resources to target their student's needs. Because of this approach, budgets varied from site to site because the student needs were different. In most cases, there were non-negotiable items that must be included in the site budget. District office financial resources were utilized to support the site needs. Four of the five superintendents acknowledged that reductions in state resources for education were negatively impacting the district's ability to respond to student needs. As one superintendent put it:

I guess really, the last four years with the dysfunction in Sacramento and the fiscal crisis that we've been dealing with, trying to sustain momentum, and hold on to a belief system, and keep our adults focused totally on the mission while we keep adding to their burden, and taking from them, balancing that declining resource with a continuing need to increase our level of support for kids, that's probably been the biggest challenge of my career. (S1, personal communication, March 19, 2012)

S1 went on to say that although his district is still continuing to see growth in student academic achievement, the slope of the line has moved downward. He contributes the decrease to having a student to teacher ratio of 25 to 1 at the elementary level.

Unfortunately, because of budget cuts, the decision was necessary. Likewise S3, S4, and S5 all acknowledge the negative impact budget cuts have taken on their district's ability to keep robust intervention programs at levels necessary to support vulnerable populations.

Collaboration and information sharing. Since collaboration is a major component of PLCs and four of the five superintendents have PLCs in their districts, it is not a surprise that collaboration and information sharing emerged as a major category. Collaboration was not only referenced in terms of district office to school site staff, but also district to the community. Parents were referenced as a collaborative partner in three of the five superintendents. In fact, two of the five superintendents (S2 and S4) had what was called a parent committee where parents from each school site met with the superintendent monthly to discuss the academic state of the district and brainstorm on ways that they might be able to increase student academic achievement. All superintendents spoke of collaboration around student data and used the data as a way to generate new ideas on how to teach material or provide supplemental support. Information was shared across grades, within school sites and across the district. One superintendent (S3) had an intranet website portal where teachers and administrators

could exchange and share teaching strategies for a particular content area or engage in dialog on how to pre-teach, teach, or re-teach a specific content area. Also, across the district, teachers were able to share lesson plans and provide feedback on the lessons ability to keep students engaged. Another superintendent (S2) found collaboration beneficial in her district stating “if you have people who can look at this issue and all this knowledge and all this experiences from the different people that come in regardless of who they are, it’s pretty powerful at the end of the day” (personal communication, March 23, 2012). The whole intent of collaboration was summed up by one superintendent (S1) who shared that the whole intent of this type of collaboration is to see what we are doing and how we can make it better. For S1, the expectation, like many of the other superintendents, is to be able to see evidence of what is being done and how it is getting better at the school sites. Based on the information obtained from these interviews, it was quite evident that in these superintendent’s environments, data ruled and collaboration was the delivery mechanism.

Accountability

As the five superintendents shared their perceptions of their leadership, accountability for student outcomes was a reoccurring theme. All superintendents noted that they were the instructional leaders of the district. One superintendent (S1) stated that he had received many awards and acclamations because of his work in the district to improve student academic achievement. S1 shared that while he did acknowledge the good work, he had to also acknowledge that he was responsible for the failures in student academic achievement also because he was in the position of superintendent when the district became one of the lowest performing districts in the state. In his mind – he was

accountable on both ends of the spectrum. For S1, he made a conscience decision to dare to do something different for the children in his district no matter what. S2 shared that her commitment to the district was for one thing – “at the end of the day, can we say that 100% of the kids are proficient in this community?” (personal communication, March 21, 2012). Tools used to measure or gauge accountability were similar among all five superintendents. However, in each case some form of data was used that ranged from district created preliminary assessments to CST benchmarks to AYP and API growth.

Focus on outcomes. Three of the five superintendents specifically said that their accountability model focused on outcomes rather than compliance. According to one superintendent (S1) being driven by compliance goals limits a person. For him, the conversation shifted at his district from getting out of program improvement to ensuring that they knew their kids well enough to answer the question, “Did learning occur today?” For S1, in order to answer this question, four key questions must be asked (a) what do we want our kids to learn, (b) how do we know they’ve learned it, (c) how do we respond when learning did not occur; and (d) how do we respond when learning has already occurred? This concept was very much in alignment with S4 who stated, “one must understand what you want to accomplish and how it connects to the vision and mission of the organization” (personal communication, March 19, 2012). S3 felt that ensuring that principals stayed focused on the things that are most important, such as instruction, academic learning, and community engagement, was pivotal in their accountability structure. In all cases, the student outcome was at the center of the strategies.

No excuses for student failure. For the superintendents interviewed in this study, no one blamed the students in the district for academic failure. In all cases, superintendents connected the academic failure to adults or system failures. Most superintendents were very passionate about this point and held that students do not fail but rather adults fail children. S2 (personal communication, March 21, 2012) stated that

it doesn't really matter if you have a school that has this ethnicity or these demographic characteristics or another school that is high poverty, high Latino, high this, that or the other - to me, it doesn't matter. It takes a lot of work to get to where you need to be.

S4 felt that adults have plenty of opportunities to have a way out in this business and,

whether it is Language Proficiency, whether it is home life, whether it is the student's ethnicity – whatever it might be. I think a part of leadership is recognizing that our goal in education is to have the same expectations for all of our kids.... (personal communication, March 30, 2012)

S1 added that we must realize that students do not come to school lacking potential; schools are not underachieving because of needs of kids, but rather schools are underachieving because we have failed to meet the needs of the kids (S1). To this point, the focus must change.

How will this action impact kids. As the superintendents talked, four of the five spoke of focusing on the outcome and no excuses for student failure, understanding what impact this action will have on students was referenced. All superintendents connected district goals, systems, and culture to one pivotal question – “What impact will this have on students?” As the question was raised, how the question was vetted through the organization looked differently. In some instances, the superintendents set the expectations and the principals were held accountable for answering the question. In other cases, the assistant superintendent of C&I or directors were heavily involved in this

question. In other cases, it was a leadership discussion. However, in all cases, resources, both financial and human capital, were modified or added to meet the needs of the students.

Expectations based on district goals and student data. All superintendents spoke of an evaluation process based on expectations; however, the process looked different in each district with the exception of one area – student data. All evaluations utilized student data as a basis to gauge principal effectiveness. The timeline of the evaluation varied from monthly to every other year. For example, S4 required principals to turn in an Academic Action Plan. The purpose of the plan was to not only outline the principal’s goals, but also how the principals planned to accelerate learning at his or her site as well as how they planned to involve the teachers in building the plan. In addition to the action plan, S4 gave the principals a single sheet of principal expectations. This sheet listed the non-negotiable areas and correlated to the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools based on Lezotte’s work – instructional leadership, clear and focused mission, safe and orderly environment, climate of high expectations, frequent monitoring of student progress, positive home/school relations, and opportunity to learn and student time on task. In addition to S4, the other four superintendents mentioned that there were non-negotiable areas that administrators were evaluated on. In all cases, the non-negotiable areas were centered on parent engagement, student assessment and monitoring, PLCs, and student intervention. In other areas, superintendents set the expectation of desired outcomes, but did not micromanage the principals and allowed flexibility in the implementation of strategies at each school site. In other words, the superintendent standardized the structure, but was flexible on the format.

Relationships

Parent and community engagement was a common theme among all superintendents. For this area, all of the superintendents were consistent with relationship building. Methods utilized by the superintendents to engage parents included, superintendent/parent committees, parent newsletters, op-ed pieces, monthly or quarterly newsletters, and even television appearances.

In addition to the superintendent, principals were expected to build relationships with parents and in the community. In many cases, this process was a part of the principal's evaluation. Principals were expected to build relationships by using tools such as fact-to-face meetings, social media, and the Internet. One superintendent (S4) spoke of Principal Coffee where parents could come in and have coffee with the principal and engage in conversation. Based on information gathered in this study, it appeared that parents were welcome and expected to come and interact with administrators, students, and teachers at the school sites.

Four of the five superintendents were engaged with local businesses and civic groups and sat on boards like the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary board. As one superintendent (S1) put it "when you connect with the community, you carry the message out" (personal communication, March 19, 2012). In the case of S1, the city adopted the school district's message of caring and started mailing the school district's core values out to citizens. For S1, this connection carried the school district's message out in a broader context and highlighted the importance of showing community effort and identity.

All superintendents included consistent dialog with the school board. Some superintendents sent weekly newsletters out to the board members to keep them abreast of issues in the district.

Summary

As indicated in Chapter 2, transactional leadership acts within a culture while transformational leadership creates a new culture. Based on the data gathered, four of the five superintendents exhibited characteristics of transformational leadership due to cultural shifts that occurred under their leadership.

Table 4.2

<i>Superintendent Leadership Style</i>					
Description	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5
Transformational Leadership	X	X		X	X
Transactional Leadership			X		

It is important to note that while S3 exhibited more transactional leadership qualities, his district seemed to be more student focused upon his arrival in the district. Had the district culture looked different upon his arrival, I believe that more transformational qualities would have been demonstrated.

Chapter 4 presented qualitative data that gathered interviews with five superintendents in California school districts who moved schools out of program improvement over a period of time. This chapter included numerous interview citations. The intent of this chapter was to attempt to accurately reflect the connection between the interview questions and the research questions. A lot of time and care was taken

analyzing the data and searching for emerging themes. In instances where interview quotes or paraphrasing was utilized, the researcher made every effort to ensure accuracy of what was being presented.

Overall, the participants had a plethora of comments related to their leadership beliefs and practices, challenges they faced in the district, and their beliefs around relationships and accountability for student academic achievement. Based on the data gathered in this study, the qualitative evidence suggest that superintendents are vital to whole-system reform in school districts, particularly program improvement districts; and that superintendents have the ability to change organizational culture to focus on increased student academic achievement. Chapter 5 will highlight the major findings, limitations and recommendations.

Chapter 5

Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of superintendents who successfully moved schools out of program improvement. The intent was to examine their leadership practices with the goal of gaining an in-depth understanding of the superintendent's leadership characteristics, perceptions of organizational priorities, goals and objectives, along with the alignment of the district mission statement and vision to allocated resources. Chapter 2, a review of the literature, identified specific areas that were shown to impact superintendent leadership and became the basis of the framework in which the qualitative interviews were composed. Chapter 3 gave explicit details of the methodology that was used to collect, analyze, and secure data. Chapter 4 addressed the research questions and presented the data collected. Chapter 5, the final chapter, focuses on the findings, conclusions, and recommendations that are connected to the superintendent interviews and literature review from Chapter 2.

Major Findings

With qualitative data, one must make sense of the data and identify emerging themes, and this practice was utilized in this study. This study's findings are based largely on the data gathered in the interviews with the five California superintendents. Steps have been taken to gauge the trustworthiness of the data collected using strategies outlined in Chapters 3. However, qualitative data is subjective in nature and is based on the participant's experiences, beliefs, and shared perceptions. Although the results are

not random, it is possible that another researcher could find different results based upon his or her study's participants and experiences.

The research question and sub-questions were:

1. What, if any, are the demonstrated leadership practices among superintendents that positively affect student academic achievement in schools designated by the No Child Left Behind Act as Program Improvement?
 - a. What themes emerge regarding the decision making process of academic strategies implemented at the district level delivered from the superintendent to administrators?
 - b. What are the common experiences surrounding how each resource, financial and human capital, is aligned to district priorities, goals and objectives?
 - c. What themes emerge regarding the role superintendent leadership plays in student academic achievement?

Changes in rules, roles, and relationships, as well as changes in commitments, meanings, beliefs, values, and traditions, are required as a part of systemic change (Schlechty, 2005). Literature from Chapter 2 found that superintendents use systems of practice indirectly to design, influence, shape, enable, and maintain organizational and instructional outcomes (Halverson, 2003). In order to provide individual opportunities and shape instruction that will affect academic achievement outcomes, superintendents use a network of policies, procedures, programs, tasks, and traditions. That network can include, but are not limited to:

- District goals/standards aligned with curriculum (Leithwood, 2005);

- Identified campus/district needs aligned with personnel, time, and money resources (Björk, 1993; Waters & Marzano, 2006);
- Policies that allow all relevant stakeholders to be engaged in collaborative goal setting (Waters & Marzano, 2006); and
- Principal supervision and staff recruitment (Björk, 1993).

Findings in Chapter 4 are supported by the literature regarding how superintendent's influence student academic achievement. Based upon the themes that emerged in Chapter 4, superintendents' leadership practices impact student academic achievement in five critical areas (a) governance, (b) culture, (c) systems, (d) accountability, and (e) relationships.

Culture. Culture appeared to be the one area that gave the superintendents the most difficulty; however, all areas were interdependent upon one another. For example, if the culture remained the same, it would be difficult to build new systems based upon a different set of core values and beliefs. Because culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group and taught to new members of a group, a strong leader must be in place to lead major changes in organizational culture (Schein, 2004).

In the cases of four of the five superintendents, cultural shifts were necessary before whole-system reform could take root and flourish. Changes in areas such as a service oriented environment and staff belief systems were necessary in order to start the change process. Four of the five superintendents stated that staff believed that children in poverty could only achieve academically to a certain level, therefore the standard for learning and the expected outcome for the students was very low.

During the process of changing the culture, many adults either left the organizations or were fired and new staff that held the same academic beliefs as the superintendent was hired. Collins (2001) was very clear that the leader should first assemble the right type of people in the right positions; and that vision creation occurs only after the team is organized. Collins also stressed that leaders should remove individuals who do not benefit the organization and replace them with the right people.

It was evident in this study that as the organization moved from being adult focused to student focused, four of the five superintendents made leadership changes. In one case (S2), only six of twenty-four principals were asked to return to the district. An effective leader has the ability to create the necessary team momentum to move an organization in the right direction (Collins, 2001). However, for in-depth change to be successful, building a team of leaders is essential (Fullan, 2005).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) became a part of four of the five superintendent's organizational culture. This process became the gateway to exchange in dialog around student academic achievement. In some instances, the decision to move to PLCs was a direct superintendent decision and everyone was expected to move. For most of the superintendents, sustainable change was not seen as single event, but rather a continuous process of self and organizational improvement.

Systems. The five interviewed superintendents had strong curriculum and instruction background and had extensive experience in K-12 education ranging from 12 to 34 years in the industry. The career track was the same; all superintendents were a teacher, administrator, and finally superintendent. With the exception of two superintendents, each served as a superintendent in a prior district. With such a strong

background in curriculum and leadership, the researcher was not surprised to see a high level of comfort in system changes related to student academic achievement.

All five of the superintendents created or enhanced their district's educational systems to meet the needs of vulnerable populations such as English Language Learners, Special Education, low socio-economic, and students with behavioral challenges. As educational enhancements were implemented, support for principals and teachers were also implemented at school sites and the district office.

Goal setting and resource alignment were an integral part of system. Although how the goals were created looked different, all five superintendents saw goals move from the top of the organization and ultimately down through the organization into the classroom. Financial resources were aligned with goals. The expectation was that resources would be used to target student academic achievement based on data and district goals. For these five superintendents, continuing with the status quo was not an option. In some cases, staff was laid off and programs were realigned to meet the needs of the students. Fullan's (2010) research supported the superintendent's process. This study specifically connected to Fullan's conclusion that current school district practices not only permit massive waste of resources on ineffective remedies, but also sustain ineffective practices and cause dysfunctional outcomes. For superintendents in this study, the only approach to system changes was whole-system reform and no piecemeal programs or pilot programs.

Accountability. Three of the five superintendents did not use a compliance model to increase student academic achievement, but rather a results oriented approach that focused on student outcomes. One superintendent (S1), felt the goal moved from getting

out of program improvement to ensure that they knew their children well enough to determine whether or not learning occurred each day in the district. The belief was in alignment with Fullan who stressed that successful outcomes will not be realized when using resources without appropriate whole-system reform (2010); however, when current resources are used with greater focus, successful outcomes can gain additional resources (Fullan, 2005). This was true for several of the superintendents, particularly S1 who secured over \$100,000 in private funds to support an additional staffer for supplemental support. For all of the superintendents, blaming the students for academic failure was not an option. It does not matter who one is, where they come from, or how many parents are at home. For these superintendents, what mattered is that systems were in place to assist the students in reaching his or her maximum potential. For these superintendents, many of the reasons for student failure were disproved as the same schools that were in program improvement exited.

Relationships. Board superintendent relationships centered on keeping the board informed of district issues. Communication was kept current by using weekly newsletters. All five superintendents stressed the importance of having a good relationship with their board.

The superintendent's in this study were consistent that parent and community involvement was a mandatory requirement. All superintendents engaged parents using parent newsletters, monthly or quarterly newsletters, superintendent/parent committees, and even op-ed pieces. In addition to the superintendent, principals were expected to engage parents at the site level. Parents were able to meet directly with the principal to

talk about issues and collaborate on topics related to student academic achievement and school culture.

Superintendents were also engaged in business and civic activities such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club. The intent was to connect to the community and carry the district's message out to a broader audience. In some instances, local government agencies incorporated the district's message into their core values.

Theoretical framework. In addition to the five themes that emerged, transformational leadership was the most common theoretical framework that was identified in the superintendents that participated in this study. Four of the five superintendents exhibited transformation leadership characteristics. For the one superintendent that exhibited more transactional leadership, it is important to note that this superintendent's district appeared to be the most functional with support systems in place to support student academic achievement. Given a different environment, I believe that more transformational qualities would emerge.

The idea of transformational leadership involves the mutual connection that links leaders and subordinates (Page & Miller, 2002). Ibarra et al. (2010) found that transformational leadership is connected to increased organizational outcomes and creates "conditions for individuals to confront existing values and norms, compared to transactional leadership that manages the current belief and values system while applying fixes to problems bound by existing paradigms" (p. 32).

Transformational leaders must be able to provide "(1) charisma or idealized influence, (2) inspirational motivation, (3) intellectual stimulation, and (4) individualized consideration or individualized attention" (Stewart, 2006, p. 5). This type of leader also

emboldens high achievement and collective standards with a sense of resolve and a common mission and vision (Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2006).

The superintendent's that participated in this study were passionate about their district and students, determined to make a difference in the student's lives, committed to increased student academic achievement, and refused to accept low student academic achievement as a way of being. Each superintendent strived to motivate staff to increase student outcomes. These leaders worked to build capacity in management and staff, but were not afraid to remove unproductive staff or change the culture even if it meant facing off with district union leaders. Four of the five superintendents changed the organization culture to be more student focused.

Goleman (1998) identified emotional intelligence (EI) components as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, and researched EI effective performance connections, primarily in leaders in terms of how EI manifests on the job. Goleman sought to determine whether an individual has high EI and, if so, how to recognize it. Goleman found that EI was twice as important as other leadership characteristics for jobs at all levels. His research also demonstrated that EI could be developed when people take the right approach to training programs. Goleman pointed out that finding the right approach to EI is important because leadership requires effective relationship management and that, although technical ability is necessary for a leader, EI completes the equation regarding effective leadership and performance. Superintendents in this study sought to not only increase their own emotional intelligence, but that of their staff. Professional development programs were geared to raise self-awareness regarding student achievement, give staff the technical skills to meet district expected outcomes,

and collaboration and communication skills that were necessary to connect to the students and the parents. Fullan (2005) stressed that schools are effective when “connection, coherence, and collective-capacity building characterize the entire system—classroom, district, and state” (Fullan, 2005, p. 12). This effectiveness is expressed in Fullan’s seven big ideas for whole-system reform:

All children (95%), except the severely disabled students, can learn to a high level of critical reasoning and problem solving; select a few core priorities; resolute leadership/stay on message or target with focus even during hard times; collective capacity-collaboration that is disciplined; strategies with precision; intelligent accountability where policies and procedures increase individual and collective capacity; and all means all—whole-system reform cannot be pieced together.

(Fullan, 2005, p. 4)

Based on the data presented in this study, Fullan’s seven big ideas are in alignment with concepts and strategies that the superintendents utilized to improve student academic achievement. Although the timeframe varied in terms of the length of time it took to see student academic achievement improve, the superintendents did not lose focus.

Governance. The critical component to the success of these superintendents was the governance ability of the school board. When the board was stable and did not engage in micromanagement, superintendents were able to lead the organization to meet district goals. Several superintendents gave examples of how the board’s dysfunction led to turnover at the superintendent level. When there is constant turnover at the board level, previous goals and initiatives can change frequently, leading to fragmented educational

systems and ineffective leaders. As indicated in Chapter 2, governance directly impacts the superintendent's ability to lead major reform efforts.

Political environment. It is important to stress the significance political environments play in shaping the relationship between the board and the superintendent. Although the five superintendents who participated in this study stated that the district's political climate did not impede their ability to lead, several superintendents did share how the board interacted with their predecessor. In the examples given, as the board turned over, the superintendent did so as well. This posed a major challenge when there was a need to implement system-wide initiatives or modify entire systems within the district. What appeared to be evident was that as the board changed, so did the initiatives, goals, and objectives of the district. With extreme board influx, there was insufficient time given to the superintendent to implement changes and monitor and evaluate system effectiveness.

Such inconsistency at the board level impacted student academic achievement. Absent a strong board committed to student academic achievement and a superintendent holding staff accountable, student academic achievement declined. However, once the board was able to hold itself together and allowed a superintendent to serve as district Chief Executive Officer, student academic achievement began to rise. In two examples presented in this paper, students move from significantly underachieving to superseding state and federal academic achievement targets.

Conclusion

Superintendent leadership is a critical component of improving low-performing districts. The superintendent has the ability to set the tone of the district and hold staff

accountable for student outcomes. Without a strong superintendent leading whole-system reform, reform efforts can fall short and fail to reach the classroom. In order to lead such massive reform efforts, superintendents cannot rely only on the technical expertise of others. The superintendent must be actively engaged in the curriculum and instruction and staff hiring. The superintendent must be visible and active in the community. Critical conversations around culture should start with the superintendent.

The job of the superintendent is not by his or her work alone. It is vital for the superintendent to have a highly competent and capable leadership team that can ensure that the goals and objectives are achieved throughout the district. Accountability for student outcomes is achieved through the collective capacity of administrators and teachers with the superintendent charting the course and leading the way through reform efforts. No other position in the district has the ability to provide such critical leadership.

Recommendations for Future Research

A quantitative study should be conducted to determine the impact of budget cuts on program improvement districts. Reductions in revenue should be compared to the growth or decline of student academic achievement based on AYP and API before and after 2007-2008, which was the last year California school districts received a cost of living adjustment. Since that time, school districts have continued to face budget cuts and have been required to continue to raise student academic achievement.

A qualitative study could be undertaken to determine the role school district governance plays in student academic achievement. Concentration should be given to goals and objectives and how they may or may not change as new board members come on and board focus shifts.

Summary

This study of superintendent leadership and its impact on student academic achievement began with the notion that superintendents are critical in reform efforts of program improvement school and/or school districts. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature and identified practices superintendents used to impact student academic achievement. Chapter 2 also focused on known issues that affect superintendent leadership. Five superintendents were interviewed in an attempt to understand the practices that were used to move schools out of program improvement. Chapter 4 presented the data that was collected and analyzed. After reviewing the data, it was identified that certain themes emerged regarding how the superintendent can impact student academic achievement. Areas identified were: governance, culture, systems, accountability, and relationships.

Growing up in the rural south, my educational experience taught me three things (a) I define me, (b) I determine my success, and (c) I can rise above any circumstance presented to me. Southern culture taught me that, in this world, all things are not equal. My family taught me not to despise injustice, but to embrace it in order to be a part of the solution to make a positive difference. Because of this belief, I am resilient, resourceful, and determined to be the best that I can be. It is the fabric of my spirit and composition of my heart to dare to be different, stand up against human injustice, and be a champion for the oppressed, depressed, and compressed individuals who have no other means to be heard but through me.

My grandmother is the most inspirational person in my life. She graduated from college and went on to become a phenomenal educator. Her message was always consistent to her students and me, “You are what you think, so always think big.” After

graduating college, my grandmother often reflected on growing up poor and the conscience choice she made at an early age that education was the key to her success. I often wonder if the children of today can make a conscience choice to succeed and thrive in school systems that may be by their very design set up for student failure.

In my career as an Assistant Superintendent of Business, I witness first hand, billions of dollars pushed into education and have a difficult time understanding why minority students are not achieving at the same or higher rate of other ethnic groups. I firmly believe that poverty is not a disability; it is a circumstance that one can rise above when given the right tools for academic success. Additionally, I believe that poverty is not an excuse for failure. Growing up in Mississippi in a rural impoverished town, I have personally witnessed firsthand low socio-economic students rise above their circumstances to go on to become college graduates with great careers.

For my dissertation I wanted to know what has changed; why are our schools moving in a different direction academically and what impact educational leadership plays in shaping the district culture. Because of my practical experience with poverty, my professional experience in education administration and leadership (K-16), specifically accounting and finance, I believe that I have a unique lens to explore the dynamics of this topic. My goal was that through this dissertation, I would be a more informed education administrator and others could use this study as a tool to begin the critical conversations around what adults believe about children of poverty. My life was truly enriched by the experiences shared by the five superintendents in this study. I hope that this study adds to the small amount of literature related to the important role of the superintendent.

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APPENDIX A

BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Richard H. Goodman, William G. Zimmerman,

From New England School Development Council

Responsibilities of Board/Superintendent Team:

- Having as its top priority the creation of teamwork and advocacy for the high achievement and healthy development of all children in the community
- Providing education leadership for the community, including the development and implementation of the community vision and long range plan, in close collaboration with principals, teachers, other staff and parents.
- Creating strong linkages with social service, health and other community organizations and agencies to provide community wide support and services for healthy development and high achievement for all children.
- Setting districtwide policies and annual goals, tied directly to the community's vision and long-range plan for education.
- Approving an annual school district budget, developed by the superintendent and adopted by the board
- Ensuring the safety and adequacy of all school facilities.
- Providing resources for the professional development of teachers, principals and other staff
- Periodically evaluating its own leadership, governance and teamwork for children.
- Overseeing negotiations with employee groups.

Responsibilities of School Board:

- Selecting, working with and evaluating superintendent
- Serving as advocates for all children teachers, and other staff by adopting "kids-first" goals, policies and budget
- Maintaining fiscal responsibility and fiscal autonomy, with the authority to appropriate local funds necessary to support the board-approved budget
- Delegating to the superintendent the day to day administration of the school district, including student discipline and all personnel matters

Responsibilities of Superintendent:

- Serving as chief executive officer to the board of education, including recommending all policies and the annual budget.
- Supporting the board of education by providing good information for decision-making
- Overseeing the educational program
- Taking responsibility for all personnel matters
- Developing and administering the budget
- Managing business and financial matters, bids and contracts, facilities, transportation, etc.
- Developing and supporting districtwide teams of teachers and other staff working to improve teaching and learning and supporting local school councils of staff, parents and students
- Taking care of day to day management and administrative tasks including student discipline and personnel issues.

APPENDIX B

FCMAT INDICATORS OF FISCAL DISTRESS

1. **Leadership Breakdown***
 - a. Governance crisis**
 - b. Ineffective staff recruitment
 - c. Board micromanagement and special interest groups influencing boards
 - d. Ineffective or no supervision
 - e. Litigation against district
2. **Ineffective Communication***
 - a. Staff unrest and morale issues
 - b. Absence of communication to educational community**
 - c. Lack of interagency cooperation**
 - d. Breakdown of internal systems (payroll, position control)
3. **Collapse of Infrastructure**
 - a. Unhealthful and unsafe facilities and sites
 - b. Deferred maintenance neglected
 - c. Low Budget Priority
 - d. Local and state citations ignored
 - e. No long-range plan for facility maintenance
4. **Inadequate Budget Development***
 - a. Failure to recognize year-to-year trends, e.g., declining enrollment or deficit spending**
 - b. Flawed ADA projections**
 - c. Failure to maintain reserves**
 - d. Salary and benefits in unrealistic proportions
 - e. Insufficient consideration of long-term bargaining agreement effects**
 - f. Flawed multi-year projections**
 - g. Inaccurate revenue and expenditure estimations**
5. **Limited Budget Monitoring***
 - a. Failure to reconcile ledgers
 - b. Poor cash flow analysis and reconciliation**
 - c. Inadequate business systems and controls
 - d. Inattention to COE data
 - e. Failure to review management control reports
 - f. Bargaining agreements beyond state COLA**
 - g. Lawsuit settlements
6. **Poor Position Control***
 - a. Identification of each position missing
 - b. Unauthorized hiring
 - c. Budget development process affected
 - d. No integration of position control with payroll**
7. **Ineffective Management Information Systems***
 - a. Limited access to timely personnel, payroll, and budget control data and reports**
 - b. Inadequate attention to system life cycles
 - c. Inadequate communication systems
8. **Inattention to Categorical Programs***
 - a. Escalating general fund encroachment**
 - b. Lack of regular monitoring**
 - c. Illegal expenditures
 - d. Failure to file claims
9. **Substantial Long-Term Debt Commitments**
 - a. Increased costs of employee health benefits+
 - b. Certificates of participation
 - c. Retiree health benefits for employees and spouse+
 - d. Expiring parcel taxes dedicated to ongoing costs
10. **Human Resource Crisis**
 - a. Shortage of staff (administrators, teachers, support, and board)
 - b. Teachers and support staff working out of assignment
 - c. Students/classrooms without teachers
 - d. Administrators coping with daily crisis intervention
 - e. Inadequate staff development
11. **Related Issues of Concern**
 - a. Local and state audit exceptions
 - b. Disproportionate number of under performing schools
 - c. Staff, parent, and student exodus from the school district
 - d. Public support for public schools decreasing
 - e. Inadequate community participation and communication

* Highlights the seven conditions consistently found in each district requesting an emergency loan or dealing with a "fiscal crisis."

** Represents the 15 conditions that have been found most frequently to indicate fiscal distress and are those referenced in Assembly Bill 2756 (Daucher) and recently amended Education Code Sections 42127 and 42127.6.

+ Indicates an emerging area of significant concern.

APPENDIX C
REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

Participant Name
Participant Address

Dear Participant:

I am Candi Clayton-Clark, a doctoral candidate at Pepperdine University. Currently, I am conducting a qualitative study focusing on leadership practices utilized by California school superintendents and I would like to ask you to participate.

The study will help determine what superintendent leadership strategies, if any, impact student academic achievement in low performing school districts. Each participant will be asked about his/her own leadership experiences.

In order to participate in the study, you will be required to set aside time for a 45-minute interview. During this interview, you will be asked to elaborate on your experiences surrounding how resources are aligned to district priorities, goal and objectives and your perception of how the role of superintendent has impacted student academic achievement. You will also receive a copy of the interview transcript and will be given an opportunity to change any statements that you feel are inaccurate or unclear.

If you agree to participate, we will establish an interview time within the next 45 days. You will also receive a copy of the interview questions in advance. Please call me at [REDACTED] or email me at candiclark00@gmail.com to confirm your participation.

Thank you in advance,

Candi Clayton-Clark, MBA
Doctoral Candidate, Pepperdine University

APPENDIX D**PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY****INFORMED CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION**

- Title:** Academic Performance Strategies Implemented by Successful California Superintendents in Low-Performing School Districts
- Researcher:** Candi Clayton-Clark, MBA
Pepperdine University Doctoral Candidate
- Purpose:** The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of superintendents as a means to document resource allocation methods, leadership challenges, and leadership styles that have a positive impact on student academic achievement. This study seeks to understand effective superintendent leadership as it relates to exceptional school practices.
- Information:** Participants will receive a research participation request letter. After a participant agrees to participate, an interview time will be scheduled within 6 months. Interview questions will be provided prior to the interview and the interview itself will be recorded and transcribed. Interview information will be analyzed and coded into categories. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the superintendent and school district. This information will be used to determine the study's findings and will be shared as a public document through a dissertation, presentation and other public media modes. This study will fulfill partial requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership Administration and Policy through Pepperdine University.
- Risks:** There are no known participant risks.
- Benefits:** The researcher will offer each participant a copy of the study's results. It is the researcher's expectation that this study will expand the body of literature about superintendent leadership and its impact on student academic achievement. Although participants will not be financially compensated for participating, the researcher will send each participant a small token of appreciation.

INFORMED CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Confidentiality: All documents, digital and hard copy, will be kept in either a double lock file cabinet or fire proof safe in the researcher's home. All data will be destroyed after 5 years. All data collected is considered confidential. Interview responses will be kept private and your right to privacy will not be violated.

Participation: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participants have the right to withdraw at any time. Participants have the right to decline to answer any question presented in the interview. The researcher has the right to end a participants study participation at anytime.

Informed Consent: Participant signature below indicates that the information above has been read and that the participant agrees to participate in the study.

Participant _____ **Date** _____

Researcher _____ **Date** _____

Contacting the researcher: For questions regarding this study, contact:

Candi Clark, MBA
P.O. Box 1822
Gilroy, CA 95020
[REDACTED]
candiclark00@gmail.com

Contacting Pepperdine University: To speak to a university representative, contact:

Robert Barner, Ph.D
[REDACTED]
robertbarner@pepperdine.edu

APPENDIX E**INTERVIEW GUIDE****Academic Performance Strategies Implemented by Successful California Superintendents
in Low-Performing School Districts**

Participant _____ Date _____

Please state your name, gender, age and your position.

How many years have you been in the district in your current position?

1. Please describe the overall district goals regarding student academic achievement.
2. Leadership characteristics are the primary focus of this study; therefore, how would you describe your personal belief about your leadership and its impact on student academic achievement?
3. How did you come to the conclusion that your leadership characteristics were a fit for this district?
4. In the role of superintendent, what are some of the most difficult issues you have encountered within this district?
5. How do you ensure instructional focus, both in practice and in performance, to everyone in the organization?
6. Please describe how you hold administrators accountable for student's academic performance.
7. Can you describe how administrative staff is evaluated?
8. What are some of the ways that you communicate with staff and other district stakeholders?
9. When hiring a new administrator, what are some of the characteristics that you look for?
10. How often do you visit classrooms and sites, and what do you look for when you conduct visits?
11. How do you determine when to loosen or tighten administrative control?
12. What strategies do you use to assist staff in understanding the perception of what the district aspires to be and what the district office is currently accomplishing?
13. How are resources, financial and human capital, used to target achievement gaps?
14. What steps have been taken to enable the alignment of budgets with learning goals?
15. Can you describe how professional development opportunities, for both administrators and teachers, are organized, executed, and gauged for success within the district?

APPENDIX F
PARTICIPANT REVIEW LETTER

Participant Name
Participant Address

Dear Participant:

Your participation in my doctoral study was greatly appreciated. Your insights and perceptions added value to the study and are critical as I progress towards the findings.

As I promised, enclosed is a copy of the interview transcription. Please review the document and make any corrections or comments. Feel free to include any questions that you might have. If there are any statements that require correction, let me know. Keep in mind that the transcripts will not be published and they will only be shared with my dissertation committee.

If corrections are required, submit the transcript to me no later than, XXXXXX. If I do not hear from you by this date, I will assume that the transcript accurately reflects your comments and I will proceed to the next stage of the research process.

Thank you for participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Candi Clayton-Clark, MBA

