

USING SEARCH CONSULTANTS IN SUPERINTENDENT SEARCHES
FROM THE BOARD MEMBER PERSPECTIVE

By

MICHAEL L. SIMPSON

Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK
1991

Master of Arts in Kinesiology
Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, TX
1993

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
December, 2010

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Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Bernita Krumm

Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Ed Harris

Dr. Ken Stern

Dr. Pam Brown

Dr. Mark E. Payton

Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Bernita Krumm for inheriting me and pushing me through with her wisdom and good common sense. I would also like to thank the members of my committee past and present, Dr. Betty Edgley, Dr. Janice Miller, Dr. Ken Stern, Dr. Ed Harris and Dr. Pam Brown for their guidance and insight.

I have been fortunate to have a mentor in my professional life who has been a source of encouragement and a constant sounding board for this process. Thank you to Dr. David Pennington. Without your continued support professionally and personally I would not have completed this study.

My family has been a constant support throughout my life at all points of my education. I regret that my parents Jerry and Charlene Simpson could not live to see the conclusion of this program, but their support and the value they placed on education has made me a lifelong learner. The new addition in our family, my daughter, Abigail Marie is a constant source of inspiration who reminds me of my responsibility to improve education every day. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Kelly—my best friend. She has supported me and sacrificed much to allow me to complete the doctoral program.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Today's young people enter a world that is much more demanding than the one their parents and grandparents took for granted. Preparing all students to thrive in this world presents its own set of challenges for schools; at the same time, the children they welcome each year bring increasingly diverse needs for support and instruction (Center for Public Education, 2009). In their mission statement, The National Association of School Boards (2009) lists the goal, “Every school board will lead its community in preparing each student to succeed in a rapidly changing global society.” This preparation is highlighted in President Barack Obama’s State of the Union Address (February 24, 2009):

This [high dropout rate] is a prescription for economic decline, because we know the countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow. That is why it will be the goal of this administration to ensure that every child has access to a complete and competitive education – from the day they [sic] are born to the day they begin a career.

Despite the national focus, the ultimate responsibility for the quality of education our children receive rests with the local community.

While schools are governed by a board of education comprised of community members, the superintendent runs the district on a day-to-day basis. This position requires the person to be the face of the school district as well as the educational expert to whom the board looks for guidance, a role that is all-encompassing and certainly more than ceremonial. The board of education looks to the superintendent to provide the vision of the educational program so that students can succeed in life. The board and superintendent must work together to mesh this vision of success with the values of the community.

When a public school district needs a new superintendent, the selection process may become very politically charged. Regardless of the district's size, this job greatly affects the vision of education in that community. Employing a superintendent ultimately rests on the shoulders of the school district's board of education. This group of people from the community suddenly must become education human resource experts. Hanging in the balance is the education of the children in the school district. Because of this selection's importance, board members may turn to an expert who provides them with guidance through part or all of the process. Often, this expert is an employee of a state organization that serves the school boards. School boards may also seek the services of a for-profit search firm that specializes in similar searches. Consultants typically have a general knowledge of the job market and potential candidates. They also have time to verify references and employment history of applicants. A consultant who has the trust of the school board becomes a powerful person in the selection of a superintendent.

Statement of the Problem

There are several reasons this study of a school board's use of a consultant in hiring a superintendent was both important and timely:

1. School superintendents provide the vision and leadership for the entire school district.
2. A large number of superintendents are quickly approaching retirement age, thus necessitating replacement.
3. The school board, despite potentially lacking necessary expertise in human resources, is charged with the task of hiring a superintendent.
4. School board members are not paid employees of the school and often have jobs that limit their time commitment to the task of hiring a superintendent.
5. The search consultant provides the expertise to direct the process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze the use of a superintendent search consultant from the perspective of the school board member. Because selection of a superintendent, the chief executive officer of the school district, is an important task, the decision to use a search consultant must be thoughtful and well-informed, and based on research and factual evidence. Although an individual district's decision to involve a consultant in hiring a superintendent may be unique to its situation, common reasons among districts have included the services of a search consultant in the process. School board members provided insight to the specific needs of the different communities and how the consultant addressed those needs.

Research Questions

This study examined the superintendent search process from the perspective of board members in four Oklahoma school districts that recently completed searches for superintendents. Board members were asked about the decision to hire a consultant, the search process itself, and the role played by a consultant. Information was gathered to identify themes pertaining to the consultant and the process among the school districts.

Primary research questions were used to guide the study from the perspective of the school board member:

1. What are the challenges associated with hiring a superintendent?
2. How did the characteristics of a community and school district influence the decision to use a search consultant?
3. What effect did the former superintendent have on the selection either directly or indirectly?
4. How did the search consultant influence the process of hiring the superintendent?

Theoretical Framework

Since the action this study investigates was decision making, this study was guided by several decision making models proposed by Hoy and Tarter (2004), including the principal models of classical, administrative and shared (2004). Hoy and Tarter noted that classical decision making theory operates under assumptions that decisions are rational and are the best alternatives with respect to the goals and objectives of the organization. They further asserted that the model assumes one best solution is discovered and implemented, and they divided the process into a series of sequential steps: problem identification, problem diagnosis, alternatives, consequences, evaluation,

selection and implementation. Hoy and Tarter (2004) pointed out that this model assumes an optimizing strategy of decision making with clear goals, complete information and the cognitive capacity to analyze the problem. The authors called this process *maximizing*. Hoy commented, “Boards [of Education] cannot maximize in their decision making (personal communication, July 9, 2010). When Hoy and Tarter (2004) asked the question, “Is the optimizing strategy realistic?” (p.12), their conclusion was, “Probably not.” (p. 12). They explained their conclusion by noting that this model fails to acknowledge various human factors associated with the decision making process.

For more complex problems, Hoy and Tarter (2004) stated that decision makers may use the administrative model. They found this model to be a more realistic approach to problem solving because it outlines steps that define the way decisions are actually made. A strategy within the administrative model identified by Herbert Simon was *satisficing*. Hoy and Tarter further commented, “Herbert Simon introduced the strategy of satisficing in an attempt to provide a more accurate description of the way administrators do and should make decisions” (p. 13). The process was initially described as looking for satisfactory solutions and then further explained as the rational means to an end for meeting agreed upon objectives or bounded rationality. Hoy and Tarter (2004) described this strategy as looking for the best of the satisfactory options using a simplified picture of reality that accounts only for the factors they consider most important. This strategy is appropriate when objectives are set and all satisfactory options are considered. Hoy and Tarter (2004) described the final decision is a means to an end that fits within the desired outcome of the organization. Their conclusion for this model can be found in their statement, “There is no one best way to solve a complex problem; rather, there are many satisfactory solutions that work” (p. 27).

Hoy and Tarter (2004) cited several sources that support the shared decision making model in education. They further noted that this model can improve the quality of decisions and promote cooperation if the right strategy is linked to the right situation. “Vroom and Jago suggest a more appropriate interpretation is that under some circumstances groups outperform some individuals. It is just as wrong to conclude that autocratic decisions will always be inferior as to believe that they will always be superior” (Hoy and Tarter, 2004, p. 121). Hoy and Tarter described the level of participation in the decision making process as a variable for each person based on many factors, including personal relevance to the problem, expertise and trust. Hoy and Tarter further noted that although participation may improve the decision making, it can also impede the process. Their conclusion regarding this model was that the critical question of when to involve subordinates must be answered carefully with much analysis.

Procedures

The research was conducted and reported using qualitative methods. “Qualitative dissertations, once quite rare, have become increasingly common as the criteria for judging qualitative contributions to knowledge have become better understood and accepted” (Patton, 2002, p. 11).

Researcher

I am in my third year as an Assistant Superintendent in north central Oklahoma. My prior experience includes working in three other school districts, one in southwest Oklahoma and two in north central Oklahoma. I began my career in education as an instructor in the Department of Health and Kinesiology and assistant basketball coach at a university in eastern Texas for two years. I then turned to common education as a

classroom teacher and coach, first in southwest Oklahoma for three years, then north central Oklahoma for four years. My career in administration followed as an athletic director of a school district in north central Oklahoma for the next eight years. Recently, I accepted my current position of Assistant Superintendent.

My interest in superintendent selection procedures began in 2002 when the school district where I was the Athletic Director began to search for a superintendent. One of my close friends was a finalist for the position, so I was informed of the procedures from the perspective of a district employee as well as that of one of the candidates. I was intrigued by the fact that the district hired a search consultant at the beginning of the search. The consultant gave a structure to the process that was transparent to the staff, public and candidates. The services of the consultant were discontinued at a time that, in retrospect, appears to have been the mid-way point of the process. Also, at this time, one board member began seeking more involvement and promoting one candidate. Some of the processes prescribed by the consultant were carried out by the board members while others were not.

I privately began to question the process as the three finalists met with district administrators and were presented at a public forum. Two highly qualified in-state candidates were passed over by the board, and that further piqued my interest in the process. The candidate selected by the board was a person who had recently owned an educational software company that had gone out of business and before that had worked as a superintendent in two other states. Following his selection, several people connected with the search confided that he was a “compromise candidate.” Four board members wanted one of the in-state candidates; the dissenting board member wanted a person who lacked the qualifications for the job and failed to make the final three, but was a close

friend and a member of the community. The superintendent who was hired continued to live in another state, rented an apartment in the community, and traveled to his out-of-state home most weekends. He served the district for six years, but was never embraced by the community or staff; his contract was bought out with one year remaining. I have often wondered what the outcome would have been if the consultant in the search had continued assisting in the process.

Case Study Method

A multi-case study was used to examine the selection process when a search consultant was used. The role played by the search consultant in the selection process was investigated from the perspective of school board members from four Oklahoma school districts who participated in the searches for superintendents in their districts.

Cresswell (2003) explained the case study:

The researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. (p. 15)

Patton (2002) referred to observations by Yin that “analysis of rival explanations in case studies constitutes a form of rigor in qualitative analysis parallel to the rigor of experimental designs aimed at eliminating rival explanations” (pp. 553-4). Yin’s statement supports the use of the multi-case study in comparing school districts to identify common themes.

Site Selection

Purposeful sampling was used for participant selection in this study. According to Cresswell (2003), “The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p. 185). The participants in this study were school board members from four districts that hired superintendents in the past three years and used a search consultant. All participants were current or former board members whose terms of office included active participation in the entire selection process.

Data Collection Needs

Patton (2002) wrote, “The purpose of interviewing is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (p. 341). Identifying the effect of the consultant on the selection process of a superintendent from the perspective of the school board member was the purpose of this study. Interviews with the members of the board of education were the primary source of data. The use of the interview, as stated by Patton (2002), is a method to “find out what is in and on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories” (p. 341). Stake (1995) noted, “Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64).

Board members were asked questions from an interview protocol regarding their experiences as school board members of a school district that recently hired a superintendent (see Appendix B). Yin (2009) noted, “Having a case study protocol is desirable under all circumstances, but it is essential if you are doing a multiple-case

study” (p. 79). An open-ended questioning format allowed the participants to fully express their opinions about the process.

I audio taped the interviews, and upon completion, the entire tape was transcribed verbatim to protect against any preconceived assumptions on the part of the researcher. I emailed each board member a transcript of the appropriate individual interview that included pseudonyms, and asked each to correct responses from the interview or clarify unclear meanings. Additionally, I took fieldnotes and collected and reviewed artifacts such as meeting minutes, school district brochures, newspapers articles and achievement data for relevance to the study.

Data Analysis

“Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings” (Patton, 2002, p. 432). This [analysis] is done by making sense of the massive amounts of data (2002). I used axial coding was used to identify common phrases and words; findings were derived from analyzing the data by examining the transcripts and fieldnotes for the coded data that related most directly to the topic. Responses that provided insight to the primary research questions were noted for future cataloging. I asked participants to elaborate on and clarify information through member checks of their interview transcripts and I analyzed pertinent newspaper articles. These actions enhanced validity through triangulation (Garrahy, 2005).

Significance of the Study

Goens and Exparo (2006) stated that a school board has the obligation of stewardship to act for the common good and to select the best leader possible for its

district. State school board associations or other organizations that provide consultant services to school districts could use this study to improve the services they provide to school districts searching for a superintendent. School board members who serve a district searching for a superintendent may use this study to understand the processes employed by a search consultant. Additionally, potential candidates could use the results of this study to identify the professionalism of the districts searching for a superintendent.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were relevant to the study:

1. The researcher assumed that the participants understood the search and selection processes used by their districts.
2. The researcher assumed that the participants believed they were acting in the best interests of the school district during the selection process.
3. The researcher assumed that participants understood each interview question and responded in a truthful manner.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are relevant to this study.

Applicant or Candidate: person who has officially shown interest in the available position through a formal process.

Applicant Pool or Candidate Pool: group of people under consideration for the available position.

Consultant: person or firm retained by the school district to advise the school board on various items related to the hiring process of a superintendent.

District Enrollment: The number of students enrolled in a school district in grades Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade. For the purposes of this study, a small district consists of fewer than 500 students, a medium district contains 500-1,999 students, and a large district has 2,000 or more students enrolled.

School board or Board of Education: The governing body of the school district, usually elected by a vote of the registered voters residing within the boundaries of the school district.

Selection process: The actions associated with hiring a superintendent from the initial posting of a vacancy to filling the position.

State School Boards Association: Statewide organizations created to provide support, education and expertise to school board members and district administrators.

Superintendent: The executive officer of the board of education and the administrative head of the school system of a district maintaining an accredited school, provided he or she holds an administrator's certificate recognized by the State Board of Education (70 O.S. §§ 1-116, 2008).

Summary and Organization of the Study

One of the most important decisions a member of a school board will make is hiring a superintendent. This action affects every part of the district and places a face in the community for the entire school system. The study was designed to provide insight to the role a paid consultant plays in the selection process through the perspectives of the board members who recently completed such a task.

This study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter included an introduction to the study as well as a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research

questions, theoretical framework, procedures, description of the case study method, significance of the study, assumptions, definitions of terms and the organization of the study. Chapter two reviews the literature related to the study. Chapter three details the research design and methodology of the study. Chapter four reports on and analyzes the data collected, and chapter five includes the summary, implications, conclusions and discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The superintendent's close relationship to successful school reform is emerging as a centerpiece in school reform research and literature. If superintendent leadership is important for meaningful change and reform, then superintendent selection is a critical event for both the school district and the community. (Glass, 2001a, p. 3)

Hiring the right person is an inexact science to say the least and may put community members serving on the school board into roles for which they are ill-prepared. The purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze the use of a superintendent search consultant from the perspective of the school board member. This chapter reviews relevant literature on the subject and is divided into three areas. The first area is a description of school governance, including the role played by both the superintendent and school board; the second area is a description of how to hire a superintendent; the final area describes the role of the consultant in the hiring process.

School Governance

The Role of the Superintendent

When a school board hires a superintendent of schools, they must first examine the role and what is expected of that person. The position of superintendent is defined by Oklahoma statute as “the executive officer of the board of education and the administrative head of a school district maintaining an accredited school, provided he or she holds an administrator’s certificate recognized by the state board of education” (70 O.S. §§ 1-116, 2008). A school district in north central Oklahoma described the duties of the superintendent in their policy manual: “The superintendent is held accountable to the Board for all aspects of administering the school system under the policies adopted by the Board” (2008, p.8). Further clarification of authority is stated:

Since the division of labor is essential for managing a large organization, it is expected that the superintendent will delegate portions of the administrative tasks to building principals and appropriate central staff members under written job descriptions. The responsibility for their performance is not considered a delegable function. By the same token, it is presumed that the responsibility for all activities within any building during school hours belongs to the designated head of that unit who is deemed accountable to the superintendent. (2008, p. 8)

According to Goldberg (2006), “By its very nature, the superintendency is a challenging job. Parents, students, teachers, teacher organizations, the board, other administrators and the custodial staff all make demands. But to sustain their leadership, superintendents cannot allow the job to overwhelm them.” (¶ 16).

The origin of the superintendent position can be traced to Buffalo, New York, in 1837 (Cuban, 1976). As communities grew and schools began to resemble bureaucracies, the need for someone to manage the day-to-day business of the school district arose. Cuban (1976) related that most of the early day responsibilities of the superintendent were closer to that of a clerical position. During the early 20th century, superintendents were viewed as educational experts who had equal status to doctors, lawyers and ministers, despite limited compensation (Kamler, 2009). The superintendent's authority was rarely challenged and in general gained considerable influence with boards and community (Wallace, 2003, p. 39). According to Kamler (2009), the latter part of the 20th century brought changes to the superintendency that included societal, economic and political pressures along with heightened expectations. Those expectations were exacerbated by reform agendas, politicized boards and diminishing resources, which ultimately resulted in superintendents possessing less unilateral authority and higher expectations.

Policy of a school district in north central Oklahoma exemplifies the importance of the position as well as the all-encompassing role the person fills for the district.

The Board views the superintendent's position in the school system in a triple capacity: executive of the Board, leader and officer accountable for all personnel of the system, and liaison between those personnel and the Board. Because of the extreme responsibility assigned to the superintendent, the selection of the proper person for this position is one of the most important tasks the Board performs, second only to that of policy development. (2008, p.8)

An important ingredient to a successful superintendency is maintaining a positive relationship with the board of education. Kamler (2009) noted superintendents can become the focal point for the ills of the district and also the target of deflection from the school board over heated controversies. Fusarelli (2006) indicated that a precarious relationship between a superintendent and the board of education deters school improvement, affects the quality of educational programs, increases conflict over district instructional goals and objectives, and weakens district stability and morale. She stated,

Over the past 30 years, school boards have become increasingly politicized and more involved in the daily operations and administration of their school districts, making it more difficult for superintendents to provide strong leadership for school improvement. When a policy or practice is unsuccessful, boards and superintendents often blame each other, resulting in a lack of clear accountability.

(pp. 50-51)

Fusarelli further suggested that such involvement can lead to an increase in the “revolving door syndrome” of district superintendents.

The Shrinking Candidate Pool

Riede (2003b) noted that school boards seeking replacements for their superintendents face a much greater challenge than school boards of only a few years ago, due to fewer young educators in the candidate pool. Demographics contribute to this problem as legions of baby-boomers retiring at 55 move on to other pursuits—in some cases becoming superintendent searchers themselves (Riede, 2003b). Many search firms concede they have seen huge drops in their candidate pools. In a survey of superintendents, Glass (2001b) noted that 71% of

superintendents believe the superintendency is in a state of crisis. Borja (2006) cited data from the American Association of School Administrators that placed the annual turnover rate for superintendents at 15 percent or between 2,000 and 2,200 of the country's 13,500 superintendents. According to Dr. June Ehinger, Deputy Executive Director of the Oklahoma State School Boards Association, in 2008 Oklahoma had 538 school districts. Seventy of those districts started the school year with a new superintendent. She estimated that a superintendent's tenure in Oklahoma averages between 27 and 32 months. Of the 70 vacancies, 30 were created by retirements. Ehinger listed the average age of Oklahoma superintendents at 57 years (personal communication, April 29, 2009).

Reasons listed for the crisis in the United States include challenging relationships with school boards, long work hours, and stressful working conditions that discourage other administrators from seeking the superintendency. Boring (2003) referred to the high economic costs for relocation along with the growing number of two-profession couples with complex relocation needs as further deterrents to mobility in the profession.

In an issue paper, Glass (2001a) suggested specific measures that would improve the applicant pool, such as better qualified boards that micromanage less, higher salaries and transportable retirement systems. Another idea was a six year contract, which Glass suggested would promote the superintendent longevity and reduce the apprehension associated with comprehensive reform. Glass further commented that it is unknown what effect these suggestions might have on the applicant pool since the suggestions have been largely ignored by school boards or are legislatively prohibited.

Gender and Racial Equity

Kamler (2009) cited statistics of a growing shift leading women to the superintendency. History shows that this position is one of the most male dominated of any profession. In 2000, 86.6% of the superintendents in the United States were male and 13.2% were female. Kamler's statistics indicate an increase of 4.8 percentage points in only five years as the female total for 2005 increased to 18%. Grogan and Brunner (2005) found that men are twice as likely as women to be hired into the position if the selection comes from outside the district.

Opportunities for people of color have not increased at the same rate as that of female candidates. Grogan and Brunner (2005) noted, "Evidence indicates that superintendents of color are more likely to be hired if school boards are relatively diverse" (p. 48). Kamler (2009) found that African Americans were considered for positions only in minority districts. Ehinger (personal communication, April 29, 2009) cited statistics from Oklahoma that support the national trend. Of the 538 school districts in Oklahoma during the 2008-09 school year, only 6 superintendents were black, 3 were Native American and 87 were female. The U. S. Census Bureau (2009) listed the population demographic of Oklahoma at 7.4% black, 6.9% Native American and 50.6% female, however, demographics for superintendents employed in Oklahoma were 1.1% black, 0.5% Native American and 16.1% female.

Grogan and Brunner (2005) found that women have a better chance than men of being hired when a consultant is employed by the district. In their study, 23% of the districts who hired women used a search firm while 17% of the districts who hired men used a search firm. Kamler (2009) concluded that

gatekeepers such as consultants help to remove some of the historical barriers to diversity associated with this position. She suggested the removal of these barriers will continue to assist in addressing the shortage of candidates.

The School Board

Members of the Board of Education are elected by the community. According to 70 O.S. §§5-56 (2008), independent (PK-12) school districts in Oklahoma may have either five or seven members. Boards with five members serve five year terms while boards with seven members serve four year terms. Wards are created based on population, and members must reside in the ward they represent. While school districts may allow the election of members to be at large (voters from throughout the district may vote), the candidate must reside within the ward. Title 70, § 5-724 (2008) mandates that candidates for this office possess a high school diploma, have no felony convictions and agree to attend continuing education for school board members.

The Responsibilities of the School Board

While responsibilities of school board members vary by state, Oklahoma law (70 O. S. §§ 5-117) defines them in 24 sections with additional subsections. A school district in north central Oklahoma translated that law into four basic areas: legislative and policy making, appraisal, financial resources, and educational planning and evaluation. The district's policy manual provides further clarification of each area. In the area of legislative and policy making, the board is responsible for developing policies that will guide administrative action and employing a superintendent to implement its policies. The board is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of its policies, implementing

those policies and also evaluating the superintendent of schools, which explains the appraisal duties. The board is responsible for adopting a budget to provide the resources (buildings, staff, materials and equipment) that will enable the school system to carry out the board's policies. Finally, educational planning and evaluation is explained:

The board is responsible for establishing educational goals which will guide both the board and the staff in working together toward the continuing improvement of the educational program. It is responsible for providing ongoing evaluation of the school program in relation to the goals and objectives set forth by the board.”

(2008, pp. 1-5)

Other responsibilities within the school district are considered to belong to staff members.

How Does the Board Hire a Superintendent?

Since the board of education is legally responsible for hiring the superintendent of as established in 70 O. S. §§ 5-106 (2008), establishing a method of hiring a superintendent is a decision of the school board. Minimal research centers on the process to select superintendents, and no national database describes what actually occurs in the search for a superintendent performed by boards or consultants (Kamler, 2009, pp. 120-21). Vaughn (2007) indicated that depending on their resources, the school board can contract with their state school board association or a private search firm to assist in finding candidates; but in small districts, this can be cost prohibitive. Glass (2001a) suggested that states should provide grants for less wealthy districts so using a search consultant can be a decision based solely on choice not cost. In his study, Glass found that fewer than 10% of the districts using search consultants were from rural areas.

The size as well as the financial condition of the district may influence the process and any outside assistance. The school board could choose to conduct the entire process on its own or could select members of the board to serve as a committee to screen the candidates based on a set of criteria. Wildman (1988) supported the notion that a school board should conduct its own search. He suggested that despite the time involved to find a quality candidate, a board will have ownership in the selection and, thus, be more committed to the selection and supportive of the successful candidate. According to Vaughn (2007),

If you are a small district and cannot afford to hire a consultant, here's how the process goes. You search through references and contacts for anyone who will say something positive about the superintendent. The defining element is finding enough people who know enough about the applicant and will speak favorably about his or her character. (p. 41)

Goens (2006) pointed out that these references can be misleading by citing an example of a candidate who was not hired based on a negative recommendation. "The superintendent did her job, but a negative reference cost the school board and the candidate a potentially beneficial relationship" (p. 19). Reide (2003) quoted one consultant who said, "Some boards are less precise but no less demanding; they want someone who not only walks on water but changes the water into wine immediately" (p. 15).

Decision Making Models

Hoy and Tarter (2004) noted several decision making models appropriate for this study. A popular model that assumes there is one best solution that can be discovered

and implemented is the Classical Model. Hoy and Tarter (2004) identified seven sequential steps in the process:

1. Problem Identification: Problems are discrepancies between actual and desired outcomes. Administrators monitor school operations to identify problems, that is, to determine when performance falls short of expectations.
2. Problem diagnosis: Information that explains the nature and origin of the problem is collected and analyzed.
3. Alternatives: All the possible alternatives, options that area potential solutions, are developed.
4. Consequences: The probable effects of each alternative are considered.
5. Evaluation: All the alternatives are evaluated in terms of the goals and objectives.
6. Selection: The best alternative is selected, that is, the one that maximizes the goals and objectives.
7. Implementation: Finally, the decision is implemented and evaluated (pp. 11-12).

Hoy and Tarter (2004) identified several shortcomings in this model. They noted the model assumes clear goals, complete information and the cognitive capacity to analyze the problem. They further noted, “The demands it makes on human cognition simply cannot be met” (p.12). Hoy and Tarter concluded that this strategy is probably not realistic.

Hoy and Tarter (2004) acknowledged the Administrative Model which they further identified as the Satisficing Theory of decision making. In his book *Administrative Behavior*, Herbert Simon noted his development of the Satisficing Theory

of decision making in an attempt to provide a more accurate description of the way school administrators do and should make decisions (as cited in Hoy & Tarter, 2004).

“Administrators continue to talk about finding the best solutions to problems. What is meant, of course, is the best of the satisfactory options” (Hoy & Tarter, 2004, p. 13).

Hoy and Tarter explained that administrators look for satisfactory solutions that are good enough because they are using a simplified picture of reality that accounts only for the factors they consider most important.

Hoy and Tarter (2004) discussed the importance of aligning individual decisions with the values and goals of the organization and that organizational decisions should be rational from the individual perspective. They also contended that while decision making in some areas of education is quite different from areas such as the military or industry, many aspects related to policy, resources and execution are substantially the same.

Often in education, the limited means can have an effect on the ability to maximize the organization. Brown (2004) noted, “Good administration or administrative efficiency is important for conserving the scarce resources that the organization has at its disposal for accomplishing its tasks” (p. 1241). She concluded that the individuals settle for decisions that *satisfice*, and compromise may be necessary since the perfect decision making model does not exist. Hoy and Tarter (2004) list five sequential steps in the decision making process for the Satisficing Model:

1. Recognize and define the problem.
2. Analyze the difficulties in the existing situation.
3. Establish criteria for a satisfactory solution.

4. Develop a strategy for action, including the specification of possible alternatives, the prediction of probable consequences, deliberation and the selection of an action plan.
5. Initiate the plan of action. (p. 15)

They pointed out that the process is not only sequential but also cyclical as it may be entered into at any stage.

Hoy and Tarter (2004) identified the Shared Decision Making model, which is designed to enhance the acceptance and quality of decisions. They noted that the right strategy must be linked to the right situation and that always involving subordinates is as shortsighted as never involving them. “Typically, groups outperform individuals, a finding that may be interpreted to demonstrate the superiority of group decision making” (p. 121). Hoy and Tarter further noted that groups outperform some individuals.

Hoy and Tarter (2004) identify the appropriate application of the Shared Decision Making model by asking two questions:

1. Do the subordinates have a personal stake in the outcome?
2. Can subordinates contribute expertise to the solution?

Hoy and Tarter (2004) further noted, if the answer to both questions is yes, then subordinates will want to be involved and their involvement should improve the decision. According to Hoy and Tarter, the next question that must be asked is, “Can subordinates be trusted to make a decision in the best interests of the organization?” (p. 154). They concluded, “If they can be trusted, their involvement should be extensive as the group tries to develop the best decision” (p. 154).

Hiring with a Consultant

What is a Consultant?

In the event that the board decides to seek the services of a consultant, they have many options including public and private organizations that specialize in assisting in the hiring of a superintendent. Hann (2008) described a consultant as a person who helps school boards identify a district's needs while simultaneously serving as a buffer between board members, the public, and aspiring applicants. The consultant may serve as inspirational speaker, sounding board, data cruncher, forensic investigator, and grand inquisitor (Hann, 2008). Avellanet (2008) suggested that a consultant can provide a fresh perspective on an organization. Consultants can assess strategic options, identifying ways to maximize an organization's efficiencies, or to apply current best practices.

Consultant's Role in the Selection Process

The role of the consultant varies, depending on the needs of the board. Tallerico (2000) indicated that "headhunters," as they are often referred to, may actually recruit a candidate. Riede (2003b) conceded that search firms who once relied on advertising to bring in most of their candidates must now doggedly recruit people through networks of consultants across the country. Many firms indicated well over half of their recommended candidates now come from recruitment rather than advertising (Riede, 2003b). Walter, Sharp and Sharp (1997) stated that the consultants' network allows access to high quality candidates who might have been unaware of the vacancy prior to contact by the consultant. Tallerico (2000) revealed that consultants may control the early paper-screening of applicants. She explained that the consultant "advances and

discounts candidates according to both formal and informal criteria defined by the school district” (p.20).

Glass (2001a), surveying 30 practicing search consultants, found most openings were created by the retirement of the previous superintendent. The majority of searches for a replacement lasted three to five months, with the majority of boards who used search consultants meeting with the consultant between four and six times before the replacement was hired. Typically, consultants met with district faculty, staff and patrons. “Twenty-one of the 30 search consultants surveyed indicated board members visited the districts of the search finalists. Eleven consultants surveyed indicated encountering boards that did not work well together, to the extent of interfering with the search” (p. 5).

Rickabaugh (1986) noted that services provided by consultants typically paralleled those found in his doctoral research. He outlined a ten-step process that defines those services:

1. Setting timelines for the search;
2. Reviewing the goals, strengths, and problems of the school system and community;
3. Identifying the characteristics and qualifications sought in a new superintendent (This step usually involves a series of meetings with board members, school employees, and community leaders to conduct a needs assessment.);
4. Designing a brochure describing the position;
5. Establishing a budget for the selection process;
6. Announcing the vacancy;

7. Reviewing applications, checking references, and recommending candidates for interviews (Remember that some consultants will interview the candidates before recommending.);
8. Providing detailed information to top candidates regarding the position, the school system, and the community;
9. Structuring the interview format and questions (Some consultants will sit in on the first one or two interviews to give the board feedback on its interviewing techniques, but many prefer not to be put in the position of reacting to the candidate's interview performance.); and
10. Arranging for board members to visit the finalists' home communities.

(Zakariya, 1987, p. 38)

The Council of Great City Schools (2006), a coalition of the 65 largest urban districts in the United States, detailed very similar services common to the search but also included possible assistance in organizing community forums as well as notifying all candidates of the board's final selection. The Council advised against community visits of a sitting superintendent as this may scare off potential candidates.

According to Underwood (1994), the consultant should be frank and honest with the candidate about the district. Some of the issues Underwood addressed are the personality of the district within the community, board climate and upcoming elections, and information regarding the fiscal position of the district. According to Underwood, "The best service the consultant can provide the prospective candidate is information" (p. 25). He also stated that consultants should not disclose the identities of other candidates who have applied or might apply.

Should a District Use a consultant?

According to Walter et al. (1997), the use of a search consultant has several benefits when the board is conducting a search for a new superintendent. First, the use of a consultant can deflect attention and criticism away from the board. Second, search consultants, unlike board members, do not have their jobs tied to a ballot box, so they are not as easily influenced by local political pressure. Third, a consultant may approach a search without preconceived ideas about local candidates and issues. Finally, in addition to other factors, consultants' knowledge of personnel law and their wealth of connections allow for a quality candidate pool and a trouble free hiring process.

Wildman (1988) took a much more critical view of using a consultant. He indicated that the use of a consultant costs taxpayers money that could be better spent in other ways. He also explained that board members have more first hand knowledge of their school system and how each candidate might fit. In addition, board members are more likely to be committed to a candidate they select or even recruit.

Hill, Hermes, and Donwerth (1988) pointed out that one action in this entire process belongs to the board alone—choosing a superintendent. Hess (1989) warned that the time a board invests in the hiring process is crucial and will be repaid in a long period of high quality service by the superintendent. Walter et al. (1997) explained that a consultant can also keep a search moving at a reasonable pace. The Council of the Great City Schools asserted in *The Superintendent Search and Selection Process Primer* (2006) that regardless of the choice on using a consultant, the roles of the school board members must be well defined. The Council suggested that board members should be free to

propose potential candidates to the consultant, but that only one member of the board communicate with the press.

Some school districts may use an outside Advisory Committee to help with the search and selection. The goal of an outside committee is generally is to broaden the community input on the direction and vision desired for the district by its patrons. These members may be comprised of students, teachers, support personnel and administrators from the district. Additionally, certain civic groups from within the community may also be represented, including local business and industry leaders as well as leaders from other local government agencies. The Council of the Great City Schools (2006) advised against such a committee, stating that they are unnecessary. Boring (2003) made a point to discourage staff involvement in directing the search process. He suggested that some staff members could appear closer to the new person, thus hindering the ability to be impartial.

Points to Consider in Consultant Selection

Search consultants may appear to offer the same services, yet their rates vary greatly. Zakariya (1987) offered explanation of the differences largely through the scale of the search. She explained that school boards basically borrow the professional network of the consultant. Price is typically related directly to the size and quality of the consultant's network. Concerning whether a consultant is needed, she stated, "If there's an internal candidate you think is right for the job, don't conduct a search as window dressing for a choice you've already made" (p. 35). Goens and Esparo (2006) offered that "anyone can place an ad [sic]. But not everyone can help your board launch a

serious search, differentiate between candidates, and make wise decisions using a comprehensive, legal, and ethical process” (p. 18).

Walter et al. (1997) suggested asking the consultant if guarantees are offered. This would obligate the consultant to additional responsibilities, such as reopening the search if the recommended candidate backs out after the job is offered. “In such cases, a consultant may conduct another search at no cost” (p. 40). Walter et al. (1997) suggested getting everything in writing prior to hiring the consultant including the duration of the guarantee.

How Much Do Search Consultant Services Cost?

The cost of the search consultant can vary greatly, based on the scope of the search and the consultant used. According to Hill et al. (1988), a superintendent search for Oklahoma City Public Schools in 1987 cost \$50,000, which would equate to over \$96,000 in 2010 if adjusted for inflation according to the consumer price index (U. S. Department of Labor, 2010). Walter et al. (1997) revealed that statewide searches generally ranged in cost from \$6,000 to \$8,500 in the 1990s while nationwide searches were in the \$14,000-\$25,000 range. Adjusting those figures for inflation produced a range from \$7,800-\$32,000. These costs included expenses for brochures, postage, advertising, travel and telephone. These figures seemed to be supported by Riede (2003b) and *The Superintendent Search and Selection Process Primer* (2006) as low-end estimates. In 1994, Underwood cited 23 independent firms specializing in this type of search. The least expensive was priced at \$3,500 while the two most prominent firms, Korn/Ferry International and Heidrick and Struggles, both charged the equivalent of one-third of the successful candidate’s first year salary. Riede’s figures (2003a) showed low-

end estimates from private firms at \$2,000, while the figure can reach as much as \$75,000. These figures are in addition to expenses. Riede (2003a) referred to Underwood's information, citing an increase by six private firms conducting searches on a regional or nationwide basis. He also noted that while Heidrick and Struggles have greatly increased their number of searches for superintendents, Korn/Ferry International have greatly reduced their involvement in this market. *The Superintendent Search and Selection Process Primer* (2006) cited costs ranging from "about \$40,000 to more than \$100,000 depending on the kinds of services the board wants" (p. 7). The primer further suggested that the district could accept the offer of an outside group to pay for the search as long as the board does not relinquish its ultimate decision-making authority during the process.

Selecting a Consultant

The selection of a consultant can often begin with a state school board association. Walter et al. (1997) explained that the school board association may offer advice on potential consultants. Riede (2003a) found that 34 state school board associations operated search businesses themselves while many regional education centers or intermediate school districts were active in searches. Riede (2003a) also found 14 private firms listed as performing searches for school superintendents in the United States in 2003. Three well established firms were highlighted along with a relatively new player in the superintendent search business, a merger forming BWP and Associates. The firm consists of 10 partners; all but one is a former school superintendent. The tenth partner is the dean of the school of education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. According to their website (<http://www.bwpassociates.com/>, n.d.), this firm has six

regional offices located throughout the United States (Borja, 2006). Borja (2006) noted many small private firms are run by retired superintendents, but they tend to be short lived.

Public or Private Courting

Searches vary on the amount of information provided to the public prior to the selection of a superintendent. One of the more public searches was detailed by Gewertz (2004) as many knew of the courtship between the Miami-Dade County Schools and Rudolph Crew who was hired on a 7-2 vote of their school board. Crew, the former New York City Schools chancellor, was very public in his interest not only in the Miami-Dade post, but also in similar positions in St. Louis, MO; East Baton Rouge, LA; the District of Columbia and Ravenswood, CA. His public nature of searching for a job caused one metropolitan newspaper to publish an editorial headlined “Rudy, You Flirt.” While Crew chose a public nature with his searches, others sought a much different approach.

Chion-Kenney (2003) cited an example of a much more private approach in the search for the Cincinnati, Ohio, superintendent in 2002. Board members were not even given the names of the candidates and were required to return any information given to them by the candidates during in-person interviews. The effect was that at no time did any information become public record for the press to publish. These steps were taken in an effort to reduce the probability of difficulty in the candidates’ current jobs. The eventual selection in Cincinnati had been “cold called,” meaning they were called by a consultant without interest shown by the candidate. The Milwaukee based search consultant, calling after hours, employed a technique used often by business headhunters. Carter (2006) explained that a popular technique of cold calling is to place calls early in

the morning or late in the evening when the “gatekeepers” or secretaries have left for the day.

Increasingly, search consultants are convincing boards to conduct searches in private as previously detailed. Chion-Kenney (2003) stated this is critical to candidates who are presently serving in a desirable position: “If it’s a choice between quality and openness, the choice will be quality, and if quality means confidentiality, the board will accept confidentiality” (p. 9).

Effect on the Final Selection of a Superintendent

Tallerico (2000) stated that once a candidate reaches the final interview stages, the most important factor is the compatibility of personalities. She indicated that board members are most concerned about finding the candidate with whom they will work best. An assumption is made that all finalists are competent; however, not all may be compatible with the board. According to Chion-Kenney (1994), search consultants may not be part of the problem in regard to racial and gender bias, but rather part of the solution. She explained that some search consultants will place a minority or female in the pool as a method of promoting diversity. She encouraged consultants to consider non-traditional candidates who may not have an educational background. Oklahoma law (70 O. S. §§ 3-126), allows this with the approval of the State Board of Education in school districts with more than 25,000 students.

Determining the best fit includes the assumption that the candidate receiving the offer will accept. A candidate who declines an offer can send a school board back to the beginning of the process if care is not employed in identifying the best fit. Krinsky and

Rudiger (1997) developed a list of 10 risk factors designed to assess the candidate pool before making an offer:

1. The candidate's spouse is a professional;
2. The candidate's children are in high school;
3. The candidate owns his or her home;
4. The candidate is unfamiliar with the new community;
5. The board is offering a salary that is equal to or less than the candidate's current compensation;
6. The move is to an area with a high cost of living;
7. The candidate or spouse is currently in school;
8. The former incumbent was terminated;
9. The new organization is viewed as unstable; and
10. The current employer is aggressively countering the offer. (p. 33)

Each risk factor carries a numerical weight. The researchers determined that factors 1 through 5 were more significant and gave them a value of 2 points each. They determined that factors 6 through 10 were less significant and gave them a point value of 1 each. They concluded that the higher scores increase the risk that the candidate will decline a job offer. Rudiger (1997) suggested risk analysis such as this might be useful as public scrutiny of the process and the board of education itself could begin to grow if a candidate turns down an offer.

Summary

The most important task a school board faces is hiring a superintendent. This theme was common in all the research. Although the methods to a

successful hire vary, the ultimate goal in a superintendent search is to find a quality fit for the candidate and the school district. Consultants can provide an outside viewpoint that gives board members a clear opinion unclouded by the politics typically generated from such a search. While the ultimate decision rests with the school board, some research indicates the consultant allows the board to make a more informed choice for the district and its stakeholders. The purpose of this study was to analyze the use of the consultant from the board member's perspective. The analysis allowed the researcher the opportunity to determine if the conclusions drawn support the literature.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design and methodology are presented in Chapter Three as are the purpose of the study, a description of the participants, data collection procedures, statistical analysis techniques and a summary of the research design.

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research allows for a free flow of ideas between the researcher and the school board members regarding their opinions of the use of the search consultant. The goal of this approach was to analyze the use of a superintendent search consultant from the perspective of the school board member.

The qualitative paradigm was appropriate for this study because it provided an opportunity for the researcher and participants to interact while building rapport and credibility. Research generally was conducted in environments comfortable for the participants. Additional detail of the interview and overall setting through thick, rich description increases the level of understanding regarding the environments of the participants (Cresswell, 2003).

The necessity of justifying qualitative research methods has changed greatly in recent years. Creswell (2003) suggested that the need to convince scholars of the legitimacy of qualitative inquiry no longer exists. He identified five accepted strategies of qualitative inquiry that include ethnographies, grounded theory, phenomenological research, narrative research and case studies.

This research was conducted as a multi-case study. According to Stake (1995), case studies are undertaken to make the case understandable, and the case is studied primarily to generalize to other cases. In this study, the cases were bounded by time as the hiring process has a beginning and ending. Stake (1995) further noted that sampling of different groups allows the researcher to maximize the similarities and differences of information contained in the data to determine more accurate conclusions. Four groups were used to gather information regarding why the school districts used a search consultant to hire a superintendent.

Participants

The primary source of data for this study was school board members from the list of schools that hired new superintendents in the previous three years. Because the use of a consultant can be influenced by financial resources, and funding in Oklahoma is based on student enrollment, similarly sized districts were identified for this study by accessing the website of the Oklahoma State School Boards Association (OSSBA). According to its website, OSSBA is a resource for school boards in Oklahoma; their services include superintendent job listings as well as a search service (2009). I interviewed three board members from four school districts, resulting in twelve interviews. To account for a sampling of different school districts, no more than three board members from any

district participated in the study. All participants were school board members who actively participated in the hiring of a superintendent and interviews were completed following the hiring of a superintendent. The time frame was essential to gain a vivid description of the subjects' perceptions of the process without the influence of an uninformed public regarding the successful candidate's early performance.

Data Collection Procedures

After gaining committee approval of my research proposal, I applied for approval to conduct the research through the Institutional Review Board of Oklahoma State University. The approval was granted on November 30, 2009, for a period of one year (Appendix A).

Following the formal institutional approval, I called the superintendents of the selected districts to seek introductions to the boards of education and explained the purposes and procedures to be used with the study. Then I asked for verbal consent to continue with the study involving the board members of their school district. When such consent was given, I sought contact information for the board members and asked the superintendent to give the board members a brief explanation of my study. This communication served as an introduction to the study prior to my contact with the board members. Other than logistical needs of meeting space, the remainder of the communication was between the board members and me.

According to Merriam (2001), "Data collection in case study research usually involves all three strategies of interviewing, observing, and analyzing documents. Rarely, however are all three strategies used equally. One or two methods predominate while the others play a supporting role" (p. 137). Merriam (2001) also noted, "In all

forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews” (p. 71). Yin (2009) indicated, “Interviews are essential sources of case study information. The interviews will be guided conversations rather than structured queries” (p. 106). Yin’s (2009) description of a focused interview is appropriate for this study. “A person is interviewed for a short period of time—an hour, for example. In such cases, the interviews may still remain open-ended and assume a conversational manner, but you are more likely to be following a certain set of questions derived from the case study protocol” (p. 107).

Prior to beginning the interview, the board member was asked to sign the informed consent form (Appendix B). The board members were asked questions from a protocol (Appendix C) formulated by the researcher and addressing their experiences as a school board member of a district that had recently hired a superintendent. According to Yin (2009), “The protocol is a major way of increasing the reliability of case study research and is intended to guide the data in a single case (again [sic], even if the single case is one of several in a multiple case study)” (p. 79). The entire audio taped interview was transcribed upon completion of the interview. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, along with a pseudonym for the participant’s school district and any other place names or persons in the study. I asked participants to elaborate on and clarify information during a member check of their interview transcripts, thus enhancing validity through triangulation (Garrahy, 2005). The member check was accomplished by emailing the transcript complete with pseudonyms to the board member and asking them to make any necessary corrections. During the interview and immediately following, I compiled fieldnotes on paper and through audio tape. The fieldnotes contained a richly detailed description of each interviewee, the setting of the interview and nonverbal

communication during the interview. The length of the interview was largely determined by the responses, but generally lasted one hour. Once the interviews for the school district were completed, I began collecting newspaper articles about the school district that reported the transition including the resignation of the previous superintendent, search procedures and final selection of the replacement. I analyzed the newspaper articles to determine if the public account of the process was similar to the personal story of each board member. This action provided triangulation within the process. A representative sample of the articles may be found in Appendices D-G.

I analyzed the data by examining transcripts and fieldnotes for samples relating most directly to the topic. Fieldnotes were analyzed and cross-referenced with transcripts. Responses in the transcripts that provided insight to the primary research questions were noted for future cataloging.

The cataloging process started with analysis of the responses for their relevance to each research question. I created electronic documents for each research question and responses relating to a research question were pasted into the electronic document for that question. In some cases, the response addressed multiple research questions and was pasted into all appropriate documents. I checked this cataloging twice for consistency, with at least one day between verifications. The responses were coded to indicate the board member who contributed the data and what school district they were from. Notes were made in the margins of the documents facilitate identification of potential themes. Topics emerging from responses of multiple board members in multiple school districts were reviewed for significance based on the research questions or overall impact to the outcome of the search. Responses deemed important were placed in another electronic document containing identified themes. The themes were then analyzed to verify their

presence consisted of more than one board member and more than one school district in the study. Artifacts such as school board meeting minutes, district brochures or statistics available from sources such as the Oklahoma State Department of Education, Oklahoma State Office of Accountability and newspaper articles were used to verify claims by participants. (Sample newspaper articles may be found in Appendices D-G.) Common responses between school board members of the same school district were noted for further triangulation of data.

Interviews and member checks were the only involvement by the participants. Follow-up interviews to answer questions arising from the initial interview and analysis or to clarify information were not needed. No risks were anticipated or experienced in this study.

I used the audio tapes only for the purposes of this research activity. During the study and for a period of one calendar year following the study, the tapes will remain in a secure location accessible only to the researcher and advisor. After one calendar year following the study, the tapes will be destroyed.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this study were addressed in the Informed Consent to Participate in Research (Appendix B). Confidentiality was secured by changing all names and places contained in the data. Transcripts submitted to the board members for member checks included all pseudonyms for the consideration and protection of the interviewees. Participation on the part of the district was purely optional based on agreement with the superintendent and board president. Although the Superintendent

was the initial contact for the district, this was to facilitate contact information for the board president; participation by board members was voluntary.

Support and Permissions Necessary

This study required the approval of the Institutional Review Board of Oklahoma State University. Consent was also given by the participants and their school boards. To achieve access to a school district, the support of the Oklahoma State School Boards Association was sought and granted.

Chapter IV summarizes and analyzes all data gathered through the interview process.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze the use of a superintendent search consultant from the perspective of the school board member. The findings of this study may assist organizations that provide consultant services to school districts searching for a superintendent. School board members who serve a district searching for a superintendent may use this study to understand the processes employed by a search consultant. Additionally, potential superintendent candidates could use the results of this study to identify the level of professionalism of the districts in which they apply.

School districts with an enrollment of between 2700 and 7000 students with superintendents who had been on the job no longer than three years and hired with the assistance of a search consultant were selected for the research pool. The student population was considered to be large as defined by study parameters. From this pool, three current or former school board members who participated in the superintendent search from four school districts were selected to be interviewed. This totaled 12 interviewees. All were asked the following four overarching questions and related follow-up questions:

1. What are the challenges associated with hiring a superintendent?

2. How did the characteristics of a community and school district influence the decision to use a search consultant?
3. What effect did the former superintendent have on the selection either directly or indirectly?
4. How did the search consultant influence the process of hiring a superintendent?

The answers to these interviews are presented and discussed in this chapter.

Chapter four begins with a description of each district's community characteristics. Secondly, the data are organized by school district with a description of the interviewees, the locations of the interviews, a description of the interviews, and a summary of the findings for each district provided. Finally, the data are organized and summarized by the interviewees' school districts.

District Community Characteristics

The four school districts in the study had differing community characteristics, thus creating a need to explain the community characteristics and to provide a framework for understanding the culture of each school district's board of education. Because the board members ultimately decided to use a search consultant and also cast the vote on the final selection, their characteristics are important to the study. Table 1 outlines the community characteristics of each district.

Table 1

School District Community Characteristics

School District	Student Enrollment	Certified Staff	District Population	Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Meals	Number of School Board Members
Mayville	2,775	226	17,115	58.9%	7
Stafford Springs	3,514	294	16,780	67.2%	5
Harrisville	6,873	482	29,305	30.6%	5
Palmdale	6,405	529	41,755	61.9%	7

Findings by School District

Description of Community and Interview Location for Mayville

According to the Office of Accountability (2008), the 2000 census listed the population within the district boundary of Mayville at 17,115. The enrollment for 2008 was 2,775 students, and the district employed 226 certified staff members. Almost 59% of the student population qualified for the free and reduced lunch program. The district board of education had 7 members, all of whom were natives of the community and graduates of the school system.

All interviews for Mayville took place in the conference room in the administrative building. The room had a conference table approximately 10 feet long with a projector that could be connected to a computer and screen on one end. At the other end was a large marker board on the wall. One long wall held pictures of all National Merit Finalists and Academic All-Staters from the district along with the year of

their accomplishments. The other long wall was lined with windows approximately seven feet in height.

Description of Subjects and Interviews for Mayville

Keith Sewell. Mr. Sewell is a Caucasian of average height and weight. His fair skin was a tip off to the red hair that remained with the gray on his balding head. He appeared to be in his late fifties. He wore glasses and was dressed in a jacket and sweater vest as well as an ascot cap complete with wool fabric. He appeared confident and noted his thirteen years of service on the board of education. Most recently, Sewell served as board president through the search for the current superintendent. He had announced he would resign from the Board of Education during the next board meeting in order to have more time to devote to his family and church. He was proud of being a product of the Mayville Public Schools as well as his work for the district.

Interview Description. I asked Sewell to describe his role in the process. He indicated that this was the second superintendent hired during his time on the board. On both occasions he was serving as President of the board and took a lead role in the hiring process. Both times the board used a search consultant.

Sewell noted the amount of time to perform a search for a superintendent was prohibitive. While the presence of the search consultant assisted in getting the members together for interviews and review of applications, one member missed some crucial meetings. Further, Sewell spoke to the needs of the Mayville board considering the characteristics of their board.

I think it took a lot of pressure off of me as board president that I would have felt if we were doing that [conducting a search without a consultant]. And I guess if a board had a board president that was retired and had time on his hands or her hands, you know, that might be different; but in our case all seven of our board members are working full time.

Sewell was disappointed in the number of applicants and felt a responsibility for a lack of community input. His concern over the lack of candidates was indicated by the comment, "Well, I think that actually both times we didn't get near the number of candidates I thought we would." When asked about what he would do differently if another search would be necessary, he responded, "I might make a greater effort in getting community involvement."

I asked Sewell about characteristics of Mayville and if those characteristics led to the decision of using a search consultant. He replied, "I've always felt like as long as everything is running pretty smoothly people don't worry about what the board's doing; that's been the case for us all the time I've been on the board." He also indicated that the community was more focused toward dissatisfaction with the municipal leadership and described the possible effect it had on the applicant pool.

The city manager had been fired and actually went to prison and he ended up putting the city in pretty bad financial shape and[sic] we are still suffering from that and probably will for several years. So some of that negative publicity may have played a factor a little bit in who applied.

This was Sewell's second superintendent search as a board member. Although he did not attribute what he considered a small applicant pool to the immediate past

superintendent, he did mention that he felt the prior superintendents' tenures had a negative impact on the applicant pool.

Joan [consultant] explained to us she thought the people just didn't want to follow in Linda's steps. Linda had been a long time superintendent here for many years, was highly respected across the state. So we felt we hadn't gotten nearly enough the number [of applicants] I thought we would get.

Sewell referred to Linda who had served the district for many years as superintendent. She was followed by her assistant superintendent who was promoted. Sewell spoke very little of the short three year tenure of the previous assistant, but casually indicated that his hiring was the product of the shallow applicant pool.

Sewell believed using a search consultant provided a positive impact on the process from the perspective of the board. Three times during the interview he made the statement that the consultant "took a lot of pressure off of us as a board." He also indicated that the consultant was aware of candidates' application habits and past work history without pushing a candidate toward selection:

You know there was[sic] some candidates that she knew had applied multiple, multiple, multiple times and she knew things about them that helped us to screen them out. Not that she was pushy in any way. That was not the case at all. I never felt like she was trying to talk us out of a person. But she made us aware of things that we probably wouldn't have been aware of without her involvement.

Sewell indicated that it was the consensus of the board to use a consultant as they decided it would attract a better candidate pool and limit the work for the board members during the process, while increasing community involvement and input.

It was the board's consensus that we wanted to use a search service due to the [fact] we felt like if we could attract better qualified candidates for the job. We could eliminate some of the responsibilities and work on individual board members and in screening and background checks and that type of thing. There were some other considerations such as the providers of the search service were willing to come in and conduct community surveys and conduct community forums to get input from our community as to what they wanted in a superintendent and what they felt like the needs were for the school district. So we just felt like we wanted a professional to handle it rather than the board itself.

Randy Hunter. Hunter entered the room wearing a grey tweed blazer, black pants and a shirt with an open collar. Of average height and weight, he appeared to be in his mid to late fifties in age. Hunter had darker, almost olive colored skin and a full head of silver hair combed straight back. He was soft spoken and appeared guarded while wondering openly what knowledge he had to offer my study. Hunter had been on the board of education for 11 years and was also a graduate of the Mayville Public Schools.

Interview Description. Hunter supported the use of a search consultant largely because the services they offer provide the board of education with credibility and knowledge of the process. He was on the board for two searches conducted with the assistance of a consultant. He also indicated the need for outside assistance due to the amount of time required in the process.

Board members are non-paid, and we all have jobs, so there wasn't anybody who really wanted to step up and take care of all of the background checks, the reference checks, making sure that we covered all the bases.

When asked about the challenges associated with hiring a superintendent, Hunter noted the internal difficulties within the board with regard to the amount of time required for the process. He spoke of one board member who missed several meetings including some interviews and offered dissenting opinions from those of the remainder of the board for the final selection.

Hunter spoke of his disappointment in the lack of input offered by the community. He referenced controversy with city officials and indicated the board's hope that community input could separate the school district from those issues.

I was rather disappointed because we had very little participation from the community. As far as an individual board member, I was much more interested in or I was very interested to see what the community had to say as far as their input because our community has suffered some political unrest, if you want to call it, a political dissatisfaction. Not so much with the school board, but more with our city government, and I think some of that it kind of spilled over in some distrust for elected officials. And so my hope [was] to kind of pick up on what the community wanted and offer input into the process.

When asked about the influence provided by a search consultant on the process, Hunter expressed the desire to take some of the responsibility off of the board as well as provide guidance, advice and oversight. He also listed "go between" as a role of the consultant, especially when it came to contract negotiations. While Hunter did indicate the presence of a consultant removed some control from the board of education, he also thought of that as a benefit as an independent third party, "Taking it out of the board's hands and there being a third party is a benefit I think."

Hunter described the screening procedure, “Of course the OSSBA screened the applications for us, but they did not withhold any of the applications. We were able to look at all of them.” He also said the consultant gave opinions on certain candidates, but he believed the board formed their own opinions. He later clarified the consultant’s role as pointing out differences in candidates.

Amy Sutton. Sutton wore a non-descript black shirt, grey slacks and a black jacket. She walked into the room accompanied by a faint odor of cigarette smoke and quickly apologized for her tardiness. She also offered that it was her day off from work. She was strictly guarded, appearing nervous until we began the interview and some conversation was generated. She was a board member for thirteen years and was also proud to be a graduate of the Mayville Public Schools. She was also proud to be an African American woman and mentioned her mission to represent that constituency from the community on the board.

Interview Description. When asked about her opinion on the use of a search consultant, Amy indicated support because it “takes a lot of pressure off of the school board itself.” Sutton noted challenges associated with the search including coordination of board members’ schedules as well as the amount of time required to conduct the search.

I think the most difficult one [task] is making sure when we set our meetings for our interviews that each board member could be there. I think that is the most difficult part because we have a seven member board and you have seven members that are doing different things that have different positions, different jobs, so it the hardest thing is trying to coordinate where they can all be there.

She also noted her belief that the search consultant relieved some of the time required by the individual board members.

I did not realize all the different special meetings we had to have; I just--I really did not know. So that's why now that we've gone through this process twice, I'm really in favor of search consultants. It took so much time, and we weren't the ones getting and receiving all the applications and doing all the background checks; it is very time consuming.

When asked about community influence on the use of a search consultant, Sutton indicated that community support of the school system was required for the success of the district, but noted concerns over the lack of local applicants for the job.

I think that we have people in our community that could possibly do the job, but did not apply. What bothers me is why they didn't apply. They have their certificate, administrative but didn't apply so I--I kind of wonder is it because you don't want the responsibility, or is it because, we as a board made them feel like we wouldn't give it to them. I still think that we made the right choice, but it just bothers me why they did not apply.

When asked, Sutton said she did not feel the search consultant discouraged local applicants.

Sutton offered several items regarding the influence the search consultant had on the hiring process. Background checks were the item she appreciated the most of the tasks performed by the search consultant. She pointed out that she did not believe the individual board members would have had time to do the investigation into the individual candidates.

Sutton noted that she believed the board did not see all of the applications for their position but also expressed trust in the consultant's judgment.

Sometimes I wonder if maybe we should not have seen all of the applications, but that's why we hired her. I don't think that the applicants that we had [sic] I think they were great every one of them. I guess you probably get a whole bunch of applications when...I mean you know--that's why we hired the search committee[consultant] so we probably could not have seen every application It was hard even looking at all the applications that we did look at--to weed out the ones that we were not going to interview.

I asked Sutton if she felt steered by the search consultant toward a candidate. Her response noted the importance of a strong willed yet open minded board.

I think that they [consultant] can steer you, but we were not steered. Yeah, I think that you could be steered yes...in a direction to choose one over another. You know you have to keep an open mind.

Sutton appreciated the diligence of the consultant in contacting potential candidates to gauge their interest in the position and to see if they would like to apply. She concluded that the search consultant's diligence improved the applicant pool.

Summary of Findings for Mayville

All three of the board members from Mayville had participated in two superintendent searches and on both occasions the same consultant's services were utilized. When asked about challenges associated with hiring a superintendent, board members identified several common opinions. The amount of time required to complete

the process by board members was a major concern. Also, the challenges of coordinating schedules for the board members proved very difficult and led to some board dissension as one member failed to attend some of the interviews. That board member disagreed with the consensus of the board during the executive session on the final selection. The board member later changed his/her vote after objections from fellow board members. This scheduling problem was confounded by the local mandate of having seven members on the school board rather than some schools in the study with only five.

Keith Sewell noted two additional challenges that were alleviated somewhat with the guidance of the consultant. One was the lack of qualified candidates, the other a general lack of knowledge of the applicant backgrounds. As president of the board, he could have provided more intimate knowledge of the intricate details associated with the search process.

The second research question was designed to identify community characteristics that led the district to employ a consultant. Both Sewell and Hunter spoke of the board's desire for community input during the process. Sewell highlighted the support delivered by the consultant for this part of the process while Hunter was highly disappointed in the interest by the community when the opportunity was presented. Sewell attributed this to trust or disinterest in the absence of controversy. Hunter and Sewell also believed this to be a result of the focus on city government scandals rather than the school system. Sutton was concerned by the lack of local applicants, but did not attribute that to the use of the consultant.

Keith Sewell was the only Mayville board member who attributed efforts of previous superintendents to having an effect on the selection process. He noted an

indirect influence of the successful tenure of a longtime superintendent who had local ties in the first search the board members conducted. The consultant believed her successful tenure made the applicant pool smaller. That search yielded an internal candidate with a tenure of only three years.

Hunter and Sutton gave conflicting accounts of whether the board members were allowed to see all applications. Hunter noted that all applications were viewed by the board, while Sutton noted that the consultant could steer the board since the board did not review all of the applications. Which account of the events is accurate is unknown.

The Mayville board identified ways that a search consultant may influence the process of hiring a superintendent. Common responses among all three board members included the belief that the expertise and work of the consultant removes some pressure from the board while also removing the task of tedious work such as collecting the resumes and verifying information. The board members also said that the search consultant gave credibility to the process.

Description of Community and Interview Locations for Harrisville

According to the Office of Accountability (2008), the 2000 census listed the population within the district boundary of Harrisville at 29,305. The enrollment for 2008 was 6,873 students, and the district employed 482 certified staff members. Only 30.6% of the student population qualified for the free and reduced lunch program. The district board of education had five members; four were serving their first terms of five years.

The interviews for Josh Nichols and Jerry Newsome were conducted in the conference room of the Harrisville administration building. I was greeted at the door by

the custodian who, along with one co-worker was the only person working that day because all offices were closed for spring break. He acknowledged that he was expecting me and escorted me to the conference room. When asked, he informed me that the building was an elementary school building that had extensive renovation to provide the current configuration for the administration complex. As I entered, I noticed the room was large and rectangular in shape with four tables six feet in length side by side. The tables had eight chairs down each side along with a chair on each end. One end wall had an interactive white board while the other had a dry erase board. Both long side walls had pencil sketches depicting historical buildings from the community. The wall farthest from the door and hallway had two windows that looked out to a courtyard and another wing of the building. The custodian was aware of my interview schedule and showed me where to find the restroom and refreshments. The conference room temperature was 63 degrees when the interviews began and actually dropped during my time in the room. Obviously, the thermostat was disabled for the spring break.

Description of Subjects and Interviews for Harrisville

Josh Nichols. Mr. Nichols appeared to be in his early sixties. He arrived approximately five minutes late wearing a black leather jacket, blue jeans and a grey polo shirt bearing the logo of the local hospital. Fair skinned, of average height and weight, he spoke in a conversational manner answering many questions before they were asked. Several times he asked what information I was searching for so he could address specifics that would assist me. He mentioned that he retired from a management position about three years previously but did not elaborate.

Interview Description. I asked Josh to explain the process Harrisville used to hire a superintendent. He began with an explanation of how the opening occurred. The first meeting he attended as a board member followed the resignation of the previous superintendent. Nichols gave an indication that the departure was less than amicable. “The first meeting I attended our present superintendent left. I’ll put it in good terms, left. That was my first meeting.” Because of his experience in management at the corporate level, Nichols was given the charge by the rest of the board to lead the superintendent search.

Nichols addressed many details that provided insight to Harrisville’s concern regarding the challenges of hiring a superintendent. Since no consensus existed among the board members to employ the services of a consultant among the board members, Nichols talked about how he began his charge from his fellow board members. “I say this very kindly, but really no one on the board knew how to go about doing it [hiring a superintendent].” When Nichols was asked to provide further details, he talked about his initial efforts without the consultant and the decisions that followed. “It’s all such a blur; I made a lot of phone calls. Then I finished, sat back and I thought this isn’t working because I was not getting a feel [of our options]. I came up here [to the administration building] and I asked, ‘Who is our consultant?’”

When asked about the challenges associated with hiring a superintendent, Nichols described the amount of time as prohibitive even with the presence of a consultant:

The time element involved, it’s an intense amount of time if you do it right. I mean it’s 20 to 30 hours a week...it’s a time consuming thing. That was the one problem I had since I’d just retired [wanting] to be with my grand kids.

Nichols explained he realized his lack of expertise in this field was holding back the process and his belief that a person with an educational background could help.

Whether you're a businessman or a housewife or whatever you are, this is not your world. If you can get someone whose world this is, they will give you confidence in what you're doing.

Nichols also described current staff members' desires for the position posing a problem since the board consensus was to seek outside candidates.

As far as the people within the district who feel like the job should be theirs based upon the fact that we should hire from within, that is a tremendously strong feeling. It [sense of entitlement] is a tremendously divisive thing that you've got to really be aware of. The first thing you need to do if you've decided as a board we're going outside is sit down your two assistant superintendents or whomever and just be totally and utterly honest.

Potential candidates found little interest in Harrisville when Nichols was conducting the search without the consultant. He alluded to the reputation and the less than amicable departure of the previous superintendent as a concern for the candidate pool.

Harrisville, at that point, had a bad reputation among the superintendents. I found out real quickly that the superintendents are little bit like my wife's little club that she's in. You know one thing happens or is said, and every one of them is going to know what happened.

Nichols spoke to the desire of the board to search outside the district. Harrisville had a long standing practice of looking inside for key district positions and the pleasure of the board was a different approach. "You know I made up my mind we weren't going

to come from within. We had gotten to the point to where we had not had any outside blood come in a long time.” He would later clarify that it was not just his decision but the decision of the board.

This decision stifled much of the internal politics of the district: “There were favorites already existing. Those favorites had their supporters and it became very difficult to work within that environment.” Because this decision was causing external and internal conflict in the community, Nichols and the board along with the consultant, paused and assessed the situation. “If the citizenry, and when I say citizenry I’m talking about maybe 20 to 30 people [in the community], don’t approve of something, you’ve automatically got a problem.” In another part of the interview, Nichols gave greater description to the time during the search:

I’ve experienced a lot of stuff in my business life but nothing that was any more difficult during that 12 month time frame that we experienced without a superintendent. With everyone trying or wanting to fill that vacuum and with all of the people inside wanting the job, it was a difficult, difficult time.

Nichols, in a move suggested by his wife and with the assistance of the consultant, proposed to his fellow board members the establishment of a focus group to help frame the qualities the community desired in the next superintendent.

All these people, the city manager, the head of General Hospital, the head of our union, two teachers and then about another twelve of the citizens that have a lot of influence just sat down and said, “Okay, we’re going to determine what kind of superintendent we want.” By the time we got our new superintendent in here, we

had the newspaper and all of the people waiting with open arms for him because someone else had not picked him. They had picked him.

Nichols used the search consultant as a tool to reach potential candidates since he was not satisfied with his efforts alone.

He gave me a place to start, and he gave me an in. Instead of me trying to call these guys, I would pick out whom I thought would be good to talk to and I would ask Bob [consultant] to call. When Bob called, suddenly he was able to get through a lot easier and everything worked out. Then things started happening.

While a trust developed between Nichols and the search consultant, Nichols did not believe the board was steered toward a certain candidate. "I really got to trust the guy. I'd let him be in my foxhole with me." Nichols went on to caution that the decision is ultimately up to the board:

What you've got to do is take what the consultant gives you and make your own decision. Let the consultant guide you, but you've got to be the one that gets the gut feel when you look the superintendent in the eye and make the decision.

Jerry Newsome. Mr. Newsome arrived approximately 15 minutes late and mentioned how busy he was. He gave the impression that he would need to leave as soon as possible. Newsome said he was a home builder and former Career Tech instructor. He appeared to be in his mid-fifties, with tanned skin a moustache and well styled hair. Wearing a starched oxford dress shirt and blue jeans, he was approximately 6'0" and average build. As I asked him questions, he began to elaborate, and at times his inflection changed greatly and his tone quickly adjusted to exhibit his emotion about a certain topic. The interview lasted longer than any in the study and what began with my

fear of Newsome failing to elaborate due to his work schedule was quickly replaced with the need to focus the dialogue toward the interview questions. Newsome was in his second term, and the current superintendent was the third he participated in hiring, but the first where a consultant was used. He was the only current Harrisville board member who had served multiple terms.

Interview Description. Newsome declared several times the greatest challenge associated with hiring a superintendent rested with board members' lack of knowledge of potential candidates.

The challenge being on the school board is you're not in the loop on who's out there. That is the greatest problem I see in hiring superintendents. As a board member you're not involved in the arena where these superintendents function. When it comes time to hire, you really don't know who's doing what unless they're [the candidate] fairly close to your school.

He also indicated his opinion that some candidates fail to apply for jobs for fear of creating discontent in their current jobs. "Those that might want to come to you that are happy where they are. They're very careful about putting their name out there because if their board hears that they're looking somewhere else."

Newsome detailed the importance of board unity as a major challenge associated with hiring the superintendent. He also described the unity as a vision.

First of all you've got to have a board on the same page. If your board doesn't have the same vision, you've got problems. If the majority of your board likes status quo you've got a real problem. So, if you don't have a board on the same

page as far as what they want for a district, then you've really got problems no matter what.

He went on to give a better description of his past experience and what he termed a dysfunctional board in a previous superintendent search.

There was enough board muscle with numbers [on the board] that we hired from within. We didn't have a search committee, and Bob [previous superintendent] had his retirement set up where he retired in four years. The next time we had a search committee but our board was dysfunctional. We each had a different vision for our district. The challenge is you have to have a board that has the same vision for the district. Whether it's the same, which in my opinion is not good, or it's improvement. You have board members that want improvement and you have board members that want to keep it the same, then you've got a great challenge because you have dysfunction.

Newsome considered the reputation of previous Harrisville boards to be a community characteristic that limited the candidate pool. The consultant helped to verify board unity and vision to potential candidates. "We were dysfunctional. The superintendents [around the area] knew that. It's nothing new. We had a dysfunctional board. We'd been through two or three superintendents." Newsome continued to describe the local issues with a previous search in 2002 when he was a new board member:

Two of us wanted to have a search committee because we didn't know what was out there and the other board members wanted status quo; they won out. If I hadn't been a new board member they wouldn't have won out, but I was new and

I was already called a micro manager. I was a super bad guy just because I wanted the best. I wanted to hire the best. But so many boards don't want to hire the best. They want to hire who they're comfortable with, or who they know. Newsome was the board president and gave much of the responsibilities to another board member. His past experience on the board and dissatisfaction with previous superintendents would not allow him to fully abdicate all responsibilities. He described his involvement:

I was involved. Being a long time resident of Harrisville and educator and being a part of some dysfunctional boards, and being a part of some superintendents who I didn't think were doing as good as they should have been, I was going to be involved, but that was my process. I was involved, but I wasn't the front guy.

Newsome voiced dissatisfaction in the past with the process used to hire the superintendent. "The board at that time manipulated that we'd hire our assistant. We didn't even interview. And you know who became superintendent. He was already in place, and they just pushed him in."

Newsome described the perfect scenario as one that lacks a consultant, but confessed Harrisville's need for the consultant's services was based on the board's lack of knowledge. He also spoke to the influence a consultant might have on the process and outcome.

So the best case scenario is you wouldn't have to use a consultant. You would do it as a board yourself. Anytime you have somebody else involved leaning on their expertise, believing what they're saying is true or you're leaning on their guidance, and they may not be on the right track either. Like I said, you have to

take his word and that's not a shortcoming so to speak. I'm telling you, Hooper [consultant] was good for us in some bad times.

According to Newsome, the most important influence a consultant can have on the process is to guide the board toward unity. "You can have the greatest consultant and the greatest candidates, but if your board isn't looking for certain things in a potential leader, the consultant needs to help the board to be on the same page." He later summarized, "If you have a dysfunctional board, you better have a consultant."

Robert Stephens. I waited for Mr. Stephens more than 40 minutes at the administration building. I was told by the superintendent's secretary prior to arranging the interviews that he was a very busy attorney. We had corresponded by email several times, and he chose the scheduled time. Finally, I called his office, and found he had failed to place our meeting on his calendar. He asked if I could come to his office, and I told him I would be glad to do so. His directions led me to a rather new area of professional offices located behind a retail center and near a major highway. I found his office and entered a reception area where I was promptly met by Stephens and one of his partners. The reception area had a desk for a secretary, but was vacant. Stephens apologized for the mix-up. He elaborated that his secretary recently left the practice and he had not yet replaced her. Stephens was of average height and portly. Wearing glasses, a yellow polo shirt and slacks, he appeared to be in his early to mid thirties. We walked back to his office, a rather small but well appointed room, with a large desk and many trinkets on a nearby end table flanked by two guest chairs. One chair was in front of his desk, and papers were in piles on the desk and throughout the office. He apologized again for his forgetfulness and asked if I could wait while he finished up

something on his computer, located on a credenza directly behind the desk. During this time, I set up my equipment and noticed some credentials on his wall including awards for Future Farmers of America from his high school years as well as an undergraduate diploma from Oklahoma State University and a Juris Doctorate diploma from Oklahoma City University. Stephens quickly focused himself and we began. He, along with Josh Nichols, was very new to the Harrisville board when the hiring process began for the current superintendent.

Interview Description. The two main challenges Stephens spoke of when hiring a superintendent were lack of candidate knowledge and his lack of experience in the education personnel field. “As school board members, we are all very active in our community, but we don’t necessarily know of superintendents in other districts or availability--what’s really out there to compare.” He noted that he was not well versed in the education community, and he lacked experience in personnel management. “Each board member brings a different perspective to the board room. I hadn’t hired a lot of personnel on my own and hadn’t had the managerial experience or experience on how to conduct an interview.”

Stephens explained changes that occurred on the board that led the district from what the other members had described as dysfunctional to the current Harrisville board.

Two of the long time board members had left, so we had a two board member swing since the hiring of the previous superintendent. Shortly after this, another of the long time members of the board got off. I think that he (consultant) helped down play this whole turmoil thing saying “Hey the next superintendent is fixing

to have a whole new board.” I was brand new on the board having just been there a year.

Stephens further elaborated on the culture of hiring from within that existed at Harrisville and how he believed that culture was damaging to how outsiders saw the district.

It was mainly the poor reputation that was kind of unique. We were trying to get past this good old boy network that existed. We had situations where an assistant coach or a lower level teacher would just move up when someone left. It was just almost automatic. You didn't always get the best person for the job. You got whoever was next in line regardless of what they had or hadn't done for the district. The board really hated that process in the past. This practice had placed some poor administrators in key positions.

Stephens also addressed what he feared was a lack of confidentiality that existed during the hiring process with current staff in the administration building and how the board worked to overcome the issue.

We think that somebody was eavesdropping or at least they would see what candidates we were looking at. The board room and the executive session room are adjacent to the bathrooms which are adjacent to the staff break room. So one of the things we did is we started meeting off campus. We met at a church a few times and then Josh Nichols is a member of a country club up north. We had some meetings up at the country club where we had meals and everything which was really nice. They were all executive sessions so no one could come to the

meetings, but we planned it that way so people wouldn't necessarily know who we were interviewing just by sitting out in a parking lot.

The troubles with regard to the Harrisville reputation were illustrated by Stephens along with his opinions about the previous superintendent and the effect they had on the search.

The superintendent that we had at the time at the time was like a bull in a china shop. He was very abrasive, hard to get along and a short tempered kind of guy. We had some other board members at the time who had been on the board for a long time. There were some old school ways and some good old boy networking kind of things that were going on in Harrisville. The board really didn't have a great reputation in the state. Any time you have a problem with a board and it doesn't support their superintendent I think it creates an air of danger. Sometimes you don't get a lot of people who are willing to roll the dice and come to a district when there's the history of turmoil.

He also revealed that the current superintendent had been passed over by the board during the previous search and showed appreciation for the willingness to seek the position for a second time, especially with his knowledge of previous turmoil.

I wasn't on the board the last time they hired and they hired the superintendent from Siler City over Mr. Baker [current Harrisville Superintendent]. I was impressed with him coming back. He was still willing and looking forward to coming to Harrisville. That was a huge problem just the reputation that the board had and the school district had because of the turmoil.

The Harrisville district was led to the search consultant due to friction between the previous superintendent and teachers union on negotiations.

We had used Bigelow [education consulting firm] in our teacher negotiations because the former superintendent had such a bad experience with the head of our teacher's union. With his abrasive nature, we thought it was really important to have an intermediary when we were having those negotiations [with the teachers union].

Bigelow was the firm that supplied the search consultant for the Harrisville search.

Stephens was very candid about the work the consultant did to repair the image of Harrisville to potential candidates as well as about his work with the board. "Dr. Hooper [consultant] was able to help us narrow down some things to look at such as reputation and things that went beyond what are our confines here in Harrisville." Later in the interview, he further described the work of image repair the consultant performed. "Dr. Hooper met with a lot of the candidates. While not really recruiting them so much, he was preparing them and explaining the changes we had on the board."

Stephens described the consultant's role during the interview as more of an observer, but said he offered help on matters of procedure and formulation of questions prior to the interviews and assisted in focus, consistency and interpretation of answers following the interviews. When the board entered the decision making phase, the consultant stepped away, but was still available for questions. "He [consultant] was just distant enough to let us make the decision, but he was always available to help us with any decision we had to make." Stephens also appreciated the protection offered by the

consultant, “Just making sure that we complied with different laws such as the posting of meetings and other procedures was a huge resource.”

Summary of Findings for Harrisville

While Harrisville had employed three superintendents since 2000, only Jerry Newsome participated in all of the searches. Josh Nichols and Robert Stephens participated only in the most recent search. When asked about the challenges associated with hiring a superintendent, all three noted a lack of knowledge about potential candidates and admitted they lacked understanding of process in educational hiring. All three noted the importance of board unity and vision toward a common goal of hiring the best candidate. Only Josh Nichols, who had a greater role than the other two in the process, indicated that time required for the process was a challenge.

The research question seeking to identify the community characteristics leading to the use of a search consultant yielded much history about board politics and past practice in the district. All three board members noted the previous dysfunction of the board and the damage caused to the Harrisville reputation as a challenge in seeking quality candidates. Their knowledge of this damaged reputation was uncovered by Josh Nichols as he began the search without the services of a consultant. As the search progressed, board members realized past practices of hiring from within had created what one board member termed a wall around the city where outside candidates either did not apply because they would not be considered for the job or feared the reputation of the dysfunctional board of education. Because of these factors, the search consultant was

selected to provide an outside view. Josh Nichols arranged for input from key community people to allow building a local support base for the successful candidate.

The previous superintendent indirectly led the district to the firm the board would eventually retain to find his successor. Robert Stephens said that the past conflicts between the previous superintendent and the teachers union necessitated the services of Bigelow and Associates, an educational consulting firm, for negotiations. From that past relationship, their services were enlisted for the superintendent search. While Stephens gave the greatest detail about the origin of the relationship, all three noted similar accounts of the consultant selection. Nichols also noted that the culture of the past was possibly the greatest internal force with many people inside wanting the job.

All three board members noted that influence of the search consultant on the Harrisville selection was through repair of the community reputation as much as anything. The consultant visited with potential candidates and provided reassurance that change had occurred on the board and in how the school district was run with the changes in board members. This credibility allowed Harrisville to have a quality candidate pool despite their reputation. All three board members indicated that the consultant provided guidance but stayed out of the discussions, unless asked his opinion, when board members were making the final decision.

Description of Interview Subjects, Locations and Interviews for Stafford Springs

The Office of Accountability (2008) published data about Stafford Springs placing the population at 16,780 inside their district boundary. The 2008 enrollment was 3,514 students with 294 certified staff members. Within Stafford Springs, 67.2% of the

students were eligible for the free and reduced lunch program. The district has five board members. Of the three interviewed for this study, one was no longer on the board, but participated in the hiring of the current superintendent.

Steve Cook. Due to his busy schedule as a local attorney, I arranged to meet Mr. Cook on a Sunday afternoon at his home. During a phone call, I learned Mr. Cook's house was less than a mile from my hotel, and he gave me directions. As I was driving into the neighborhood, I found the house when Mr. Cook walked out of the front door to meet me in the circle drive. The house was very modern and spacious, but on the tour he gave me following the interview, I noted touches of classical architecture throughout the home. Cook appeared to be in his mid fifties of average height and weight. He was obviously dressed for the weekend with blue jeans, a white golf shirt, caramel pullover sweater and black golf cap. As he took off his golf cap, I noticed he had thick silver hair. We exchanged greetings while he asked about my background and spoke of his, exhibiting an air of confidence. We sat down in his study, immediately inside the front door, and he offered me something to drink. I declined and began to set up my equipment. His study was approximately 12 feet by 12 feet with a very high ceiling. On the wall behind his small desk was a stuffed deer head trophy along with many civic awards from the Stafford Springs community. Below that were bookshelves filled with law books and athletic memorabilia. Across from his desk were two guest chairs upholstered with some type of animal skin. He moved some of the many piles of paper on the desk so I could see him. I used one of the guest chairs to hold my recording equipment since there was no room on the desk. He sat in a large leather chair behind the desk. Behind me, on the wall, was a flat screen television tuned to a basketball game,

along with many books on the bookshelf. He muted the television, but did not turn it off. During the interview, he seemed to have more eye contact with the television than with me.

Steve Cook. Cook outlined two central challenges with the Stafford Springs search. The first was the time frame the board was operating under since the previous superintendent resigned in May with an effective date at the end of June.

After we received the resignation, it was late in the school year so we were put under the gun to find someone as quickly as possible. We were fearful that all the good candidates may have already signed contracts for the upcoming year. The other central challenge Cook noted was a lack of hiring experience by three of the board members. Cook also spoke to the importance of the decision and the need for information about the candidates.

Several of the board members had never hired a superintendent before and so it was a completely new process to go through. Hiring a leader of your school district is an important process. If we don't start at the top with a good person, it can cause us a lot a lot of difficulty. We had had a good superintendent before, and there was going to be some big shoes to follow. We wanted to make the right choice. It's always been my position that the more information you can get on any matter, [the] better off you are before you make the decision.

Cook also spoke of differences of opinion among board members regarding internal candidates. "One board member wanted to hire a local person; the other four of us were pretty unanimous that he [another candidate] was our man. We pretty much convinced the other person that he was the best candidate as well." Later he referred to

the situation with more clarity and explained that all internal candidates were interviewed, “The assistant superintendent had applied. I think there were two local folks that submitted applications. We felt like we needed to hear from them.”

Cook addressed some of the unique characteristics of Stafford Springs including the board’s concern for financial matters, many nearby dependent school districts and the presence of a regional university in the community. The board also wanted the superintendent to be an integral part of the community.

Some of the candidates didn’t want to live in this area. Although we couldn’t really make that a requirement, we did get some indications from some of the questioning as to whether or not they wanted to make their home in our community. We had several candidates that were familiar with Regional State University, and therefore, familiar with Stafford Springs. Some people may not have ever lived in a small rural community like we have. Joan supplied us with the most information and of course, we had the interview process that was very helpful, too, to make our final decision.

Cook indicated that the board also used the knowledge of the consultant to understand the financial backgrounds of each candidate. Stafford Springs had many characteristics that made money management important for the superintendent position.

I knew that finance and things of that nature are a big key with our economic situation. We wanted to find someone that had balanced the budget, kept the carryovers and had dealt with a lot of troubled kids. He had dealt with a number of problems similar to ours. There are so many rural schools inside our district boundaries, where the money doesn’t follow the kid. The money stays in those

rural schools and that makes it even tougher from the financial standpoint. We have a situation that puts a lot more pressure on the person keeping up with the dollars. On the other hand, we have a lot of poverty, so we get a lot of grants.

According to Cook, the consultant provided valuable information that sped the selection process along. The previous superintendent, who was well liked, resigned in May, which is very late to prepare for the upcoming school year. His late resignation seriously limited the applicant pool and concerned the board members.

We were under the gun to get somebody. We thought about some alternatives such as an interim and resume our search in October or November. We really wanted to find someone that was going to be good, and we didn't want to just jump at the first person.

The information provided by the consultant, according to Cook, allowed them to save time and know as much as possible about each candidate. He also talked of her sincere interest in assisting the district find the right fit.

This wasn't her first rodeo. She has done this a lot of times and helped a many districts find administrators. I got the sense that it wasn't just a fee she was interested in. She was interested in trying to help us, trying to give us the best information she could so we could find someone good.

Amy Grimes and Scott Proctor Interview Location

The interviews for Scott Proctor and Amy Grimes were conducted in the board room of the Stafford Springs administration building. I was greeted by a receptionist who appeared not to be expecting my arrival. She called to the superintendent's secretary

who immediately came out to escort me to the board room. She locked one door and explained that the room is often used as a short cut by staff to some offices. She offered me something to drink but I declined, and she left me to set up for the interviews. Six tables were set end-to-end forming a long row with chairs all around the tables. One wall had the full complement of kitchen features including a stove, refrigerator and counter space. It was obvious that I had invaded the space used as the break room when the board of education is not meeting. Along the wall farthest from the entrance was the board table with seating for the board members. The elevated table was elliptical in shape and made of lightly stained wood. Behind the table, the mission for the district was attractively framed in large print along with a picture of the football team from 1927. Along the back wall were pictures of all five board members along with plaques below for awards the district had won. Throughout the room, chairs were stacked for storage as were boxes of child identification kits from the State Department of Education, a folding machine and what appeared to be classroom supplies.

Amy Grimes. Ms. Grimes entered the room precisely at the agreed upon time. I heard her say hello to several staff members as she came through the building. She entered walking with a pronounced limp and using a cane. She introduced herself and asked where I would like her to sit. Grimes was in her late fifties with dark hair and glasses. She was wearing a white blouse, grey pants and a maroon jacket. She later mentioned she was a volunteer at the local hospital which was the reason for the maroon jacket. Grimes had a wedding ring with large diamonds.

Interview Description. Amy Grimes was very direct when discussing the challenges faced by the Stafford Springs board to replace their superintendent. She noted

the time frame as a limiting factor and that they were advised by the consultant that the candidate pool would be small.

Well, this was a whole new experience for me. We were working with a very short time frame because Bill resigned in April, or told us he was resigning. We needed somebody, if possible, by July 1, but we realized that that might not happen. Dr. Joan told us that she had not been having very many applicants for superintendent positions. While it was a much smaller pool than we expected, it was helpful to know that she was going to do a lot of the leg work.

While the amount of time required was more than Grimes anticipated, she concluded that the importance of the position justified what was required for the task.

Oh my goodness gracious--we did have meetings, and we had meetings, and we had meetings. It was strenuous; but it's so important. It [hiring a superintendent] is not something you can take lightly. It's something that's going to affect your school for an indefinite amount of time, and you don't want to make a mistake or get somebody that's not going to be a fit at all.

Grimes explained the local characteristics of the remaining administration also lead the board to use the services of the search consultant. She qualified her opinion on using a search consultant based on the satisfaction with in-house candidates.

Well, if you--if you know who you want, obviously there is no reason...if you have an assistant superintendent who is a natural to walk right in to the position then there would be no need to bother with a search consultant.

That being said, she described the board of education as split on the decision to hire either of two candidates inside the district.

You know, some felt very strongly this way, while some felt very strongly this way, and some felt very strongly it shouldn't be either inside candidate. That pretty much put us in a position where we really needed to find someone from outside the district.

As she described the situation, it appeared the circumstances leading to the board decision were formed from public opinion regarding the inside candidates' past history with the district.

The in house candidates are both very capable, competent people. One of them had taken a stand when he was principal which was very unpopular with the newspaper. They had basically crucified him. We were aware that he probably would never be given a fair chance by the newspaper if we chose him as superintendent, even on an interim basis. The other one does an excellent job, but she had too much power, and I don't think the teachers would have accepted her. They felt like she had more power than she should have.

Grimes appreciated the work of the consultant and noted that the assistance was critical to the timeline created by the late resignation. The consultant also offered advice on the in-house candidates, which included giving them the courtesy of an interview. The consultant screened candidates, but offered all applications to the board members.

Just that fact that somebody else can cull the applicants I think was very beneficial. We certainly were free to see anything that came in. She said I think these are possibilities that might be a fit for your community.

Grimes followed the lead of more veteran board members who suggested using the consultant. She further indicated that she would support using the services again if a vacancy occurred.

Scott Proctor. I waited for over 20 minutes past the appointed time for Proctor to arrive. Finally, I asked the superintendent's secretary if she could call him to see if he was coming. She did, and he said he was running late and apologized. He arrived 25 minutes late, entered the room and quickly introduced himself while apologizing for forgetting. He was a thin man approximately 6'0' in height and 170 pounds. Wearing a dark grey turtleneck shirt and light grey slacks, he seemed very tense as we began, but later relaxed and became more engaged in conversation. Proctor chose not to seek re-election when his term was up in the winter of 2009.

Interview Description. The challenges Proctor noted in the hiring process involved time constraints and a general lack of knowledge about how to hire a superintendent. He highlighted that board members have professional lives outside of the board. "Time constraints are always a factor with the board. You've got five people on your board who are professional people with outside businesses and lives. Getting them together for meetings is always a chore."

Proctor, a professor at Regional State University, mentioned that neither his career in education nor his time on the board prepared him to hire a superintendent.

To school board members who are relatively new first termers or even second termers, this is all new stuff. We know whatever business we're in, is not hiring a superintendent. I would say going in I didn't know much about it. While I know how we hire faculty at the university, it's a little different to hire a superintendent.

He later described the process as “daunting” since the board members did not even know how or where to advertise the vacancy. The boards’ lack of knowledge about protocol combined with the necessity of continuing their careers made Proctor thankful that the consultant could provide the services Stafford Springs needed.

Proctor was very concerned about the public perception of spending money for the services of the consultant. However, he and the other board members did not believe they had the time needed to perform a successful search.

When we looked at the cost compared to the amount of time that it would take us as individual members to do an effective search, we thought it was cost effective to bring in an outside agent. A head hunter if you will, to help us with this process. We could do these things, but it might take hours and hours and hours on evenings, weekends. I don’t think we chose to use a consultant because we weren’t willing to put forth the effort. Even with all of those hours, we still wouldn’t have an inside track like someone that worked for the Oklahoma State School Board Association.

Proctor also asserted his belief that the consultant’s presence in the process improved the applicant pool as well as the information available to the board on the applicants. He described the board’s thought process in evaluating the benefits and costs involved.

Can we do this ourselves without spending X amount of money? Yes we can. So, let’s again talk cost benefit. Are we likely to get the same applicant pool? Maybe not. Are we likely to get the same depth of information if we choose to go without the firm? Likely not, so is it worth spending X amount of money to try to

ensure that we get the right person? Once the decision was made, the board felt like it was worth the money.

Proctor mentioned the precarious financial situation of Stafford Springs with regard to the large number of dependent districts feeding students into their secondary schools.

I think the most unique thing about Stafford Springs Public Schools is the number of dependent districts that feed into our district. It is incumbent that the chief administrator here be able to deal effectively with those outlying districts. From a purely financial point of view, it becomes somewhat of a burden accommodating those students.

When asked about the role the consultant played in the process, Proctor explained the consultant collected the resumes, reduced the field for consideration and provided background on the candidates. He described the information on candidates provided by the consultant as “inside information” but went on to clarify that it was nothing confidential. The information the board was provided included salary information and issues the candidates had dealt with in their careers.

I asked Proctor if using a consultant improved the applicant pool. His reply supported the process but he could not quantify his conclusion.

My guess is yes, but if you asked me to prove it, I would be hard pressed to do so. By working with the people that are in this business day in and day out, my assessment would be yes. I can't guarantee that. You can advertise in the paper and you can advertise it in the *Journal of Higher Education* and you can advertise

it in lots of places but our feeling that we would get an enhanced applicant pool by using an outside consultant.

Summary of Findings for Stafford Springs

Stafford Springs received the resignation of their well liked superintendent at the May board meeting. Scott Procter was one of two remaining board members who had participated in his hiring. The board had used the OSSBA services in the previous hiring, but with a different consultant. The common challenge noted among the interviewed board members was the time frame of the previous superintendent's resignation. Steve Cook and Procter both stated the board members lacked a general knowledge of how to hire a superintendent. Amy Grimes and Procter both were concerned about the time necessary by the board members to conduct an effective search. Grimes and Cook mentioned internal candidates and the challenge they presented to the selection process; both stated the internal candidates each brought pre-conceived opinions from community or staff that they indicated made their selection prohibitive.

Cook and Grimes gave details on the financial concerns of the district. Stafford Springs had a large number of dependent school districts inside their district boundaries. The presence of the dependent districts made the financial status of Stafford Springs more sensitive and critical than similar sized school districts. Cook and Grimes both explained the importance of seeking the information about how the candidates managed money in previous districts.

Internal candidates posed a challenge to the district that Grimes and Cook both described. Grimes mentioned that the candidates split the board and their alliances. The

search consultant advised the board that all internal candidates should receive an interview if they were qualified. Ultimately, the consensus of the board was to seek outside candidates.

Proctor was concerned about the public perception of expending public funds for the services of the search consultant. Ultimately, he concluded that the board's decision was prudent.

The central issue Stafford Springs dealt with that was discussed by all board members interviewed was the timing of the resignation from the previous Superintendent. The direct effect on the selection was placing the board members under a narrow time frame within which to hire the successor. The indirect effect impossible to quantify was fewer applicants. The small candidate pool was pointed out by both Cook and the consultant.

All three board members described the search consultant's influence at Stafford Springs as informing and facilitating, noted the information provided by the consultant about the candidates was very helpful in speeding the process along. She further advised the board to interview the internal candidates and served as the first screener of applications on behalf of the board. All three board members were unified in their belief that the consultant was more concerned with finding a person that fit the needs of Stafford Springs than with collecting a fee.

Description of Interview Location for Palmdale

According to the Office of Accountability (2008), the 2000 census listed the population within the district boundary of Palmdale at 41,755. The enrollment for 2008

was 6,365 students, and the district employed 529 certified staff members. Almost 62% of the student population qualified for the free and reduced lunch program. The district board of education had seven members.

All Palmdale interviews took place in the board room of the administration building. The building appeared to be built exclusively for the use of the Palmdale administration in the architectural style of the 1960s. The board room was approximately 50 feet long and 30 feet wide, with genuine oak paneling, but no windows. Twelve tables were arranged in a horseshoe that opened to the double oak doors that I entered. The tables on the end opposite the double door entry were of a much higher quality while the tables forming most of the sides of the horseshoe were typical folding tables with mismatched finishes. Around the outside of the high quality tables were 13 high back executive desk chairs. The remaining tables had maroon colored plastic chairs on both sides. Along one wall were seven leather guest chairs below pictures of all previous board members in the history of the school district. Each picture was labeled with the board member's name and the years served. Also, along that wall was a door directly into the superintendent's office. The wall across from the entry door had a smart board directly behind the head of the table flanked by the United States flag and the flag of Oklahoma. The wall to the left had a picture of each current board member along with a framed poster of the mission statement for the district and two awards for having blue ribbon schools. Finally, along the back wall beside the corner double doors were the pictures of all superintendents from the district along with their names and years of service.

Description of Subjects and Interviews for Palmdale

Carrie Cooper. Carrie Cooper entered the room escorted by the superintendent's secretary. I greeted her and thanked her for giving time to share her experiences with me. Cooper, in her late sixties, seemed full of energy and excitement about Palmdale. Approximately 5'7" of slight build with shoulder length silver hair, Cooper was wearing a turquoise shirt and jacket along with khaki slacks. She carried a binder she later said was part of her "board study material." The most experienced board member in the study, Cooper mentioned during the interview that she has served on the Palmdale board for over 30 years and participated in three superintendent searches.

Interview Description. Carrie Cooper outlined the central challenges Palmdale faced beginning with a shallow candidate pool and the amount of time required to conduct the selection. She highlighted the magnitude of the decision with the statement, "It's the most important decision you will ever make."

Cooper lamented over what she called a shallow pool of applicants as she recalled previous searches by the Palmdale board.

The sad thing in Oklahoma is that the pool is pretty shallow. For the previous national search we conducted, I think we had two or three hundred [applicants].

With the situation in Oklahoma right now, she [consultant] didn't have that many to go through.

Cooper later attributed the small number of applicants to regionalizing the search with the state school board association.

Cooper also noted the challenge of time required for the search. When asked about the process, she described it as "a time consuming process and not something that

just happens overnight.” She later noted the challenge was increased since Palmdale has a seven member board and the board was often at the mercy of member and applicant schedules. “Scheduling meetings was difficult. You can schedule your own meetings, but when it comes time for the interviews, sometimes you have to work around other peoples’ schedules too, including the seven member board.”

When asked why Palmdale chose to use a consultant, Cooper explained that board members did not have the time to run the entire search. She explained that the decision was too important to complete the task without help.

With seven very busy individuals, the size of the search that we wanted to conduct and without a full time person, who on the board is going to take on that responsibility? It has grown to the point that it’s not something one person or necessarily a board can handle—in my opinion.

Cooper credited the search consultant with having a profound effect on the process at Palmdale. The board quickly narrowed the field after the consultant provided the applicants she believed would be a fit for the community.

I don’t remember how many total applicants there were, but I think she brought us maybe 10 applications to look at. With her recommendations and guidance, we quickly narrowed it down to three or four that we wanted to interview.

She further commented on the efforts of the consultant and how it led to a candidate the board was pleased with:

As far as most people knew Trent [successful candidate] wasn’t out looking for a job. But she knew that he might be interested. I guess her knowledge of the candidates that might be available [was beneficial]. If we had just put out a cattle

call you get a little bit of everything. Narrowing it down in the beginning saved us a lot of time and a lot of effort.

Jason Stone. Stone came into the meeting room a few minutes early wearing a tan plaid button down oxford shirt and jeans. Standing about 6'0" and weighing approximately 220 pounds, he appeared to be in his mid-fifties with thick brown hair. He was soft spoken and often paused as though in thought before answering questions. His demeanor conveyed a genuine caring nature, and he seemed modest about the accomplishments of the board but very proud of the accomplishments of the community and school.

Interview Description. Jason Stone was the board president for the search, but confessed that he leaned heavily on Carrie Cooper's experience for guidance. The challenges he identified were a lack of experience among board members for hiring a superintendent and maintaining confidentiality with the public and the local newspaper. With the previous superintendent's tenure of 24 years, only one board member had participated in a superintendent search. When asked if he had to perform the task again what he would change, Stone replied, "I would want the board members to be more experienced." Although he cited problems during the interview process of members deviating from the interview questions, he indicated the board discontinued the deviations after the first interview.

Stone noted the local newspaper wanted more information than the board was willing to provide. "That was the hardest part is the papers wanted to know who the candidates were, and we wouldn't tell them." Stone noted the board members were trying to protect the identity of the candidates and not jeopardize their current positions.

Another challenge Stone addressed was an internal applicant. He described the situation as leaving the board in a tough spot. While they liked the job the applicant was doing, Stone said, “They [board of education] did not believe he was a fit as the superintendent.” Stone was also concerned because hiring an internal applicant would create another opening to fill.

When asked about local characteristics that prompted hiring a consultant, Stone deferred to the judgment of his fellow board member, Carrie Cooper. “Carrie had told us that that was the best way that they had found to do it [using a consultant]. They had tried it other ways in the past and weren’t really lucky with. Also, five of us were pretty new board members.”

Stone was asked if the newspaper’s interest prompted increased reliance on the expertise of the consultant. His reply was, “There’s no doubt in my mind. I mean that scared us.” Another concern Stone mentioned was the recent failure of a bond issue. The board used the consultant as a spokesperson to potential candidates allaying any concerns about local support of the school system.

Stone clearly believed the previous superintendent had an effect on the selection in several ways. I asked Stone if he thought the lengthy tenure of the previous superintendent was a hindrance. “I know it was a hindrance. There were two superintendents that would have put in but didn’t want to follow in Dr. King’s footsteps. They said, ‘I’ll come in later, but I don’t want to apply for that job.’”

Stone indicated the information provided by the consultant was the basis for the finalists. He noted her biggest assistance was with procedure in the interview process

and said she worked to keep the board members focused on their task without proposing a candidate. Stone detailed what the consultant added to the process:

The experience, knowledge of people, one on one, help, getting the process going fast and being able to print out everything we needed for all the interviews. She told us what we could and couldn't do. She also made sure that we stayed within the laws, especially talking among board members.

James Frazier. I called Frazier when he was 12 minutes late. He apologized and said he had gotten caught by a friend but was on his way. He entered the room shortly after the phone call wearing a green polo style shirt and khaki pants. In his early forties with premature grey hair, Frazier was approximately 6'2" and 180 pounds with a slight build and good shape. He spoke with a soft, but confident voice.

Interview Description. James Frazier noted the most daunting challenge associated with hiring a superintendent was the amount of time required to complete the process. He was thankful to have the services of the consultant in order to expedite the process.

Maybe not everybody on the school board is as busy as I am, but I don't have the time to personally weed through 40 or 50 resumes to decide [on a candidate] and follow up with reference checks. Probably the best school board members are the ones that are very busy. Their time is valuable. That means they are probably involved in the community and successful in what they do.

Frazier considered an internal candidate a challenge while noting a shallow candidate pool. He believed the internal candidate was more valuable to the district in his present position. He seemed concerned about the challenges created if the candidate's

present position had to be filled. Frazier lamented, “We didn’t have just a flood of applicants to go through.” He later attributed the lack of applications to the consultant’s screening of applicants for the board and the local reputation with the failed bond issue.

Frazier explained that the failed bond issue was something the consultant assisted the board in overcoming when searching for candidates. He also mentioned some public criticism for using a consultant.

I think there was a little bit of criticism from the community. We were paying to have somebody tell us who to hire when we had just laid off teachers a year before. It’s a tough thing [to] lay off some teachers then pay money to hire an outside consultant.

Frazier believed the previous superintendent’s long tenure had an effect on the entire process. “Dr. King had been here for so many years and I think that may have created a little bit of anxiety for somebody coming in to replace him.” He also indicated the board sought King’s opinion on using the search consultant, “I’m pretty sure that Dr. King even made that recommendation [using a consultant] that that maybe was a good way to go.”

While King had a long tenure, not all in Palmdale was perfect as evidenced by the failed bond issue. Frazier described Dr. King:

He was a no nonsense guy. He had a lot of gristle to him. You take a bite out of him and all you’re going to get is a mouthful of gristle, but he really looked out for what was best for the school district. People in Palmdale sometimes are a little fickle towards that.

Frazier went on to explain the community perception of the relationship with the board and superintendent:

What we heard in the community was kind of like the good old boys syndrome.

You know there was nothing new, nothing fresh, maybe to a certain extent they felt like the board just kind of rubber stamped what Dr. King did.

Frazier clarified how the consultant addressed the image to other candidates.

“She saw it as a positive to have Dr. King here such a long time. That was a selling point.”

Frazier expressed trust in the consultant and the influence she provided to the process. “I think that they did a lot of the research as far as the background. If someone was just a dud, she knew it. We didn’t even get to see an application like that. So we trusted her [consultant].”

Summary of Findings for Palmdale

The superintendent retired following his 24 year tenure in the position. Carrie Cooper had been on the board for over 30 years and this was her third superintendent search. Jason Stone noted that Cooper was the only board member with any experience in hiring a superintendent. Cooper and Frazier said a shallow candidate pool and time required were the greatest challenges. Frazier and Stone also listed application of an internal candidate as a challenge in this search. Cooper said the seven member board made scheduling meetings more of a complicated.

Both Stone and Frazier mentioned relying on the judgment of Cooper with her long tenure as a board member as she encouraged using a consultant. Stone was highly

concerned about the interest and pressure by the newspaper to divulge candidate information. Frazier said he believed a recent failed bond issue tarnished the Palmdale image around the state, and the consultant was helpful in explaining the positives to potential candidates.

Stone and Frazier believed the tenure of the previous superintendent discouraged potential candidates and contributed to the challenge Cooper discussed with a shallow candidate pool. Frazier credited the former superintendent with suggesting they use a search consultant.

All Palmdale board members indicated different ways that the consultant influenced the process. Cooper credited the consultant with seeking out the successful candidate since he was not looking for a job when the opening took place. Stone was thankful for the consultant's influence on following legal procedure since he was very concerned with the interest drawn by the newspaper. Frazier was thankful for the consultant's discretion in removing applications from consideration prior to the board members decision making phase.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze the use of a superintendent search consultant from the perspective of the school board member. In the first research question, interviewees were asked what challenges are associated with hiring a superintendent. Emerging themes were identified by their repetition in data from multiple board members and multiple school districts. Board members did not feel comfortable in their ability to manage the search without the assistance of the consultant

nor did the board members feel they had enough time to devote to the process. The board members recognized their lack of knowledge in personnel and believed the consultant would add credibility to the process both internally and externally.

The second research question focused on how characteristics of the community and school district influenced the decision to use a search consultant. Board members did not find a viable in-house candidate. The fear existed among the board members that local image problems would hurt the candidate pool. In three districts, board members did not choose internal candidates seeking the job. In each case, the consultant would not have been needed had the board desired the internal candidate.

Research question three addressed the effect the former superintendent had on the selection. School districts replacing a superintendent with a long and successful tenure concluded that quality candidates were hesitant to apply and follow someone so successful. Conversely, a district with a superintendent who had a short tenure made candidates wary of the stability with the district.

The final research question addressed the influence the consultant had on the process of hiring a superintendent. The consultant acted as communicator with potential candidates about changes occurring in the district and an information provider to the board members. Board member opinions on having someone screen the applicants were mostly positive. The consultant was a gatekeeper of qualified applicants for the district. All board members concluded they would support the use of a consultant if a search were needed again.

Chapter V summarizes the interview data, presents conclusions for the study, outlines a theoretical framework for the data presented and contains recommendations for

further study. It also offers implications for both superintendents and school board members while providing final thoughts regarding the research project.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FINAL THOUGHTS

Summary

The role of district superintendent began in 1837 as a largely clerical position with its origins tracing back to Buffalo, New York (Cuban, 1976). According to Kamler (2009), the early 20th century brought respect and power to the position despite limited compensation. More recently, it has evolved to a position filled with higher expectations and unilaterally less authority.

The people ultimately responsible for the selection of the superintendent are members of the board of education. Oklahoma statute (70 O. S. §§ 5-724) mandates that that school board members must possess a high school diploma, have no felony convictions and agree to attend continuing education. Expertise in personnel selection is not a requirement for holding this office. Kamler (2009) noted that there is minimal research centering on the process to select a superintendent.

The challenge of finding a superintendent gets greater each year as the candidate pool continues to shrink. Riede (2003b) described the process of finding quality

candidates for a superintendent position as a much greater challenge than that faced by school boards faced only a few years ago.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the use of a superintendent search consultant from the perspective of the school board member. Four primary research questions guided the study. The first question research focused participants on the challenges associated with hiring a superintendent. Secondly, the participants were asked how the characteristics of the community and school district influenced the decision to use a search consultant. The third question centered on whether the former superintendent had any effect on the selection either directly or indirectly. Lastly, the participants were asked how the search consultant influenced the process of hiring a superintendent.

A multi-case study method was selected to examine the selection process for a superintendent when the services of a consultant were utilized. The objective of this approach was to focus on the experiences of the board members during the selection process. Creswell (2003) explained that in case study, “The researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals.” (p. 15). Research participants were asked to expand on the four research questions to determine why a consultant was selected and the influence the consultant had in the selection process.

Results

The school boards’ decisions to seek the services of the consultant were influenced by several factors. Board members recognized they would not have sufficient time to dedicate to the process. All school districts in this sample did not have a

candidate already on staff that the board members believed would be the best fit as superintendent.

Results of this study indicate that time availability and personnel expertise are determining factors in the decision to select a search consultant. The board members were not prepared for the amount of time necessary to conduct the superintendent search and were appreciative of the tedious work the consultant performed. The first use of Shared Decision Making by each district was to employ the consultant. While the consultants had limited personal stakes in the situation, in each case they had expertise and the board's trust. Hoy and Tarter (2004) call this an "expert situation" and noted the involvement in the final decision by the expert should be limited since the consultant lacks a personal stake in the decision. While the board utilizes the expertise of the consultant, who to hire is still the decision of the board. In this study, participants from seven member boards noted challenges associated with getting the entire board together to discuss the process. Information about the individual candidates and background checks were provided by the consultant to fully educate the board members about the qualities of each candidate under consideration. The consultant advised each board about issues of employment law and accepted interviewing practices. Despite the assistance of an outside person with expertise, the process involved more work and much greater time than was anticipated. According to Josh Nichols from Harrisville, "it's an intense amount of time if you do it right."

Study results supported the belief that school districts desiring to hire an internal candidate do not need the services of a search consultant if a quality candidate is available. According to Carrie Cooper from Palmdale,

I'm sure there are communities in Oklahoma that don't feel a consultant is necessary. If they have someone in line that they've been grooming or they know will fit in and be a good leader when the superintendent retires or leaves, they don't have to hire a consultant.

Palmdale, Stafford Springs and Harrisville had internal applicants for this search, but they were not considered to be in the category described by Cooper.

Themes emerging from the data indicate the amount of time required by the board members when hiring a superintendent is extensive. While the consultant's role reduces the time necessary by board members, it remains much more of a commitment than inexperienced board members imagined prior to the search. The balance sought by the board members in selecting a consultant was having someone with credibility who could do much of the clerical work for a cost that was not prohibitive to the district.

The consultant served as the gatekeeper of candidates to the board of education. Board members relied on the expertise of the consultant to have a working knowledge of the candidate pool. Conversely, board members expected the consultant to present information to potential candidates about the district. This was especially important if it addressed a negative external perception of the district. The consultant also provided advice on legal issues such as open meetings act compliance and personnel practices.

Relationship of Results to Theory

Two decision making models discussed in Chapter II are relevant to this study. The Administrative Model further identified as the Satisficing Theory of decision making along with the Shared Decision Making model by Hoy and Tarter (2004) were both cited

in Chapter II as relevant to the study. The Classical Model also proposed by Hoy and Tarter (2004), which was also cited in Chapter II was not found to apply.

Satisficing Theory, described by Hoy and Tarter (2004) as looking for satisfactory solutions, is relevant to this study. They identified five sequential steps in the Satisficing Theory of Decision making that may be entered at any stage. Step one of the process is to recognize and define the problem. In this study, the superintendent resignations were the problem for each district to solve. Step two of the process is analyzing the difficulties. These were situational based on the school district and included poor public perception of the district or community (Mayville and Harrisville), short timelines to fill the position (Stafford Springs), or a long tenured predecessor (Palmdale). Step three is to establish criteria for a satisfactory solution. The consultant worked with the board to understand what the members were looking for before beginning the search process. Step four calls for developing a plan or strategy for action. Hoy and Tarter included four steps in this task: specifying alternatives, predicting consequences, considering options and selecting a plan of action. The districts accomplished this in various ways such as evaluating interim options to address a tight timeline (Stafford Springs), considering internal candidates (Stafford Springs, Harrisville and Palmdale), and predicting the potential satisfaction or dissatisfaction of living in the community based on where the candidate has lived before (Mayville). Finally, step five is initiating the plan of action. This action includes four steps: programming, communicating, monitoring and evaluating. All schools hired the person that best fit their needs based on who applied for the position. The newspaper articles communicated the process including, in some instances including the salary negotiations as well as past professional and personal successes.

The school districts participating in this study selected their superintendents from the candidates who applied for the position. No evidence existed that any final selection was actively recruited by the district or search consultant, rather the candidate showed the interest to apply for the position. Final selections were limited to the candidates who submitted an application. Satisficing theory applies in this case since the final selection was the best of the satisfactory options.

According to Hoy and Tarter (2004), the Shared Decision Making model is designed to enhance the acceptance and quality of decisions. Hoy and Tarter began the application of the model by asking two questions:

1. Do subordinates have a personal stake in the decision outcome?
2. Do subordinates have expertise to contribute to the decision?

Subordinates in the case of this study could be fellow board members, community members, teachers or students. If the answer to both questions is yes, the subordinates will want to be involved. Hoy and Tarter further noted that the involvement of the subordinates is bounded by the level of trust for the subordinates to make a decision in the best interests of the organization.

Each school district had a component of involvement for the board, staff or community based on the needs identified by the board. The first example was a community forum where input was drawn for the qualities desired in the candidate (Mayville). A second example was creation of a community focus group composed of community members who may not have children in the district but are part of organizations that benefit from quality school leadership (Harrisville and Palmdale). Another example found in the study was site visits to a candidate's current community by an ad hoc committee of board members (Stafford Springs). Hoy and Tarter (2004)

proposed that the right strategy must be linked to the right situation. Each district was somewhat different in their approach, based on the needs of their district.

The Classical Model of Decision making was not found to apply to this study. Hoy and Tarter (2004) concluded that this model fails to account for human behavior and should not apply when the decision is formed by qualitative opinions of humans. The authors further noted, “The demands it makes on human cognition simply cannot be met.” (p. 12). Hoy and Tarter concluded the strategy is not realistic. Because one best solution was not discovered, the results of the study supported that conclusion. All board selections were made from the applicant pool that was limited by the supply and quality available.

Conclusions

The consultant brings expertise to the process that board members lack. The consultant offers skill in personnel management, a network of contacts with knowledge about the candidates and can dedicated time that the board members do not have.

Consultants do not necessarily recruit candidates. The final selections by the boards of education came from applicants that showed an interest in the district through the formal application process. The literature suggested that the role of the consultant was to provide an early paper screening of qualified applicants based on criteria provided by the board and to offer information through background checks or the consultant’s own network about the candidate pool, allowing board members and candidates to make an informed choice. While the results of this study support this belief, the idea of actually recruiting a candidate was not supported by the research. In the districts in this study,

superintendents were selected and hired from the available candidate pool; no evidence existed that candidates were recruited by the consultants.

The consultant brings credibility to the search process. All districts used the consultant to improve potential applicants' perception of the district in an effort to improve the candidate pool. This supports claims by Walter et al. (1997) that a consultant brings a wealth of connections allowing for a quality candidate pool. The research also supported the literature of Chion-Kenny (2003) where it is desirable to maintain confidentiality of applicants in order to improve the applicant pool.

Using a consultant yields positive results for the school district. According to this study the board members would use a consultant again for the same task. The board of education hires the superintendent, but the board members recognized they lacked the time and network to adequately conduct all necessary parts of a superintendent search without assistance. When the ultimate goal was finding a good fit for the district, the decision to involve a professional deflected some pressure from the board as well as increasing the potential success of the search.

Recommendations for Practice

The conclusions of this study lead to recommendations that could be appropriate for other school districts experiencing similar situations. When a board member is presented with a superintendent opening, it is already too late for training on how to find a replacement. The local control of each school district in Oklahoma provides a unique environment for each superintendency. School board members are required to attend continuing education but as one board member noted, no education exists for hiring a superintendent. Board unity was identified as a necessary ingredient to a successful

search, but members may not truly understand how that atmosphere is created. Efforts to standardize some aspects of the hiring process across the state with effective school board training could improve an ever-shrinking candidate pool. Despite differences in communities, board members who follow a standardized process based on best practices in the search process will attract a greater candidate pool. Candidates who understand the process will know what to expect and may be more likely to apply for the position.

Recommendations for Future Research

Possible efforts to expand the current research could include examining the role of the consultant from the perspective of the successful candidate for a superintendent position. This would allow the role of the consultant to be examined through the lens of the candidate. This would better identify the role of the descriptions of the district conveyed by the consultant to the candidate as well as the accuracy of the description.

Future research could include identifying characteristics of successful searches from the consultant perspective. This research could include an examination of cohesiveness among board members throughout the search. One board member in this search indicated that a unified board is vital for a successful search. The relation to board unity on candidate satisfaction has not been studied from the perspective of the consultant or board member.

As the need for a consultant grows, so will the power they possess as the gatekeeper for the board. All board members interviewed encouraged the use of the consultant and it was apparent a loyalty developed between the members and consultant. This brings to question the method used to select the consultant. With the growth in need more people will be required to provide this service with potentially varying degrees of

expertise. Future boards of education will need to understand how to eliminate charlatans or overworked experts who lack the time to provide quality service.

Finally, an opportunity exists in Oklahoma to research the effects of a large-scale school consolidation on the shrinking candidate pool. The topic of consolidation has been considered for many years in Oklahoma with little more than healthy debate. A method to secure quality leadership for school districts when the number of qualified leaders is decreasing is to decrease the number of school districts.

Summary and Final Thoughts

The literature suggests that the pool of applicants for educational administrative positions is shrinking at an alarming rate. Oklahoma parallels the trend identified in the research and literature. The result of this trend will be fewer applicants for school board members to consider when selecting their next superintendent. This makes retention of quality superintendents crucial as many administrators are reaching the retirement age. A district with people on staff capable of leadership roles would be better served to “train” their future superintendent and promote them. Consequently, if a school board is unified on hiring an in-house candidate, there is no need for a consultant.

If the school board does not find an in-house candidate capable of filling the position, they should be honest with people of leadership positions in the district and encourage them to participate in the hiring through the shared decision making process rather than their own candidacy for the position. Then, the school board should use a consultant to lead the search.

Satisficing could lead a district to a selection that they will regret or will be short lived as board members attempt to fill the position. A consultant’s value to school board

members will continue to grow as the candidate pool decreases. Schools may decide to “recruit” a superintendent for their district. This trend could lead to a greater disparity in quality education between affluent communities and those with fewer resources.

In order to create a better pool of superintendent candidates, the job must become more attractive. Many of the superintendents in Oklahoma are actually CEOs of one of the largest employers in their community. Since the superintendency is very public in nature, the position may become politically charged, creating a difficult environment to generate success. This has led to increased turnover that exists in the superintendency. The trend could be reversed with longevity incentives such as long term contracts and increased benefits with performance based bonuses tied to objectives evaluated by some method exclusive of the community such as growth models of school improvement that do not involve benchmarks.

Much has been written and discussed in recent years about school reform and accountability. Nothing has been said or done to address the decline in people wanting to tackle the leadership of this change. School districts are facing a daunting task if they have to replace their superintendents. A consultant provides a school board with expert advice to find the best fit for the district. School districts who enlist the services of an expert to accomplish this task are making the best decision for the students and community.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Monday, November 30, 2009
IRB Application No ED09155
Proposal Title: Using Search Consultants in Superintendent Searches From the Board Member Perspective

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 11/29/2010

Principal

Investigator(s): ✓

Michael L. Simpson
3005 Canterbury Ave.
Ponca City, OK 74604

Bernita Krumm
310 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Sheila Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: "Using Search Consultants in Superintendent Searches From the Board Member Perspective"

Investigators: Michael L. Simpson, Principal Investigator
Bernita L. Krumm, PhD, Dissertation Advisor

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative multicase research study is to examine the experiences of members of five different boards of education of school districts that have recently hired a new superintendent in an effort to increase the understanding of the role a consultant plays in the process.

Procedures: Data for this research study will be collected through on-site interviews, telephone interviews, observations and available documents. The interview will last about one hour.

Risks of Participation:

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits: Expected benefits include shared experiences which should assist other board of education members make more informed decisions regarding the process of a superintendent search.

Confidentiality:

Your real name will not be used at any point in the process of information collection or in the research study. Yours and any other person and place names will be assigned fictitious names that will be used in all verbal and written records and reports. Interviews will be audiotaped; however, audiotapes will be used only to complete this research study. I will transcribe the tape for the purpose of accuracy and provide you with a copy of the transcript for you to comment upon. Upon completion of this research study and acceptance of resulting document, the tapes will be destroyed. The audio tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet in the office of the principal researcher (111 W. Grand Ave., Ponca City, OK) where they will not be accessible to any other person or persons. In order to protect identity, the interviewer will assign pseudonyms to the subject and the school district the participant represents. To insure privacy, consent forms will be kept in a locked cabinet in the office of the dissertation

APPENDIX C

INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Initial Interview Protocol

Using Search Consultants in Superintendent Searches

From the Board Member Perspective

The following assent is to be read and an affirmative must be given and recorded on the audiotape for the individual's consent to be audiotaped. If consent is not given, the interview cannot transpire.

I am Mike Simpson, a graduate student in Qualitative Research at Oklahoma State University. As you know, this research study is for my doctoral dissertation. I am conducting research on the use of search consultants when a board of education hires a superintendent. I would like to ask you a few questions about your experiences as a school board member during your board's search for a superintendent. This will take approximately one hour of your time. Your answers will be kept confidential and your participation in this conversation is purely voluntary. The answers to the questions I have for you today will be audiotaped, so I need your permission to tape our conversation. Following the interview, the tape will be transcribed. You will receive a complete transcript of your interview so you may review your responses for their accuracy and clarity. Do you agree to be audiotaped right now?

1. What are your thoughts about the use of search consultants when hiring a superintendent?
2. Describe the process your district used to hire a superintendent.
3. Describe your role in the process.
4. Why did your district choose to use a search consultant?
5. What part of that process do you feel was beneficial to finding a superintendent?
6. Explain about any factors that hindered your search process.
7. What would you like to change if you had to perform this task again?
8. Describe any aspect of the process that you feel was unique to your community.
9. Describe the most difficult issues during this search and how they were overcome.
10. What types of costs were experienced by your district during this search?
11. What do you see as the benefits and/or shortcomings to working with a consultant?
12. Is there anything you would like to add?
13. What questions have I not asked that I should have asked?

APPENDIX D

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE FOR MAYVILLE

School's out! Super says he will retire

By [REDACTED]
Senior Editor

January 14, 2009 10:53 am

[REDACTED] Public Schools will be searching for a new superintendent soon. [REDACTED] says he's retiring as the superintendent of [REDACTED] Public Schools, effective June 30. Why is he stepping down at this time? "No particular reason," said [REDACTED] who became superintendent in 2006. "I just felt like it's time to retire."

"I feel like the district's in good shape," he said. He also referred to his nearly four decades in education. "I've been in education for 38 years, 37 of them in [REDACTED]" [REDACTED] said. [REDACTED] School Board President [REDACTED] said he hadn't been expecting [REDACTED] to retire. "We were surprised by his announcement, but that's OK. He's done an outstanding job as superintendent," [REDACTED] said.

The Oklahoma State School Board Association will be contacted to conduct a search for a new superintendent for [REDACTED] according to [REDACTED]. He said the search should start soon. "We'll determine a time-line and what we want and set out a job description," [REDACTED] said. In the meantime, "We stand behind [REDACTED]. He's done an outstanding job and we wish him the best." After his retirement goes into effect, [REDACTED] plans to remain in the community. "I grew up here," he said. "I have no desire to leave."

[REDACTED] said he's not retiring to take another job and he has no plans to seek one at this point. "I'm going to do what I want to do," he said. One of the things he wants to do is travel. "There are places I want to go and people I want to see."

[REDACTED] has seen a lot of changes during his nearly four decades in education. "I feel like the education process has grown since the early 1970s," he said. "I feel the students today receive a more thorough education, there is so much more material for them to cover and experience."

"Technology has changed tremendously and we've had to change with that." [REDACTED] pleased with some of the projects he's seen accomplished during his time at [REDACTED]. "One of the biggest things was completing the high school and putting the ninth through twelfth grades together," he said.

The past few years have presented their own special challenges. "The last two or three years we've been in a survival mode because mandates from the state have increased and funding hasn't increased," [REDACTED] said. "Costs have also increased and then, again, funding has not increased," he said. [REDACTED] spent his first year of his long career in education in [REDACTED] Texas. "It's right between [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]" he said. By the following year, [REDACTED] had a job in his home town of [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] started his career with [REDACTED] Public Schools as a teacher at [REDACTED] Elementary, where he taught fourth, fifth and sixth grade classes. "At the time, they had elementary sports in football, basketball and track and I coached all of those," he said. The next year, [REDACTED] moved to [REDACTED] Middle School, where he taught the sixth, seventh and eighth grades.

"From there, I went to [REDACTED] as a principal in 1981," he said. [REDACTED] then went to [REDACTED] in the mid-1980s, where he also served as principal. Around 1999, [REDACTED] became the business manager for the school district. In 2004, he became the assistant superintendent at [REDACTED] Public Schools, then in 2006, he succeeded Dr. [REDACTED] as the superintendent. Beginning in June, he should have a lot more personal time. "I plan on enjoying retirement," said [REDACTED].

Contact [REDACTED] at [REDACTED]@[REDACTED].com

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[http://www.\[REDACTED\].com/archivesearch/local_story_014105408.html/resources_prin...](http://www.[REDACTED].com/archivesearch/local_story_014105408.html/resources_prin...) 2/20/2010

APPENDIX E

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE FOR HARRISVILLE

APPENDIX F

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE FOR STAFFORD SPRINGS

May 13, 2008

resigns superintendent's post

During a meeting Monday night, the Board of Education approved the resignation of Superintendent , effective June 30, "with great sorrow and apprehension."

"Public Schools is a special place, and I will sing the praises of this school district for the rest of my life," said Superintendent in announcing his resignation on Monday night. " and I have been blessed during our time here. Our love for our community will not diminish."

During his tenure as superintendent, has guided the district through ever-tightening budgets, a school bond issue and sales tax plan to generate funds for capital improvements, numerous construction projects, and changes to the district's grade-level structure.

In announcing his resignation, thanked all the members of the school board, past and present, with whom he has worked during his tenure. He expressed hope that the positive relationship they have established will continue after he left. Hurst also thanked all the teachers, staff and administrators at for working so hard to provide a quality education for the children of .

"The work has been great, and I hope the relationships we have established will be enduring," said . "This is a very special place when all of us are doing what we need to be doing for our boys and girls."

also offered his gratitude to people of the community for embracing him.

" is very unique in that it values education more than any other community I can imagine," said . "Certainly while the staff has provided the leadership for what we've accomplished, the community has given us the impetus to move forward."

The board approved a contract with the Oklahoma State School Board Association for assistance with the search for a new superintendent.

According to the Schools Web site, that school board hired as its new superintendent Monday night. The Web site did not indicate how much will be paying ; he was making about \$113,000 a year at .

Director of Curriculum and Instruction presented the board with the Oklahoma Office of Accountability's 2007 District Report Card. The report details socioeconomic data about the

community, information on the school district, and the result's of the district's standardized tests scores from 2006-2007. "Our report is very good and we wanted to share this with you," said [REDACTED].

The district is compared to the average of all schools from across the state, and also to districts of roughly the same size with similar socioeconomic backgrounds. For [REDACTED], those communities include [REDACTED], among others. "Our students scored about the group average in every area except fifth-grade writing, sixth-grade math and seventh-grade math," said [REDACTED]. "We've done some things in sixth grade to address math specifically for this year."

Test scores cover students from third through eighth grades, and end-of-instruction exams for high school students in Algebra I, English II, U.S. History and Biology I.

"As Mr. [REDACTED] would say, we educate all of God's children here, and I think we do a very good job at it," said [REDACTED].

Each student in the district will receive a copy of the report card at the end of the school year to present to their parent, along with their report cards.

[REDACTED] High School Principal Dr. [REDACTED] reminded the community that in case of rain during the [REDACTED] graduation Friday, May 23, the ceremony will be held in the morning Saturday, May 24.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX G

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE FOR PALMDALE

February 19, 2008

board's superintendent search continues to progress

Staff reports

The Public Schools Board of Education continues to make progress as members search for the next superintendent.

The successful candidate will begin July 1, upon the retirement of current superintendent,

Last week, the board conducted an initial screening process of applicants, and Tuesday night continued to conduct initial interviews. The board now will determine which candidates to invite for additional interviews.

"We are not hurrying through the process," President said. "We want to take our time and find the best candidate for this community."

In December, the board engaged the services of Oklahoma State School Board Association to conduct a regional search. , with OSSBA, has visited every school site to gather direct input from members of the staff. Additionally, several smaller meetings have been hosted to provide an opportunity for community and civic leaders, PTA officers and administrative staff to identify goals, objectives and criteria for selecting superintendent candidates.

Board members also have asked four community members to serve as advisory members on the search committee. Community representatives are , , and .

"The board is very grateful for the time and expertise these community representatives have dedicated to finding the right superintendent for ," said. "The community input — from the surveys to the meetings — has been very helpful to this process."

announced his retirement in December, after more than four decades in education and 24 years at the helm of . Candidates interested in applying for the positions should request and return applications to: , Oklahoma State School Boards Association, 2801 N. Lincoln Blvd., Suite 125, Oklahoma City, OK 73105 or call (405) 528-3571. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled.

VITA

MICHAEL LYNN SIMPSON

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: USING SEARCH CONSULTANTS IN SUPERINTENDENT SEARCHES
FROM THE BOARD MEMBER PERSPECTIVE

Major Field: Educational Administration

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born May 27, 1968, Amarillo, TX

Education: Graduated from Stillwater High School, May 1986; received Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education from Oklahoma State University, December 1991; Masters of Arts in Kinesiology from Sam Houston State University, May, 1993.

Professional Experiences: Employed as assistant basketball coach at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, TX (1991-1993). Employed as a high school teacher in Apache, OK (1993-1996) and Blackwell, OK (1996-2000). Employed as athletic director in Stillwater, OK (2000-2008). Employed as assistant superintendent in Ponca City, OK (2008- current).

Name: Michael L. Simpson

Date of Degree: December, 2010

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: USING SEARCH CONSULTANTS IN SUPERINTENDENT
SEARCHES FROM THE BOARD MEMBER PERSPECTIVE

Pages in Study: 127

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major Field: Educational Administration

Scope and Method of Study: Qualitative research to collect data from two sources:

- 1) Face-to-face interviews with school board members representing four Oklahoma School Districts; 2) Newspaper articles.

Findings and Conclusions: Data from the study indicate that time availability and personnel expertise are determining factors in the decision to select a search consultant. The consultant advised each board about issues of employment law and appropriate interviewing practices. Despite the assistance of an outside person with expertise, the process involved more work and much greater time than anticipated. Superintendents in the sample were selected from the available candidate pool, but no evidence existed that they were recruited; selections were from a pool of candidates who submitted applications. Results supported school districts desiring to hire an internal candidate do not need the services of a search consultant if a quality candidate is available. Board members believed the presence of a consultant in the process provided connections to improve the candidate pool while also bringing credibility to the process. All board members indicated they would support the use of a consultant again in the event of a superintendent vacancy.

The decision making models of Wayne Hoy and John Tarter guided the theoretical framework of the study. The Satisficing Theory of the Administrative Model of decision making along with the Shared Decision Making model were relevant to this study. Satisficing Theory looks for satisfactory solutions to a problem; final selections were limited to candidates who showed interest in the position through submitting an application; final selections were the best of the satisfactory options. Each school district had a component of involvement for the board, staff or community based on needs identified by the board. Boards shared a segment of their decision making process with an appropriate group.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Bernita Krumm
