

A MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF SIX FACTORS CONCERNING
SCHOOL DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHICS AND SUPERINTENDENT TENURE AND
EXPERIENCE IN 2007-2008 SCHOOLS RELATIVE TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
ON THE THIRD GRADE KANSAS READING ASSESSMENTS

by

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B.S., Kansas State University, 1987
M.Ed., Washburn University, 1997

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the relationship between the length of tenure of a superintendent and academic achievement as defined by the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. To put this relationship into context, five other predictive variables were included as a part of this study: the individual’s total length of experience as a superintendent, the individual’s total length of experience in education, each district’s assessed valuation per pupil, each district’s percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced meal prices, and each district’s total student headcount. To gain the most comprehensive view possible, all 295 Kansas school districts in existence in 2008 were included in this study.

The backward method of multiple regression was utilized to analyze these data. Before performing this analysis, the researcher first checked to ensure that the assumption of no multicollinearity had been met. From this analysis, all six predictive variables were retained as no relationships between them were found to be too strong. Following this check, the backward method of multiple regression analysis was performed. This method of multiple regression seeks to create the most parsimonious model, so two of the predictive variables were excluded from the final summary model based on removal criterion, the significance value of the *t*-test of each predictive variable.

Results of this study revealed that 9.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment, was accounted for by the predictive variables in the model retained. Further, multiple regression analysis tested the unique contributions of the four

remaining predictive variables. Although included as one of the four predictive variables that had a significant effect on the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment, the primary focus of this study – to examine the impact a superintendent’s length of tenure has on students’ academic achievement – proved to have the least relative impact, according to beta weights.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE CONTENTS.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES	x
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xi

CHAPTER

PAGE

I.	INTRODUCTION	
	General Background	01
	Applying the Struggle to Kansas	04
	Statement of the Problem	09
	Research Purpose and Statement of Objective	10
	Significance of the Study	12
	Limitations of the Study	13
	Methodology	14
	Definitions	15
II.	REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	
	Purpose and Importance	17
	Broad Overview of Current Responsibilities	18
	Historical Progression of the Roles/Duties of the Superintendent	21
	Stage One: 1837-1850	22
	Stage Two: 1850-1900	23
	Stage Three: 1900-1950	24
	Stage Four: 1950-Present	28
	Realities of the Superintendency in the Modern Age	35
	Summary	42
III.	RESEARCH DESIGN	
	Overview of Research Design	45
	Setting Up the Study	46
	Research Questions	48
	Analysis of Data	50
	Summary	52
IV.	PRESENTATION OF DATA	
	Introduction	53
	Research Questions	54
	Results of Data Analysis	55
	Concise Answers to Research Questions	58
	Summary	60
V.	FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS	
	Introduction	61
	Summary of the Study	61

Methodology	64
Results	65
Conclusions	66
Implications	68
Limitations	71
Recommendations for Further Research	72
Concluding Thoughts	74
REFERENCES	75

LIST OF TABLES

Table I	
Multicollinearity: Pearson Correlation	55
Table II	
Multicollinearity: Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor	56
Table III	
Model Summary 3	57
Table IV	
Unstandardized and Standardized Beta Weights	58

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

General background

The position of public school superintendent as we now know it came into being during the latter part of the twentieth century. The superintendent's role as redefined in Carter's The American School Superintendent (1997) evolved into a wide spectrum of responsibilities including serving as the "professional advisor to the board, the leader of reforms, the manager of resources, and the [chief] communicator to the public" (p.24). Prior to that, the scope of the superintendent's duties and responsibilities centered around aspects of business management and maintaining an efficient system for providing educational opportunities to those few individuals lucky enough to be able to enjoy an organized educational experience, beginning with the early schools of the northeastern portion of the United States. These "Common Schools," originally managed by town councils, ultimately became complex and large enough to warrant a position dedicated to maintaining the day-to-day operations of the school. Thus, in 1837 the Buffalo, New York, Common School Council appointed the first superintendent to "carry out the policies of the board" (Carter, 1997, p.22). While this newly created position was justified, in all reality, the pre-twentieth century school superintendent had much in common with a "Superintendent of the Railroad," basically making sure that the educational "trains ran on time."

The modern vision of a superintendent's purpose was slow in developing, brought about by world events and changes in attitudes towards the role of public education. Initially, with the creation of the first public schools in the United States of America in

Lexington, Massachusetts, in 1839, the superintendent of schools managed the day-to-day activities of the school, presiding over the principal teacher who managed the teaching aides and/or advanced students who worked with the students of the school (Carter, 1997).

Then, due to population growth and the availability of formalized school opportunities offered to more students, the public school superintendent evolved into a position geared for a person with the abilities “to manage [a] great business or industrial enterprise” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 42). Thus, the educational industry embraced the concepts of the “Science of Management,” which changed the superintendent’s role from occupation to a profession and attracted individuals who Thomas and Moran (1992) describe as being “planners and thinkers” (p. 42). These planners and thinkers developed structures for efficiency.

Ultimately, the role of the superintendent shifted to one with greater emphasis in providing leadership to “build the bridge from chaos to clarity for every stakeholder so that students, teachers, parents, leaders, and the broad community know what success really means” (Reeves, 2002, p.77). Simultaneously, with the acknowledgement of the professionalism required for a person to serve as a superintendent, the early part of the twentieth century witnessed the development of Educational Administration as a formalized field of study (Iannaccone, 1996). This latter development solidified the profession as one worthy of forward thinking individuals desiring to impact the educational development of the students.

The emphasis on efficiency, while never leaving the consciousness of the superintendent, took a back seat to other issues brought on by societal factors and

demands as the twentieth century progressed. Political realities and pressures of the 1960's, the emphasis placed on test scores of the 1970's (Yee & Cuban, 1996), and the stipulations for individual student achievement found in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Student Achievement, 2004) have further shaped the role of the modern public school superintendent. In fact, Peterson and Young (2004) proclaim in their article exploring the influence NCLB has on district-level leaders, "The demand for proven results, extensive evaluations, and data-driven decision making has moved the superintendent from the sideline to the frontline of supporting student achievement" (p. 1). This is a vantage point relatively new to the school superintendents.

The role of the superintendent has changed throughout history, and the job is fraught with multiple, serious challenges (Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, and Fowler, 2009). The sheer eclectic nature of the job is such that a "successful" superintendent must possess a wide variety of skills. Superintendents must be able to effectively deal with myriad issues that call on a variety of leadership attributes. The successful superintendent facilitates the creation of the vision of the district's educational programs, manages the business aspects of the district, and serves as the lead communicator with the public.

While the "successful" superintendent must possess a variety of professional skills to flourish, the most daunting aspect of the profession is that it is so very political. In their article, Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) point out "I began to realize that the superintendency is not a position in education but a position of politics" (p. 655). Other sources agree with this assessment, making the point that first and foremost the position

is much more political in nature than one might realize when initially entering it (Roan and Hardy, 1996). In fact Callahan's "Vulnerability Theory" (1962) and Iannaccone and Lutz' "Dissatisfaction Theory" (Alsbury, 2003) both explore explanations beyond job performance or competence as to why superintendents leave their positions within a given school district.

Throughout the history of public education, the role of the superintendent has certainly changed. Starting from a simple over-seer to that as a professional who is charged with the responsibility of taking the necessary steps to provide every student in the school system an educational experience that will show academic achievement as established by NCLB standards. While the eclectic nature of the position will probably not change much in the future, it is clear that individual student achievement is now the major focus of public schools. This emphasis has an impact on the duties and responsibilities of the public school superintendents.

Applying the Struggle to Kansas

As Robert Rammer (2007) points out in his article, "Public school superintendents ultimately are responsible for the success or failure of the schools within their district" (p. 67). In years past, the definition of "success or failure" was a fairly private assessment. Generally speaking, if the "educational product" produced by the school system satisfied the local community, the district was a success. If the district's expectations for a graduation rate were merely 50% and the district met this mark, a district would be considered a success. Now, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) defines success as a mark of academic achievement of the students of a district as it relates to a set of normed

assessments and Annual Yearly Progress. This shift in thinking poses a challenge for the educational community of the country and in Kansas as well.

This challenge is particularly difficult in Kansas due to the state's rural nature, with the majority of the state's districts being located away from population centers of 50,000 people or more (Hays, 2008, Kansas Association of School Boards, 2007-2008 Kansas Administrator Salary Survey Data). This fact intensifies the challenge of meeting the stipulations of individual student achievement as set forth by NCLB. Rural schools, particularly small rural schools, experience limited internal opportunities for addressing academic and instructional needs due to fewer financial and instructional resources (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). Coupling an understanding of the negative impact limited resources has on a school district to the fact that the majority of the districts in Kansas are experiencing declining enrollment numbers (Hays, 2008, Kansas Association of School Boards, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008 Kansas Administrator Salary Survey Data) heightens the seriousness of this situation as districts' financial situations become more challenging. This potentially brings forth a presence of "uncertainty, stress and organizational conflict" (Lasher, 1990, p. 94). It becomes obvious that the Kansas superintendent's ability to positively impact student achievement has been hampered as it takes a minimum level of financial resources to provide educational programming for the students of the district.

In their report commissioned by the Kansas Legislative Council, Augenblick and Myers suggest that the base state aid per pupil in Kansas should be at the "Foundation level (base cost)...equivalent to \$4,650 in 2000-2001." When this report was completed,

though, the base state aid per pupil in Kansas was set at \$3,820 (2002). Thus, the superintendent is forced into a position of needing to be able to do more with less.

Along with the fiscal realities and challenges incumbent with leading a rural school district, Kansas superintendents also face an additional challenge because of the state's rural nature. Public school superintendents in most areas of Kansas serve in a "generalists" role. Rather than focusing on one or two aspects of the school system, the generalists maintain a certain level of competence in many areas. It is not enough to be an expert in curriculum and instruction, for example, when the nature of the position demands that the majority of Kansas superintendents be versed in a variety of unrelated areas such as facility and plant management, budgeting and school law.

Unfortunately, according to the research conducted by Tallerico, generalists are generally less satisfied in their positions than those superintendents who are able to focus their attentions on a few rather than on a whole array of activities (1996). This dissatisfaction emanates from a sense of poor preparation for the wide scope of responsibilities that are put forth for the generalist superintendent. In the end, more often than not, dissatisfaction generally leads to a superintendent moving from one district to another or else leaving the profession altogether. When leadership changes occur, a vacuum is created in the movement and direction of the district as the new leader becomes acclimated to the new surroundings. During this acclimation period, initiatives and programs lose ground and/or stagnate, causing the district, as a whole, to back up and re-assess. When this occurs within the academic programming of a district, it becomes more difficult to reach the level of student achievement goals as required by NCLB, thus creating an even greater challenge for the district.

Another impact of serving as a superintendent in the “typical” Kansas school district is the familiarity that comes along with being a part of a smaller educational community. The community has more personal access to the superintendent in a small or rural district. In a larger or urban district, however, there is less of a chance that members of the educational community know the superintendent on a personal level. While this can be viewed as a negative, anonymity also serves as a buffer when issues arise. In small rural districts in particular, community members have a direct relationship with the members of the board of education and superintendent. If there is conflict between the superintendent and the community or the board members, the probability of the superintendent having to change positions increases. Likewise, being a part of a smaller or isolated educational community also lends itself to an environment where perceived dissatisfaction with the superintendent did not relate to educational nor financial issues, rather it dealt with “personalities, whims of the board of education, and board involvement in petty matters” (Parker, 1996, p. 76), which can lead to superintendent turnover. In fact, in 2008 only 39% of the superintendents in Kansas had been in their current positions for more than five years (Hays, 2008, Kansas Association of School Boards, 2007-2008 Kansas Administrator Salary Survey Data).

While superintendent professional job movement is a reality, continuity in the superintendency provides the local educational community with consistency of leadership and design. This has an impact on student achievement (Stratton, 2008). Given this reality, it is obvious this situation needs to be addressed so as to provide a better opportunity for the education of the students of the state. Much of Kansas will remain

rural in nature, so the aspects of a rural school district will remain in force for some time to come, continuing the complicated, multifaceted nature of the Kansas superintendent.

The superintendency is a “tough and political job” (Parker, 1996, p.67), and the superintendent is vulnerable to public pressures. These aspects have manifested themselves in fewer long-term tenures of superintendents (Clark, 2001) as there is “extreme vulnerability ... to public criticism and pressure ... that is built into our pattern of local support and control” (Eaton, 1996, p.78). Also, the role of the superintendent is so “complex and is measured by such high standards tied to accountability for results” (Cudeiro, 2005, p. 16) that the change of personnel in the superintendency is becoming more commonplace. During the 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008 school years, 53.1%, 46.8%, and 51.5% of the superintendents in Kansas had served three or fewer years as a superintendent (Hays, 2008, Kansas Association of School Boards, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008 Kansas Administrator Salary Survey Data).

While the challenges facing the superintendents across the country and here in Kansas seem almost insurmountable, superintendents need to remain focused on their mission. Research shows that superintendents positively impact student achievement by fulfilling their duties in a responsive manner (Waters & Marzano, 2006) and by utilizing a “comprehensive goal-setting process to develop board-adopted non-negotiable goals for achievement” (Waters & Marzano, 2007, p. 14). By taking these actions, the situation will develop where a superintendent can provide the educational achievement opportunities for the students of the district.

Statement of the Problem

The success of any Kansas public school system is now defined by the student achievement experienced on the annual Kansas State Assessments. Extensive research has been conducted on the power and impact of the classroom teacher and the building-level administrator, but little is known about the influence the district superintendent has on student achievement. Mainly, evidence exists that superintendents primarily impact student achievement through the “promotion, support and development of principals as instructional leaders” (Cudeiro, 2005, p. 16). Aside from the important activity of developing pervasive goals for the district from top to bottom, little else is known about the influence of the superintendent on student achievement.

The focus of this present research is to investigate the impact public school superintendent tenure has on student achievement as shown by the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessments. The researcher chose to focus on academic achievement in reading over other academic areas as “the ability to read and comprehend is foundational to individual and national success” (Hock, Brasseur, Deshler, Catts, Marquis, Mark, & Wu Stribling, 2009, p. 21) and, as Berman and Biancarosa (2005) point out, “that for too many students, literacy instruction ends in Third Grade” (p. 1). This is particularly poignant as students who struggle to read are at great risk of never earning a high school diploma (Berman & Biancarosa, 2005). Also, the researcher chose to focus on reading as one of the cornerstones of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is “to support states in making every child a proficient reader by the end of the third grade” (Helf, Cooke, & Flowers, 2008, p.113). This study investigates the impact of the length of tenure of Kansas school district superintendents and the 2008 Kansas Reading

Assessment results for the third grade students of those districts. Stated as a broad framing question: Does research show that superintendent longevity and student achievement are correlated?

Research Purpose and Statement of Objective

The role of the modern day superintendent focuses more on student achievement than at any other period in public education history. For decades, superintendents served as a sort of manager taking care of the business dealings of the school district, but now the emphasis on public schools is on accountability, which comes along with an “enormous amount of political pressure” (Peterson & Young, 2004, p. 343). Along with the focus on accountability that now exists, this new responsibility brings with it a high-stakes district evaluation as determined by how the students of that district perform on the Kansas State Assessments. In Kansas students take part in the Kansas State Assessments on an annual basis. To determine whether or not a district has been “successful” in its efforts to educate the students of the district, each tested group must have a predetermined percentage of its participants as defined by the Kansas Department of Education achieve a mark of “Proficient” or better on these exams. If, however, a tested group does not make this “grade,” eventually that district could face sanctions from the state and the federal governments.

Along with the increased attention given to the accountability of the actions of the public schools, the situation exists across the nation where the superintendency may be evolving into a temporary position (Clark, 2001). This has become such a pervasive fact throughout the nation that more and more superintendents and boards of education view constant job movement and the lack of longevity of the superintendency as a part of the

profession. This reality is discouraging as evidence suggests in the business world that stability accounts for a large measure of the success for major corporations. If stability in the major corporations bring about a certain amount of organizational success, would not the same hold true for the “school corporations” of the nation? If the answer to that question is “yes,” then it is important to work to solidify these positions.

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the length of superintendent tenure of Kansas districts on student achievement as defined by the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessments. So as to put this impact into context, this study also examined the relationship of five other predictive variables on the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to answer the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between the total length of tenure of a superintendent of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
2. What is the relationship between an individual’s total number of years of experience serving as a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
3. What is the relationship between the total number of years of experience in education of a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
4. What is the relationship between a Kansas district’s assessed valuation per pupil and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

5. What is the relationship between the total student enrollment of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
6. What is the relationship between a Kansas district's percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is timely as greater emphasis is placed on school accountability as evidenced through student achievement as shown on the Kansas State Assessments. Ever since its inception, the Kansas State Assessments have set marks of achievement higher each school year, culminating at the 100% mark for student proficiency during the 2014 school year. Although districts are doing a better job of meeting the ever-demanding challenge of showing student achievement as defined by the Kansas State Assessments, it is only a matter of time before districts reach the level where they are not able to meet the goals of that year. To address this, it is necessary to seek answers as to what are the best ways to meet the demands of this accountability system. Great amounts of research have been conducted on teacher quality, instructional practices, curriculum, and on the impact of building-level administrators on student achievement. It is logical to investigate the impact the superintendent has on student achievement. Examining the possible impact superintendent tenure longevity has on student achievement is one area of study that would shed light on the over-all impact of the superintendent on student achievement.

Research shows that the average tenure of superintendents is progressively becoming shorter and shorter. As Clark (2001) put it, “For various reasons, the superintendency may be evolving into a temporary position” (p.40). This frequent turnover leads to increased instability of the academic environment, which, in turn, more often than not leads to additional turnover (Yee & Cuban, 1996), creating a seemingly never ending journey through a maze of dysfunction.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study are subject to a variety of limitations that may or may not have had an impact on the results of the 2008 Third Grade Reading Assessments. These limitations are as follows:

1. All data originated from one school year, 2007-2008
2. Class sizes found within the population
3. Critical/crisis situations that might have occurred within the district, impacting student achievement
4. District and superintendents attitudes toward assessments and academic achievement not addressed
5. Expectations of the district regarding the importance of the testing
6. Experience/quality of the staffs of the school districts not examined
7. Fiscal challenges facing the district
8. Growth and/or declining student population of the district
9. Length of tenure of a superintendent does not particularly mean there is a focus on student achievement within the district.
10. Rate of professional turnover in a given district

11. Skill level of the classroom teachers
12. Quality of reading curriculum of each district.
13. Years of experience of the building-level administrators
14. Years of experience of the professional staff

Methodology

So as to realize the most comprehensive view of the impact of the questions being researched, all 295 Kansas public schools districts in existence in 2008 were examined in the completion of this study. The dependent variable for the study, the percentages of tested students from all districts who earned a score of “Proficient” or above for the 2008 testing year on the Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment, were recorded. Then six predictive variables were recorded for each district:

1. The length of tenure of each district’s superintendent
2. Each superintendent’s total number of years experience as a superintendent
3. Each superintendent’s total number of years of experience in education
4. Each district’s assessed valuation per pupil
5. Each district’s percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices
6. Each district’s total number of students.

Appropriate statistical analysis was performed on the data to determine statistical significance of the results of the study. Particularly, the researcher sought to discover the relationship between the various predictive variables and the testing results for each district on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment.

Although six predictive variables were utilized in this study (three dealing directly with superintendent experiences and three dealing with demographic factors of the

districts), the main purpose of the study was focused on the sheer length of uninterrupted tenure of the superintendents of Kansas school districts in 2008 as it related to the academic achievement of the each district's students as displayed by the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Assessment, taking into account that turn-over in the superintendency is a reality and takes place for a variety of reasons that fall outside the parameters of this research. The other five predictive variables were chosen so as to put the relationship discovered between the length of tenure of the Kansas superintendent with the percentage of Third Graders who scored "Proficient" or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment into perspective.

The requirements of NCLB will be in force up through the year 2014, so it is imperative that the greater educational community takes the necessary steps to address the challenges that come along with this or any other accountability system. The findings of this study should assist districts in their efforts of achieving "success" in their academic endeavors.

Definitions

1. Academic Success: Percentage of a district's Third Grade students who score "Proficient" or above on the Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment in 2008
2. Assessed Valuation Per Pupil: A district's property assessed valuation divided by the total number of students of that district
3. Kansas State Reading Assessments: Annual testing process utilized in Kansas to test student competence in Reading
4. Length of Uninterrupted Tenure: Number of consecutive years a superintendent stays in the same position within a district

5. Percentage of Students Who Qualify for Free or Reduced Meals: Percentage of the total student population who, based on family income levels, meet federal guidelines for reduced prices for school meals
6. Proficient: Academic achievement mark determined to represent adequate knowledge for a given subject matter
7. Total Student Population: Total number of students in a school district
8. Total Years Experience in Education: Total number of years a person has served in education, regardless of the position
9. Total Years Experience as a Superintendent: Total number of years a person has served as a superintendent, regardless of the district(s) served.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Related Literature

Purpose and Importance

As is the case in the make up and operations of public education in the United States, the role and the importance of the public school superintendent has changed over time. Originally, the superintendent served merely as the board of education's clerk who ensured the day-to-day operations of the school went smoothly (Carter & Cunningham, 1997 and Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Now, however, the position is that of a leader of the modern day school system that is vested, along with other goals, to "inculcate in the young traditional societal and democratic values such as equity, justice, the value of hard work, and tolerance" (Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, & Fowler, 2009, p. 217). This transition in responsibilities took many decades to occur, but that does not alleviate the fact that the superintendency is a difficult position that has become even more "demanding and contentious in recent years" (Orr, 2006, p. 1363). Although the position is so demanding, its importance is such that Carter and Cunningham (1997) in The American School Superintendent make the point that, "America's future is...linked to the quality of...the leadership of its superintendents" (p. 236). In agreement with Carter's position, Grogan and Andrews (2002) state, "The development of...democracy hinges on how well we teach our children" (p. 239).

In order to meet the goal of preserving and advancing our democracy, there is a belief that the modern-day superintendent must be knowledgeable of all facets of the education within the district (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). This is easier said than done,

though, given that the superintendent's work encompasses three interrelated areas of work – education, management, and politics (Orr, 2006).

The situation is compounded further by the fact that the position may be “evolving into a temporary position” (Clark, 2001, p. 40), and as Yee and Cuban (1996) point out, frequent turnover of the superintendent leads to increased instability within the district which, in turn, can lead to additional turnover. This has a particularly devastating impact on educational initiatives and reforms as Fullan (1992) sets five years as the minimum tenure for a superintendent in order to produce lasting change. But, as Ella Flagg Young, the first woman superintendent of a large school system (Chicago from 1909 to 1915) said, “If what I have done does not remain... the sooner it dies the better” (Webb & McCarthy, 1998, p. 238). While Ms. Young's sentiment is understandable, this could prove problematic if the work completed by the former superintendent is actually making a positive difference in student academic achievement.

Broad Overview of Current Responsibilities

Repeatedly, professional literature regarding the modern-day superintendent points out that the superintendency is a “tough and political job” (Parker, 1996, p. 66) where the superintendent must “deal with conflicting expectations, multiple political agendas, and varying ideas without unduly creating enemies or distrust” (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 35). Be that as it may, as Grogan and Andrews (2002) point out, the “organization and operation of schools have been the responsibility of superintendents...since the role [was] formally established” (p. 234). So, although the actual duties of the superintendent have changed drastically, raising to a profession

requiring as much ability as is necessary for the management of a “great business or industrial enterprise” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 42), the obligations of the superintendent to over-see the school district remain as important as ever.

One facet of the position that has changed throughout the years, though, is the growth of the vast array of responsibilities that fall under the jurisdiction of the superintendent. In order to fulfill the expectations of the position, the superintendent must maintain what Browne-Ferrigno and Glass (2005) deem to be “a staggering knowledge base and range of skills” (p. 137). In their text, Sergiovanni et al (2009) provide the following list of “essential roles” of the superintendent:

- Shapes and articulates vision and values
- Manages finances, the physical plant, and personnel
- Serves as the “public face” of the district
- Coordinates with external organizations
- Plans and implements professional development programs
- Implements board policies (pp. 210 and 211).

Carter and Cunningham (1997) offer a list of superintendent responsibilities as created by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National School Board Association (NSBA):

- To serve as the board’s chief executive officer and advisor

- To serve as the educational leader of the district
- To serve as a “catalyst” for the district’s administrative team
- To propose long-range strategic planning
- To present policy options and to implement any board policies
- To keep the board informed of issues
- To develop an effective public relations program
- To oversee day-to-day management of the district
- To communicate board goals to the constituents of the district
- To develop professional development opportunities for the district staff
- To work with the legislature
- To evaluate district personnel (pp. 243 and 244).

Adding to these lists of roles and responsibilities, Roan and Hardy (1996) highlight the results Mahoney received from a questionnaire given to ninety Ohio superintendents regarding their opinions of “important elements in defining their leadership roles as being strong communication skills, strong ‘people skills,’ being visible and accessible, and being a visionary” (p. 18).

While these eclectic roles and responsibilities have been deemed to come under the superintendent’s purview, current superintendents need most to be mindful of student achievement levels. With the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB),

there is a definite increase in the pressure on superintendents to improve student learning (Sergiovanni et al, 2009). Thus, the “demands for proven results, extensive evaluation, and data-driven decision making has moved the superintendent to the frontline of supporting student achievement” (Peterson & Young, 2004, p. 343). To better function in this manner, it is imperative that the superintendent maintain the “ability to articulate and act consistently around a set of core values” (Kelleher, 2002, p. 28), allowing the district to better meet the increasing demands for greater student achievement.

As is evidenced by this latest push in society for increased student achievement, the role of the superintendent is dynamic and “shaped and reshaped by social, cultural, political, and economic forces” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 207). To fully understand the implications and importance of this statement, it is important to trace back the history of the superintendent, concentrating on how the responsibilities and duties of the superintendent have changed over time. This examination will concentrate on a variety of factors tied to the superintendent’s influence on student achievement, leading up to the question of whether or not the length of tenure of a superintendent has an impact on student achievement.

Historical Progression of the Roles and Duties of the Superintendent

As would be expected, the role of the superintendent has adjusted along with the changes found in public education. Being particularly susceptible to economic, political, and demographical factors, the schools would adjust themselves to go along with “national trends and business ideology of the given period” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 24). As a reflection of this fact, the superintendent has served in four general capacities throughout the past 172 years: Clerical, managing the day-to-day activities of the school;

Master Educator, serving as a teacher scholar who became more involved with the curriculum and instruction; Expert Manager, impacting the efficiencies of the educational process; and finally as the Chief Executive Officer of the Board, acting as a leader of reforms and a manager of resources (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, pp. 23 and 24; Grogan & Andrews, 2002, pp. 234 and 235).

Stage One: 1837-1850

On June 9, 1837, the Buffalo Common School of Buffalo, New York, hired the first public school superintendent. Prior to this hiring, volunteers on the school board, as was the case throughout our fledgling country, oversaw the operation of the city's schools. The hiring of this first superintendent became necessary as the educational enterprise had become too demanding for the members of the board overseeing the school system (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). While the superintendent became the "leader" of the school system, in all actuality he was really no more than a clerk for the board who had little real power except to oversee the day-to-day operations of the school, carrying out the directions of the board on a daily basis (Sergiovanni et al., 2009). Shortly following the appointment of the superintendent in Buffalo, school boards in New York and Louisville, Kentucky, followed suit and appointed superintendents for their respective school districts. Thus, the position of superintendent spread throughout the nation to the point that by 1890 all large cities had superintendents (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

Stage Two: 1850-1900

During this historical period, the superintendent, while still a relatively weak position by today's standards, did enjoy a growth in authority and influence. Harkening back to the position some of the nation's early leaders such as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Rush, and Benjamin Franklin held that "the government needed to organize and maintain a state school system for the general diffusion of knowledge so that the republican experiment would survive" (Lubienski, 2001, p. 641), influential educators such as Horace Mann and Ellwood Cubberley argued for the creation of public schools that were publically funded and maintained universal access for students. Toward that end, Mann argued "...not to provide equal opportunity to all the children of Massachusetts is to condemn the state itself to a secondary economic status" (Palermo, 2000, p. 194).

The public schools that emerged from this movement "were designed, in part, to promote the common values of the new nation and to help ensure the viability of the Republic" (Ward, 1987, p. 464) and "ultimately emerged as a major institution in society for the development and maintenance of public virtue and as a force to protect the nation from decline and eventual death" (Ward, 1987, p. 467).

This newly defined importance for public schools brought with it a growth in power and responsibility for superintendents. Elected county superintendents in Kansas, for instance, became "responsible for the entire educational programming for the county" (Triggs, 2002, p. 31). These early superintendents were responsible for maintaining district budgets, supervising, hiring and firing teachers, selecting curriculum and

textbooks, constructing school buildings, completing annual state reports, and overseeing county examinations for the students of the county (Triggs, 2002).

These added responsibilities helped with superintendents seeing themselves as “educational professionals and teachers” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 208). This change in self-concept is important as it played a part in motivating “the Department of Superintendence... a forerunner of the American Association of School Administrators [to begin] efforts to acquire more power for superintendents” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 208) during this second stage of the development of the superintendent’s roles and duties.

Stage Three: 1900-1950

Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century, a massive influx of immigrants flooded into the United States. Along with other consequences on society, this influx of people had an important impact on the schools of the early twentieth century as the systems became more and more overburdened with the sheer number of students. In response to this reality and due to the pressures felt from the business community fearing a loss of economic competitiveness in the world, boards of education searched for a system that would produce stability and standardization that would result in increased efficiency and control (Thomas & Moran, 1992) and would allow “schools to run more like businesses” (Cuban, 2004, p. 159). Thus, many “superintendents embraced the efficiency benefits of scientific management” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 208) that was popular in business and industry of the day (Webb & McCarthy, 1998, p. 232).

During the scientific management era, superintendents changed school supervision from the level of an occupation to that of a professional as superintendents

became planners and thinkers who designed more efficient methods of educating the students of the day (Thomas & Moran, 1992). Specifically, superintendents who adhered to the concepts of scientific management utilized a “factory model” of conducting school that included “large classes, rigid schedules and uniform approaches to instruction” (Johnson, 1996, p. 271). This top down approach to administration, which created protective levels of bureaucracy for the superintendent therefore expanding the superintendent’s power (Sergiovanni et al., 2009), went so far as to specify the actual instructional methods to be used by the teachers (Webb & McCarthy, 1998 and Thomas & Moran, 1992). The scientific management movement was so powerful, in fact, that the Buffalo, New York, school system created a Bureau of Efficiency and Research “to increase efficiency of the teaching service” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 37). As superintendents experienced success with this approach, they gained power and prestige, and according to Stanford University professor Elwood Cubberley, “changed school administration from guesswork to scientific accuracy” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 42).

Earnest Clark Hartwell, superintendent of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan; St. Paul, Minnesota; and then Buffalo, New York, from 1915-1922, is a prime example of a superintendent who successfully utilized the concepts of scientific management to advance his career (Thomas & Moran, 1992). He successfully applied common business practices of the day to the schools where he served as the superintendent. Toward that end, he limited the power of the teachers, enlarged the bureaucracy of the districts where he served, and promoted “reforms that emphasized stability and stabilization that resulted in efficiency and control over outcomes of local schools” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 26).

Specifically, Hartwell created a twelve-point model based on business principles to make the “educational plants pay dividends worthy of its investment” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 37), equating the school to a large corporation with the people being stockholders and the pupils being the products. He also mandated uniform use of standardized textbooks, daily attendance accounting, and having middle managers outline courses of study for the elementary schools (Thomas & Moran, 1992). Along with all of this, Hartwell was a strong proponent of merit pay for teachers as he felt that this meritorious system would “weed out inefficient teachers” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 31). George D. Strayer, Columbia University professor, supported this plan saying, “To oppose a plan by which the competent are to be rewarded would be nothing short of a confession of incompetence” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 32).

Although superintendents who followed the concepts of scientific management enjoyed a certain amount of protection from criticism (Parker, 1996) not all superintendents of the third stage of the superintendency followed its tenants. In stark contrast to scientific management, a whole school of superintendents associated themselves with the progressive movement of education, promoting “the individual interests of the child, gave the child great freedom, and cultivated in the child a sense of responsibility” (Webb & McCarthy, 1998, p. 231). Ella Flagg Young, the first female superintendent of a large school system and friend and colleague of John Dewey, was a passionate dissenter against the concepts of scientific management (Webb & McCarthy, 1998).

Young and other superintendents like her felt strongly that it was inappropriate to “...talk about the public schools as an indispensable requisite of a Democracy and then

conduct it as a prop for an Aristocracy” (Webb & McCarthy, 1998, p. 228). So, even though Flagg recognized the business efficiencies associated with scientific management, she felt that “administrators should never overemphasize the short-term value of efficiency principles to the detriment of long-term value of the education of citizens for a productive life in a democracy” (Bashaw, 1986, p. 371). Putting her beliefs into action, Young served as a pioneer in establishing both teacher councils and student councils to facilitate methods for the members of the educational community to make their opinions known (Webb & McCarthy, 1998).

Along with Ms. Young, John Granrud of Springfield, Massachusetts, is another superintendent who aligned himself with the progressive movement in contrast to scientific management. In his efforts to “make democracy work for all” (Johnson, 2006, p. 304) in 1939 Granrud commissioned a comprehensive group of teachers, parents, administrators and community members to create a program of “intercultural and citizenship education designed to make democracy ‘work’ for the students and citizens of Springfield” (Johnson, 2006, p. 304). These efforts brought forth “The Springfield Plan,” the most well publicized intercultural education curriculum in the 1940s.

The benchmarks of the “Springfield Plan” revolved around student activities that were “designed to develop students’ democratic decision-making” (Johnson, 2006, p. 310). Specifically, students took part in cooperative learning groups that focused on interdisciplinary educational activities centered on project instruction.

Stage Four: 1950-Present

While the scientific management era of the superintendency remained in vogue for some fifty years, the last part of the twentieth century brought with it many social, political and economic changes in society (Sergiovanni et al., 2009) that acted as catalysts for educational reform. These reforms had a dramatic impact on the skills and talents required by individuals interested in serving as superintendents. No longer was it sufficient to merely organize business efficiencies for the school districts, now a successful superintendent needed to be able to serve as an instructional leader, be able to communicate clearly, be able to develop and implement political strategies, and be willing to collaborate with the various stakeholders of the educational community (Sergiovanni et al., 2009). This transformation of the superintendent came about initially in response to events that caused a change in focus within the American school system, one being social in nature and the other being more politically based.

Although social shifts have never really come to a complete stop, there are times when great leaps forward do occur. The *Brown v. the Board of Education* case is one of those instances. As pointed out by Perlstein (2004) “The Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown* decision, outlawing school segregation, was a pivotal moment in the history of American education” (p. 288). This ruling sent shock waves throughout the country as it became illegal to maintain a “separate but equal” school system based on race or any other factor.

Although the *Brown* ruling was generally ignored initially across portions of the country (Perlstein, 2004), there were superintendents who acted “quickly and decisively.” Shortly after the ruling was made public, John Fischer, the superintendent of the Baltimore School District, said “Racial segregation [is] no longer the policy or practice of

the city's school" (Perlstein, 2004, p. 291). Leaders such as Fischer laid the groundwork of the various social programs that appeared during the Great Society era of the 1960s that emphasized equity throughout society, including within the country's schools (Sergiovanni et al., 2009).

While *Brown* definitely had an influence on society and the schools of our country, thus impacting the lives of superintendents, the launching of the Sputnik missile program by the former Soviet Union in the fall of 1957 had political ramifications that motivated the federal government to become far more involved in public schools. In response to fears of falling behind the Soviets technologically and academically, the National Defense and Education Act of 1958 was passed, placing a greater emphasis on math and science education in our schools. From this early, fairly specific involvement in public education, the federal government's role in setting the educational agenda and policy of the country's public schools has blossomed, increasingly becoming more and more intrusive, leading up to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which Sergiovanni et al (2009) refers to as being "the most powerful intrusion of federal power into public schools in our history" (p. 215).

This "intrusion" did not occur overnight, though. Slowly but surely, as the years passed, the federal government became more and more involved in public education. During the 1960s and the 1970s the focus was on "reduce[ing] inequalities...improve[ing] economic opportunity...spread[ing] capacity for personal fulfillment...improve[ing] cultural life...reduce[ing] prejudice and misunderstanding...and improve[ing] the quality of civic and political life" (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 24). Legislation such as the Civil Rights Act, the Economic Opportunity

Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Title IX, and Public Law 94-142 all served to provide protection to a variety of subgroups of people in society (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

While these various forms of legislation did address inequalities found in education, they also served as a mechanism to provide more federal control of public schools “by linking the federal funds now essential to school budgets to federal requirements” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 7). This fact placed more demands on the superintendents to ensure that all facets of the federal programs were being carried out properly, bringing with it a new level of management duties and responsibilities. Along with managing the educational business of the school plant, the superintendent focused on ensuring that programs existed that concentrated on providing equity of educational service for all.

Although the 1970s still maintained a focus on reducing inequalities, it was during that same decade that “public confidence in education declined...and...[demands] for accountability surfaced for the first time” (Grogan & Andrews, 2002, p. 235). This demand for accountability coupled with a growing concern that the United States was losing ground economically in the world “led to the issuance of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, calling for districts and schools to focus on academic achievement and the preparation of students for the workplace” (Grogan & Andrews, 2002, p. 235 and Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 25). This landmark report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education took American public schools to task and played a key part in ushering in “waves of reforms” into public education as forces from all sectors of society came forth

providing recommendations “on how to improve the American educational system” (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 27).

Along with generating an outcry for excellence in education, *A Nation at Risk* also served to be a catalyst for further political involvement in public education. Carter and Cunningham (1997) point out that during the 1980s “Education had entered the political arena full swing, and politicians felt compelled to make their mark on education. There is no sign that they will retreat from this position anytime soon” (p. 28). This expanded public and political involvement in public education had a definite impact on the superintendent’s role. It shifted once again to include the expectation that the superintendent would maintain the “capacity to generate broad-based community support for whatever reform efforts were developed to increase student achievement” (Grogan & Andrews, 2002, p. 236).

The increased public and political involvement in education has not subsided in the years since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. In fact, during the 1990s, there was a growth of special interest groups who sought to influence the direction of education in the country. These organizations focused on issues including academic standards, taxes, textbooks, curriculum, religion, family-life education, cooperative learning, school prayer, technology, and authentic learning along with a variety of other issues (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). This influence had an impact on the superintendents of the nation as they had to learn to work with these groups while still being able to maintain a focus on student achievement.

Along with the growth of special interest groups, the 1990s also witnessed a continued emphasis on raising standards and building accountability into the schooling

process. In an important shift in focus, though, moving the emphasis to a more local level, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1993 encouraged “communities to develop their own reform plans and provided seed money to support these efforts” (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 31). This made it all that more imperative that the superintendent had the ability to juggle differing opinions and attitudes and be responsive to the diverse demands placed on education as many of the reforms that were proposed and/or developed focused on specific issues and did not lend themselves to other reform plans being proposed.

Along with the growing emphasis on raising standards and building accountability based on student academic performance, the other major influence on public schools during the 1990s was the realization that the family unit was suffering from serious challenges. There was an ever “increase[ing] number of children [who were] not being cared for by their parents [as] [t]wo-parent income earners, single-parent homes, and divorce...changed how children experience[d] ‘the family’” (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 30). This growing societal dysfunction had an impact on public schools as the students themselves came to school less prepared to perform academically, thus putting yet another strain on the responsibility of the superintendent to create an educational experience that thrived despite the issues being thrust before them.

Although the challenges of the 1990s forced superintendents to find ways to manage the various national, state, and local pressures for improving school performance while working with the local school board and staff members to develop the most effective schools possible (Carter & Cunningham, 1997), the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, otherwise known as the No Child Left Behind

Act of 2001 (NCLB), brought with it significant challenges that “affect [the] daily life in the nation’s classrooms more significantly than any previous federal law” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 16). Specifically, with the advent of NCLB, the focus of federal educational influence shifted from “enabling individuals to be successful to ensuring that *all* students achieve academically” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 219) as demonstrated by individual achievement on annual testing of the students. This shift in priority “placed an enormous amount of political pressure on [superintendents] to demonstrate effective leadership at the district level” (Peterson & Young, 2004, p. 343). Developing a “laser-like focus” on student outcomes and achievement, superintendents adjusted all facets of the schools, including the organization of the schools, how resources were allocated, and how students were grouped.

In order to meet the goal of providing a quality educational experience for each student, NCLB mandates that all students “be taught by ‘highly qualified’ teachers focused on helping all students reach a level of proficiency in both reading and math by 2014” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 16). This requirement has placed extra pressure on superintendents as maintaining a “highly qualified” teaching staff has become increasingly difficult as the nation is experiencing “staggering [levels of] teacher turnover and [an increased] attrition rate” (Unraveling the teacher shortage, 2002, p. 3). This situation becomes even more problematic as a teacher may not actually be a quality instructor although he or she is “highly qualified.” In fact, Therrien and Washburn-Moses (2009) cite research by McLeskey and Brownell that there is no evidence that the Highly Qualified mandate is increasing teacher quality. Further, according to their research, only 12% of the surveyed Ohio building administrators reported “a teacher who

meets HQT criteria should be considered a more effective and competent educator” (Therrien & Washburn-Moses, 2009, p. 15). Thus, the superintendent must remain ever cognizant of the actual instructional practices taking place in the classroom, serving as a “teacher of teachers” emphasizing data-driven instructional decision making to influence teacher classroom behaviors (Sergiovanni et al., 2009), never taking for granted that the students are receiving an educational experience that will lead to increased achievement.

The superintendent must strike a balance, though, between being involved with the instructional practices and micro-managing the instructional practices of the teachers. Too much involvement in the educational process can serve to work against the educational experience, particularly if the administration engages in what Ella Flagg Young called “close supervision” of the teachers, which she opposed, saying “...no more un-American or dangerous solution of the difficulties involved in maintaining a high degree of efficiency in...teaching...can be attempted then that which is effected by...close supervision” (Webb & McCarthy, 1998, 226).

Given the fundamental shift NCLB has brought to education, the legislation has definitely met with criticism. Sergiovanni et al. (2009) points out that “...[NCLB] assumes that schools...can raise student test scores and hire highly qualified teachers if they would just try harder” (p. 18). Also, Batagiannis (2007) points out that NCLB is a clear example of what she deems as being an example of society’s thirst for “Instantaneous Perfection” (p. 146) or a quick fix to issues “irrespective of outcomes.” As Batagiannis (2007) explains it “NCLB [is] a clear example of instantaneous perfection, which has bombarded schools with a narrow, singular focus on measuring achievement through testing alone” (p. 146). This approach to education is particularly

problematic as it goes against “Local standards of excellence defining what a community values in its schools, whether music, art, drama or something else” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, pp. 10 and 11).

Although criticisms continue to mount against NCLB, particularly as the 2014 deadline of 100% proficiency approaches, the legislation remains in place, so the superintendent faces yet another challenge. Along with simply making all of the adjustments necessary to meet the obligations of the law, the superintendent must also continually work with the school board and the greater educational community to maintain a focus on achieving the mandates of the law, even if it is an unpopular action to take. To achieve this goal, it is necessary for the superintendent to act in a way with a greater “emphasis on interpersonal perspectives and a focus on the development of followers...to improve student learning” (Amatea, Behar-Horenstein, & Sherrard, 1996, p. 243). Acting in this manner will focus the energies of the educational community, pulling everyone together to work for increased student achievement.

Realities of the Superintendency in the Modern Age

Now more than ever, the role of the superintendent is a complex and stressful one that deals with “...many competing issues and is measured by such high standards tied to accountability results” (Cudeiro, 2005, p. 16). As public and political pressures continue to surface surrounding public schooling in the United States, superintendents find themselves engaged in a constant struggle to maintain a focus on the “true business at hand – educating children – in an environment where interest group politics, board relations, and regulatory muddle conspire to handcuff their leadership” (Orr, 2006, p. 1366). In order to maintain this focus, the superintendent must be able to, as Sergiovanni

et al. (2009) puts it “...read and navigate increasingly complex political landscapes” (p. 221) at the local, state and federal levels. This takes on even more meaning considering that “Public school superintendents ultimately are responsible for the success or failure of the schools within their district” (Rammer, 2007, p. 67). Given this perspective, it is imperative that superintendents comprehend that it takes the proper employment of political and leadership skills to build support for their efforts that meet district procedural and organizational goals to benefit student achievement (Gorton, Alston & Snowden, 2007).

However, merely accepting and then acting on the knowledge of the political nature of the superintendency is not enough. In order for a district to thrive, the superintendent must also display strong leadership skills that promote “trust, focus interest and attention on student learning” (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 35). In the modern school environment that means the superintendent must be accessible to the greater educational community, working “to create a vision, goals, and priorities and engage the district and community in meeting these through both organizational development and coalition building” (Orr, 2006, p. 1365).

Along with being accessible, effective superintendents also “encourage others to act and lead...provide[ing] conditions that enable...leadership to emerge” (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 239), or as Grogan and Andrews (2002) put it “Superintendents today are seen as the key players in schools and school districts that are called on to manage themselves through collaborative, pedagogical, or distributed notions of leadership that focus the role as leader of an instructional team” (p. 243). This assertion is a significant departure from the viewpoint of superintendents who followed the

concepts of scientific management such as Earnest Clark Hartwell who proclaimed “I could wish nothing worse for the misguided dupe of all this shallow talk about ‘administrative despotism’ than to have him or her obliged to teach a year in a school where every teacher should be a ‘self-directing agent’ and where no decision on any matter might be made until the local soviet could be assembled.... Teachers fare best under strong leadership” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 41).

Obviously, the role of the superintendent has shifted through the years, going from one focused mainly on management duties to one that demands active leadership focused on “participative and team management, community relations and forging consensus” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 50). While this repeatedly shows itself to be true throughout professional literature, the reality is that the modern day superintendent is held responsible to many other criteria as well. According to Thomas Glass’s “The 1992 Study of the American School Superintendent” as displayed by Carter and Cunningham (1997) “the [following] criteria [are] used by school boards to evaluate superintendents:

1. General effectiveness
2. Board/superintendent relations
3. Management functions
4. Budget leadership/knowledge
5. Educational leadership/knowledge
6. Community/superintendent relationship
7. Staff/superintendent relationships
8. Personal characteristics
9. Recruitment and supervision of personnel

10. Student/superintendent relationships” (p. 19).

On top of all of this, it is appropriate to recognize that superintendents must “develop and maintain a deep knowledge of teaching and learning, keeping a focus on the goal of improving teaching and learning, and providing the direction and support that the faculty and students need to be successful” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 226). Beyond that, Fullan (2003) points out that the superintendent must “be able to enter the debate concerning the uses and abuses of assessment data, and not be cowed by it” (p. 31). All of this gains even more importance when considering that Waters and Marzano “found a statistically significant correlation between superintendent instructional leadership behaviors and student achievement” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 216).

The eclectic and complex nature of the superintendent’s role brings with it a great deal of stress, both professionally and personally. As Roan and Hardy (1996) point out “Given the diversity of the position, the depth of the responsibilities, the ever-changing politics, the precarious finances of most districts, and the ever-present conflicts that arise, the superintendent must be effective in managing stress” (p. 21). Taking this thought even further, Sergiovanni et al. (2009) states that “superintendents must...learn not to take criticism and attack personally” (p. 225); Orr (2006) mentions that the superintendent must be intrinsically motivated as they “...[do] not get a lot of accolades for [their] work [as] [m]ost people are going to find problems with every decision that [they] make” (p. 1374); and Grogan and Andrews (2002) relate from Sternberg’s article exploring Gmelch’s research that “Superintendents experience ‘physical and psychological effects, burnout, flat-out emotional exhaustion...and...depersonalization’” (p. 238).

Obviously, the challenges of the superintendent are great, and this situation is compounded further by the fact that the position is a lonely one. Roan and Hardy (1996) point out that “Isolation and loneliness come with the job” (p. 20), and Orr (2006) quoted a superintendent who said “There are very few people that you can talk to about some of the issues because they’re people who work for you, with you or are family members who really don’t care about some of the things” (p. 1394). For survival the superintendent must combat these feelings of isolation. It is imperative that superintendents seek out collegial support groups amongst fellow superintendents, creating “...an opportunity to talk about the bad things that happen... and to learn that they are not ‘losers,’ ‘poor managers,’ or ‘poor leaders’” (Orr, 2006, p. 1395).

Going along with the fact that the superintendency can be lonely in nature, it is important to note that the stress faced on a daily basis can have a profound impact on superintendents’ personal lives. As the superintendency “is an extremely public position that carries enormous responsibility” (Roan & Hardy, 1996, p. 22), the superintendent enjoys precious little privacy as “...community expectations [exist] that [superintendents] will be accessible and available on any day at any time...[and] community members feel they can intrude on the superintendent’s personal and family life” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 214). Taking all of this into account, it is not difficult to understand why the “superintendency is not as attractive a position as it once was” (Grogan & Andrews, 2002, pg. 237) and fewer people are choosing to enter the superintendency (Orr, 2006) and “those who do are increasingly starting at the end of their educational careers” (Snapshot 2000: A Study of School Superintendents..., 2000).

With the sheer nature of the superintendency being as potentially contentious and challenging as it is and due to the fact that we live in a world that Batagiannis (2007) says “demands perfect solutions...immediately” (p. 146), it is not surprising that “superintendents and school boards seem to view constant job movement and lack of longevity as a given part of the profession” (Clark, 2001, p. 40) and that some superintendents are “looking forward eagerly to an early retirement” (Kelleher & Van Der Bogert, 2006, p. 11). It has gotten so bad, in fact, that “the urban superintendent[‘s] average longevity on the job...is three years or less” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 26), and Eaton and Sharp (1996) report a 30% turnover of superintendents within a single year and a 70% turnover of superintendents within five years.

As might be expected with such an eclectic position, a variety of factors beyond job performance contribute as to why the superintendency has become such a temporary position. According to Parker (1996), an important issue that causes superintendent turnover is a “difference in perceptions of the superintendent’s role by the school board, community members, scholars, and superintendents” (p. 65). Parker (1996) then goes on to say that most superintendent moves “did not deal with educational issues at all...the real issues dealt with personalities, whims of the board, and board involvement in petty matters” (p. 77). Contributing to the idea that turnover occurs for a variety of reasons, Waggoner (2004) adds that turnover “is typically the accumulation of little things...[or] the board may just wish to make a change” although “the superintendent has done nothing professionally or personally that could be described as wrong” (p. 1), and Carter and Cunningham (1997) mention that “superintendents are not really evaluated against criteria in their job description, but more according to a sense of whether or not the

superintendent is doing a good job and has a good relationship with the school board and/or community leaders” (p. 20). Finally, Orr (2006) mentions the “changing demands of the superintendency (resulting from increased decentralization within the district and increased centralization by the state), the lack of clear understanding of the position, time demands, stress, compensation, and...serious compromises in [superintendents’] family and personal lives” (p. 1363) as playing an important part in this situation as well.

Beyond anything the superintendent may or may not have done, the fact remains that the superintendent is employed by the local board of education. This continued employment is contingent upon the superintendent meeting the goals and expectations of that board. However, an election to a school board is not for life; eventually turnover on the board of education does occur. Sometimes, though, board member turnover is brought about more quickly than might be expected if the public grows dissatisfied with the current direction of the school district. In his article Thomas Alsbury (2003) explains Iannoccone and Lutz’s “Dissatisfaction Theory” and how it applies to school districts and how it can lead to even greater superintendent turnover. “The theory contends that community dissatisfaction with the present school policy eventually will lead to an increased involvement by voters at local school elections. When this involvement by the voting citizenry reaches the necessary level, it results in the defeat of incumbent school board members, followed by the involuntary turnover of the superintendent, and, finally a change in school policy by the reconfigured board and new superintendent” (p. 669).

While the cycle of superintendent turnover seems somewhat natural, this reality presents a challenge for schools to provide an ongoing instructional program designed to promote student achievement. So, although superintendents openly accept the role of

being an instructional leader, even “relish[ing] their more academic role” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 213), the “leadership instability [that exists] leads to changes in district direction that disrupt ongoing improvement momentum and effort and distract everyone from focusing on instruction” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 211). This is particularly discouraging as Waters and Marzano (2006) unintentionally discovered as a part of their work to examine how a superintendent’s leadership effects student achievement that there is an implication that “the longevity of the superintendent has a positive effect on the average academic achievement of students in the district” (p. 14).

Summary

Throughout the history of public schools in the United States, the role of the superintendent has changed. Originally serving as a clerk for the board of education whose main responsibility was taking care of the day-to-day operations of the school, the modern-day superintendent’s responsibilities have shifted away from management duties to that as an instructional leader who is expected to “guide, facilitate, and coordinate” (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 238) activities within the educational community to provide a quality educational experience for the students of the school system, paying particular attention to the individual academic achievement of each student. Of course, the transition to this new role for the superintendent took place over many years as the expectations for the superintendent efforts reflected the “economic, politics...national trends, and business ideology” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 24) of the given time period. Although each time period brought with it a new emphasis for the superintendent, Sergiovanni et al. (2009) points out that the “New stage did not replace earlier

responsibilities [for superintendents] but added layers, making the position increasingly more complex” (p. 207).

In testimony of this “complexity,” modern superintendents face staggering challenges and pressures. They must be able to remain focused on the core mission of the school district to educate students all the while being able to manage and deal with a variety of forces from both within and outside of the school district. Now more than ever special interest groups are stronger and are able to advance their agenda and “...are capable of mobilizing to remove school authorities” (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 50). This reality added to the pressures of increased state and federal intrusion into public schools and the fact that superintendents must continually attend to developing and maintaining a quality relationship with the board of education creates a situation that “threatens to overwhelm their leadership work” (Orr, 2006, p. 1396).

Even though superintendents face a daunting task, it is important that they are “aggressive in addressing inadequate performance by students, teachers, and schools” (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 237) to better prepare the students for the future. This takes on even more importance when considering that “The general consensus that the present system of American education is not sufficient for meeting the needs of contemporary society...cause[ing]...educators to reexamine...our conceptualization of educational leadership” (Grogan & Andrews, 2002, p. 240).

This proposed “reexamination of educational leadership” gains significance when considering the scope of the studies in the past that have examined superintendents. A variety of studies have explored facets of the superintendency such as the stress and pressures of the superintendency, the role of the superintendent, and the survival of

superintendents. Relatively little research, however, has been conducted on the impact the superintendent has on student achievement, though. This is particularly interesting when considering that a great deal of research has been conducted on the impact teachers and building administrators have on student achievement. This situation is definitely changing, though, as more emphasis is being placed on individual academic accountability and there is heightened interest in discovering the best methods of ensuring that all students achieve academically. So, it is expected that future studies will follow that explore how the superintendent impacts student achievement. Of particular interest to this dissertation is the impact the superintendent's length of tenure has on student achievement.

CHAPTER 3

Research Design

Overview of Research Design

While superintendents have myriad responsibilities and duties, now more than any other time in the history of public schools in the United States, emphasis is being placed on student academic achievement. Superintendents are being held accountable for this achievement. This emphasis makes it necessary to study various facets of the superintendency. The purpose of this descriptive, non-experimental study was to examine the impact a superintendent's length of tenure has on students' academic achievement in Kansas's school districts as shown by achievement on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment.

To put this impact into perspective, the researcher used a multiple regression process exploring the relationship of six predictive variables as they related to the dependent variable of this quantitative study, the academic achievement of the students.

The predictive variables include the following:

1. Length of tenure of each district's superintendent
2. Each superintendent's total number of years of experience as a superintendent
3. Each superintendent's total number of years of experience in education
4. Each district's assessed valuation per pupil
5. Each district's percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced meal prices
6. Each district's total number of students.

To fully investigate the impact superintendent tenure has on student achievement in the districts of Kansas, this study focused on all of the districts of the state. This chapter outlines the means of conducting this research. Results from this investigation are shown in Chapter 4.

Setting Up the Study

Since the inception of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a Kansas district's academic success has been linked to student achievement on the annual Kansas State Assessments. As Gall, Borg, and Gall point out, it is beneficial to use the largest sample possible in a quantitative research project (1996), so the researcher decided to take a "snapshot" of student achievement of all 295 Kansas school districts in 2008. Given the frequency of turnover associated with the superintendency, it was not feasible to gather a population large enough to conduct a longitudinal study extending over several years utilizing multiple regressions as there should be ten to fifteen cases of data per predictor (Field, 2009).

The dependent variable for this study was the academic achievement of the third grade students of all of the Kansas school districts in 2008. Academic achievement was defined as being the percentage of students who achieved a score of "Proficient" or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment.

Three of the six predictive variables, including the primary focus of this study, described data from the 2007-2008 school year regarding the length of time the superintendents spent in education, regardless of the position they held. These include the following:

1. Length of tenure of each district's superintendent
2. Each superintendent's total number of years of experience as a superintendent
3. Each superintendent's total number of years of experience in education.

These descriptive data were chosen for inclusion in the study due to researcher interest in the relationship each variable has with student academic achievement.

The other three predictive variables used in this study were related to district demographics and were chosen for inclusion in the study as a district's characteristics determine the resources and programs a district is able to provide to the students. These variables include the following:

1. Each district's assessed valuation per pupil
2. Each district's percent of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices
3. Each district's total number of students.

The data describing the percentage of "Proficiency" of the third grade students, along with three of the predictive variables, were available and gathered from the Kansas State Department of Education through the Division of School Finance. The researcher accessed the Kansas State Department of Education web page (<http://www.ksde.org/>) and then followed the appropriate Internet link to the "School Finance" home page (<http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=119>). From this page, the researcher selected the link titled "Custom Reports" (<http://cpfs.ksde.org/cpfs/>). By defining the parameters of the data desired for the present research, including limiting the data set to that from 2007-2008, ultimately the researcher was able to build a customized report that contained the data regarding the following:

- The percentage of third graders per district who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment (Dependent Variable)
- Each district’s student headcount (Predictive Variable)
- Each district’s percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced meal prices (Predictive Variable)
- Each district’s assessed valuation per pupil (Predictive Variable).

To gather the data pertaining to the final three predictive variables, the researcher placed a phone call to a representative of the Research Department of the Kansas Association of School Boards, requesting a report that contained the following information for the 2007-2008 school year:

- Length of tenure of each district’s superintendent (Predictive Variable)
- Each superintendent’s total number of years of experience serving as a superintendent (Predictive Variable)
- Each superintendent’s total number of years of experience in education (Predictive Variable).

Once all pertinent data were gathered, the researcher entered it into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 software program to run the appropriate statistical analyses.

Research Questions

The focus on superintendent impact on student achievement is almost certain to intensify in the future. This reality makes it necessary to examine all aspects of the superintendency. Toward that end, the main purpose of this study examines the impact a superintendent’s length of tenure has on student achievement. A variety of questions

were presented in Chapter 1. The data collected during this study were analyzed to address these questions:

1. What is the relationship between the total length of tenure of a superintendent of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
2. What is the relationship between an individual's total number of years of experience serving as a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
3. What is the relationship between the total number of years of experience in education of a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
4. What is the relationship between a Kansas district's assessed valuation per pupil and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
5. What is the relationship between the total student enrollment of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
6. What is the relationship between a Kansas district's percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

Analysis of Data

The research design of this study was quantitative and used backward multiple regression analysis to measure the relationships of the predictive variables to the dependent variable. According to Field, “Regression analysis... enable[s] us to predict future [outcomes] based on values of the predictor variables” (Field, 2009, p. 198). Specifically, the backward method of multiple regression “calculat[es] the contribution of [each predictive variable] by looking at the significance value of the *t-test* for each predictor...If a predictor meets the removal criterion (i.e. if it is not making a statistically significant contribution to how well the model predicts the outcome variable) it is removed from the model” (Field, 2009, p.213). The remaining variables are then assessed as to determine their contribution to the outcome of the dependent variable. Data regarding the dependent variable and the six predictive variables were compiled and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17.0 software program.

The six research questions were addressed by conducting descriptive and correlational analyses to discover the significance of the predictor variables in contributing to the dependent variable. The researcher checked to ensure that the assumption of no multicollinearity had not been violated by having any variables that were too closely related to one another by checking the Pearson correlation coefficient, the tolerance level and the variance inflation factor (VIF) values between the six predictive variables (Field, 2009).

The level of significance was set at $p < .05$. To check the statistical significance and relative importance of each predictive variable, the researcher examined the

unstandardized coefficient beta weights and the standardized beta weights of each predictive variable. In addition an R Square was used to examine the relationships between the various predictive variables and the dependent variable:

1. The length of tenure of the superintendent to the percentage of third graders who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Reading Assessment
2. The total years of experience of the superintendent to the percentage of third graders who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Reading Assessment
3. The total years of experience of the superintendent in education to the percentage of third graders who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Reading Assessment
4. The district’s assessed valuation per pupil to the percentage of third graders who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Reading Assessment
5. The district’s percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices to the percentage of third graders who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Reading Assessment
6. The number of students in the district to the percentage of third graders who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Reading Assessment.

The results of the analyses of this study are presented in Chapter 4 in table form as suggested by the American Psychological Association (Field, 2009). Along with the tables of information, an analysis and interpretation of the data is also included in Chapter 4.

Summary

With the ever-increasing pressure on public schools to produce academically, all facets of the school system are coming under greater scrutiny. As a part of this increased focus, superintendents are being held more accountable for the academic achievement of the students within their districts. Given this reality, this study examined the relationship between the length of tenure superintendents of Kansas school districts had on student achievement as displayed by the Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessments during 2008. A presentation and discussion of the data and interpretations of the results of the analyses conducted are presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

Presentation of Data

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research questions and examines the results of the analysis performed in the completion of this study. Specifically, this chapter examines the multicollinearity of the predictive variables, the model summary of the backward multiple regression analysis of the data and how this model was produced, and the standardized coefficient Beta weights of the predictive variables. Results are presented both as brief discussions and in table form.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the impact the length of tenure a Kansas public school superintendent had on student academic achievement as defined by the percentage of students who earned a score of “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. To put this impact into perspective, five other predictive variables were also chosen to examine their influence on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. The six predictive variables include the following:

1. Each superintendent’s length of tenure
2. Each superintendent’s total number of years of experience serving as a superintendent
3. Each superintendent’s total number of years of experience in education
4. Each district’s assessed valuation per pupil
5. Each district’s student headcount.
6. Each district’s percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced meal prices.

Research Questions

To conduct this study, six research questions were developed regarding the impact each predictive variable had on the dependent variable, the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment.

1. What is the relationship between the total length of tenure of a superintendent of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
2. What is the relationship between an individual’s total number of years of experience serving as a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
3. What is the relationship between the total number of years of experience in education of a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
4. What is the relationship between a Kansas district’s assessed valuation per pupil and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
5. What is the relationship between the total student enrollment of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
6. What is the relationship between a Kansas district’s percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

Results of Data Analysis

An essential early step in completing multiple regression analysis is to ensure that the assumption of no multicollinearity has been met. As displayed in Table I, Pearson correlations were calculated between the six predictive variables. As none of the correlations reached the .80 threshold, this analysis shows that the variables are not too closely related.

Table I – Multicollinearity: Pearson Correlation

Multicollinearity Pearson Correlation						
	Length of Tenure of Supt.	Total Years as Supt.	Total Years in Education	Assessed Valuation Per Pupil	Percentage of Free and Reduced Students	Total Student Headcount
Length of Tenure of Supt.	1.000	.585	.318	.078	-.074	.096
Total Years as Supt.	.585	1.000	.525	.003	-.043	.084
Total Years in Education	.318	.525	1.000	-.059	.021	.203
Assessed Valuation Per Pupil	.078	.003	-.059	1.000	.167	-.061
Percentage of Free and Reduced Students	-.074	-.043	.021	.167	1.000	.005
Total Student Headcount	.096	.084	.203	-.061	.005	1.000

Two other checks for multicollinearity of the predictive variables are included on Table II: the tolerance levels and the variance inflation factor (VIF). The tolerance levels are not below .1 and the VIF scores are well beneath 10, the relative threshold levels

highlighting trouble with the data. These values as shown on Table II signal that there is no reason for concern that the predictive variables unduly influence each other.

Table II – Multicollinearity: Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor

Multicollinearity Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)		
	Tolerance	VIF
Length of Tenure of Supt.	.645	1.550
Total Years as Supt.	.528	1.893
Total Years in Education	.694	1.442
Assessed Valuation Per Pupil	.951	1.051
Percentage of Free and Reduced Students	.960	1.042
Total Student Headcount	.952	1.050

By utilizing the backward method of multiple regression in analyzing the data, three summary models were produced. Although all three models were shown to be significant as they all showed significance levels of $p < .001$, only data for the third model is included here as it was found to be the most parsimonious, having excluded two of the predictive variables based on removal criterion (the significance value of the *t-test* for each predictive variable).

As displayed in Table III, model 3 of the results of the backward multiple regression analysis shows that the remaining predictive variables: Total Headcount, Percentage of Free and Reduced Students, Total Years as a Superintendent, and the Length of Tenure of the Superintendent did predict performance on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. The R Square revealed that 9.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment, was accounted for by the predictive variables in the model retained, $F(4, 294) = 7.980, p < .001$.

Table III – Four Predictive Variables Used

Model	R Square	df1	df2	F	Sig.
3	.099	4	294	7.980	.000

The six research questions all sought to discover the relationship between each individual predictive variable and the dependent variable. Once again the backward method of multiple regression removed two predictive variables based on removal criterion, leaving four of the predictive variables: Total Headcount, Percentage of Free and Reduced Students, Total Years as a Superintendent, and the Length of Tenure of the Superintendent. Analysis was then conducted to test the unique contribution between these predictive variables and the dependent variable, assigning coefficients to each predictive variable. As displayed in Table IV, the beta weight for Length of Tenure of Superintendent was .138, the beta weight for Total Years as a Superintendent was -.167, the beta weight for Percentage of Free and Reduced Students was -.191, and the beta weight for Total Student Headcount was -.201. Based on these results, among the four remaining predictive variables, Total Student Headcount had the strongest effect on the dependent variable, followed by Percentage of Free and Reduced Students, Total Years as a Superintendent, and then the Length of Tenure of the Superintendent. Also, a *t*-statistic was derived to test whether each *b*-value was significant at the .05 level. All four of the remaining predictive variables were shown to significantly make a contribution to the model.

Table IV – Four Predictive Variables Used

	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Standardized Coefficients Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Length of Tenure of Supt.	.326	.138	2.005	.046
Total Years as Supt.	-.245	-.167	-2.429	.016
Percentage of Free and Reduced Students	-.133	-.191	-3.426	.001
Total Student Headcount	.000	-.201	-3.595	.000

Concise Answers to Research Questions

Answers to the research questions presented in Chapter 3 (p. 49) are as follows:

1. What is the relationship between the total length of tenure of a superintendent of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

The length of a superintendent’s tenure was shown to significantly impact the outcome of the dependent variable at the .05 level. Of the four predictive variables used to create Model 3, this predictive variable had the fourth strongest effect on the dependent variable.

2. What is the relationship between an individual’s total number of years of experience serving as a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

The total number of years experience as a superintendent was shown to significantly impact the outcome variable at the .05 level. Of the four predictive variables used to create Model 3, this predictive variable has the third strongest effect on the dependent variable.

3. What is the relationship between the total number of years of experience in education of a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

The total number of years of experience in education was not shown to significantly impact the outcome variable at the .05 level.

4. What is the relationship between a Kansas district's assessed valuation per pupil and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

The district's assessed valuation per pupil was not shown to significantly impact the outcome variable at the .05 level.

5. What is the relationship between the total student enrollment of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

The total student enrollment was shown to significantly impact the outcome variable at the .05 level. Of the four predictive variables used to create Model 3, this predictive variable has the strongest effect on the dependent variable.

6. What is the relationship between a Kansas district's percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

The percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices was shown to significantly impact the outcome variable at the .05 level.

Of the four predictive variables used to create Model 3, this predictive variable has the second strongest effect on the dependent variable.

Summary

This chapter included a review of the purpose of the study, the six research questions examined, and presented the results of the data analysis performed through the backward method of multiple regression. Also, an explanation of how backward multiple regression excludes predictive variables based on removal criterion was provided. The results of the backward multiple regression analysis showed that Length of Tenure of the Superintendent, Total Years as a Superintendent, Percentage of Free and Reduced Students, and Total Student Headcount did predict the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. Also, this chapter showed the relative contribution the four predictive variables used to produce Model Summary 3 had on the dependent variable. Beta weights were computed to show this contribution. Although included as one of the four predictive variables that had an effect on the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment, the primary focus of this study – to examine the impact a superintendent’s length of tenure has on students’ academic achievement – proved to have the least relative impact, according to beta weights.

CHAPTER 5

Findings, Conclusions, and Implications

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief summary of the present study. It explores the methodology used in conducting the study and then presents the study's findings. Further, it provides conclusions based on the findings of the study and discusses implications of these findings. Finally, this chapter presents limitations of the study and provides recommendations for further research related to the purpose of the study.

Summary of the Study

Now, more than any other time in the history of public education in the United States, the superintendent is being held accountable for student academic achievement. Originally, the public school superintendent served somewhat as the clerk for the board of education, taking care of the day-to-day operations of the school (Carter & Cunningham, 1997 and Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Over time, though, the duties of the superintendent have shifted. Rather than merely serving as the daily manager of the school building, the superintendent is, along with a vast array of other responsibilities, primarily vested with the responsibility of ensuring that every student in the school district achieves academically as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

This shifting in responsibilities has placed more and more pressure on the superintendents of the nation as they strive to meet the obligations set before them while navigating the highly political world of the superintendency (Parker, 1996). This increased level of pressure has had a negative impact on the longevity of the modern day superintendent, leading some to state that the superintendency has evolved into somewhat

of a temporary position (Clark, 2001). In fact, in 2008 in Kansas, the year and state of focus for the present research, only 39% of the superintendents had been in their current positions for more than five years. Also, 51.5% of the Kansas superintendents in 2008 had served three or fewer years as a superintendent (Hays, 2008).

Kansas is particularly susceptible to superintendent turnover as the vast majority of the state's school districts are rural in nature. In rural districts, superintendents tend to serve in a more of a generalists role, taking care of a variety of responsibilities rather than merely concentrating on two or three aspects of the school system. Unfortunately, these generalists tend not to be as satisfied in their positions. Ultimately, this dissatisfaction leads to the superintendent moving to a different district or away from the profession altogether (Tallerico, 1996). This turnover directly relates to the length of tenure of the superintendent. The impact of the length of tenure of the superintendent on student academic achievement was the primary focus of this present research.

Although a great deal of research has been completed on both the impact of the classroom teacher and on the impact of the building administrator on student achievement, relatively little research has been completed on the impact the superintendent has on student achievement. Given this fact, the purpose of the present study was to discover the impact the length of tenure of the Kansas superintendent had on student achievement as shown by the percentage of students who scored "Proficient" or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment.

So as to achieve the most comprehensive view of the impact of the length of tenure of the superintendent, the researcher examined all 295 school districts in Kansas in 2008 in this study. To put this impact into perspective, the researcher also examined the

relationship of five other predictive variables on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. Specifically, the following six research questions were developed and examined:

1. What is the relationship between the total length of tenure of a superintendent of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
2. What is the relationship between an individual's total number of years of experience serving as a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
3. What is the relationship between the total number of years of experience in education of a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
4. What is the relationship between a Kansas district's assessed valuation per pupil and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
5. What is the relationship between the total student enrollment of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
6. What is the relationship between a Kansas district's percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

Methodology

This quantitative study was primarily designed to examine the relationship between the length of tenure of Kansas superintendents and student academic achievement. To put the impact of the length of tenure of the superintendent into perspective, five other predictive variables were selected for inclusion in this study. The six predictive variables included the following:

1. Length of tenure of each district's superintendent
2. Each superintendent's total number of years of experience as a superintendent
3. Each superintendent's total number of years of experience in education
4. Each district's assessed valuation per pupil
5. Each district's percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced meal prices
6. Each district's total number of students.

The dependent variable for the study was the percentage of students who scored "Proficient" or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment.

So as to realize the most comprehensive view of the impact of the questions being researched, all predictive and dependent variable data were collected from all 295 Kansas public schools districts in existence in 2008.

The backward method of multiple regression was utilized to complete this analysis. This method of multiple regression seeks the most parsimonious model for analysis; thus, two of the predictive variables were excluded from the final analysis model based on removal criterion, the significance value of the *t-test* for each predictive variable.

Results

In a study utilizing multiple regression, it is essential to ensure the assumption of no multicollinearity had been met. Three separate measures checking for multicollinearity were used. Pearson correlations between the six predictive variables all stayed below the .80 threshold that would signal trouble. The tolerance levels found were all above the .1 level, and the variance inflation factors were all well below 10. All three analyses demonstrated that the six predictive variables were separate enough so as not to unduly influence each other.

Three model summaries for the backward multiple regression were produced, and all three showed significance levels of $p < .001$. However, the backward method of multiple regression seeks the most parsimonious model, so in producing the third and final model summary, two of the predictive variables were excluded based on removal criterion (the significance value of the *t-test* for each predictive variable). Model 3 included the following predictive variables: the Total Headcount, Percentage of Free and Reduced Students, Total Years as a Superintendent, and the Length of Tenure of the Superintendent.

Model 3 showed that the remaining four predictive variables did predict performance on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. Toward that end, the R Square revealed that 9.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment, was contributed by the predictive variables.

To identify the contribution the four remaining predictive variables (the Total Headcount, Percentage of Free and Reduced Students, Total Years as a Superintendent,

and the Length of Tenure of the Superintendent) had in predicting the dependent variable, the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Reading Assessment, standardized beta weights were analyzed. Based on this analysis, the Total Student Headcount had the strongest effect on the dependent variable (-.201), followed by Percentage of Free and Reduced Students (-.191), then the Total Years as a Superintendent (-.167), and then the Length of Tenure of the Superintendent (.138).

Conclusions

Although a great deal of research has been conducted on the impact the classroom teacher and the building administrator have on student academic achievement, that has not been the case with the superintendent. For the most part, research on the superintendent has focused on the stress and pressures related to the position, the reasons for and the turnover rates of superintendents, and the perceptions of the expected characteristics of the superintendent. To this point, the research examining the impact the superintendent has on student academic achievement has mainly related to the superintendent’s ability to promote and support quality building level instructional leaders (Cudeiro, 2005) and has shown that it is important that the superintendent acts in a responsive manner that includes employing a “comprehensive goal-setting process to develop board-adopted non-negotiable goals for achievement” (Waters & Marzano, 2007, p. 14). It is for this reason that the researcher decided to focus on the present study, to examine the relationship between the length of tenure of the superintendent and student academic achievement.

The results of this quantitative study using the backward method of multiple regression confirmed that the remaining four predictive variables used to produce Model

Summary 3 did account for 9.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. While this model accounted for less than 10% of the variance of the dependent variable, meaning that over 90% of the variance in the dependent variable is accountable to other factors, this study does reveal that aspects of the superintendency do play a part in student academic achievement, specifically the length of tenure of the superintendent and the total years of experience as a superintendent. This information is important as the focus on individual student academic achievement will continue to be emphasized in the years to come, so it is essential to examine all possible contributing factors. One such factor is the role the superintendent plays in impacting student academic achievement.

The results of the data analysis revealed that the total student headcount of a district had the strongest relationship with the dependent variable, the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. Specifically, as the number of students in a district declined, the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” increased. The percentage of a district’s students who qualified for free and reduced meals had the second strongest relationship with the dependent variable. As was the case with the total student head count, as the percentage of students who qualified for free and reduced meal prices declined, the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” increased. The total years serving as a superintendent showed the third strongest relationship with the dependent variable. Interestingly, as the total number of years serving as a superintendent decreased, the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” increased. Lastly, the length of tenure of the superintendent, the

primary interest of this study, showed the fourth strongest relationship with the dependent variable. Unlike the results for the three other predictive variables used in the Model Summary 3, data showed that as the length of tenure of a superintendent increased so did the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Reading Assessment.

Although Model Summary 3 merely accounted for 9.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment, this result should not be discounted as inconsequential as the research exploring the impact the superintendent has on student academic achievement is so very lacking. As the superintendency is such a difficult position fraught with a variety of complexities, it is important to remain mindful that how long a superintendent stays in a position matters to the over-all academic achievement of the students of that district.

Implications

This study revealed that the length of tenure of a Kansas superintendent does have a significantly positive impact on student academic achievement as defined by the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment.

As time passes and attention on individual student academic achievement brought on by NCLB increases, this positive relationship potentially poses a problem regarding student academic achievement as “superintendents and school boards seem to view constant job movement and lack of longevity as a given part of the profession” (Clark, 2001, p. 40). It has gotten so bad that Eaton and Sharp (1996) report a 30% turnover of

superintendents within a single year and a 70% turnover of superintendents within five years.

This rate of turnover has been brought about by many factors, including the fact that the superintendency is so political in nature (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996) and is “complex and...measured by such high standards tied to accountability for results” (Cudeiro, 2005, p. 16). Along with all of this, the superintendent is forced to operate “...in an environment where interest group politics, board relations, and regulatory muddle conspire to handcuff their leadership” (Orr, 2006, p. 1366).

Finally, on a personal level, it is noted that the superintendent’s life is a lonely and isolated one (Roan & Hardy, 1996) and that the superintendent must “learn not to take criticism and attack personally” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 225). This could have a bearing on the happiness and job satisfaction of individuals serving as superintendents.

Implications of this study show that steps need to be taken to assist the superintendent in surviving and prospering in their positions. Specifically, the following recommendations are offered: 1. Improved post-secondary superintendent preparation programs, 2. Creation of a research-based superintendent mentor program, 3. Promotion of formal and informal superintendent support groups, 4. Continued emphasis in training school board members in the concepts of proper boardsmanship, and 5. Conduct additional examinations of multiple variables as they relate to the superintendent and student academic achievement.

1. Develop post-secondary superintendent preparation programs that focus on technical aspects of the position and the interpersonal skills necessary for the position. These programs should provide a solid theoretical basis but should also

- be experiential in nature, focusing on real-life examples that superintendents encounter. When at all possible, these programs should include extensive practicum experiences where the person desiring to become a superintendent is faced with issues that practicing superintendents encounter.
2. Create a scientifically based mentor program for superintendents new to the field. As a part of this program, new superintendents would be paired with “successful” superintendents who would then work through a series of modules with the new superintendent. These modules would be centered on real-life situations the superintendent would face. The mentor program would run for multiple years, with the two superintendents getting together on a monthly basis. Annually, the superintendents new to the position would attend a state conference as a capstone experience to reaffirm the concepts covered in the modules covered through that particular year.
 3. Promote state suggested superintendent support groups. These support groups could either be assigned or better yet formed at the local level. The purpose of the support groups would be to proactively work against the loneliness and isolation felt by superintendents. To facilitate the shoring up of these support groups, the state could produce a white paper regarding the importance of this activity and then include a list of topics of discussion to facilitate the growth of the support groups.
 4. Expand upon and require board member participation in professional development training opportunities focusing on the proper roles and

responsibilities of the members of the board of education. Board members would be required to participate in six training opportunities per year.

5. Develop additional studies utilizing multiple regression that would examine other predictive variables as they relate to the impact the superintendent has on academic achievement. There are many possible variables to use in studies of this type. It is particularly important to continue with this sort of study as continued emphasis will almost certainly be placed on the role the superintendent has in positively impacting student academic achievement.

Limitations

There are three major limitations in this study that restrict the ability to generalize the results. The first limitation is the fact that all data used to conduct the study came from one school year, 2007-2008. Restricting the data set to a single year was necessary, though, as the mobility rate of superintendents is so high. It would be impossible to produce a sample size large enough over a five or ten year period to properly analyze the six predictive variables used in this study.

A second limitation of the study dealt with the fact that no efforts were made to access data regarding the quality and experience of the professional staff in any of the 295 school districts in Kansas. As the focus of the present research was to examine the impact the length of tenure of the superintendent had on the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment, these data were outside the parameters of the study.

The final limitation of the study was the fact that no effort was made to determine the districts’ attitudes, including the superintendent’s, toward the importance of the 2008

Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. Once again, the primary focus of the study dealt with the impact the length of tenure of the superintendent had on the results of the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. Attitudinal data fell outside the parameters of the study.

Recommendations for Further Research

Ever since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, emphasis has been placed squarely on the individual academic achievement results of the students, and superintendents are now being held accountable for these results more than ever. While many factors relating to the school experience of the students have been researched, particularly the impact of the classroom teacher and the building level administrator, very little research has been conducted regarding the impact the superintendent has on student academic achievement. This study, however, examined the impact the length of tenure a superintendent had on student academic achievement as defined by the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. The findings of this study provide insight into one aspect of the impact the superintendent had on academic achievement. Given these results and the limitations of the study, further research should be conducted so as to gain a broader view of what impact the superintendent has on student academic achievement. The following are recommended as future research topics:

1. A similar study examining the math scores of the students should be conducted. As with the present research, data from 2008 should be used. This study would be useful to see if the longevity of the superintendent made any difference with a different academic discipline. Then the results of the two studies could be

- compared to provide a more comprehensive picture of the impact the length of tenure of the superintendent had on student academic achievement.
2. If at all possible, a longitudinal study of the impact of the length of tenure of the superintendent on academic achievement should be studied. A longitudinal study would prove valuable as a pattern of influence would emerge over time and certain limitations such as any crisis situations in the school district would play less of an impact on the outcome of the study. In order to conduct this study, though, it would be necessary to restrict the number of predictive variables used as the mobility of superintendents could make it impossible to gather a sample set large enough to run the multiple regression analysis.
 3. A study examining the superintendents' attitudes toward academic achievement and the impact this attitude had on the outcome of the Kansas assessments should be conducted. This is an important research topic as the superintendent is the primary resource manager of the school district and has the power to add to or take away from instructional programming that might influence student performance on the state assessments.
 4. A study should be conducted that examines the day-to-day activities and behaviors of the superintendent as they relate to student academic achievement. This study could focus on one year's worth of data, or it could be structured so as to run over a period of several years, following the careers of the randomly chosen superintendents of the study. Regardless of whichever design were chosen, this research recommendation is important as the results would provide

insight into the superintendent behaviors that showed the greatest impact on academic achievement.

Concluding Thoughts

In the 170 years that the position of the public school superintendent has been in existence, the roles and duties of that position have fundamentally changed. Initially serving as a clerk for the board of education taking care of the day-to-day operations of the school, the role of the superintendent has definitely taken on a more important function. It is now a professional position that plays a pivotal part in the continuation of our Democracy by influencing how we educate our children (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, and Grogan & Andrews, 2002).

Assuming that the superintendent does play an important role in the preservation of our country, interestingly, very little research has been conducted on the direct impact the superintendent has on student academic achievement. Thus, the primary purpose of this study was to examine the impact the length of tenure a Kansas superintendent had on student academic achievement as defined by the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. This study is but one small step down the path to understand the superintendent’s impact on student academic achievement. Further research on this subject is more than overdue.

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