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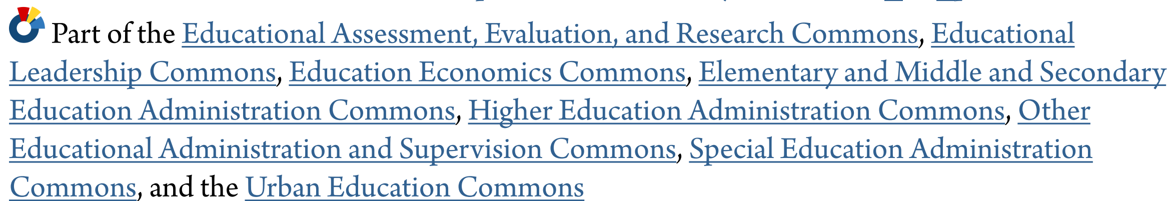
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Role Expectations of the District Superintendent:

Implications for Deregulating Preparation and Licensing

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Introduction

Roles assumed by district superintendents have been evolving for more than 100 years. As the position became more complex and demanding, the vast majority of states set policies requiring these administrators to complete a prescribed professional studies program and subsequently to obtain a license to practice. Over the past two decades, however, two opposing views have emerged addressing a growing concern that entry requirements do not address the realities of practice. One of them, expressed primarily by critics from within the profession (e.g., Cooper, Fusarelli, Jackson, & Poster, 2002; Murphy, 1994), advocates reforms that would make preparation and licensing more practice-based and rigorous. The other one, expressed primarily by critics from outside the profession (e.g., Broad Foundation & Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003; Hess, 2003), advocates deregulating preparation and licensing so that local school boards would be given the option of employing executives from outside of education.

The drift toward deregulation began in the mid-1980s as a byproduct of the intense criticism of public education made by political and business elites (Kowalski, 2004). Now several decades later, 9 states no longer require superintendents to possess a license and among the remaining 41 states, 21 have provisions for issuing waivers or emergency certificates. Moreover, 15 states allow or sanction alternative routes to licensure (i.e., other than university-based study) (Feistritzer, 2003). The most recent

call for national deregulation is found in the publication, *Better Leaders for America's Schools: A Manifesto*, issued by the Broad Foundation and Thomas B. Fordham Institute in May, 2003. Presenting largely opinions and anecdotal descriptions, it refers to university-based preparation programs and state licensing standards as meaningless hoops, hurdles, and regulatory hassles. The composers declared, "For aspiring superintendents, we believe that the states should require only a college education and a careful background check" (p. 31). The report also declares that many prominent business executives and retired senior military officers will serve as school superintendents if they are able to bypass professional preparation and licensing. Even though these convictions are presented without evidence, they can have the effect of reinforcing doubts that education is a valid profession. Some scholars (e.g., English, 2003a; 2003b) have argued that efforts to remove professional preparation from the university are driven by the profit motives of those who want to provide alternative forms of preparation and are part of a broader agenda designed to dismantle the country's public elementary and secondary education system.

At this juncture when policymakers are being asked to choose between deregulation and reform, problems affecting the superintendency need to be framed appropriately and policy decisions need to be based on evidence and not raw politics or emotion. Deregulating a profession clearly is a serious matter that is prudent either when the need for the state to protect the public from practitioners is no longer valid or when the underlying knowledge has been found to be fraudulent or irrelevant (Kowalski, 2004). This paper identifies role expectations and position requirements that have evolved for school district superintendents over the past 100 years. These expectations and requirements are then analyzed to determine if they remain valid to contemporary practice.

Conceptual Framework

The national policy debate on deregulating the profession is focused on two assertions: that state licensing standards are irrelevant to successful practice and that university-based professional preparation programs have failed to meet the mission of ensuring that public schools have effective leaders. These allegations merit analysis from both political and professional perspectives and therefore, each context is summarized.

Interest Group Politics

Politics refers to a set of activities that surround authoritative decision-making and involve the mobilization of individuals and groups to

achieve partisan interests in decision outcomes (Johnson, 2003; Gamson, 1968; Lasswell, 1936). In concert with the historical roots of politics in democratic societies, these normative activities are associated with the pursuit of the "good" society and government that benefit the commonweal. The range of activities used to influence decisions at different stages of the policy cycle include normative persuasion, debate, negotiation, pressure, and coalescing and mobilizing groups (Lindbloom, 1993). Although the American system of government is grounded in the belief that democratic processes ultimately serve the commonweal, Petracca (1992) argues, "American politics is the politics of interests" (p. 3). As a consequence, policymaking is embedded in the political arena and is characterized as a way for individuals and groups holding dissimilar values and beliefs may advance their interests, reconcile differences, and allocate resources (Rowan & Miskel, 1999).

Thomas and Hrebenar (1991) described an interest group as "any association of individuals, whether formally organized or not, that attempts to influence public policy" (p:153) with the intent of benefiting their position. As per this definition, a wide spectrum of interest groups—such as P-12 and post-secondary associations, foundations, parent and citizen groups, ideologically-oriented policy institutes, business, and media—may be active in the educational policy domain. Their foci emerge from a fusion of private values and desires and public action (Salisbury, 1991) and consequently, the nature and direction of influence patterns are revealed in public policy debates.

During recent years, contentious debates over school choice, prayer, vouchers, and decentralization have heightened awareness that the pursuit of school reform is attenuated by competing ideologies. Hunter (1991) contends that ideological polarization stems from a broader culture war in which citizens disagree on the role of government. Many emphasizing the value of liberty seek to limit the power of government; these individuals usually view public schools as educationally ineffective, socially counterproductive (i.e., they are responsible for a decline in traditional values), and economically inefficient (i.e., the costs far outweigh benefits). By arguing that education and the economy are inexorably linked (Björk, 1996) and then by declaring that ineffective public schools place the nation at risk in a global economy (Kearns, 1988), this group's elites (primarily high ranking corporate executives) have been able to play a major role in school reform (Koppich & Guthrie, 1993). Returning traditional social values to education, establishing state and national accountability standards, and market competition strategies were among their most prominent proposals (Finn, 1990; Chubb & Moe, 1990). Specific proposals such as vouchers, tax credits, and charter

schools revealed their intent to remove elementary and secondary education from the public sector economy (McCarthy, 2000).

On the other hand, those promoting equality seek a stronger government role; these individuals usually see public schooling as an instrument of social justice. Reformers such as Sizer (1992), Glickman (1998), and Comer (1996) have recommended greater investments in public schools so that internal cultural reforms can occur. They believe that schools should be improved by re-energizing classrooms, raising performance standards to ensure that all children learn, building an education profession through rigorous certification requirement for teachers and administrators (Sizer, 1984) and engaging parents as partners to support student learning (Seeley, 1981).

Although educators view "schooling as a sacred trust that should not be tainted by partisan politics, manipulated by community interest groups, or demeaned by power struggles" (Björk & Keedy, 2001, p. 276), education policymaking, including debates over professional preparation and licensing, is mired in politics (Johnson, 1996). This is why neither changes in the nature of the debate nor variation in the foci of policy forums diminish the struggle among participants to achieve hegemony.

Professional Associations, Licensure, and Protecting the Public Interest

Since the early 1980's professional associations, accreditation agencies and licensure groups have been conspicuous in education reform. Institutional accreditation and professional licensure are the cornerstones of the professions and they validate standards of institutional quality, integrity and worthiness of university-based professional programs (Seldon, 1977; Young, Chambers, Kells, & Associates, 1983). By providing quality controls, they protect public interests (Kaplin, 1982; Millard, 1983; NCATE, 1990; Wise 1992) and legitimize a profession social standing. Even the most established professions faced challenges with respect to their legitimacy in their formative stages. As an example, states at one point treated a diploma from a medical school as the equivalent of a license to practice. This myopic policy encouraged a proliferation of shoddy medical schools, many operating solely for profit and presenting diplomas to literally anyone who could afford their expensive tuition. Instead of trying to ameliorate this problem by political pressure (i.e., by directly lobbying state legislators to reinstate rigorous licensing standards), responsible medical school professors and practicing physicians elected to work collaboratively to build a defensible case for sounder public policy. They did this by first building a meaningful practice-based curriculum for preparing physicians and then by deploying it as a framework for medical school accreditation (Connelly & Rosenberg,

2003). These accomplishments allowed the reformers to wage a rational argument for rigorous state licensing that proved to be successful. As states adopted new licensing standards for physicians, unaccredited medical schools quickly disappeared after prospective students learned that they either would be ineligible for licensing or would have virtually no chance of passing the demanding state examinations (Kowalski, 2004).

Noting the evolution of established professions in the United States, some critics have vilified school administration professors for not having taken a more proactive posture as reformers. Evidence suggests, however, that these rebukes are not totally warranted. In truth, the school administration profession has been and remains divided, perhaps not equally, with respect to changing preparation and licensing requirements. This division is characterized by two opposing groups, one promoting massive reforms and the other resisting change (Kowalski, 2004). The reform advocates argue that meaningful school improvement is more likely if school administration becomes a true profession—that is, a profession embracing stringent preparation, accreditation, and licensing standards. Their influence has been most evident in initiatives sponsored by three national organizations.

1. The *University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA)*, a consortium of doctoral-granting research universities, played a pivotal role in creating three commissions: the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEEA), the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) and the National Commission for the Advancement of Educational Leadership Preparation (NCAELP). In its report, *Leaders for America's Schools,* the NCEEA (1987) recommended that the quality, rigor, and relevancy of university-based educational administration programs should be increased and that programs that failed to meet the elevated standards should be closed. The NPBEA, seeking to unify the profession and provide it with a single, authoritative voice (Murphy & Forsyth, 1999), published two notable reports: *Improving the Preparation of School Administrators: An Agenda for Reform* (1989) and *Principals for Our Changing Schools* (1993). The overarching purpose of the NCAELP was to "examine and improve the quality of educational leadership in the United States" (Young, 2002, p. 4) by aligning university-based professional preparation programs with research findings and changing school practices.

2. The *American Association of School Administrators (AASA)* published a document entitled, *Professional Standards for the Superintendency,* in 1993(Hoyle, 1993). The intent was to provide national standards that would guide preparing, licensing, and employing superintendents.

3. The *American Education Research Association (AERA)*, in concert with UCEA and the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) at Temple Univer-

sity, formed a task force for developing research in educational leadership. This group published report, *What We Know about Successful School Leadership* (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003), proposed a framework for professional preparation based on empirical evidence showing that school and district leaders can directly and indirectly influence student achievement.

These examples of attempted reforms serve two important purposes. First, they verify that at least some school administration professors are committed to reforms that would increase standards. Second, they demonstrate either that these professors are a minority in the profession or that their views remain unacceptable in political policy arenas. In either case, ineffective programs, many under-funded and under-staffed, are still operating—and in some states, they are actually proliferating (Kowalski & Glass, 2002). Not unexpectedly, professors staffing them and the graduates produced by them are often openly hostile to any suggested reform that might affect them negatively. By openly rejecting rigorous accreditation and licensing standards, however, they unwittingly enhance the political position of those outside the profession who seek to deregulate the practice of school administration so that any semblance of professionalism will be eradicated (Kowalski, 2004).

Knowledge and Skills Required of Superintendents

A four-step process was used to evaluate the merits of deregulating the school administration profession. First, an historical analysis of the evolution of the superintendency over the past 100 years was conducted to determine if specific role requirements evolved. Second, the contemporary validity of the role conceptualizations was examined in the context of input gathered from the most recent national study of practitioners, *The Study of the American Superintendency 2000: A look at the Superintendent of Education in the New Millennium* (Glass, Björk & Brunner, 2000). Next, the knowledge base associated with these role conceptualizations was identified and interfaced with the two primary superintendent standards documents, AASA's *Professional Standards for the Superintendency* (Hoyle, 1993) and the *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders* (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). The interface was completed to determine if the two documents accurately identify essential knowledge and skills embedded the position's role conceptualizations. The fourth and final step was to determine if the evidence supported the contention that deregulation would serve the public's interests.

Current Relevance of Role Characterizations

The position of school district superintendent was created in the mid-1800s; between 1837 and 1850, 13 urban districts had employed a person in this role. According to most accounts, the very first district superintendents were appointed in Buffalo and Louisville (Grieder, Pierce, & Jordan, 1969). By the end of the nineteenth century, most city school districts had created this position. The need to do so was affected by a myriad of conditions including the development of larger city school districts, the consolidation of rural school districts, an expanded curriculum, passage of compulsory attendance laws, demands for increased accountability, and efficiency expectations (Kowalski, 2003a). There are, however, discrepancies in the historical accounts of the district superintendent that span over 150 years. Petersen and Barnett (2003) attribute these differences to three conditions: the use of different literature sources, differing interpretations of historical accounts, and the analytical approaches used. While some scholars (e.g., Tyack & Hansot, 1982) relied on a developmental approach (based on the premise that the superintendent's role matured over time), others (Callahan, 1966) employed a discursive analysis (relying on rhetoric and writings to determine role expectations). Noting the use of these two distinctively different methodologies, Brunner, Grogan, and Björk (2002) concluded that the discursive approach accounted for a greater number of developmental stages.

Some authors (e.g., Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Petersen & Barnett, 2003) identify the earliest role conceptualization of the superintendent as being the school board's clerk. This role, thought to exist for several decades prior to 1850, was predicated on the belief that big city school boards were compelled to employ a figurehead but reluctant to relinquish power. Hence, superintendents during that era were relegated to performing simple clerical and practical tasks (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). The role of clerk proved to be temporary and this may explain why most scholars have not addressed it more formally in their writing.

Five more widely recognized role conceptualizations are found in the literature: (a) *teacher-scholar* (1850 to early 1900s); (b) *organizational manager* (early 1900s to 1930); (c) *democratic leader* (1930 to mid-1950s); (d) *applied social scientist* (mid-1950s to mid-1970s), and (e) *communicator* (mid-1970s to present). The first four were identified by Callahan (1966) and the fifth was identified by Kowalski (2001; 2003b). In practice, neatly separating these five characterizations is impossible because practitioners often assume two or more of them at any given time. Although all are considered essential to effective practice, the importance of each has varied over time based on prevailing social conditions and philosophical priorities. Data reported in AASA's, most recent ten-year study of the

superintendency, *The Study of the American Superintendency 2000: A look at the Superintendent of Education in the New Millennium* (Glass, et al., 2000) were systematically examined to ascertain the contemporary validity of these role conceptualizations from the perspective of practitioners.

Teacher-Scholar. From the time the position was created until the first decade of the twentieth century, the primary foci of district superintendents were implementing a state curriculum and supervising teachers. The *common school movement* was intended to assimilate students into American culture by having public schools deliver a set of uniform subjects and courses. This strategy required centralized control and standardization to ensure compliance at the local level, responsibilities that were assigned to state, county, and district superintendents (Spring, 1994). Largely because of this narrow role and the absence of formal preparation programs for administrators, the earliest superintendents were basically "master" teachers (Callahan, 1962).

Teachers who became superintendents, especially in larger districts, were often viewed as intellectual leaders. As an example, they authored professional journal articles about the philosophy and history of education and about pedagogy (Cuban, 1988); some later became state superintendents, professors, and college presidents (Petersen & Barnett, 2003). The role of superintendent as teacher-scholar was summarized in an 1890 report on urban superintendents:

> It must be made his recognized duty to train teachers and inspire them with high ideals; to revise the course of study when new light shows that improvement is possible; to see that pupils and teachers are supplied with needed appliances for the best possible work; to devise rational methods of promoting pupils. (Cuban, 1976, p. 16)

Often, early superintendents used professionalism to shield themselves from politics. One common tactic was to separate themselves from political managers in local, county, and state government (e.g., political appointees managing governmental services such police and fire protection). They were able to do this because the managerial aspects of administration (e.g., budgeting and accounting) were often assumed by board members or by subordinate officials (e.g., business managers) (Callahan, 1966).

After 1910, the conceptualization of the district superintendent as teacher-scholar waned but never became totally irrelevant. Over the past 100 years, emphasis placed on instructional leaders actually has fluctuated. In recent decades, for example, demands for school improvement have contributed to a resurgence of interest in this role. The most recent AASA study of superintendents (Glass et al., 2000) verifies that the

teacher-scholar role remains relevant; over 40% of the superintendents identified being an educational leader as their school board's primary expectation. This expectation was most pronounced in districts enrolling more than 3,000 students and more pronounced among females than males (51.4% of females and 38.2% of males cited this role as their most important responsibility). Two other findings from the AASA study also validate the continued important of the teacher-scholar role. First, 26% of the superintendents said they were expected to provide instructional leadership (connoting a more direct involvement with principals and teachers). Second, three of the five greatest challenges identified by the superintendents pertain directly to the teacher-scholar role: assessing and testing learner outcomes (ranked second); dealing with demands for improving curriculum and instruction (ranked fourth); coping with changing curriculum priorities (ranked fifth).

Organizational Manager. As early as 1890, prominent policymakers were expressing reservations that traditional superintendents could administer large city districts. Their concerns focused most directly on the fact that these educators had not been prepared to be organizational managers. Studying school administration during this period, Cuban (1976) noted that "the lines of argument crystallized over whether the functions of a big-city superintendent should be separated in to two distinct jobs, i.e., business manager and superintendent of instruction" (p. 17). This debate was fueled by growing concerns that schools did not operate efficiently, at least not in comparison to successful businesses (Kowalski, 1999). Over the next 10 to 20 years, even many leading education scholars, such as Ellwood Cubberly, George Strayer, and Franklin Bobbitt, advocated that scientific management should be applied in public schools (Cronin, 1973). In response, several leading universities initiated school management courses and many big-city superintendents seized the opportunity to enhance their stature by convincing others that their work had become separate from and more important than teaching (Thomas & Moran, 1992).

The primary management duties assigned to superintendents during this period included budget development and administration, standardization of operation, personnel management, and facility management. Efforts to refashion superintendent as organizational managers were criticized across the political spectrum. Mayors, city council members, and other political bosses, for example, objected to the role because they feared that its acceptance would broaden the power and influence of superintendents at their expense (Callahan, 1962). At the other end of the spectrum, several prominent scholars opposed the role because they believed it would advance the infusion of classical theory and scientific

management in public education. If this were accomplished, they argued, much of the authority and control possessed by citizens would be transferred to superintendents (Glass, 2003).

The business executive perspective of school administration was increasingly criticized after 1930, largely for four reasons.

1. The stock market crash and subsequent economic depression had eroded much of the glitter captains of industry had acquired by deploying scientific management during the previous three decades.

2. As predicted by some scholars, many local school district patrons resisted an erosion of their liberties, especially in relation to having a direct influence on local school governance (Kowalski, 2003a).

3. Prominent progressive educators, such as George Sylvester Counts, relentlessly criticized the infusion of business values into school administration, arguing that classical theory and scientific management were incongruous with the core values of democracy (VanTil, 1971).

4. The birth of the human relations movement contributed to changing values about appropriate administrative behavior (Hanson, 2003). Despite diminished support for the management role conceptualization circa 1930, educators and policymakers had come to believe effective administration required competent management (Kowalski, 1999).

The most recent AASA study (Glass et al., 2000) supports the continued relevance of the role conceptualization of superintendent as manager. Slightly over one-third of the superintendents (36.4%) indicated that the board's primary expectation was for them to be an organizational manager. Nearly all cited three management-related issues as serious problems in their practice: 97% cited a lack of adequate financial resources; 88% cited being accountable for resources and outcomes; 82% cited compliance with state and federal mandates.

Democratic Leader. The role conceptualization of superintendent as democratic leader is anchored in both political realities and philosophy. During the economic depression of the 1930s, for example, scarce resources heightened funding competition between public schools and other governmental agencies. Prior to this time, direct political involvement by superintendents was usually deemed to be inappropriate and unprofessional (Björk & Lindle, 2001; Kowalski, 1995). But in the highly turbulent 1930s, such convictions were replaced by mounting expectations that school administrators function as lobbyists and political strategists. Simultaneously, critics of the preceding management era were still trying to restore democracy in the larger school districts that had become bureaucratic.

Ernest Melby, who had served as dean of education at Northwestern

University and New York University, was a leading spokesperson for democratic administration (Callahan, 1966). Melby (1955) believed that the community was public education's greater resource, and he urged administrators to "release the creative capacities of individuals" and "mobilize the educational resources of communities" (p. 250). In essence, superintendents were urged to galvanize policymakers, employees, and other taxpayers to support the district's initiatives (Howlett, 1993).

By the mid-1950s, the idea of having superintendents engage in democratic administration also met with disfavor. Detractors argued that the concept was overly idealistic and insufficiently attentive to realities of practice. The everyday problems faced by superintendents were viewed largely as economic and political, and concerns mounted that administrators were not prepared properly to meet them (Kowalski, 1999). In essence, the issue was not whether superintendents should be politicians, but rather how they would use political acuity to enhance their effectiveness in complex educational arenas (Björk & Gurley, 2003). There was a growing recognition that superintendents needed to be political strategists (Keedy & Björk, 2002).

The role of superintendents as democratic statesmen and politicians is largely defined by the realities rather than the rhetoric of practice. Interest group politics has long been recognized as an influential factor in the educational policymaking processes (Tracey, 1987). Yet, superintendents have resisted attempts to characterize them as politicians (Björk & Lindle, 2001; Kowalski, 1995) since such an image has not been acceptable within the traditional culture of school administration (Cuban, 1985). However in their AASA sponsored study, Glass, et al. (2000) reported several findings verifying the intensity of politics in school administration. As examples, 57% of all superintendents and 90% of superintendents in very large districts (those with 25,000 or more students) acknowledged that community pressure groups influence board decisions. Approximately 13% of superintendents responded that board's primary role expectation for them was that of democratic or political leader. Moreover, 83% indicated that their relationships with board members were one of their most serious problems.

Applied Social Scientists. As with earlier role conceptualizations, the view of superintendent as applied social scientist was forged by several societal and professional conditions. Callahan (1966) noted four of them. The first was a growing dissatisfaction with democratic leadership after World War II; critics charged that the concept was overly idealistic and ignored the realities of practice. The second was the rapid development of the social sciences in the late 1940s and early 1950s; much of the knowledge generated by this expansion was applicable to public organizations and

administration. The third was support from the Kellogg Foundation; during the 1950s, the Foundation provided more than $7 million in grants primarily to eight major universities that allowed school administration professors to conduct social science research. The last was a resurgence of criticisms of public education in the early 1950s; much like conditions leading to the management conceptualization, public dissatisfaction spawned reform efforts and heightened interest in the social sciences. At least two other factors arguably were highly influential in the acceptance of the applied social scientist role. Circa 1955, efforts to make school administration an established academic discipline equal to business management and public administration were intensifying (Culbertson, 1981). Redefining administrators as applied social scientists and infusing the social sciences into the curriculum for preparing school administrators were viewed as positive steps toward that goal (Crowson & McPherson, 1987). Second, prior to the 1950s, the practice of school administration had focused largely on internal operations, but gradually systems theory was employed to demonstrate how external legal, political, social, and economic systems affected the operation and productivity of public schools (Getzels, 1977). Consequently, administrators had to understand these external systems if they were to provide essential leadership and management.

The applied social scientist conceptualization encouraged professors and practitioners to emphasize empiricism, predictability, and scientific certainty in their research and practice (Cooper & Boyd, 1987). The intent was to rewrite the normative standards for practice; superintendents in the future were expected to apply scientific inquiry to the problems and decisions that permeated their practice. The study of theory was at the core of this normative transition, as evidenced by the changes in school administration textbooks. Those written prior to 1950 never mentioned theory; virtually none written after 1950 omitted theory (Getzels, 1977). In many ways, the development of the applied social scientist perspective paralleled the development of the organizational manager conceptualization. Both roles emerged in the context of public dissatisfaction; both were widely supported by prominent school administration professors; both separated administration from teaching, with administrators being elevated to the status of having the more demanding and more technical responsibilities (Kowalski, 2003a). Both the organizational manager and applied social scientist conceptualizations cast superintendents as "experts," individuals possessing a knowledge base beyond teaching. More recently, the applied social scientist view has captured the attention of critical theorists because they conclude knowledge required for this role is highly cogent to eradicating social injustices in public institutions (Johnson & Fusarelli, 2003).

School superintendents are expected to contend with many contextual issues such as changing demographics, poverty, racism, drugs, and violence (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2005; Kochan, Jackson & Duke, 1999). These social factors undeniably affect the education process in general and the superintendent's approach to instructional leadership specifically. In light of the fact that nearly half of the nation's superintendents indicate that educational leadership is their primary role expectation (Glass et al., 2000), practitioners arguably should be prepared to integrate knowledge from the behavioral sciences with pedagogy to forge a coherent and relevant education program. The continuing negative effects of social factors on student performance requires superintendents to be at the forefront of ensuring that schools are simultaneously socially just, democratic, and productive (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2005; Goldring & Greenfiled, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1991).

Communicator. The view of superintendent as communicator emerged in conjunction with America's transition from a manufacturing society to an information-based society (Kowalski, 2001). Communicative expectations in this position reflected a confluence of reform initiatives and the social environment in which they were being pursued. Virtually every major school improvement concept and strategy called upon administrators to work collaboratively with others to build and then pursue a collective vision. Yet, most schools had organizational climates that viewed community interventions as being counterproductive (Blase & Anderson, 1995) and work isolation as being productive (Gideon, 2002). Since the early 1990s, however, most policy analysts have concluded that meaningful school reform requires revising these institutional climates, including the way schools are structured and the essence of underlying values and beliefs (Bauman, 1996). In addition, the conviction that restructuring complex institutions necessitates a social systems perspective (Chance & Björk, 2004; Murphy, 1991; Schein, 1996) has been widely accepted. Schlechty (1997) noted that, "systemic thinking requires us to accept that the way social systems are put together has independent effects on the way people behave, what they learn, and how they learn what they learn" (p. 134). Within this perspective, the nature of public schools is influenced by human transactions occurring within and outside the formal organization—exchanges that are often driven by philosophical differences. Consequently, restructuring proposals that ignore the ubiquitous nature of political disagreements almost always fail either because key implementers and stakeholders are excluded from visioning and planning or because the values and beliefs expressed in the reforms are incongruous with prevailing institutional culture (Schlechty, 1997).

Many scholars (e.g., Henkin, 1993; Murphy, 1994) believe that school

improvement requires changes in institutional culture that must be pursued locally with superintendents providing essential leadership. Being a reformer, however, can be highly intimidating, both because the function requires tasks for which many superintendents have had little or no formal preparation and because the necessary interventions contradict values and beliefs they have been socialized to accept (Kowalski, 2003b; Streitmatter, 1994). Democratic decision making, for example, requires communication skills and conflict management (Carlson, 1996) and the process is incompatible with traditional management values.

Many communication scholars have concluded that communication and organizational culture are entangled. Conrad (1994) wrote, "Cultures are communicative creations. They emerge and are sustained by the communicative acts of all employees, not just the conscious persuasive strategies of upper management. Cultures do not exist separately from people communicating with one another" (p. 27). Despite the fact that most organizational research has categorized culture as a causal variable and communication as an intervening variable (Wert-Gray, Center, Brashers, & Meyers, 1991), scholars often describe the relationship between organizational culture and communication as reciprocal. Axley (1996) wrote, "communication gives rise to culture, which gives rise to communication, which perpetuates culture" (p. 153). As such, culture influences communicative behavior and communicative behavior is instrumental to building, maintaining, and changing culture (Kowalski, 1998; 2000). In the case of local school districts, normative communicative behavior for superintendents is shaped largely by two realities: the need for them to assume leadership in the process of school restructuring (Björk, 2001; Murphy, 1994); the need for them to change school culture as part of the restructuring process (Heckman, 1993; Kowalski, in press).

The communicator role is shaped by two conditions: the need to restructure school cultures and the need to access and use information in a timely manner to solve problems of practice. Nearly all superintendents (95.3%) acknowledged that they were the board's primary source of information (Glass et al., 2000). Moreover, a majority of superintendents reported having engaged regularly in communication-intensive interactions with parents and other citizens: setting district objectives and priorities (68.7%); strategic planning (60.6%); fundraising (60%); program and curriculum decisions (59.8%) (Glass et al., 2000). In the presence of modern technologies, superintendents are compelled to communicate more often and more intensely than ever before, and the consequences of the quality of their communication are higher than at any previous time (Kowalski & Keedy, 2004).

Required Knowledge and Skills in Relation to Current Standards

In summary, data from the 2000 AASA study reveal that superintendents continue to view the five established role conceptualizations for their position to still be relevant. Therefore, they continue to provide perhaps the most relevant framework for determining qualifications for this high profile position. More precisely, they provide a rational basis for determining essential knowledge and skills that should be honed in professional preparation and validated in the licensing process. Such an analysis is presented in Table 1. Certain elements of the knowledge base cut across all five role conceptualizations; certain elements are pertinent to just two or three conceptualizations; certain elements are specific to a single role conceptualization. Collectively, the information presented in Table I provides a mosaic of the theoretical knowledge and craft knowledge required of superintendent practitioners.

Directly or indirectly, the two standards documents described earlier (AASA and ISSLC) have guided professional preparation and licensing standards since the mid-1990s. The former includes eight superintendent-specific standards that were recently affirmed in the literature

Table 1
Knowledge and Skills Associated with Superintendent Role Conceptualizations

Role	Pertinent Knowledge and Skills
Teacher-scholar	Pedagogy; educational psychology; curriculum; instructional supervision; staff development; educational philosophy
Manager	Law; personnel administration; finance/budgeting; facility development/maintenance; collective bargaining/contract maintenance; public relations
Democratic leader	Community relations; collaborative decision making; politics
Applied social scientist	Quantitative and qualitative research; behavioral sciences
Communicator	Verbal communication; written communication; listening; public speaking; media relations
Multi-role*	Motivation; organizational theory; organizational change and development; leadership theory; ethical/moral administration; technology and its applications; diversity/multiculturalism; human relations

*This category includes knowledge and skills pertinent to all or nearly all roles.

(Hoyle, Björk, Collier & Glass, 2004). The latter includes six generic standards applicable to all administrative positions. Standards from both documents are summarized in Appendix A. Comparing the knowledge base requirements presented in Table 1 with the standards in these two documents provides a second procedure for examining the claim that the superintendent knowledge base is fraudulent or invalid. If such claims were true, an incongruity between what is said to be necessary and what actually is necessary should be apparent.

Results of the second level analysis are presented in Table 2. They reveal that every knowledge base component identified in Table 1 has been addressed in at least one standard in both the AASA and ISLLC documents. Moreover, no standard identifies a knowledge or skill not found in Table 1.

Discussion

Arguments for deregulating school administration presented in *Better Leaders for America's Schools: A Manifesto* (Broad Foundation & Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003) are grounded in several questionable assertions. One of them is that school administration professors and their organizations are either moribund or obstruct needed improvements. A fair reading of recent history exhibits that this claim is at best only minimally correct. Reforms that would have increased the rigor in preparation and licensing were proposed a number of times by school administration professors; however, they were rejected by policymakers and other members of the school administration profession largely for political reasons.

The claim that one need not master a specific knowledge base to be an effective superintendent is another claim that was examined in this paper. This contention is obviously advantageous to the cause of would-be reformers campaigning to de-professionalize school administration. Their success depends on policymakers accepting the assertion that anyone with generic management skills can be an effective superintendent. Logically, one would expect that policymakers would demand compelling evidence before dismantling a profession. Emotion and politics, and not rationality, however, have been the anti-professionists' preferred weapons (Kowalski, 2004). To this point, their case for deregulation has been based primarily on (a) anecdotal evidence, (b) claims that top-level business executives and retired senior military personnel would become superintendents if spared the indignity of having to study pedagogy and school administration, and (c) appeals to policymakers for "common sense" (e.g., see Broad Foundation & Thomas B. Fordham

Table 2
Interface of Knowledge and Skills and the AASA and ISLLC Standards

Pertinent knowledge/skills	AASA	ISLLC
Teacher-scholar		
Pedagogy	6	2
Educational psychology	6	2
Curriculum	5	2
Instructional supervision	6	2, 5
Staff development	6, 7	2
Educational philosophy/history	2	5
Manager		
School law	2, 4, 7	3, 6
Personnel administration	7	3
Finance/budgeting	4	3
Facility development/maintenance	4	3
Collective bargaining/contract maintenance	4, 7	3, 5
Public relations	3, 4	3, 6
Democratic leader		
Community relations	3	1, 4, 6
Collaborative decision making	1, 2	1, 4
Politics	1, 2, 8	1, 6
Governance	2	6
Applied social scientist		
Quantitative and qualitative research	4, 5	1
Behavioral sciences	1, 8	4, 6
Measurement and evaluation	5, 6	2
Communicator		
Verbal communication	3	1, 4, 6
Written communication	3	1, 4, 6
Media relations	3, 8	6
Listening	3	1, 6
Public speaking	3	1, 6
*Multi-role**		
Motivation	5, 6, 7	2
Organizational theory	1, 2, 7	1, 2, 5
Organizational change and development	1	1, 4, 6
Leadership theory	1	1, 2, 5
Ethical/moral administration	8	5
Technology and its applications	3, 4, 6	2, 3
Diversity/multiculturalism	1, 3, 8	1, 2, 4
Conflict management	1, 2	1, 4, 6

*This category includes knowledge and skills pertinent to all or nearly all roles.
Note: Numbers in the AASA and ISLLC columns refer to the standards number. See Appendix A for reference.

(Hoyle, Björk, Collier & Glass, 2004). The latter includes six generic standards applicable to all administrative positions. Standards from both documents are summarized in Appendix A. Comparing the knowledge base requirements presented in Table 1 with the standards in these two documents provides a second procedure for examining the claim that the superintendent knowledge base is fraudulent or invalid. If such claims were true, an incongruity between what is said to be necessary and what actually is necessary should be apparent.

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Curriculum	5	2
Instructional supervision	6	2, 5
Staff development	6, 7	2
Educational philosophy/history	2	5
Manager		
School law	2, 4, 7	3, 6
Personnel administration	7	3
Finance/budgeting	4	3
Facility development/maintenance	4	3
Collective bargaining/contract maintenance	4, 7	3, 5
Public relations	3, 4	3, 6
Democratic leader		
Community relations	3	1, 4, 6
Collaborative decision making	1, 2	1, 4
Politics	1, 2, 8	1, 6
Governance	2	6
Applied social scientist		
Quantitative and qualitative research	4, 5	1
Behavioral sciences	1, 8	4, 6
Measurement and evaluation	5, 6	2
Communicator		
Verbal communication	3	1, 4, 6
Written communication	3	1, 4, 6
Media relations	3, 8	6
Listening	3	1, 6
Public speaking	3	1, 6
*Multi-role**		
Motivation	5, 6, 7	2
Organizational theory	1, 2, 7	1, 2, 5
Organizational change and development	1	1, 4, 6
Leadership theory	1	1, 2, 5
Ethical/moral administration	8	5
Technology and its applications	3, 4, 6	2, 3
Diversity/multiculturalism	1, 3, 8	1, 2, 4
Conflict management	1, 2	1, 4, 6

*This category includes knowledge and skills pertinent to all or nearly all roles.
Note: Numbers in the AASA and ISLLC columns refer to the standards number. See Appendix A for reference.

Institute, 2003; Hess, 2003). These contentions might be more credible if the qualifications of superintendents and the nature of practice across all districts were uniform; obviously they are not. One can find weak and ineffective practitioners in any profession. The task arguably is easier in school administration than in most other professions because preparation program quality and state licensing requirements are highly inconsistent (Kowalski & Glass, 2002). Deregulation, however, will only exacerbate these situations.

Today, school administration is best characterized as a quasi-profession in desperate need of becoming a full profession (Kowalski, 2004). Examining the historical roots of law and medicine in the United States, Connelly and Rosenberg (2003) concluded that stringent state licensing was preceded by internal reforms that produced both a national preparation curriculum and rigorous accreditation standards. Based on the analysis discussed in this paper, an identical reform strategy in school administration clearly would be more beneficial to society than the knee-jerk solution proposed by anti-professionists. Ironically, however, the greatest enemy of needed reform comes from within school administration. Faculty and administrators associated with under-funded and under-staffed programs continue to resist any policy initiative that is politically disadvantageous to them.

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Appendix A

Superintendent Preparation/Licensing Standards

American Association of School Administrators
(focused specifically on superintendents)

Standard 1: Leadership and district culture
Standard 2: Policy and governance
Standard 3: Communications and community relations
Standard 4: Organizational management
Standard 5: Curriculum planning and development
Standard 6: Instructional management
Standard 7: Human resources management
Standard 8: Values and ethics of leadership

Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium
(focused on all school administrators)

Standard 1: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

Standard 2: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Standard 3: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Standard 4: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Standard 5: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Standard 6: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal and cultural context.