AN INVESTIGATION OF JIM COLLINS'S *GOOD TO GREAT* AND APPLICATIONS FOR RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THEIR LEADERS

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Doctor of Education

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled:

AN INVESTIGATION OF JIM COLLINS'S *GOOD TO GREAT* AND APPLICATIONS FOR RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THEIR LEADERS

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And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Dr. Dan Beard and Dr. Debbie Beard, thank you for instilling in me the value of education. The sacrifices you have made to put me in a place where I can achieve any of my dreams will never be forgotten. I was always proud to answer the phone when someone would say "Could I speak to Dr. Beard," and I would respond with, "Which one, my mom or my dad?" I will forever be proud to say I am your son. Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

The difference between Level 5 Leaders (Collins, 2001) of rural school districts and other effective/competent leaders of rural school districts were examined in this study. The case study compared Level 5 Superintendents and other effective/competent Superintendents in terms of budget management, academic performance, recruitment and retention of teachers, and their district core values. Level 5 Superintendents in this study did not show any significant effect on district budget balances or base teacher salary when compared to the other leaders. The Level 5 Superintendents' school districts did have a greater positive effect on their district's academic performance in scores on their Missouri Annual Performance Report when compared to the other leaders. In addition, Level 5 Superintendents have more success in recruiting and retaining teaching staff and an increased awareness of district core values within their teaching staff.

Section One – Introduction to Dissertation

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In 2001, Jim Collins published a groundbreaking book based on his research of why some companies are able to make the jump from being a "good" company to being a "great" company. In his work, Collins outlined the keys to making that jump as a model for other businesses and as a way of noting why others never make that jump. In recent years, many public school districts have faced the question of how they can take their schools to the next level in an age of increased criticism and accountability. No list can be found of key factors that help a school district move from being a "good" school to being a "great" school. In particular, rural school districts encounter specific problems that make this move from good to great an even more interesting dilemma. A major factor in keeping rural districts who are achieving moderate or worse performance reaching high performance is linked to those districts having high poverty and lack of effective leadership (Bell, 2001).

Much of Collins (2001) work focused on the leadership in large companies. Leadership plays a large role in school districts as well. No research reveals a specific curriculum or method of teaching that is the secret to high performance in high poverty schools today, but what they all have in common is excellent leadership (Carter, 2000). If rural school districts wish to move from being "good" to "great," they must then need effective leadership. Not only is there a list of specific traits that these leaders must possess, but also skills must be developed in order to combat the issues that rural districts encounter that not all school districts face today.

But, the issue of achieving high performance in rural schools does not stop at leadership. There are many other unique challenges that face rural school districts, such as, high poverty rates, lack of academic motivation of rural students, funding issues,

teacher quality, and teacher retention and training. In order for those districts to reach high performance, given the multitude of factors that are present, there needs to be a method to address each factor so that students in those districts succeed and in turn the communities in those rural districts thrive as well.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, there has been an array of research on the achievement gaps that are prevalent in urban districts, low-income districts, and between ethnicities. Included in the numerous studies on those topics are Finigan-Carr, Copeland-Linder, Haynie, and Cheng's (2014) compiled research on engaging urban parents in parenting interventions. Basch (2011) investigated how diet and nutrition of urban youth impacted academic achievement. The lack of opportunities for more enriching and engaging learning opportunities of students in urban schools was the focus of Reis and Renzulli (2010). Wilkins (2014) investigated student and teacher relationships in urban districts. These are just a few examples showing the depth and variety of research that covers those topics in urban districts.

A multitude of research exists on leadership and high performing schools as well. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003), synthesized three decades of research on the effects of leadership practices on student achievement. They were able to identify 21 leadership responsibilities that were significantly associated with student achievement in schools, providing leaders with a framework by which to improve their schools. Newman, King, and Youngs (2000) discovered school leaders are the crucial variable affecting the instructional quality and student achievement. Research also describes the

effect an administrator has on the creation and implementation of programs. Wahlstrom, Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) say that student-learning gains only occur when administrators in charge believe the improvement from a program was possible.

While much of that research is informative and needed to help us solve and address issues in public education in the United States, there is far fewer research dealing with low-income rural school districts and performance. What we know from the research is that lack of successful leadership is a problem in many rural, low-income school districts (Lamkin, 2006). Rural school districts have a shortage of quality applicants for administrative jobs due to the many obstacles that face rural districts. Obstacles such as limited resources, resistances to change, financial compensation, and isolation, make rural school districts unattractive for many qualified applicants (Barker, 1986; DeYoung, 1995; and Stephens & Turner, 1988). Cruzeiro and Boone (2009) found many rural districts often hire new school leaders from within the district due to the shortage of applicants for administrative positions, often these leaders gain experience in the district and then leave for more well-paying administrative jobs in larger districts (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). Other research suggests that many of the problems facing rural districts in recruiting qualified leaders are the same for recruiting and retaining quality teachers (Harde & Sullivan, 2008; Monk, 2007; Erwin, Winn, & Erwin, 2011). Collins (2001) would identify this process as "getting the right people on the bus" and in "the right seats on the bus."

While we know rural districts face many issues and those issues have an effect on performance, why some rural districts are successful, and others are not has only been a

small focus of educational researchers. In particular, the distinguishing characteristics of rural districts achieving consistently high performance and to what role leadership plays in those districts has all but been ignored. This lack of research creates a problem for many rural districts hoping to find leaders who will generate long term, high performance, or "great" results.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to use some of the framework and ideas Collins (2001) had for businesses and investigate their value and applicability for rural school districts in terms of student performance and the leadership of those schools. If indeed a set of distinguishing characteristics exist in businesses that allow them to move from good businesses to great businesses, then there should be a specific set of distinguishing characteristics that rural school districts have that allow them to move from good performing districts to great performing districts. Collins discusses this somewhat in *Good to Great and the Social Sectors (2005)* (p 3). He says the issues forming the framework for non-business entities include Level 5 Leadership, Getting the Right People on the Bus, Calibrating Success, the Economic Engine, and Building a Brand.

Collins (2001) calls the leaders who are able to take companies from good to great, "Level 5 Leaders." He outlines the traits, characteristics, and skills of those leaders in his research. The intent of this study is to investigate rural school districts in Missouri in regards to the framework set by Collins (2005). More specifically, the study examines the variables contributing to rural schools moving from "good" to "great" under a Level 5 Leader as outlined by Collins (2001). The study will examine the steps a Level 5 Leader

takes in terms of Getting the Right People on the Bus (Recruiting and Retaining Teachers), Calibrating Success (District Performance), the Economic Engine (District Financial Health), and Building a Brand (District's Core Values).

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are

1. Is there a difference in Level 5 Leaders and other effective/competent leaders in terms of how they recruit and retain quality teachers in rural schools?
2. Is there a difference in a Level 5 Leader and other effective/competent leaders in terms of budget management in rural schools?
3. Is there a difference in a Level 5 Leaders in rural schools and other effective/competent leaders in terms of the core values set by the district?
4. When comparing Level 5 Leaders in rural schools to other effective/competent leaders, is there a difference in district performance based on Missouri's Annual Performance Report (APR)?

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

A major concept of this research stems from Jim Collin's work in his book, *Good to Great* (2001). In his book, Collins (2001) notes a difference between good organizations and great organizations. In particular, his focus is on the principles and practices that are adopted by corporations who make the leap from a good corporation to a great corporation. In his book he has researched some of the top companies and

identifies the common principles that have allowed them to make the leap from being very good companies to being great companies. In particular he discusses the traits that identify a leader as a "Level 5 leader". Collins argues that a "Level 5 leader is – an individual who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will" are the catalysts for the transformation of a good company to a great company (p. 21). Northouse (2013) would define part of this leadership style of portraying humility in leadership as a "servant leader" behavior. Northouse builds much of his discussion on servant leadership from Greenleaf (1970), who coined the term servant leadership. Spears (2002) developed the 10 characteristics of servant leadership that were developed from Greenleaf's research. Many of those characteristics align with Collins (2001) definition of a Level 5 leader. In addition to defining a Level 5 leader, in his research, he discusses how these leaders can grow to be Level 5 leaders by "practicing good-to-great disciplines of Level 5 leaders."

In Getkin's article (2007), he provides a couple of definitions of greatness in an educational setting. Getkin (2007) says that greatness can be defined as a "continuous pursuit rather than a final destination" (p 16). He goes on to say that internally it is "inspiring to an organization and its stakeholders," (p 16) and that external greatness is seen when other organizations inquire about how it is able to achieve the things that it does. Getkin (2007) also discusses the changes that have occurred and need to occur in school leadership, which he says "is the single most important ingredient in determining the degree of greatness" (p 17) a school will reach.

Howard and Rice-Crenshaw (2006) have researched and developed a model for school reform that includes research on leadership styles. Their research in South

Carolina schools shows that performance of schools increased when its leaders became more holistic in their leadership style. They discuss the four leadership styles and say that a school leader "should be able to use the most appropriate leadership style that the situation dictates" (p 406). They also discuss that only around 3% of leaders actually have this "situational leadership" trait. Northouse (2013) states this type of situational leadership is seen as effective because it "requires that a person adapt his or her style to the demands of different situations" (p 99). Onorato (2013) also discusses leadership styles. In particular, he discusses intensively transformational leadership in schools. He defines the transformational leader as "leadership for change" (p 38). He also quotes Avolio & Bass (1988) in their discussion on transformational leadership by saying that transformational leaders "do not merely react to environmental circumstances, they attempt to shape and create them" (p 38).

Research examined the relationship between socioeconomic status and the performance of students in schools. For example, the U.S. Department of Education (2001) found that students from high-poverty schools scored significantly lower than other students and that school districts with the highest percentages of low-income students also scored lower than other schools with lower percentages of low-income students. This study is not the only research that shows that students from low socioeconomic households routinely do not have as high of performance as those students who are from a higher socioeconomic household. There is a variety of individual studies and group research that show this same trend (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997; Reeves, 2009; Levin, 2007; Pellino, 2007; Butler, 2006; Nelson,

2006; Rowan et al., 2004). Students from these low-socioeconomic backgrounds consistently score below average regardless of race or ethnicity (Bergeson, 2006).

The research also shows a significant decrease in performance as the extent of the poverty increases (Smith, Brooks-Gunn, and Kiebanov, 1997). Students who are more likely to fail in school are often considered at-risk students as a result of their low socioeconomic status (Leroy and Symes, 2001). Mulford and others (2007) spent time researching high-poverty communities and the schools that serve them in Tasmania. In *Successful Principalship of High-performance Schools in High-poverty Communities*, they discussed many of the problems that result in high-poverty schools and surveyed 195 schools in hopes of gaining data on successful school principalships. In their findings, they concluded that high-performing schools in high-poverty areas had the common characteristic of successful, high-performing leadership.

A good basis of a study on rural students and academic motivation towards academic success is also prevalent. Research on rural students and school performance has taken many forms. Approximately 30% of students in the United States attend what would be considered a rural school district, yet 6% of research studies are done in rural schools (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). Given that the research has underrepresented the population of students attending rural schools, we are able to identify some characteristics of rural schools and the struggles that those districts often encounter in their schools. We also know, for example, from Hardre, Crowson, Debacker, and White (2007) that rural school districts must work harder to create a vision for their students' academic futures than other districts, as academic motivations of those students are

different than others. Typically rural students are further from higher education opportunities than students in suburban and urban districts.

Research also indicates many factors that can effect the achievement of these rural students. One such factor in which Rainey and Murova (2004) state in their research is that "parent's education greatly influences the quality of education of their children." In addition they list factors such as teachers' experience, community attitudes toward education, and school expenditures on technology as other factors influencing student achievement in rural schools (p 2404).

A large percentage of rural areas are also poverty areas. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2004), approximately 20% of children in America's rural communities are poor, a figure that is higher than the poverty percentage in urban areas. In addition, rural income averages 25% below the urban average income. Not only are students facing the financial constraints at home, but rural schools often face financial constraints themselves. The community businesses often in low-income areas face the same constraints and often are unable to help or provide support like than can in other school districts (Flora et al., 2003). Property tax in rural populations limits revenue in those school districts and many state aid formulas are inadequate at noting factors often seen in rural schools (Imazeki & Reschovsky (2003). Rural districts often are not able to spend as much on students in their schools. Funding disparities in high-spending districts to low-spending disticts are close to 3 to 1 in terms of how much they spend per pupil (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012).

As mentioned, a multitude of factors, influences, and struggles routinely face rural school districts. However, a vast amount of those studies on rural schools show that

school leadership plays an important role in the success of the district. Loveland (2002), has investigated the challenges and rewards of rural school leadership. DeRuych (2005) studied the importance of strong instructional leadership in rural schools. Fullan (2001) dives deep into the leadership and the role that leaders play in school districts. Fullan (2001) says that leaders structure culture and that building this culture is "hard, labor intensive work (p 44). McEwan (2003) identifies leaders as the individuals who set the example for the school and that their example can have a positive or detrimental effect on the culture of the school.

Given all the research on low income districts, rural districts, and leadership in schools, it seems one could see the importance of all three of these factors. The challenges facing rural districts and the problems that low income areas possess, it seems appropriate to study how leaders can best tackle these problems in those schools. In particular, it seems that researching the impact a Level 5 Leader might have in rural and low income districts would help close some of the gaps in the research.

Design of the Study

Setting

This study utilized mixed methods methodology, as defined by Creswell (2009), through the use of a cross-sectional survey to assess the leadership style of superintendents in a sample of rural Missouri K-12 school districts. Creswell (2009) defines mixed methods as "an approach to inquiry that combines both qualitative and quantitative forms" (p 4). Mixed methods yields more overall strength of a study than does quantitative or qualitative research by themselves (Creswell, 2009). Mixed methods

design was used as it neutralizes or cancels biases that may be found in only researching using a single method (Creswell, 2009).

A survey consisting of 45 questions from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was given to all rural superintendents in a Southern Missouri Region to determine self-perception of their leadership behaviors. Information was also gathered from schools in terms of budget balances and district performance on the Missouri Annual Performance Reports obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Following the surveys, a group of 6 superintendents were selected for interviews. The superintendents were selected from all the surveyed superintendents using stratified selection, three who were identified as Level 5 Leaders based on the survey and three who identified as Below Level 5 Leaders, yet still effective/competent leaders in their school districts. The superintendents were next interviewed for their perceptions of how they recruit and retain teachers, manage the district budget, and on the core values of their district. A case study method of research, as defined by Merriam (2009), was also used in order to gather information and analyze data to answer the research questions. Merriam (2009) defines a case study as an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit" (p 203).

Participants

Participants for this study were determined using data obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The study identified districts in the state of Missouri that are considered rural school districts. A rural district for this survey were defined as a public school district with K-12 student populations

under 1500 students, located in communities no larger than 5000 people, and are at least 20 miles from communities larger than 25,000 people (based on information obtained from the United States Department of Agriculture, 2015). Data was collected from school districts using a nonrandom selected sample (Creswell, 2009) of schools that meet the rural definition. A nonrandom sample was used as all schools who meet the criteria of the rural definition were surveyed. Of the schools surveyed, data was collected on their Annual Performance Report (APR) obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to identify district performance. Districts were classified into high performing districts, average performing districts, and low performing districts. High performance over an extended period of time was defined as a school who has maintained an APR above 95%, and have done so consistently for at least the last 5 years. Districts were also classified into budget management groups based on district balances and teacher salary data. Healthy budget districts are districts with balances above 25% and teacher salaries in the top 25% tier in their region. Recruiting and retaining teachers and district core values data from the survey was used to identify differences in districts and differences from districts with Level 5 Leaders from those without.

Data Collection Tools

This study relied on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire for identifying Level 5 Leaders for the study. Interviews were then conducted of both Level 5 leaders and those not identifying as Level 5 Leaders. An interview protocol was used to identify the superintendents' perceptions of effective practice surrounding the areas discussed in

the research questions. This data collection tool was used as Fink (2013) says they are "best when you need information directly from people about what they believe, know, and think" (p 24). The survey was given to the superintendent of the school to assess their self-perception of their leadership style in reference to a Level 5 Leader. The survey was emailed to the principal and will be answered electronically.

Data Analysis

After the data was collected from this study, the data was analyzed to look for patterns and themes in the data. Charts were made that identify what leadership style the superintendent has been identified with, using the data from the superintendent survey. Using t-test to identify any significant difference between the expected outcomes and observed outcomes of the variables. The variables being the recruiting and retaining of teachers, school district performance, district financial health, and the district core values. The charts should help to display any similarities or differences in style of leadership of the different school districts.

All research questions were addressed for both Level 5 Leaders and non-level 5 leaders. Research question number 1, on recruiting and retaining qualified teachers, was addressed qualitatively from the interview protocol given to the selected superintendents. Research question number 2, on budget management, was addressed both qualitatively through the interview protocol of the selected superintendents and quantitatively by identifying district financial health through data collected from DESE. Research question 3, on district core values, was addressed qualitatively through the interview protocol given to the superintendents. Research question 4, on district

performance was addressed based on data collected from the Missouri Annual Performance Report from the schools used in the study.

Limitations, Assumptions, and Design Controls

As with most research there are some limitations to be expected. One limitation for this study is the lack of consistency of superintendents to stay in school districts for an extended period of time. We likely see a smaller sample size of Level 5 Leaders as a result of this inconsistency of individuals to remain in districts for an extended period of time. Another limitation of the research will be the role that other administrators play in each of the rural districts. The superintendent will be the focus on the study; however the leadership of the superintendent's building-level principals will not be specifically addressed. In addition, there could be unforeseen circumstances at the school that is surveyed that will create a bias or discrepancy in the data that results from the study. There will always be unknown factors that cannot be truly discovered in just one study.

There are assumptions of the researcher in this study as well. One assumption was that the superintendents that are surveyed answered the survey questions honestly and candidly. We will have to assume the superintendents surveyed took the survey with the sincere desire to aide in the study of the subject. Another assumption is that the Annual Performance Report (APR) is a good indicator of how a school district is performing. This study is not a study of whether a district with a high APR score is performing high, rather we will assume that a high APR does truly indicate high performance. The study assumes that the major factors determining the health of a district are its teacher salaries and its budget balances. There is so much that goes into

school finance, however, these two factors are often measured for districts by DESE and teacher organizations. Finally, the study assumes that the superintendent plays a pivotal role in setting and carrying out the core values of a school district.

In order to strengthen the data of the study, certain controls were put into place. The study was given to only superintendents of rural school districts (as define previously) in the state of Missouri. The surveys were all given to superintendents during the same point in the school year. In addition, all superintendents were given the same survey. Finally, the study compared data of the same years when making comparisons between districts.

Definitions of Key Terms

1. **Level 5 Leader** – a leader with humility and a will to achieve great things (Collins, 2001). A Level 5 Leader is a mixture of a transformational leader and a servant leader.
2. **Rural school district** - a public school district with K-12 student populations under 1500 students, located in communities no larger than 5000 people, and are at least 20 miles from communities larger than 25,000 people (United States Department of Agriculture, 2015).
3. **High performing school district** – an APR (Annual Performance Report) score of 95% or above (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education).

Significance of the Study

The need for a systematic set of procedures, data, and research that would help school leaders and school boards in rural districts to increase student achieve in their school is drastically needed. With specific research that both identifies the style of leadership and the important traits of great school districts that superintendents lead out, rural school districts would be able to mark a path to follow in the every changing world of public education. This study aims to identify whether a Level 5 Leader can lead to rural districts having high achievement over an extended period of time. In addition, the districts will be examined in hopes of uncovering certain characteristics those highly successful, or "great" schools are able to create in the areas of teacher recruitment and retention, student performance, financial health, and core values. This information greatly benefits educational leaders such as superintendents and school boards in those rural districts. Not only would the leaders know the impact a Level 5 Leader could have on their district, but they would know what to look for when hiring administrators to work in their district.

This research has many implications for me personally. As a leader in a rural high poverty district, I am always looking for ways in which I can help our school achieve the goals and objectives we have set out to accomplish. In my study of leadership styles, traits, and characteristics I was given the understanding of a multitude of different styles and left wondering what would work the best in my district or in other districts like mine. If I am able to discover certain information that would lead more success for our district by simple changes in my own personal style or to aid those other administrators in my district, then I have made a difference in the lives of students.

This research provides contributions to the existing literature base. This study got down to the simple basis for rural school leaders. With the variance of information out there, it is hard to find research that pinpoints a specific idea for rural schools and what leaders can do in those schools. This study specifies the most effective leadership style and the aspects that the style can have on creating a culture that leads to rural school districts having long term high performance as a result.

Summary

The importance that superintendents play in school districts is extremely important. This study attempts to shed light on ways superintendents and school districts can achieve higher performance in their schools by identify the most effective leadership styles of leaders and how that in turn speaks to the culture of the rural school through the areas that Collins (2009) points as the keys to great social sector organizations. Collins's (2001) work is a benchmark in the business world as to what makes companies great. It is this researcher's hope that this study begins the process of shedding light as to how principles in Collins's work can relate to school districts as well. In particular, high-poverty rural school districts in Missouri.

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Section Two – Practitioner Setting for the Study

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Introduction

Every school district in the United States faces a multitude of problems of practice. There are issues with lack of parent involvement, teacher evaluation methods, family poverty, student absenteeism, adequate classroom sizes, funding, discipline, and low test scores, just to name a few. While each and every district faces problems such as these, they all face a unique set of problems tailored specifically to their communities, students, and staff. However, there are some school districts that consistently have many of the same types of problems. One such group is school districts in rural areas. Most rural school districts face problems such as low socioeconomic status of families, lack of retaining effective teachers and principals, and complex special education needs without the same resources as other suburban and urban districts (Strange, Johson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012; Erwin, Winn, & Ervin, 2011; Monk, 2007). All the while trying to combat these issues and others without increasing budgetary support needed to address the issues (Johnson, 2006). The setting for this study is rural school districts in the state of Missouri.

History of Organization

Rural school districts have been around since the American Education system was established in colonial times in the mid-1700s. Still today, rural school districts make up nearly 1/3 of the American school children who attend public school (United States Department of Education, 2003; Ashton & Duncan, 2012). When school districts were first established, they were small organizations often centered around a single schoolmaster or teacher who served multiple roles within the schools. Because these

rural schools were so small, they lacked the number of positions available in larger schools in more populated areas of the country (Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, and Slate, 2008). As the American public education system has grown over the years, many of the rural districts have as well; however rural districts still differ from urban and suburban districts in many of the same factors. They still lack the number of positions available to the larger districts. As a result, administrators in these smaller districts are forced to wear "many hats" to cover the responsibilities a district has, which in larger districts a separate position may fill (Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, and Slate, 2008). The same is true for many rural school districts in the state of Missouri.

Rural school districts have historically been held to the same standards as all other schools. For many years, the success of any school district was evaluated by the districts own local communities. In more recent history, however, there has been far more control taken by the state and federal governments. Standards and accreditation are set by state and federal governments. These standards are the same no matter whether you live within a state. There are also certain national standards of measurement as well. The ACT or SAT test is the same test whether you are a student in a rural area or urban area for example. In recent years, national standards and programs, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, that tie federal funding of schools to achievement have increased the importance of school districts to achieve academic success and improvement in performance. Government mandates of policies, such as No Child Left Behind, have added to the already heavy workload of district administrators, created more financial inequity, and expanded the responsibilities of these administrators, especially in rural districts (Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, and Slate, 2008). Though no one would argue that a

rural school student should get a different education or be given lower standards than a student in a more populated district, it is important to note when studying student achievement in areas where community resources are often less than many suburban districts in many states (Johnson, 2006). These issues will be further addressed in section 3 on the scholarly review where we further note issues historically facing rural school districts.

Organizational Analysis

Rural school districts are organizationally structured similar to all other districts in the state of Missouri. However, as mentioned above, with fewer school employees, many employees fill multiple slots on the organization chart. Rural districts in Missouri operate with an elected school board that sets the policies that govern the school. In addition they establish the overall goals and direction of most local districts. The school board employs a superintendent to run the school district. The superintendent of the district is the head of the administrative team. The superintendent oversees the four major frames Bolman and Deal (2008) define as the structure in organizations: (1) Human Resource Frame; addresses the needs of people in the organization. (2) Political Frame; addresses the problems of interest groups and individuals agendas. (3) Symbolic Frame; addresses the culture in the organization. (4) Structural Frame; the strategy, goals, tasks, responsibilities, and procedures of the organization. In some smaller rural districts, the superintendent may also act as the building principal as they may be the only administrator employed in the district. Other larger rural districts may have elementary, middle, and high school principals and/or assistant principals.

Rural school districts vary on the structure of their teachers. Larger districts may separate students and teachers into elementary, middle, and high schools. They may create departments of common teachers, such as the science department of teachers. However, many other rural districts may only have one building K-12 or K-8. The teachers in these schools may also teach multiple subjects to multiple grade levels. Outside of the basic structure of the school districts organization, the roles and responsibilities of the employees varies depending on the size and employment capacity of the school district. Rural districts also face organizational challenges when hiring individuals. Rural schools often have a difficult time finding qualified staff for their districts, as recruitment of teachers and administrators falls short when compared to larger districts (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). In addition, retaining those effective teachers and principals is just as difficult (Erwin, Winn, & Erwin, 2011; Monk, 2007).

Leadership Analysis

Rural schools play an extremely important role in most of their communities. Administrators in those rural schools are often one of the most recognized individuals in those communities. Often times the school district is one of the largest employers in those small communities as well. Northouse (2013) defines leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (pg 5). The superintendent in a rural school district is the leader of the school. Superintendents in rural school districts face a myriad of leadership problems.

Leadership has extreme importance for schools as Getkin (2007) says, leadership is the single greatest factor in determining the success of a school. Northouse (2013) did extensive work on transformational leadership and servant leadership or what Collins

calls a Level 5 Leaders. Transformational leaders place great emphasis on the needs of their followers, according to Northouse (p. 201). He also suggests that transformational leaders are leaders who motivate others to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the organization. In addition, transformational leaders are able to create vision and direction for their organization and place an emphasis on developing a set of high moral values (p. 200). Avolio & Bass (1988) said that transformational leaders "do not merely react to environmental circumstances, they attempt to shape and create them" (p.38). Burns (1978) first defined transformational leadership as leaders and their followers who raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation within their organization. Later, Bass (1985) identified a transformational leader as one who models integrity, sets goals, encourages others, provides support and recognition, stirs emotions in people, gets people to look beyond themselves, and inspires.

Kotter (1990) distinguishes between leadership and management. He says that management is "coping with complexity," while leadership is "coping with change." Many rural leaders struggle to find a balance between leadership and management with their time and energy already stretched thin (Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, & Slate, 2008). In addition, rural school districts often must endure rapid and frequent turnover of their school leaders (Lamkin, 2006; Erwin, Winn, & Erwin, 2011; Monk, 2007)). While there is little to no specific data on Missouri superintendent turnover, there is more on other school leaders such as principals in Missouri. Baker et al (2010) found that in Missouri schools, approximately half of principals are no longer principals in the state after about 5 years (p. 551). In addition, 75% of Missouri principals have made at least one move to another school district (p. 551). Morford (2002) posed an important question when she

asked who is ultimately responsible for the instructional leadership of the school if the rural school leadership is turning over every year or two.

Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting

This research has major implications for rural schools and rural school leaders. Currently, there is little research on what already "good" performing schools can do in order to become "great" performing school districts as Collins (2001) would define. Even less is available when you break it down to rural school districts. This research aims to examine the variables that Collins (2001) outlines for organizations and identify how they contribute to rural schools becoming "great" schools. Specifically, it aims to identify a set of distinguishing characteristics that would help rural districts become "great" performing districts and in turn how a Level 5 Leader would lead out these characteristics in their school districts.

If school boards desire to hire superintendents who can lead their school to high sustained academic performance, this study is of specific importance as they can utilize the understanding of a Level 5 Leader in their hiring process. Superintendents in rural districts would find this research important as it will help identify major areas of importance in improving their school districts. It will also be useful for superintendents in the hiring of their other administrators in their district. For example, if a middle school building is underperforming or not achieving "great" status in their building, it may be that a Level 5 Leader needs to be put in place in the building in order to help the overall performance of the building improve.

The research presented in this report will also play an important role in helping the leaders of rural districts identify major areas of improvement that would help move a

district towards improvement. The research will examine variables identified in the exhaustive research of Collins (2001) and determine their importance in rural school districts. From this study, school boards, Superintendents, and administrative teams will be able to determine the effect leaders in rural school districts play in the areas of recruitment and retaining of teachers, effective budget management, setting of district core values, and district performance based on the Missouri Annual Performance Report.

Summary

Rural school districts have been around since the United States education system was first formed. There has always been a need to educate students in rural communities and that need will never go away. Today, rural districts outnumber those districts located in cities, suburban areas, and towns nationwide in terms of amounts of school districts (Chen, 2011). Rural districts range anywhere from successful to districts needing improvement. Many of the organization and leadership issues that rural districts face have also been around for an extensive period of time.

There is an extensive amount of research delving into identifying the problems rural schools encounter. Much of that will be discussed and expanded on in the literature section of this paper. However, there is little research available that identifies how an effective leader, in our case a Level 5 Leader, can bring about improvement in rural school districts. There is even less about what an already good performing school can do to become a great performing school. Collins (2001) work is an exhaustive study on this for businesses. This research brings a piece of that to rural school districts. In doing so, this research hopes to bring to light ways of improving, not simply to identify problems for rural school districts.

Part Three – Scholarly Review for the Study

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In 2001, Jim Collins published a groundbreaking book based on his research of why some companies are able to make the jump from being a "good" company to being a "great" company. In recent years, many public school districts have faced the question of how they can take their schools to the next level in the age of increased criticism and accountability. A major gap in rural districts achieving high performance from moderate or worse performance is greatly linked to their high poverty and lack of effective leadership (Bell, 2001).

No specific curriculum or method of teaching exists that is the secret to high performance in high poverty schools today, but what those schools do all have in common is excellent leadership (Carter, 2000; Baker, Punswick, & Belt, 2010; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004;Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Not only are there specific traits that these leaders must possess, but also specific skills must be developed in order to combat the issues that low income, rural districts encounter that not all other school districts face.

Characteristics of Rural School Districts

Research on rural students and school performance has taken many forms in recent years. Approximately 30% of students in the United States attend what would be considered a rural school district, yet 6% of research studies are done in rural schools (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008; Ashton & Duncan, 2012). The number of rural schools also outnumber schools located in cities, suburban areas, and towns (Ashton & Duncan, 2012). Given that the research has underrepresented the population of students attending rural schools, we are still able to identify characteristics of rural schools and the struggles

that those districts often encounter. Research also identifies many factors of those communities that can affect the achievement of these rural students.

We know, for example, from Hardre, Crowson, Debacker, and White (2007) that rural school districts must work harder to create a vision for their students' academic futures than other districts, as academic motivations of those students are different from others. Typically rural students are further from higher education opportunities than students in suburban and urban districts (White, 2007). Schools located in impoverished rural communities have dropout rates that are more than twice the national average (Provasnik et al., 2007).

A large percentage of rural areas are poverty areas (Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012). According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2004), approximately 20% of children in America's rural communities are poor. Not only are students facing the financial constraints at home, but rural schools often face financial constraints themselves (Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, & Slate, 2008; Monk, 2007; Johnson, 2006). The community businesses often in low-income areas face the same constraints and often are unable to help or provide support like than can in other school districts (Flora et al., 2003). Property tax in rural populations limits revenue in those school districts and many state aid formulas are inadequate at noting factors often seen in rural schools (Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003). In turn, rural districts often are not able to spend as much on students in their schools. Funding disparities in high-spending districts to low-spending disticts are close to 3 to 1 in terms of how much they spend per pupil (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012).

There are many other factors effecting rural schools that can make them different from non-rural schools. Rainey and Murova (2004) list factors such as teachers' experience, community attitudes toward education, and school expenditures on technology as other factors influencing student achievement in rural school (p. 2404). Other research has suggested that school districts have issues surrounding teacher recruitment and retention, community impacts, and resources to name a few (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). Rural schools have challenges retaining effective principals and teachers (Erwin, Winn, & Erwin, 2011; Monk, 2007). The organization of rural schools also plays a role in the teacher qualifications, as often times teachers must have multiple certifications and teach different grade levels and subject areas (Holloway, 2002). In addition, school leaders are stretched thin in their duties without increasing resources, and often routinely take on many different roles within the organization (Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, & Slate, 2008; Ashton & Duncan, 2012).

Leadership in Low-Income, Rural Districts

As mentioned, Collins (2001) notes a difference between good organizations and great organizations. In particular, his focus is on the principles and practices that are adopted by corporations who make the leap from a good corporation to a great corporation. In his book, he has researched some of the top companies and identifies the common principles that have allowed them to make the leap from being very "good" companies to being "great" companies. In particular, he discusses the traits that identify a leader as a "Level 5 leader." Collins argues that a "Level 5 leader is – an individual who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will" are the catalysts for the transformation of a good company to a great company (p. 21). Northouse (2013)

would define this leadership style of portraying humility in leadership as a "servant leader" behavior. Northouse builds much of his discussion on servant leadership from Greenleaf (1970), who coined the term servant leadership. Spears (2002) developed the 10 characteristics of servant leadership that were developed from Greenleaf's research. Many of those characteristics align with Collins (2001) definition of a Level 5 leader. In addition to defining a Level 5 leader, in his research, he discusses how these leaders can grow to be Level 5 leaders by "practicing good-to-great disciplines of Level 5 leaders."

In Getkin's article (2007), Reforming or Changing Educational Leadership, he provides a couple of definitions of greatness in an educational setting. Getkin says that greatness can be defined as a "continuous pursuit rather than a final destination" (p. 16). He goes on to say that internally it is "inspiring to an organization and its stakeholders," (p. 16) and that external greatness is seen when other organizations inquire about how it is able to achieve the things that it does. Getkin (2007) also discusses the changes that have occurred and need to occur in school leadership, which he says "is the single most important ingredient in determining the degree of greatness" (p. 17) a school will reach.

There is ample research on leadership styles in school leaders. Howard and Rice-Crenshaw (2006) have researched and developed a model for school reform that includes research on leadership styles. Their research in South Carolina schools shows that performance of schools increased when its leaders became more holistic in their leadership style. They discuss the four leadership styles and say that a school leader "should be able to use the most appropriate leadership style that the situation dictates" (p. 406). They also discuss that only around 3% of leaders actually have this "situational leadership" trait. Northouse (2013) states that situational leadership is seen as effective

because it "requires that a person adapt his or her style to the demands of different situations" (p. 99). Onorato (2013) also discusses leadership styles. In particular, he discusses intensively transformational leadership in schools. He defines the transformational leader as "leadership for change" (p 38). He also quotes Avolio & Bass (1988) in their discussion on transformational leadership by saying that transformational leaders "do not merely react to environmental circumstances, they attempt to shape and create them" (p. 38).

A multitude of research also exists on leadership and high performing schools. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003), synthesized three decades of research on the effects of leadership practices on student achievement. They were able to identify 21 leadership responsibilities that were significantly associated with student achievement in schools, providing leaders with a framework by which to improve their schools. Newman, King, and Youngs (2000) found that school principals are the crucial variable affecting the instructional quality and student achievement. Research also describes the effect a principal has on the creation and implementation of programs as well. Wahlstrom, Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) say that student-learning gains only occur when principals in charge believe that the improvement from a program was possible. Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff (2002) found that schools with lower student outcomes have less experienced principals.

A large amount of research exists on school leaders and their effectiveness or lack of in high poverty communities and schools as well. Mulford and others (2007) spent time researching high-poverty communities and the schools that serve them in Tasmania. In Successful Principalship of High-performance Schools in High-poverty Communities,

they discuss many of the problems that result in high-poverty schools and surveyed 195 schools in hopes of gaining data on successful school principalships. In their findings, they concluded that high-performing schools in high-poverty areas had the common characteristic of successful, high-performing leadership.

Another major problem with leaders in high-poverty schools is that it is hard to keep consistent school leaders. Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler (2006), found that principals in high-poverty schools often moved to other schools. They noted that principals with high leadership ratings had a shorter tenure in high-poverty schools. Morford (2002) found that 9 out of 10 new rural principals left their positions within 3 years. Baker et al. (2010) found that in Missouri, 75% of principals moved to another school within a 5 year span (p. 551). They also discovered that approximately half of the principals were no longer principals in Missouri over that 5 year period (p. 551). This is not only a Missouri problem. Papa et al. (2002) found that around two-thirds of new principals leave with the first 6 years from the school they started in the state of New York. Fuller, Young, and Orr (2007) discovered that 50% of principals in Texas leave within 5 years and 75% within 10 years. As mentioned, finances are often a struggle for rural school districts. Superintendents consider the financial side of the job as one of the most serious challenges according to Absheir, Harris, & Hopson (2011). They go on to say that many superintendents in rural schools do not have a background in budgeting or money management and that graduate schools do not spend proper time instructing on the topic (p. 1). McCurdy and Hymes (1992) discovered that rural superintendents may leave their jobs because of the demands on the job that wears them down. Tekniepe (2015) found that the fiscal stress of superintendency had an impact on superintendent

turnover. He discovered that superintendents in districts with low reserve balances were more likely to experience departure (p. 9). These are some of the factors that contribute to school leader turnover in rural school districts. Morford (2002) posed an important question when she asked who is ultimately responsible for the instructional leadership of the school if the rural school leadership is turning over every year or two.

As mentioned there are a multitude of factors, influences, and struggles that face rural school districts. However, a vast amount of those studies on rural schools show that school leadership plays an important role in the success of the district. Loveland (2002), has investigated the challenges and rewards of rural school leadership. DeRuych (2005) studied the importance of strong instructional leadership in rural schools. Fullan (2001) dives deep into the leadership and the role that leaders play in school districts. He argues that leader of a school is the central figure in the ability to create change and also to improve the educational experience of its students. He goes on to list five core competencies of leaders, as the ability to understand change, build relationships, having a moral purpose, the ability to create and share knowledge, and making coherence. McEwan (2003) identifies leaders as the individuals who set the example for the school and that a leader's example can have a positive or a detrimental effect on the culture of the school.

Socioeconomic Status and Student Performance

Vast arrays of research and studies have taken place to examine the relationship between socioeconomic status and the performance of students in schools. For example, the U.S. Department of Education (2001) found that students from high-poverty schools scored significantly lower than other students and that school districts with the highest

percentages of low-income students also scored lower than other schools with lower percentages of low-income students. This study is not the only research that shows that students from low socioeconomic households routinely do not have as high of performance as those students who are from a higher socioeconomic household. There is a variety of individual studies and group research that show this same trend (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997; Reeves, 2009; Levin, 2007; Pellino, 2007; Butler, 2006; Nelson, 2006; Rowan et al., 2004). Students from these low-socioeconomic backgrounds consistently score below average regardless of race or ethnicity (Bergeson, 2006). The research also shows a significant decrease in performance as extent of the poverty increases (Smith, Brooks-Gunn, and Kiebanov, 1997). Students who are more likely to fail in school are often considered at-risk students as a result of their low socioeconomic status (Leroy and Symes, 2001).

Researchers have identified that an achievement gap exists between the two household statuses. In fact, research has suggested that the achievement gap between high and low-income families is not only present but it is growing. The gap has shown to be as much as 40 percent larger among children born in 2001 than those who were born 25 years earlier (Reardon, 2011). The income achievement gap has also been shown to be almost twice as large as the black-white student achievement gap (Reardon, 2011).

A variety of factors have been found to contribute to the data as to what the reasons socioeconomics plays a role in student success. One such factor has been nutrition. Nutrition of a child can have an effect on student performance. Intelligence has been linked to health (Gray and Thompson, 2004) and overall child nutrition has been found in numerous studies to have a direct link to learning (Turner, Chriqui, &

Chaloupka, 2013; O'Dea & Mugride, 2012). Low-income households tend to have diets consisting of lower nutritional value (Taki et al., 2010). Recent studies have even indicated the presence of an achievement gap rooted in the health of students (London & Castrechini, 2011).

Children in low socioeconomic homes also face many obstacles when they enter the school setting in terms of vocabulary. Children in low socioeconomic families hear three times as few words by age 4 than children who grow up in upper-income families, resulting in those children learning fewer words when they are young (Hart & Risley, 1995). Students with a smaller vocabulary have been shown to be at higher risk of academic failure (Walker, Greenwood, Hart, & Carta, 1994). The initial reading competency of a child entering school has been linked to many home literacy environment factors, including how many books the parents own (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008).

The background and circumstances of the parents also plays a large role in the performance of students of low socioeconomic status. One such factor in which Rainey and Murova (2004) state in their research is that the education of the parents greatly influences the quality of education of their children. This research has been shown in countless other studies (Davis-Kean, 2005; Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2002; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Haveman & Wolfe, 1995; Nagin & Tremblay, 2001; Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997). In addition, parents who live in poverty have also been identified to being prone to a weakened ability to parent their children as a result of the emotional and psychological stress associated with living in poverty (Kaiser and Delaney, 1996).

There are also studies that focus specifically on the behaviors of students coming from low socioeconomic statuses as well. One such study done by Yazzie-Mintz (2007) indicated that students who were not in low-income programs consistently had higher levels of engagement than students who were identified as eligible for free or reduced lunch. Higher levels of engagement produce greater levels of academic achievement (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007).

Other research has suggested that even though children of low socioeconomic status face many obstacles towards student success, schooling can have dynamic effects on the success of students regardless of socioeconomic background. Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, Hutchins, (2011) have suggested that the school and the teacher are the primary factors in student motivation and achievement rather than the home environment. Bell (2001) found that teacher support predicted student interest in the subject and that in high-performing, high-poverty schools having learning goals and perceived competence had a positive effect on student achievement regardless of socioeconomic status. Teacher credentials, such as certification and licensure have shown to have a significant contribution to the achievement gaps of students as a result of the uneven distribution of teachers with certain credentials (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2010). A teacher's years of experience and quality of training has also been correlated to academic achievement (Gimbert, Bol, & Wallace, 2007).

School Leadership and Culture

Schein (1992) defines culture as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as

the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p. 12). Cross (1990) described school culture as the "intangible feel of a school" that can be felt when a person is present in a school. This culture reflects the school's "values, beliefs, and traditions," which characterize the school community and describe the relationship of student, teachers, parents, and administrators (p. 3). Cross goes on to state that the principal of a school is the cultural leader of the building. This job is not one to be taken lightly, nor is it an easy undertaking. Fullan (2001) says that leaders structure culture and that building this culture is "hard, labor-intensive work. (p. 44). Kruse and Louis (2010) identified features of school cultures that promoted success as ones that have trust, organizational learning and professional community.

Bolman and Deal (2003) note the importance of the role of culture when discussing the symbolic frame of an organization. They say that leaders who understand the significance of culture of an organization can shape a more cohesive and effective organization (p. 269). Bolman and Deal describe the many symbols that organizations have as the way that the organization reveals its culture. They symbols might be in the form of values, vision, heroes, stories, rituals, or even ceremonies of the organization (p. 254). They go on to describe that the culture of an organization is not only a product of the organization, but it is also a process (p. 269).

Many others have conducted research that indicates how leadership plays a major role in the effectiveness of a school and impacts its culture (Schmoker, 2006; Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005; Cotton, 2003). Still, other research has suggested that a principal's leadership cannot solely be explained through existing models of leadership and that school leaders must act in accordance and in response to the particular

needs of a school district (Day, 2003; Lazarido, 2007). Only focusing on leadership models of skills, traits, values, or types of leadership will not encompass all the factors that a leader must face in each individual district.

Conclusion

As the literature suggests, rural school districts face many challenges in order to maintain and achieve high performance. This performance becomes even more difficult when you try to achieve it consistently over an extended period of time. The information presented in this literature review is essential for rural schools to understand when trying to achieve at a consistent high level of student performance. Rural schools that have a student population with a high level of low socioeconomic level students must take many factors for consideration. Much of the research revolves around the challenges of urban low socioeconomic level students, though rural students face challenges on their own. With a multitude of evidence as to the importance and effect that school leaders have on the overall success of the school, the alarming rate of turn over is alarming. How rural schools will tackle the challenges they face is largely based on the impact the school leader has on the culture of the school.

The research on this topic is far from comprehensive. A large gap in the research exists in terms of what leaders in those districts specifically can do to help their schools reach that consistent, high performance. Yet another gap exists in what impact that leader is able to create and sustain on the culture of those rural districts that are achieving success. Further research is needed in order to develop a more conclusive and comprehensive understanding of a rural school leadership in order to help schools achieve future success.

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Section Four – Contribution to Practice

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Target Journal

School Administrator

Rationale for Target

School Administrator is a publication geared towards school leaders. It is published by the American Association of School Superintendents. The readers of the publication are typically school superintendents and other members of school districts who oversee a variety of areas in schools.

Plan for Submission

I will submit the article for publication upon the successful defense of my dissertation, target date in June of 2019. I will create an online account in order to submit the completed manuscript.

An Investigation of Jim Collins's *Good to Great* and Applications for Rural School Districts and Their Leaders.

Every day in school districts across the country, school leaders are faced with a myriad of tasks, challenges, struggles, as well as, opportunities. School leaders in rural school districts are certainly no different. Rural school districts, make up a large part of our educational system as they educate nearly 1/3 of the American school children who attend public school (United States Department of Education, 2003). The leadership of these districts is extremely important to the success of the school district. The quality of leadership in a school district can be the difference in a high performing school and a low performing school (Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2003; Newman, King, and Youngs, 2000; Wahlstrom, Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, and Anderson, 2010; McEway, 2003).

Rural school leaders face many problems associated with high poverty areas (Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012). Whether it is their location from higher education opportunities, their parents' education level, diets consisting of lower nutritional value, initial reading comprehension of kindergarten students, or emotional and psychological stress, rural school leaders must find ways to address problems resulting from poverty (Kaiser and Delaney, 1996; Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Taki et al., 2010; White, 2007). Rural school leaders must face the issues such as fiscal stress of their district, lack of highly qualified teachers, recruitment and retention of teachers, and funding disparities compared to other districts. (Tekniepe, 2015; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2010; Harde & Sullivan, 2008; Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012).

Jim Collins did extensive research on businesses for his book *Good to Great*, published in 2001. He discussed the factors that play a role in a business organization

being able to move from a "good" organization to "great" organization. One of the biggest factors Collins describes is that "great" organizations have "Level 5 Leaders" (p 22). Fullan (2001) argues that a leader of a school district is the central figure in the ability to create change and improve the educational experience of its students. If a Level 5 Leader has such a large role on the success of a business, what effect would it have on a school district? More specifically, what role does a Level 5 Leader have on a rural school district? This study will examine the effect a Level 5 Leader has on rural school districts.

Abstract

The difference between Level 5 Leaders (Collins, 2001) of rural school districts and other effective/competent leaders of rural school districts were examined in this study. The case study compared Level 5 Superintendents and other effective/competent superintendents in terms of budget management, academic performance, recruitment and retention of teachers, and their district core values. Level 5 Superintendents in this study did not show any significant effect on district budget balances or base teacher salary when compared to the other leaders. The Level 5 Superintendents' school districts did have a greater positive effect on their district's academic performance in scores on their Missouri Annual Performance Report when compared to the other leaders. In addition, Level 5 Superintendents have more success in recruiting and retaining teaching staff and an increased awareness of district core values within their teaching staff.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to use the framework and ideas of Jim Collins, in his research in *Good to Great* (2001) had for businesses and to investigate their value and applicability for rural school districts in terms of student performance and the leadership of those schools. If indeed a set of distinguishing characteristics exist in businesses that allow them to move from good businesses to great businesses, then there should be a specific set of distinguishing characteristics that rural school districts have that allow them to move from good performing districts to great performing districts. Collins discusses this somewhat in *Good to Great and the Social Sectors (2005)* (p 3). He identifies the issues forming the framework for non-business entities to include Level 5 Leadership, Getting the Right People on the Bus, Calibrating Success, the Economic Engine, and Building a Brand.

Collins (2001) calls the leaders who are able to take companies from good to great, "Level 5 Leaders." He outlines the traits, characteristics, and skills of those leaders in his research. The intent of this study was to investigate rural school districts in Missouri in regards to the framework set by Collins (2005). More specifically, the study examined the variables contributing to rural schools moving from "good" to "great" under a Level 5 Leader as outlined by Collins (2001). The study examined the steps a Level 5 Leader takes in terms of Getting the Right People on the Bus (Recruiting and Retaining Teachers), Calibrating Success (District Performance), the Economic Engine (District Budget Management), and Building a Brand (District's Core Values).

Review of Literature

Superintendents in rural school districts will find advantages to Collins's study of leaders because Collins focuses on the behaviors of leaders. This study attempts to translate those behaviors of business leadership to school educational leadership. As mentioned, rural school district leaders face a variety of challenges and any research identifying behaviors to assist in tackling those challenges is welcome news for rural school leadership.

Leadership

Collins (2001) discusses the traits that identify a leader of a "great organization" as a "Level 5 leader." Collins argues that a "Level 5 leader is – an individual who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will" and are the catalysts for the transformation of a good company to a great company (p 21). Burns (1978) first defined transformational leadership as leaders and their followers who raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation within their organization. Later, Bass (1985) identified a transformational leader as one who models integrity, sets goals, encourages others, provides support and recognition, stirs emotions in people, gets people to look beyond themselves, and inspires. Onorato (2013) discussed the transformational leadership style as well. In particular, he discussed intensively transformational leadership in schools. He defines the transformational leader as "leadership for change" (p 38). He also quotes Avolio & Bass (1988) in their discussion on transformational leadership by saying that transformational leaders "do not merely react to environmental circumstances, they attempt to shape and create them" (p 38). Collins's Level 5 Leader, who are those catalysts for transformation of a company, would be most closely aligned with the

educational leadership style of a transformational leader. Level 5 Leaders, according to Collins, ignite people's passion, motivate, focus on people, and build momentum in order to develop greatness in their organizations (p 119).

In Getkin's article (2007), he provides a couple of definitions of greatness in an educational setting. Getkin (2007) says that greatness can be defined as a "continuous pursuit rather than a final destination" (p 16). He goes on to say that internally it is "inspiring to an organization and its stakeholders," (p 16) and that externally greatness is seen when other organizations inquire about how it is able to achieve the things that it does. Getkin (2007) also discusses the changes that have occurred and need to occur in school leadership, which he says "is the single most important ingredient in determining the degree of greatness" (p 17) a school will reach. Greatness in organizations, according to Collins (2001), would be achieving high performance over a long period of time. For schools, the logical measureable identifier of greatness would be student achievement.

Rural School Problems

Research indicates many factors that can effect the achievement of rural school district's students. Factors such as the recruitment and retention of teachers, teachers' experience, community attitudes toward education, and school expenditures on technology as other factors influencing student achievement in rural school (Harde & Sullivan, 2008; Rainey & Murova, 2004). In addition, schools located in impoverished rural communities have dropout rates that are more than twice the national average (Provasnik et al., 2007). A large percentage of rural areas are also poverty areas. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2004), approximately 20% of children in America's rural communities are poor, a figure that is higher than the poverty

percentage in urban areas. In addition, rural income averages 25% below the urban average income. Not only are students facing the financial constraints at home, but rural schools often face financial constraints themselves. The community businesses often in low-income areas face the same constraints and often are unable to help or provide support like in other school districts (Flora et al., 2003). Property tax in rural populations limits revenue in those school districts and many state aid formulas are inadequate at noting factors often seen in rural schools (Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003). Rural districts often are not able to spend as much on students in their schools. Funding disparities in high-spending districts to low-spending districts are close to 3 to 1 in terms of how much they spend per pupil (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). As a result of these financial constraints facing many rural school districts, much of the time of a superintendent in these districts is spent trapped in the office working on budget management. Superintendents consider the financial side of the job as one of the most serious challenges according to Absheir, Harris, & Hopson (2011). They go on to say that many superintendents in rural schools do not have a background in budgeting or money management and that graduate schools do not spend proper time instructing on the topic (p 1). McCurdy and Hymes (1992) discovered that rural superintendents may leave their jobs because of the demands on the job that wears them down. Tekniepe (2015) found that the fiscal stress of superintendency had an impact on superintendent turnover. He discovered that superintendents in districts with low reserve balances were more likely to experience departure (p 9). These are some of the factors that contribute to school leader turnover in rural school districts. Morford (2002) posed an important

question when she asked who is ultimately responsible for the instructional leadership of the school if the rural school leadership is turning over every year or two.

Research examined the relationship between socioeconomic status and the performance of students in schools (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997; Reeves, 2009; Levin, 2007; Pellino, 2007; Butler, 2006; Nelson, 2006; Rowan et al., 2004.) For example, the U.S. Department of Education (2001) found that students from high-poverty schools scored significantly lower than other students and that school districts with the highest percentages of low-income students also scored lower than other schools with lower percentages of low-income students. This study is not the only research that shows that students from low socioeconomic households routinely do not have as high of performance as those students who are from a higher socioeconomic household. Students from these low-socioeconomic backgrounds consistently score below average regardless of race or ethnicity (Bergeson, 2006).

The research also shows a significant decrease in performance as the extent of the poverty increases (Smith, Brooks-Gunn, and Kiebanov, 1997). Students who are more likely to fail in school are often considered at-risk students as a result of their low socioeconomic status (Leroy and Symes, 2001). Mulford and others (2007) spent time researching high-poverty communities and the schools that serve them in Tasmania. In *Successful Principalship of High-performance Schools in High-poverty Communities*, they discussed many of the problems that result in high-poverty schools and surveyed 195 schools in hopes of gaining data on successful school principalships. In their findings, they concluded that high-performing schools in high-poverty areas had the common characteristic of successful, high-performing leadership.

A good basis of a study on rural students and academic motivation towards academic success is also prevalent. Research on rural students and school performance has taken many forms. Approximately 30% of students in the United States attend what would be considered a rural school district, yet just 6% of the research is done in rural schools (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). Given that the research has underrepresented the population of students attending rural schools, we are able to identify some characteristics of rural schools and the struggles that those districts often encounter in their schools. We also know, for example, from Hardre, Crowson, Debacker, and White (2007) that rural school districts must work harder to create a vision for their students' academic futures than other districts, as academic motivations of those students are different than others. Typically rural students are further from higher education opportunities than students in suburban and urban districts.

Leadership in Rural Schools

As mentioned, a multitude of factors, influences, and struggles routinely face rural school districts. However, a number of the studies dealing with rural schools show that school leadership plays an important role in the success of those district. For example, Loveland (2002), has investigated the challenges and rewards of rural school leadership. DeRuych (2005) studied the importance of strong instructional leadership in rural schools. Fullan (2001) dives deep into the realm of leadership and the role that leaders play in school districts. Fullan (2001) says that leaders structure culture and that building this culture is "hard, labor intensive work (p 44). McEwan (2003) identifies leaders as individuals who set the example for the school and that their example can have a positive or detrimental effect on the culture of the school.

Given all the research on low income districts, rural districts, and leadership in schools, it seems one could see the impact of all three of these factors on a school district's success. The challenges facing rural districts and the problems that low income areas possess, it seems appropriate to study how leaders can best tackle these problems in those schools. In particular, it seems that researching the impact a Level 5 Leader might have in rural and low income districts would help close some of the gaps evident from the research above.

Methods of the Study

While we know rural districts face many issues and those issues have an effect on performance, why some rural districts are successful and others are not has only been a small focus of educational researchers. In particular, the distinguishing characteristics of rural districts achieving consistently high performance and to what role leadership plays in those districts has all but been ignored. This lack of research creates a problem for many rural districts hoping to find leaders who will generate long term, high performance, or "great" results.

This study attempts to translate Collins's (2001) research to the educational setting and in doing so, attempts to help narrow the gap in the research on rural district leadership and performance. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are use in order to best relate Collins's research to the areas of district performance, recruitment and retention of teachers, budget management, and school district core values.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are

1. Is there a difference in a Level 5 Leaders and other effective/competent leaders in terms of how they recruit and retain quality teachers in rural schools?
2. Is there a difference in a Level 5 Leader and other effective/competent leaders in terms of budget management in rural schools?
3. Is there a difference in Level 5 Leaders and other effective/competent leaders in terms of the core values set by the district in their rural schools?
4. When comparing Level 5 Leaders in rural schools to other effective/competent leaders, is there a difference in district performance based on Missouri's Annual Performance Report (APR)?

Design of Study

This study utilized mixed methods methodology, as defined by Creswell (2009), through the use of a cross-sectional survey to assess the leadership style of superintendents in a sample of rural Missouri K-12 school districts. Creswell (2009) defines mixed methods as "an approach to inquiry that combines both qualitative and quantitative forms" (p 4). Mixed methods yields more overall strength of a study than does quantitative or qualitative research by themselves (Creswell, 2009). Mixed methods design was used as it neutralizes or cancels biases that may be found in only researching using a single method (Creswell, 2009).

A survey consisting of 45 questions from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was given to all rural superintendents in a Southern Missouri Region to determine self-perception of their leadership behaviors. Information was also gathered from schools in terms of budget balances and district performance on the

Missouri Annual Performance Reports obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Following the surveys, a group of 6 superintendents were selected for interviews. The superintendents were selected from all the surveyed superintendents using stratified selection, three who were identified as Level 5 Leaders based on the survey and three who identified as Below Level 5 Leaders, yet still effective/competent leaders in their school districts. The superintendents were next interviewed for their perceptions of how they recruit and retain teachers, manage the district budget, and on the core values of their district. A case study method of research, as defined by Merriam (2009), was also used in order to gather information and analyze data to answer the research questions. Merriam (2009) defines a case study as an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit" (p 203).

Participants

Participants for this study were determined using data obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The participants' anonymity was protected by using pseudonyms. The study identified districts in a Southern Region of Missouri that are considered rural school districts. A rural district for this case study is defined as a public school district with K-12 student populations under 1500 students, located in communities no larger than 5000, and are at least 20 miles from communities larger than 25,000 people (based on information obtained from the United States Department of Agriculture, 2015). Data was collected from school districts using a nonrandom selected sample (Creswell, 2009) of schools that meet the rural definition. A nonrandom sample was used as we surveyed all schools who meet the criteria of the rural definition. Of the schools surveyed, data was also collected on their Annual

Performance Report (APR) obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to identify a school district's academic performance. Recruiting and retaining teachers and district core values data from the selected interviews was also used to identify differences in Level 5 Superintendents and their districts and differences from districts with Level 5 Superintendents from those without.

Data Collection Tools

Leadership

This study used the Mulitfactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Avolio and Bass (1995) to identify the leadership level of the superintendents surveyed (Appendix A). The survey was given to the superintendent of the school to assess self-perception of their leadership style. The survey was emailed to the superintendent and was answered and recorded electronically. The MLQ identifies the characteristics of a transformational leader, the educational leadership style that most closely resembles a Level 5 Leaders discussed by Collins (2001). The MLQ scores individuals on a scale of 0 – 4 in terms of transformational style. A transformation leader, according to the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, would score at or above the 90 percentile (3.6 or above) on the questionnaire. This scale was used by the researcher as the method of determining if the participate identified as a Level 5 Superintendent or Below Level 5 Superintendent. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire is the standard instrument for assessing transformational leadership and has been developed and validated over the last two decades (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Budget Health

The two factors that were used in terms of evaluating a school district's budget health were the school district's fund balance percentage (budget balance) and the district's base teacher salary data. The district fund balance percentage was chosen as it shows how much available money the district has in reserve to carry out its organizational activities. Districts that identified as having a healthy budgets will be identified as having a budget balance of 25% or above and having base teacher salaries in the top 25% tier in their region. District fund balance data was gathered from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and was based on a 3 year average from 2015-2017. District base teacher salary 3 year average was gathered from the Missouri State Teachers Association's Missouri Salary Schedule and Benefits reports (2015, 2016, 2017).

Performance

The performance for each school district was identified by the district's state accountability measurement tool (the Annual Performance Report or APR), identified by the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP). The Missouri School Improvement Program has the responsibility of reviewing and accrediting school districts in the state. The school district performance data used was taken from the Annual Performance Reports (APR) for each school district accessed from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. The APR of each school was then averaged using data from each year from 2015-2017.

Interviews

Interviews were then conducted of both those superintendents identifying as Level 5 and those not identifying as Level 5. An interview protocol (Appendix B) was used to identify the superintendents' perceptions of effective practice surrounding the areas identified by the research questions. This data collection tool was chosen because it is "best when you need information directly from people about what they believe, know, and think" (Fink, 2013, p 24). The six superintendents who were interviewed were randomly chosen, with three individuals identifying as Level 5 Superintendents based on their MLQ score and three individuals identifying as Below Level 5 Superintendents. All of the superintendents who were interviewed have been in their school district for the entire three year span. The structure of the interviews would be classified by Merriam (2009) as "semistructured" (p 90).

Results

After examining superintendent leadership using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), School District Financial Health, School District Performance, and interviewing selected superintendents, a variety of results were recorded. Table 1 shows the data collected on each of the 20 school districts of superintendents who completed the MLQ survey. Data showed a variety of differences in the school districts in terms of health of budget balance, base teacher salary, and APR score. Districts that identified as having a healthy budget balance are identified as having a budget balance of 25% or above. Healthy base teacher salaries are identified as in the top 25% tier in their region. High performance on APR is identified as having 95% of greater.

Table 1

School District Data for Participating Superintendents

Superintendent	MLQ	Budget Balance	Base Teacher Salary	APR
Mickey	3.4	49.13%	$ 32,400.00	93.1%
John	3.4	34.28%	$ 31,500.00	94.7%
Jim	2.6	34.73%	$ 29,050.00	76.6%
Fred	2.5	51.28%	$ 30,600.00	91.5%
Brian	3.2	29.00%	$ 31,300.00	90.5%
Cal	3.2	52.29%	$ 27,500.00	90.2%
Jeff	3.1	19.24%	$ 26,950.00	78.9%
Steve	3.3	16.44%	$ 30,500.00	78.4%
Kent	3	50.95%	$ 35,375.00	94.0%
Thomas	3	79.74%	$ 35,500.00	88.7%
Jacob	3.3	16.86%	$ 31,100.00	74.5%
Edward	3.1	20.38%	$ 34,700.00	97.6%
Corey	3.4	58.31%	$ 31,500.00	79.4%
Jason	3.5	41.59%	$ 35,400.00	90.6%
Mike	3.5	57.56%	$ 31,000.00	96.3%
Don	3.5	29.84%	$ 31,500.00	93.2%
Bart	3.6	24.71%	$ 30,000.00	98.1%
Dan	3.6	42.53%	$ 35,500.00	98.0%
James	3.8	1.14%	$ 31,000.00	84.5%
William	3.9	40.28%	$ 30,000.00	99.9%

An independent samples t-test was used for all surveyed superintendents MLQ score (Level 5 and Below Level 5) and their school district's APR score. The median level of Level 5 Superintendents APR score was 94.35% and the median of the Below Level 5 Superintendents was 86.79%. The results found this to be statistically significant at a level of .0192. This data shows that Level 5 Superintendents have higher average student performance than Below Level 5 Superintendents. The statistically significant data would suggest that Level 5 Leaders play an important role in a district's student

performance, yielding higher scores on Missouri's Annual Performance Report. Table 2 reports the results of the test.

Table 2

MLQ and APR score

MLQ	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Level 5	7	.9435	.0538	2.23438	18	.0192
< Level 5	13	.8679	.0799			

Note. n = number of superintendents surveyed with the MLQ

Note. The variation in sample size is due to the variation in number of superintendents identifying as Level 5 versus Below Level 5 on the MLQ

*p < .05

An independent samples t-test was used for all surveyed superintendents MLQ score (Level 5 and Below Level 5) and their school district budget balance. While descriptive statistics reveal a lower budget balance in the Level 5 Superintendent's school district budget balance than the Below Level 5, results were not statistically significant. Table 3 reports the results of the test.

Table 3

MLQ and Budget Balance

MLQ	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Level 5	7	.3395	.1783	-.6201	18	.2712
< Level 5	13	.3943	.1932			

Note. n = number of superintendents surveyed with the MLQ

*p > .05

An independent samples t-test was used for all surveyed superintendents MLQ score (Level 5 and Below Level 5) and their school district's base teacher salary. While

descriptive statistics reveal slightly higher median base teacher salaries in the Level 5 Superintendent's school district than the Below Level 5, results were not statistically significant. Table 4 reports the results of the test.

Table 4

MLQ and Base Teacher Salary

MLQ	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Level 5 Leader	7	32057.14	2381.78	.5557	18	.2926
< Level 5	13	31382.69	2686.41			

Note. n = number of superintendents surveyed with the MLQ

*p > .05

For the qualitative portion of the study, 3 of the 7 superintendents identifying as Level 5 Leaders and 3 of the 13 superintendents identifying as Below Level 5 Leaders, were interviewed. Table 5 shows the data collected on the 6 interview participants and their school districts. Three Level 5 Leaders were selected based on an MLQ score of 3.6 or greater. Three Below Level 5 Leaders were selected as well. The table summarizes the participant's MLQ score, district APR over a three year period, the district's budget balance over a three year period, and the base teacher salary of the district.

Table 5

Data Collected on the Six Interview Participants and their school districts

Participant	Level 5 or Below	MLQ Score	APR – 3 Year Avg (%)	Budget Balance – 3 Year Avg (%)	Base Teacher Salary ($)
Dan	$L5_1$	3.6	98.0	42.53	35,500
Bart	$L5_2$	3.6	98.1	24.71	30,000
William	$L5_3$	3.9	99.9	40.28	31,518
Thomas	$B5_1$	3	94.0	50.95	35,375
Jeff	$B5_2$	3.1	78.9	19.24	26,950
Edward	$B5_3$	3.1	97.6	20.38	34,700

Note. *L5 – Level 5 Leader

Note. *B5 – Below Level 5 Leader

The superintendents who were interviewed were asked questions surrounding recruitment and retaining of teachers, budget management, and district core values in a "semistructured" format (Merriam, 2009). The interviewer noted all statements that had relevance to the question asked of the participant. These statements were then taken through the coding process as outlined by Creswell (2009, p. 186-187). Through the coding process themes or categories were identified. The main themes pulled from the interviews were the difference in a Level 5 Superintendent and Below Level 5 Superintendent in how they recruit and retain teachers, manage their budgets, and communicate the district's core values.

Recruiting and Retaining Teachers – Level 5 Focus on Climate and Culture

One of the themes emerging from the data was found in the difference in how Level 5 Superintendents and Below Level 5 Superintendents recruit and retain teaching staff. Rural schools have challenges retaining effective principals and teachers (Erwin,

Winn, & Erwin, 2011; Monk, 2007). All six of the participants noted in some form or another that a barrier for their district in terms of recruiting and retaining teachers is their school district's location and size. Bart, a Level 5 Superintendent, noted that due to his district's size, some of his teachers "teach multiple different preps and cannot specialize." Bart says that "when a teacher has a choice of teaching one high school ELA course, six times a day at a larger school verses preparing for 6 different sections of ELA at a smaller school, the larger school can become more attractive." School leaders are stretched thin in their duties in rural district often with a lack of resources, and often routinely many take on many different roles within the organization (Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, & Slate, 2008; Ashton & Duncan, 2012). Thomas, a Below Level 5 Superintendent, noted that the location of his district "far away from any college" as a major barrier for recruiting teachers to his school. Researchers have identified this in rural school districts as their distance from higher education opportunities, results in teacher candidates being further away than they are in urban areas (Hardre, Crowson, Debacker, and White, 2007).

Five of the six participants also noted that being financially competitive is a barrier for them in the recruiting and retaining process. Rural schools often face financial struggles when compared to other school districts in areas with a larger populations (Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, & Slate, 2008; Monk, 2007; Johnson, 2006; Flora et al., 2003; Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003; Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012) Jeff, superintendent of the lowest base salary district of the group interviewed, says his district is simply "a low paying district" and cannot compete with other higher paying districts to recruit teachers to his school.

When asked about how they address barriers to recruit and retain teachers, Below Level 5 Superintendents mostly focused on financial factors, such as salaries and benefits. Thomas stated "trying to keep the financial piece strong to compensate for the location" was his way to address the barriers he faces in recruiting and retaining teachers. Thomas mentioned that "keeping financially strong" had been the best thing he has done to break the barriers with recruiting and retaining his instructional staff. Jeff stated being "flexible" with benefits, such as sick days and personal days as one of the major ways he addresses barriers of retaining staff. He said that "if they need off early, we try fill in house" instead of making them use their sick and personal days. Jeff also mentioned that being "flexible" was the best thing he has done as a leader to break the barriers of retaining teachers. Edward said the way in which he goes about addressing the barriers of recruitment and retention is by "working hard to maintain a competitive salary schedule, provide a significant amount of insurance coverage, and market our school district well."

The Level 5 Superintendents take a similar approach to recruiting teachers but a much different approach to retaining its teachers. Level 5 Superintendents used terms like "atmosphere, caring, teams, celebrate, valued" when discussing how they retain teachers in their district. All three of the Level 5 Superintendents noted that staff retention was not a big problem in their district. They said "we have a very low turnover rate" and "our people stay here" to describe the lack of problem with retention of teachers. Dan said that one way to address the barriers location and size have on recruiting teacher is by "trying to position the district's finances in a position to have a competitive salary." However, when asked about how he goes about retaining teachers

he noted that his district does "everything to help people feel attracted to the district by its warmness and caring attitude." He went on to say the best thing he has done to break the barriers of retaining teachers was to focus on "school climate, genuinely caring attitude, and trying to let staff know they are appreciated for their hard work." Bart said that he retains his teachers by creating an "atmosphere" where administrators "let them close their door and teach." Bart also stated that the best thing that he had done at the district to retain teachers was the "atmosphere" they have created for their staff. William added that the best thing he has done is to break the barriers of recruiting teachers was to "build a staff and student-focused environment that makes our people feel valued." He then followed that by saying the best thing he has done to retain teachers is to "make culture a focal point."

Budget Management – Long-term strategic planning

Another theme emerging from the interviews was in terms of how the superintendents manage their budget. All six of the interviewed superintendents noted balancing the budget is an important aspect of managing a rural school district budget. Dan, a Level 5 Superintendent, said "living within the means" and "staying committed to the budget" are the most important parts of managing the budget. Thomas, a Below Level 5 Superintendent, stated that the most important part of managing the budget was to "handle what we are spending." Both Level 5 and Below Level 5 Superintendents mentioned that budget focus needs to be on "benefitting students" and used on "resources for instruction."

Current research identifies the struggles rural school districts face with budgets and finances (Flora et al., 2003; Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003; Adamson & Darling-

Hammond, 2012), there is no reason to doubt that the interviewed superintendents would use the terms "creative," "strategic," "prioritize," and "maximizing" to describe how they go about managing their budgets as both the Level 5 and the Below Level 5 Superintendents interviewed did. However, only the Level 5 Superintendents used terms focusing on the future or the strategic planning happening in their district. Level 5 Superintendents mentioned "strategic plan," "planning," and "long-term plan" when describing ways they adapt and manage their budgets. None of the Below Level 5 Superintendents mentioned anything similar to those terms in the interviews. Dan, a Level 5 Superintendent, said his main focus on managing the budget was to have "futuristic planning, knowing how to determine the long term effects of obligations." Bart, a Level 5 Superintendent, said that he changed his budget to "fit initiatives of the strategic plan" into his budget. The final Level 5 Superintendent, William, stated the most important part of managing a rural school district budget is "long-term planning."

Little research can be found on the impact strategic and long-term planning by superintendents have on school district performance. However, we do know that transformational leaders can create change over time (Onorato, 2013). Avolio & Bass (1988) in their discussion on transformational leadership say transformational leaders "do not merely react to environmental circumstances, they attempt to shape and create them" (p. 38). Level 5 Leaders create change in their organizations (Collins, 2001). We also know that strategy or aligning plans is an important piece of the organization as Collins says Level 5 Leaders (p 124). Level 5 Superintendents interviewed all showed that planning was an important piece of their budget management. In Collins's "Hedgehog Concept" he further identifies the importance of how strategy and budget meet when he

says that understanding an organization's core values, what it can uniquely contribute to the people it touches, and what drives its economic engine must overlap in order to have a great organization (Collins, 2005, p 19).

Core Values – Do the Teachers Know Them

The final theme that emerged from the interviews with the superintendents revolved around the superintendent's teachers understanding of the district's core values. When discussing the school districts' core values with the superintendents interviewed, there was a mix of responses even within each group. Superintendents in the Level 5 and the Below Level 5 groups, both had school districts who had an actual list of core values and both groups had schools with an unwritten list of core values. Both groups also had different ways of communicating those values. The superintendents mentioned anything from board policies, to handbooks, to mission statements on the walls, as ways in which the core values are communicated in their districts. In addition, there is a variety of ways in both groups in which the core values of the school district are developed. Bart, a Level 5 Superintendent, said his district's core values are developed by his professional development committee. Edward, a Below Level 5 Superintendent, said that his district's core values are "developed collaboratively by staff, administration, and the Board of Education."

However, a difference emerged in the superintendents' answers to what percent of their staff they believe know their core values, whether written or unwritten. The three Below Level 5 Superintendents stated that "no one has it memorized," "maybe 40% could quote it," and "not memorized," Jeff stated specifically that "I don't even like it… no one has it memorized." The Level 5 Superintendents interviewed have found a way

to weave in the core values of their district to their staff to where their staff understands and knows what the district's core values are. Collins (2001) says "Great" organizations build their brand. One way Level 5 Superintendents appear to build their brand is by conveying district core values to their staff and their staff knowing the district core values.

Discussion and Recommendations

The results of this study should serve as a resource to school leaders in any school district, as well as, school boards who are hiring those school leaders. It is especially meaningful to superintendents in rural school districts who are looking to make their district high performing. The study examined the role superintendents play in a school district in terms of recruitment and retention of teachers, budget management, core values of the district, and district performance. Some of the results of the study yield significant results and provide valuable information to current or future superintendents and to rural school districts.

The superintendents faced many of the same issues in terms of budget management, however, Level 5 Superintendents all focused on long-term and strategic planning in their budget management focus, whereas that planning was absent from Below Level 5 Superintendents. There was, however, no statistical significance found in a Level 5 Superintendent and Below Level 5 Superintendent in terms of budget management categories of the school district's budget balance or base teacher salary. While the study lacks quantifiable data to support that a school district's budget balance or base teacher salary is handled differently between a Level 5 and a Below Level 5

Superintendent, this study would suggest long-term strategic planning appears to be a trait of the Level 5 Superintendent and their school district.

The same barriers were faced by the Level 5 and the Below Level 5 Superintendents in the study in terms of recruiting and retaining teachers. Level 5 Superintendents focused on climate and culture to recruit and retain teachers, while Below Level 5 Superintendents focused on financial issues. The Level 5 Superintendents interviewed did not have the same struggles as the Below Level 5 in terms of retaining teachers. Level 5 districts did not report a high turnover rate of staff and the Below Level 5 reported more struggles with retaining staff. This study would suggest, as other research suggests, the Level 5 Superintendents focus on culture and climate in this area is an important factor in their leadership (Fullan, 2001; Kruse and Louis, 2010; Schmoker, 2006; Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005; Cotton, 2003).

Research also suggests that school leaders play a large role in the core values of a school district (Cross, 1990; Bolman and Deal, 2003; Schein, 1992; Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2003; Cotton, 2003). This study found a variety of ways in which core values are created and communicated and no difference was found between the two groups of superintendents in those areas. However, the study did find that school districts who have a Level 5 Leader have teachers who know the district's core values, whereas the Below Level 5 Leaders' teachers do not know their districts core values. Though there was not consistency with how Level 5 Superintendents communicated or defined the core values, it is evident that core values where used within their districts by the percentage of teacher's they feel know those values.

Perhaps the greatest impact of this is evidence in the data on Level 5 Superintendents and their school districts' performance. District performance was found to be statistically significant to whether the superintendent was a Level 5 or a Below Level 5 superintendent. School districts with a Level 5 Superintendent had a mean APR score of 94.35% compared to a Below Level 5 Superintendent mean APR score of 86.79%. This data has many ramifications for school leaders and school districts. The major ramification being that if a rural school district wishes to perform at its highest level, it is more likely to do so with a Level 5 Superintendent leading it. This data also illustrates that a rural school district with a leader who is Below Level 5, is more likely to score lower on their district's APR or have lower student performance. Collins (2001) would say that the Level 5 Leader is "essential" to having a great company that has success over a long period of time. As a result, the data from this study would suggest a school district should invest in a Level 5 Superintendent if it desires to have success in terms of student performance. As a result of the study, some recommendations are to be made to rural school district:

- Rural school districts should recruit and hire superintendents who identify as Level 5 Leaders
- Rural school districts should design meaningful core values and make sure staff understand those values
- Rural school districts should maintain a healthy budget balance so long-term strategic planning can happen and is not negatively effected
- Rural school district leaders should focus on climate and culture within their schools in order to recruit and retain staff

- Rural school district leaders should practice the habits Collins (2001) lists as Level 5 Leader characteristics

Limitations

As with most research there are some limitations to be expected. One limitation for this study was the lack of consistency of superintendents to stay in school districts for an extended period of time. We saw a smaller sample size of Level 5 Leaders as a result of this inconsistency of individuals to remain in districts for an extended period of time, as superintendents not in the same position at their school for the entire research years were not included in the study. Another limitation of the research was the role that other administrators play in each of the rural districts. The superintendent is the focus on the study, however the leadership of the superintendent's building level principals is not specifically addressed. In addition, there could have been unforeseen circumstances at the school that was surveyed that created a bias or discrepancy in the data that results from the study that the research was not made aware of. There will always be unknown factors that cannot be truly discovered in just one study.

There are assumptions of the researcher in this study as well. One assumption is that superintendents surveyed answered the survey questions honestly and candidly. We have to assume the superintendents surveyed took the survey with the sincere desire to aide in the study of the subject. Another assumption is that the Annual Performance Report (APR) is a good indicator of how a school district is performing. This study is not a study of whether a district with a high APR score is performing at a high level, rather it is assumed that a high APR does truly indicate high performance. The study also

assumes that the major factors determining the financial health of a district are its teacher salaries and its budget balances. There is so much that goes into school finance, however, these two factors are often measured for districts by DESE and teacher organizations when discussing the financial health of a district. In addition, teacher salaries, as mentioned in the literature review, plays a role in teacher recruitment and retention in rural districts. Finally, the study assumes the superintendent plays a pivotal role in setting and carrying out the core values of a school district.

In order to strengthen the data of this study, certain controls were be put into place. The study was given to only superintendents of rural school districts (as define previously) in a Southern Region of Missouri. The surveys were all be given to superintendents during the same point in the school year. In addition, all superintendents were given the same survey. Finally, the study compared data of the same years when making comparisons between districts.

Conclusion

This study sought to analyze the effect that a Level 5 Leader (Superintendent) had on a school district. The study, based on Collins (2001) research on what makes a great company, questioned whether there was a difference in a Level 5 Leader and a Below Level 5 Leader in terms of recruitment and retention of teachers, budget management, core values, and district performance.

The results indicate that the Level 5 Superintendent has a significant effect the school district performance. School districts with a Level 5 Superintendent have a higher average student performance score on their Missouri Annual Performance Report. In addition, the results of the study indicate that Level 5 Superintendents are able to retain

teachers far better than Below Level 5 Superintendents, possibly from their focus on climate and culture of their school districts. In particular, Level 5 Superintendents focused on atmosphere and the treatment of their teachers personally rather than focusing mainly on salaries and benefits, as the Below Level 5 Leaders did. Finally, the study results show that although both Level 5 and Below Level 5 Superintendents have struggles in terms of budget management, a Level 5 Superintendent focuses their budget management on long term strategic planning. Long-term strategic planning was not observed in the Below Level 5 Superintendents.

The results of this study indicate to school boards, school leaders, and especially rural school district superintendents that the traits of a Level 5 Leader have many positive impacts on a school district. Collins (2011) says that "we keep putting people in positions of power who lack the seed to become a Level 5 Leader, and that is one major reason why there are so few companies that make a sustained and verifiable shift from good to great" (p 134). However, school districts can change the course of their district, if they hire or cultivate Level 5 Superintendents.

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Appendix A

For use by Brian Beard only. Received from Mind Garden, Inc. on February 18, 2018

www.mindgarden.com

To whom it may concern,

This letter is to grant permission for the above named person to use the following copyright material for his/her research:

Instrument: ***Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire***

Authors: ***Bruce Avolio and Bernard Bass***

Copyright: ***1995 by Bruce Avolio and Bernard Bass***

Five sample items from this instrument may be reproduced for inclusion in a proposal, thesis, or dissertation.

The entire instrument may not be included or reproduced at any time in any published material.

Sincerely,

Robert Most
Mind Garden, Inc.
www.mindgarden.com

MLQ Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire
Leader Form (5x-Short)

This questionnaire is to describe your leadership style as you perceive it. Please answer all items on this answer sheet. **If an item is irrelevant, or if you are unsure or do not know the answer, leave the answer blank.**

Forty-five descriptive statements are listed on the following pages. Judge how frequently each statement fits you. The word "others" may mean your peers, clients, direct reports, supervisors, and/or all of these individuals.

SAMPLE

Use the following rating scale:

Not at all	**Once in a while**	**Sometimes**	**Fairly often**	**Frequently, if not always**
0	1	2	3	4

1. I provide others with assistance in exchange for their efforts..... 0 1 2 3 4
2. I re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate 0 1 2 3 4
3. I fail to interfere until problems become serious 0 1 2 3 4
4. I focus attention on irregularities, mistakes, exceptions, and deviations from standards 0 1 2 3 4
5. I avoid getting involved when important issues arise 0 1 2 3 4

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Interview of Selected Rural Superintendents

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interviewer: Hello _____. My name is _____. Thank you for giving me a few moments of your time to ask you some questions regarding a small part of all the roles superintendents play in a school district. I have a few questions to ask you regarding some of the areas I am researching.

1. What barriers do you see in terms of recruiting and retaining quality teachers in your school district?
    a. Which do you believe is the biggest barrier in recruitment of quality teachers?
    b. Which do you believe is the biggest barrier in retaining quality teachers?

2. How do you address those barriers in your role as superintendent?
    a. What do you believe has been the best thing you have done in order to break the barriers you face in recruitment?

   b. What do you believe has been the best thing you have done in order to break the barriers you face in retention?
   c. How important is certification in your hiring process?
   d. How do you know what to look for in a person for a particular position?
   e. How do you get and keep the best people for the job in your district?

3. What do you believe is the most important part of managing a rural school district budget?
   a. What is your main focus when managing your budget?
   b. How have you had to change/adapt your budget management strategies?
   c. How do you determine if you are properly managing your budget? How do you know you are being successful?

4. Does your district have a list of core values that are important?
   a. How are those values communicated?
   b. Who determines those core values?
   c. What percent of your staff do you believe know the core values of the school district?
   d. How do you see those core values reflected?
   e. What is your role in regards to the core values of your district?

Interviewer: Thank you for your help in providing your input to my study. Thank you most importantly for the job you do in seeing that your district helps students.

Section Five – Contribution to Scholarship

Brian D. Beard

University of Missouri

A Mixed Methods Study Exploring Leadership in Rural Schools

Moving Rural Schools From Good to Great

An Investigation of Jim Collins's *Good to Great* and Applications for Rural School Districts and Their Leaders

Abstract

The difference between Level 5 Leaders (Collins, 2001) of rural school districts and other effective/competent leaders of rural school districts were examined in this study. The case study compared Level 5 Superintendents and other effective/competent Superintendents in terms of budget management, academic performance, recruitment and retention of teachers, and their district core values. Level 5 Superintendents in this study did not show any significant effect on district budget balances or base teacher salary when compared to the other leaders. The Level 5 Superintendents' school districts did have a greater positive effect on their district's academic performance in scores on their Missouri Annual Performance Report when compared to the other leaders. In addition, Level 5 Superintendents have more success in recruiting and retaining teaching staff and an increased awareness of district core values within their teaching staff.

Moving From Good to Great in Rural Schools

Contents

Introduction	3
Statement of the Problem	3
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Introduction

Every day in school districts across the country, school leaders are faced with a myriad of tasks, challenges, struggles, as well as, opportunities. School leaders in rural school districts are certainly no different. The role of these leaders play is extremely important to the overall success of the school district. The quality of the leaders can be the difference in a high performing school and a low performing school (Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2003). Jim Collins (2001) published groundbreaking research on what companies do to move from "good companies" to "great companies." One of the pieces Collins found in all "great companies" is the presence of a "Level 5 Leader" (p 22). If a Level 5 Leader has such a large role on the success of a business, what effect would it have on a school district? More specifically, what role does a Level 5 Leader have on a rural school district? This study will examine the effect a Level 5 Leader has on rural school districts.

Statement of the Problem

Rural school leaders face a myriad of problems. Whether it is their location from higher education opportunities, their parents' education level, diets consisting of lower nutritional value, initial reading comprehension of incoming kindergarten students, or emotional and psychological stress, rural school leaders must find ways to address these problems (Kaiser and Delaney, 1996; Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Taki et al., 2010; White, 2007). In addition to those problems rural school leaders must also face the issues of fiscal stress of their district, lack of highly qualified teachers, recruitment and retention of teachers, and funding disparities compared to other districts. (Tekniepe, 2015; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2010; Harde & Sullivan, 2008; Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). It is safe to say the challenges facing leadership in rural districts is a daunting task to tackle.

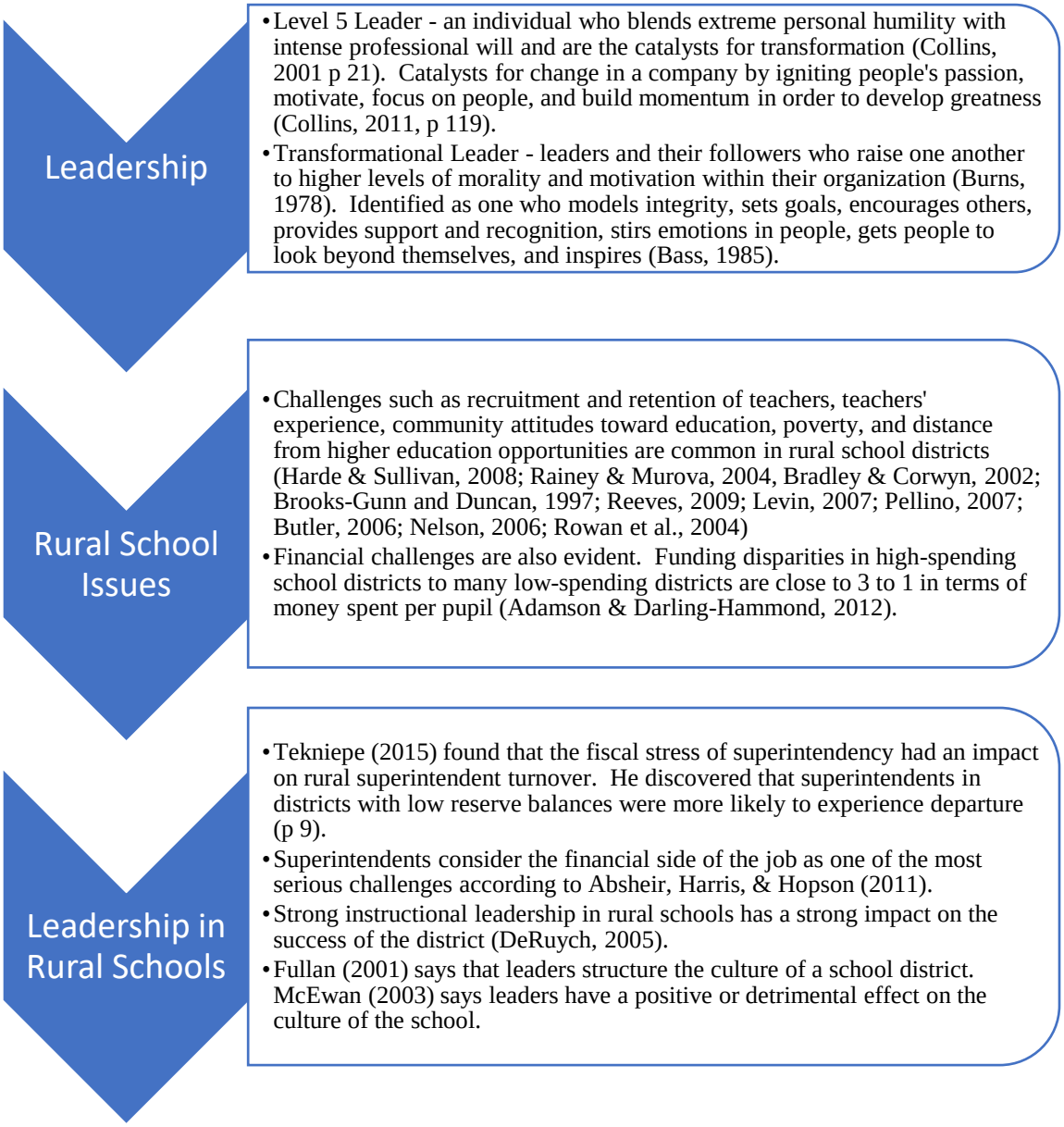
Purpose of Study

This study builds from the leadership framework for businesses researched by Jim Collins, in *Good to Great* (2001), and investigates their value and applicability for rural school districts. If indeed a set of distinguishing characteristics exist in businesses that allow them to move from good businesses to great businesses, then there should be a specific set of distinguishing characteristics that rural school districts have that allow them to move from good performing districts to great performing districts. In Collins (2001) work he outlines the behaviors of Level 5 Leaders and a framework he says all great companies have. This study examined a Level 5 Leader (Superintendent) in rural school districts in Missouri in terms of Collins's framework of Getting the Right People on the Bus (Recruiting and Retaining Teachers), Calibrating Success (District Performance), the Economic Engine (District Budget Management), and Building a Brand (District's Core Values).

Review of Literature

Although a 1/3 of students in the United States attend rural school districts, only 6% of scholarly educational research is done on rural schools (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). Given the research has underrepresented rural schools, there is still research available that when reviewed and synthesized helped in exploring the major themes of this study. Scholarly articles, books, and studies were performed in the areas of educational leadership, issues found in rural school districts, and leadership in rural schools. A summary of research is found in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Review of Literature



Design of the Study

This study attempts to translate Collins' (2001) research to the educational setting and in doing so, attempts to help narrow the gap in the research on rural district leadership and performance. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are use in order to best relate Collins' research to the areas of district performance, recruitment and retention of teachers, budget management, and school district core values.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. Is there a difference in a Level 5 Leaders and other effective/competent leaders in terms of how they recruit and retain quality teachers in rural schools?
2. Is there a difference in a Level 5 Leader and other effective/competent leaders in terms of budget management in rural schools?
3. Is there a difference in Level 5 Leaders and other effective/competent leaders in terms of the core values set by the district in their rural schools?
4. When comparing Level 5 Leaders in rural schools to other effective/competent leaders, is there a difference in district performance based on Missouri's Annual Performance Report (APR)?

Methodology

This study utilized mixed methods methodology, as defined by Creswell (2009), through the use of a cross-sectional survey to assess the leadership style of superintendents in a sample of rural Missouri K-12 school districts. A survey known as the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was given to all rural superintendents in a Southern Missouri Region to determine self-perception of their leadership behaviors. Information on budget balances and district performance on the Missouri Annual Performance Reports were collected for those school districts. Following completion of the surveys, a group of 6 superintendents were selected for interviews. The superintendents were selected from all the surveyed superintendents using stratified selection, three who were identified as Level 5 Leaders based on the survey and three who identified as Below Level 5 Leaders. The superintendents were interviewed for their perceptions of how they recruit and retain teachers, manage the district budget, and on the core values of their district. A case study method of research, as defined by Merriam (2009), was also used in order to gather information and analyze data to answer the research questions.

Participants

The participants in this study were superintendents in a Southern Region of Missouri that are considered rural school district. Data was collected from school districts using a nonrandom selected sample (Creswell, 2009) of schools that meet the rural definition described by the US Department of Agriculture (2015). A nonrandom sample was used

as all schools surveyed met the definition of rural school. A transformation leader, according to the MLQ, would score at or above the 90 percentile (3.6 or above) on the survey. This scale was used as the method of determining if the participate identified as a Level 5 Superintendent or Below Level 5 Superintendent. Data was also collected on school performance from the Missouri Annual Performance Report (APR) obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Recruiting and retaining teachers and district core values data from the selected interviews was also used to identify differences in Level 5 Superintendents and their districts and differences from districts with Level 5 Superintendents from those without.

Data Collection Tools

Data was collected in this student in four areas as shown in Figure 2:

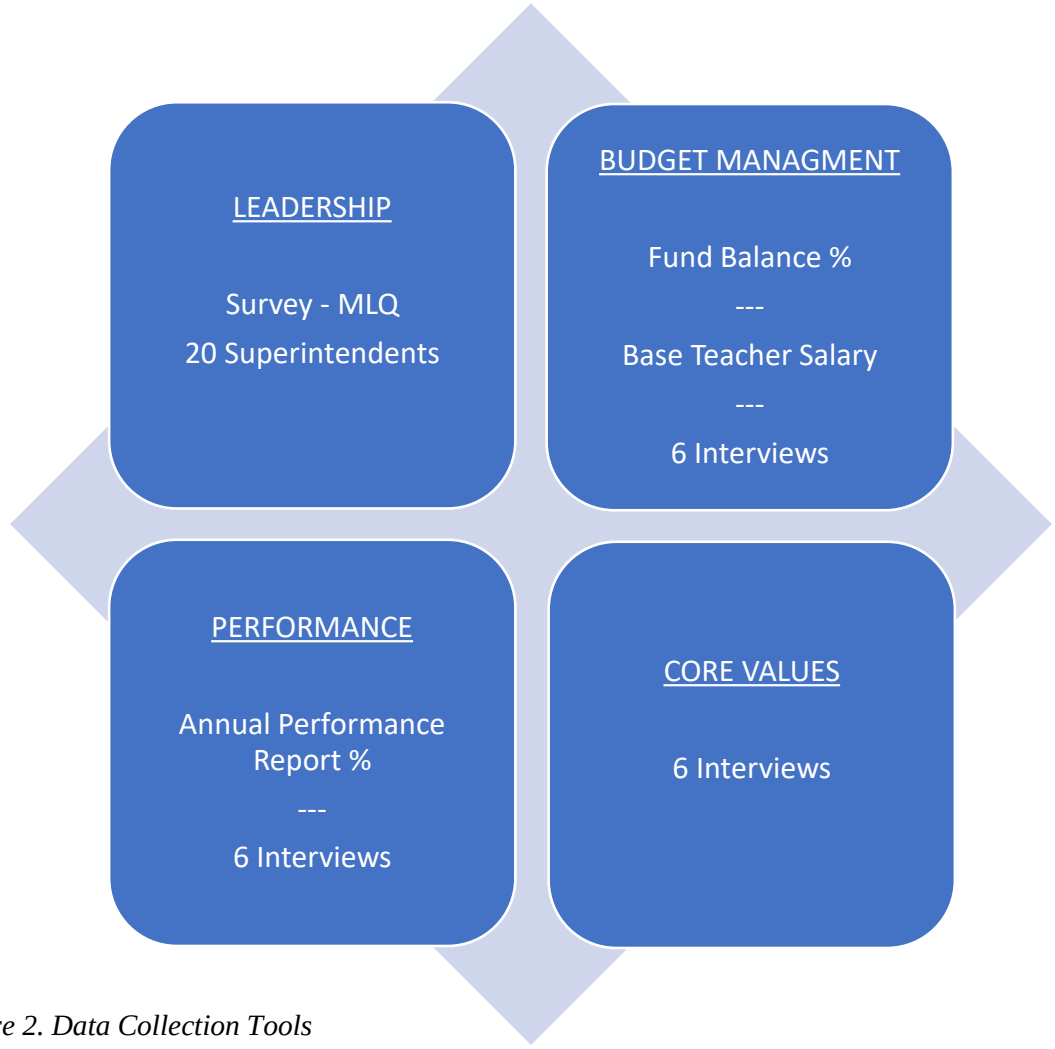


Figure 2. Data Collection Tools

Results

After conducting the mixed methods study, a variety of results were recorded. The most significant result is that Level 5 Superintendents have higher performance on the Missouri Annual Performance Report, than the school districts of Below Level 5 Superintendents. An independent samples t-test was used for all surveyed superintendents MLQ score and their school district's APR score. The median level of Level 5 Superintendents APR score was 94.35% and the median of the Below Level 5 Superintendents was 86.79%. The results found this to be statistically significant at a level of .0192. The results are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

MLQ and APR score

MLQ	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Level 5	7	.9435	.0538	2.23438	18	.0192
< Level 5	13	.8679	.0799			

Note. n = number of superintendents surveyed with the MLQ

Note. The variation in sample size is due to the variation in number of superintendents identifying as Level 5 versus Below Level 5 on the MLQ

*p < .05

An independent samples t-test was also used for all surveyed superintendents MLQ score and their school district's budget balance and teacher base salary. Neither of the results were considered to be statistically significant. The results are shown in Table 2 and 3.

Table 2

MLQ and Budget Balance

MLQ	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Level 5	7	.3395	.1783	-.6201	18	.2712
< Level 5	13	.3943	.1932			

Note. n = number of superintendents surveyed with the MLQ

*p > .05

Table 3

MLQ and Base Teacher Salary

MLQ	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Level 5 Leader	7	32057.14	2381.78	.5557	18	.2926
< Level 5	13	31382.69	2686.41			

Note. n = number of superintendents surveyed with the MLQ

*p > .05

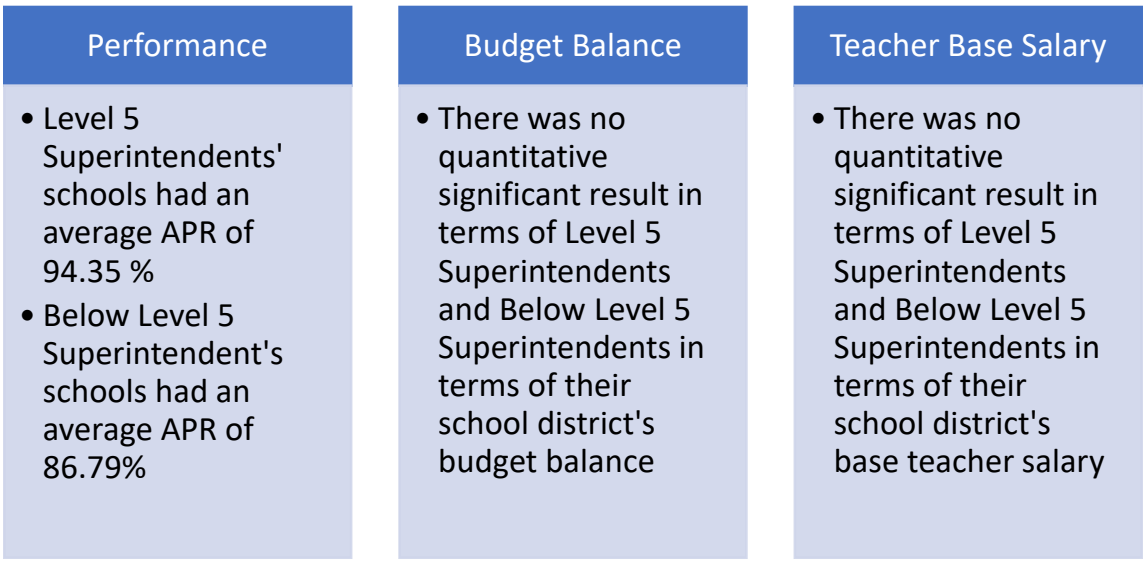


Figure 3. Results from Independent Samples T-Test

For the qualitative portion of the study, 3 of the 7 superintendents identifying as Level 5 Leaders and 3 of the 13 superintendents identifying as Below Level 5 Leaders, were interviewed. Table 4 shows the data collected on the 6 interview participants and their school districts. Three Level 5 Leaders were selected based on an MLQ score of 3.6 or greater. Three Below Level 5 Leaders were selected as well. The table summarizes the participant's MLQ score, district APR over a three year period, the district's budget balance over a three year period, and the base teacher salary of the district.

Table 4

Data Collected on the Six Interview Participants and their school districts

Participant	Level 5 or Below	MLQ Score	APR – 3 Year Avg (%)	Budget Balance – 3 Year Avg (%)	Base Teacher Salary ($)
Dan	$L5_1$	3.6	98.0	42.53	35,500
Bart	$L5_2$	3.6	98.1	24.71	30,000
William	$L5_3$	3.9	99.9	40.28	31,518
Thomas	$B5_1$	3	94.0	50.95	35,375
Jeff	$B5_2$	3.1	78.9	19.24	26,950
Edward	$B5_3$	3.1	97.6	20.38	34,700

Note. *L5 – Level 5 Leader *B5 – Below Level 5 Leader

The superintendents who were interviewed were then run through a series of questions surrounding recruitment and retaining of teachers, budget management, and district core values in a "semistructured" format (Merriam, 2009). The interviewer noted all statements that had relevance to the question asked of the participant. These statements were then taken through the coding process as outlined by Creswell (2009, p. 186-187). Through the coding process themes or categories were identified. The main themes pulled from the interviews were the difference in a Level 5 Superintendent and Below Level 5 Superintendent in how they recruit and retain teachers, manage their budgets, and communicate the district's core values.

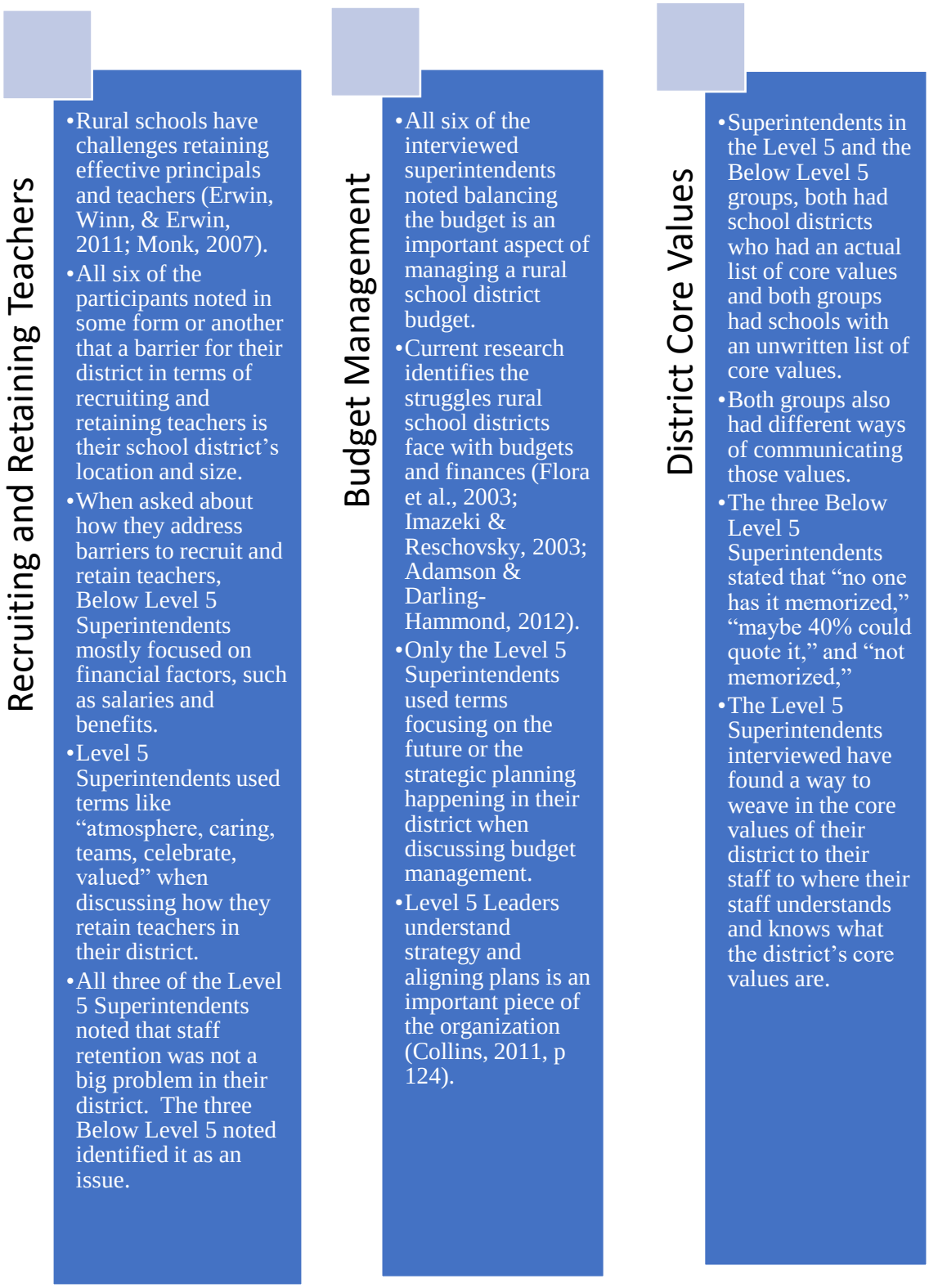


Figure 4. Themes from Interviews

Discussion

The study examined the role superintendents, in particularly Level 5 Superintendents, play in a school district in terms of recruitment and retention of teachers, budget management, core values of the district, and the overall district performance. The study found several significant results. Perhaps the most noted result, was found in the effect Level 5 Superintendents have on district performance. Level 5 Superintendents, in this study, had higher district performance than Below Level 5 Superintendents. As a result, if a school district wishes to perform at its highest level, it is more likely to achieve higher performance with a Level 5 Leader in the role of superintendent.

The study also found that Level 5 Superintendents focus more on the climate and culture of their school when trying to retain teaching staff, while Below Level 5 Superintendents focus on finances such as teacher salary and benefits. Both groups cited finances as a difficult and important part of managing their district but Level 5 Superintendents differed from Below Level 5 in terms of having a long term strategy or planning in place. The final difference noted in Level 5 Superintendents and Below Level 5 is seen in the staff of Level 5 Superintendents having a better understanding of the district's core values.

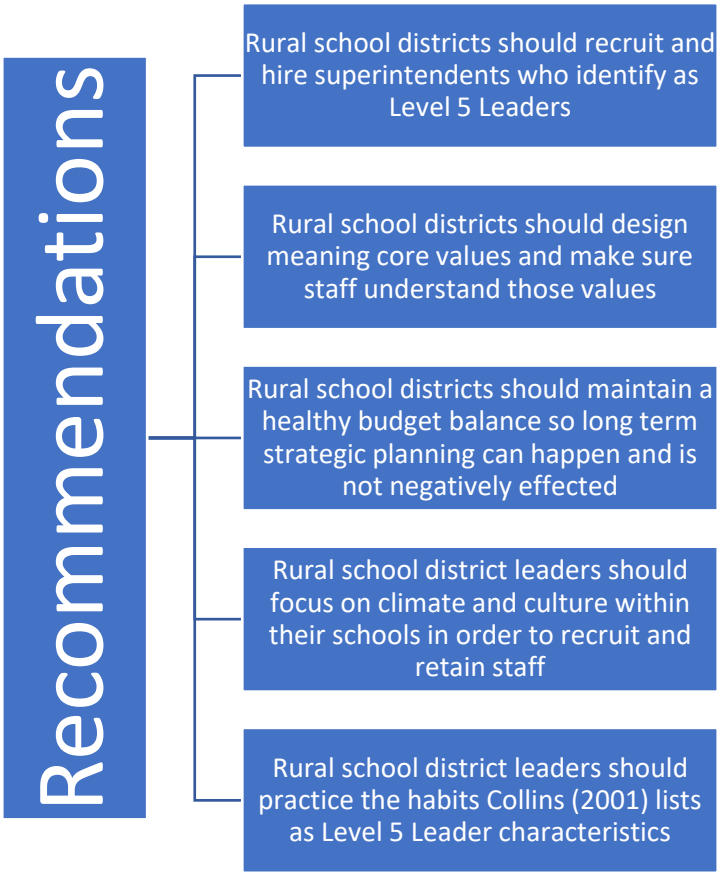


Figure 5. Recommendations

Limitations

1. Small sample size of entire Southern Missouri Region on MLQ
2. Interviews on Superintendents, not their staff
3. Building level leadership (principal) not assessed
4. Assumption that self-perception of leader is correct on MLQ
5. Assumption that APR is good indicator of how a district is performing

Conclusion

This study sought to analyze the effect that a Level 5 Leader (Superintendent) had on a school district. The study, based on Collins (2001) research on what makes a great company, questioned whether there was a difference in a Level 5 Leader and a Below Level 5 Leader in terms of recruitment and retention of teachers, budget management, core values, and district performance.

The results of this study indicate to school boards, school leaders, and especially rural school district superintendents that the traits of a Level 5 Leader have many positive impacts on a school district. In particular in terms of school performance. Collins (2011) says that "we keep putting people in positions of power who lack the seed to become a Level 5 Leader, and that is one major reason why there are so few companies that make a sustained and verifiable shift from good to great" (p 134). However, school districts can change the course of their district, if they hire or cultivate Level 5 Superintendents.

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Section Six – Scholarly Practitioner Reflection

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To say the journey to the end of the dissertation process was just a journey is understating the process immensely. The process including years of work, many challenges, and a multitude of personal setbacks and accomplished goals. The coursework of the Doctorate of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis was by far the most cumbersome educational experience I have had experienced, as well as, the most joyful experience. The highlight for me was the summers at the University of Missouri – Columbia and the relationships and networking that I developed while spending my time on campus. The coursework paved the way for me to begin to becoming a leader. I learned a great deal about organizational analysis, leadership strategies, and proper quantitative and qualitative research design. The coursework concluded when I put the finishing touches on the dissertation.

How Has the Dissertation Process Influenced my Practice as an Educational Leader?

The dissertation process has influenced me in several ways as an educational leader. I learned that an educational leader must be well read, be able to pull out data from situations and not be afraid to push to find answers. These three things have helped me to become a better leader as a result of the dissertation process.

An educational leader must be able to gather the information in the literature in order to apply it to a situation of need. I learned that there is a wealth of information at a leader's fingertips. They just need to read the research so that they are well-versed in how to become a better leader of their organization. An educational leader must be able to pull out data when given information in a situation. There is all sorts of data to be found in a conversation, in a group of test scores, or in facts and figures about a school.

The dissertation process taught me how to pull that data out. An educational leader must not be afraid to push to find answers. I learned in the dissertation process that when in the middle of a problem, you have to make the extra call, send the extra email, or make the next ask in order to push forward your agenda as a leader. If you fail to do that, you will become stagnant and not very efficient as a leader.

How Has the Dissertation Process Influenced me as a Scholar?

The dissertation processed influenced me as a scholar in several ways. One influence was observed in ability to follow a process to come to a conclusion that was learned in the research process. A second influence was observed in the ability I learned to synthesize information to make it meaningful.

As a science teacher, the scientific method has always been a strong skill in my scholarship. However, the dissertation process gave me the skill to use a similar process in order to study an education situation. Walking through the steps in order to come to a conclusion based on what the current research says, what data is pulled out of surveys and interviews, how to analyze that data, and how to develop practical recommendations is a skill that has made me a better scholar. In addition, perhaps the most useful influence on my scholarship, was developed through the learning how to proper synthesis all the information in the study. I learned through the dissertation process to make a bunch of random information and turn it into a coherent whole in order to better understand what was happening and what influences the data was showing had a positive effect on the school districts that I researched.

VITA

Brian Beard has been a life-long Missouri resident. He is a graduate of Cape Girardeau Central High School. Following high school he obtained a Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education from Southeast Missouri State University with an emphasis in Unified Science Education. He taught middle school and high school science before obtaining his Masters of Arts in Secondary Education from William Woods University. In addition, Brian completed coursework at Saint Louis University while working on his Superintendent Certification. Brian has served as a middle school assistant principal, high school principal, and assistant superintendent prior to his current position as Superintendent in a K-12 school district in Missouri. Brian recently finished his coursework for his Doctor of Education from the University of Missouri – Columbia. He is in his 15th year in public education. He believes positive relationships are the key to success in education, and is passionate about putting both students and staff in positions for success.