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Exploring K-12 Superintendent Turnover: Career Advancement Or Dissatisfaction Realized?

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EXPLORING K-12 SUPERINTENDENT TURNOVER: CAREER ADVANCEMENT OR

DISSATISFACTION REALIZED?

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

University of North Dakota

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
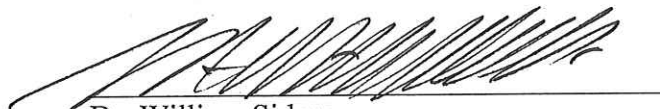

For the degree of

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Grand Forks, North Dakota
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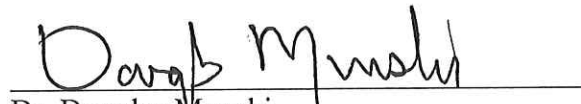
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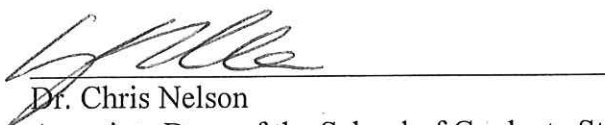
Title   Exploring K-12 Superintendent Turnover: Career Advancement or Dissatisfaction
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Department   Educational Leadership

Degree   Doctor of Philosophy

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I would like to thank my wife, Helen, for her support and tolerance while I served as a superintendent. She has endured trials and tribulations in her life resulting from simply being the wife of a superintendent in the same town where we both were employed. I thank her for the sacrifice she has made while I pursued my goal. I look forward to our free time.

I would like to thank my son Frank (F2) for his support and tolerance while I served as an administrator in the same building where he attended school. Being a child of a principal and later a superintendent is a challenge. He enjoyed brief moments of pride followed by many challenging situations. These included attempting to establish trusting relationships with fellow students and teachers while they and he were under the supervision of his father, the administrator. My son persevered and established lifelong relationships with his peers. I am proud that he has developed into a successful individual with a beautiful wife, Heidi, and a more beautiful granddaughter, Adalyn. I look forward to spending my newly acquired time focused on being a grandparent.

Finally, I would acknowledge my late father, Louis Schill, and mother, LouVerne Schill. Both obtained an eighth-grade education, but each had endured growing up during the 1930s. I am so proud to honor them both as veterans of WWII. It is only through their guidance that I developed an attitude of committing to become a lifelong learner resulting in a doctorate degree.

ABSTRACT

Leading educational reform is one of a superintendent's many roles, which involves working with elected school board members with varying beliefs of what constitutes educational reform. Superintendents accept this responsibility despite the considerable challenge that meaningful educational reform efforts take at least five years (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). The average stay of a superintendent in a school district is six and a half years, further complicating reform efforts (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). The purpose of the study was to better understand the factors that lead to the turnover of superintendents of K-12 schools in North Dakota.

The conceptual framework for this study was premised in the Push-Pull Career Movement Theory (Tekniepe, 2015) and the Dissatisfaction Theory of Democracy (Iannaccone and Lutz, 1970). The qualitative study involved utilizing Grounded Theory to understand the shared experiences of recently retired North Dakota superintendents. Ten superintendents were interviewed. Follow-up interviews were conducted as necessary. Data from the interviews were coded into categories, themes, and assertions.

The aim of this study was to better understand the push/pull factors that influenced a superintendent during his or her career and how these factors possibly influenced a superintendent to remain in a district or leave a district. The researcher then provided recommendations for superintendents, school board members, North Dakota Educational Leadership Programs, and North Dakota Department of Public Instruction.

The result of the study from the ten participants' shared experiences was the emergence of the Accelerated Leadership Departure Theory. The majority of participants chose to leave their position before they had intended and expressed that they were pushed out by stressors. The Accelerated Leadership Departure Theory best encapsulates the shared experiences and professional journey of the majority of the participants involved in this study.

Keywords: superintendent turnover, grounded theory study, push/pull career movement theory, dissatisfaction theory of democracy, superintendent/school board relationship

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

At the time of this study, the researcher had been an educator for 29 years and began his teaching career at Four Winds High School in Fort Totten, ND. Five years later, the researcher accepted a teaching position at Williston High School. Five years after that, he began his administrative duties as an assistant principal at Williston High School. After three years in the assistant principal role, the researcher assumed the high school principal position and served in that capacity for three additional years.

The researcher's first superintendent duties began during the summer of 2004 in Cavalier, ND. This school district had an enrollment of approximately 450 students in K-12. Although the enrollment of the district was substantially lower than that of Williston High School with 1,000 students in Grades 9-12 and roughly half the professional staff, the duties as a first-time superintendent proved more complex than anticipated regarding mastering the many roles necessary to lead educational reform. The difficulties encountered contributed to two veteran board members being voted off the board and one more choosing not to run for re-election. The replacement board members were intent on the researcher leaving the district, and after his eighth year of serving as superintendent, the researcher submitted his resignation to the board. Later in the researcher's doctoral studies, he discovered that these previous series of actions or events he had experienced were better understood in the context of the Dissatisfaction Theory. It

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is a theory proposed by Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) relating to a superintendent's longevity in a K-12 school.

How can a superintendent who attempted to implement school board directives and moved education forward in a community experience dissatisfaction? This was the question the researcher sought to research and answer. It is a question asked by other superintendents to gain a better understanding of their leadership experiences. The answer to the question needs to be shared with other superintendents, school board members, and educational leadership training programs at the university level in the hopes of reducing the frequency of superintendent turnover. The answer might increase continuity of leadership among individual school districts and ultimately result in an improved learning culture and achievement for students.

Need for Study

Successful education reform initiatives require time and continuity of district leadership and governing bodies to be fully realized. Research conducted by Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) revealed that successful reform requires a minimum of five years. Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padilla, and Ghosh (2002) echoed Fullan and Stiegelbauer stating that in order to make significant reform in a school district, a superintendent needs a minimum of five years. Kowalski (2006) argued that significant change cannot be accomplished in a short amount of time. Not only does successful reform require time to fully implement and realize results, but continuity among leadership is necessary to see the initiatives through to fruition. The importance of leadership is perhaps best described by Hargreaves (2005) when he states, "one of the most significant events in the life of a school is a change in its leadership. Yet few things in education succeed less than leadership succession" (p. 163). Metzger (1997) adopts a similar stance stating, "The superintendency is the least stable and secure positions in education" (p. 44).

Not only is the change of leadership a significant event that affects the entire organization and its members, but also the longevity of leadership has a direct impact on the successful implementation of change initiatives. Past and recent studies regarding superintendent tenure paint a picture of a "revolving door" for leadership affecting the continuity necessary for educational reforms to become embedded in the organizational culture and flourish. Research conducted by Glass and Franceschini (2007) found that the average superintendent tenure since 1923 has consistently been six years. Yee and Cuban (1996) reported that the length of tenure of superintendents has declined over the past 90 years from 14 years to six years. The National School Boards Association reported that the average tenure of urban superintendents in their current position is 3.4 years (2002). The Council of Great City Schools conducted a study including 59 urban public school superintendents. The study found that the average tenure was 2.75 years (2003).

Data collected from the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction Management Information Systems show that in a ten-year period between 2006 and 2016, 76% of North Dakota K-12 superintendents served five or fewer years in one location, and 86% of superintendents during the same period of time served seven or fewer years in one location. Only 6.83% of the superintendents during this time period served 10 or more years in one location (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2017).

To further complicate the process of achieving continuity among leadership is the fact that school board member longevity is also less than desirable to implement meaningful change. Funk and Funk (1992) reported that a quarter of all board members are new to the board at any given time. Nationwide, 60% of board members have fewer than three years of service. Hess (2002) conducted research and prepared a report for the National School Boards Association in

which 2,000 school districts were surveyed. Results revealed that the mean length of board service among respondents was 6.7 years (2002, p. 5). This longevity barely met the five-year minimum reported by researchers necessary to achieve significant education reform.

Frequent turnover among superintendents and board members affects the ability of K-12 education organizations to function effectively. This phenomenon of high turnover not only affects the culture of an organization and its staff members, but it also affects the students.

As K-12 public education continues to be the focus of public scrutiny, studies have been conducted that begin to link tenure of both superintendents and school board members to student achievement. Ikejiaku (2000) conducted research on 258 school board presidents in New York State. Results revealed that districts having professional school board indicators also had student test scores above that state's average while districts with political school board indicators had student scores that fell below the state's average (p. 119). Yee and Cuban (1996) report, "short tenures create public perception of increased instability, lower morale, a loss of organizational direction and 'vision,' and a general sense by the staff of 'here we go again,' that the district will undergo yet another round of short-lived programs and policies" (p. 615).

At the state level, studies examining superintendent turnover in Kentucky found that a connection between superintendent tenure and student achievement was observed. Johnson, Huffman, Madden, and Shope (2011) analyzed data from Kentucky over a 10-year period. They reported that districts with no turnover had the highest overall student achievement ratings, and districts with two or more turnovers of superintendents had the lowest ratings.

Meaningful education reform requires longevity and continuity among leadership including superintendents and school board members. This continuity adds to the stability of the organization which appears to lead to improved student achievement. There is a genuine need to

gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of superintendents. There is a need to better understand the phenomenon of superintendent turnover in K-12 education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to better understand turnover of superintendents of K-12 schools in North Dakota. This study focused on the shared experiences of ten superintendents who recently retired from serving in North Dakota schools in the K-12 environment. The research included reviewing superintendent/school board relationships and push/pull factors that influenced a superintendent during his or her career. The information resulting from this study may interest North Dakota University System leadership programs, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI), North Dakota School Boards Association (NDSBA), and local school boards as to the factors that influence superintendents during their careers. Perhaps, a better understanding of superintendents' professional experiences will lead to a reduction in superintendent turnover. A 76% turnover rate among superintendents was reported by NDDPI in 2016 (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2017).

Research Questions

This qualitative study focused on recently retired K-12 superintendents from North Dakota and attempted to gain a better understanding of the turnover of superintendents serving in K-12 schools in North Dakota. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What lived experiences did recently retired North Dakota K-12 superintendents share throughout their career regarding leading change in school districts?

2. What rewards and challenges did recently retired North Dakota K-12 superintendents experience throughout their careers?

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3. What factors influenced recently retired North Dakota K-12 superintendents to remain or leave their positions during their careers?

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework "explains either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied-the key factors, construct or variables-and the presumed relationships among them" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 18).

Throughout history the role of the superintendent has undergone several changes. The position itself and changes to the duties of the superintendent appear to have occurred with tension. McCloud and McKenzie (1994) state:

> In the past, school board members were charged with administering all aspects of the school. However, as city populations grew, members of urban school boards were overwhelmed by the enormity of their task. As a result, the office of the superintendent was created. From that day until now there has been tension and, often strained relationships between the board that makes policy and the superintendent who implements it. (p. 385)

This tension between superintendent and the governing board resulting in turnover has been studied and reported continually throughout the history of K-12 education.

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was influenced by the Push-Pull Career Movement Theory (Tekniepe, 2015). Tekniepe suggests that push factors are external pressures that force leaders from their current positions. Pull factors are referred to opportunities for leaders to relocate and experience professional growth or advancement (p. 2). Research relating to the Push-Pull Theory applied to the departure of K-12 superintendents is limited. An earlier developed theory by Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) known as the Dissatisfaction Theory of

Democracy suggests that local school boards are a democratic process involving local community politics that affect school board membership and superintendents. Public dissatisfaction can result in school board member defeat or board members forced into early resignation. Turnover of board members usually leads to the superintendent resigning or being replaced as a result of the new board membership. New board members attempt to carry out new initiatives not necessarily aligned with the past board members' or superintendent's views. This tension usually results in the superintendent resigning or being forced out by the new board members.

Domene (2012) examined the departure of superintendents serving in California. Although the majority of superintendent respondents listed career advancement as their primary reason for departure to another district, they noted that when asked why they might choose to leave their current district, participants indicated that superintendents/school board relationships had the strongest influence (p. 96).

Research regarding superintendent and school board relationships frequently referenced the Dissatisfaction Theory. Numerous quantitative studies have been conducted testing the proposition of the Dissatisfaction Theory: Walden (1966), Kirkendall (1966), Gaberina, (1978), Rada (1984), and Weninger (1987). Alsbury (2002) conducted a mixed method study premised on the Dissatisfaction Theory and concluded, "Researchers should realize that even if the number of quantitative data is expanded, significant indicators of community dissatisfaction may remain hidden, only to be discovered by qualitative data collection methods" (p. 30).

The Dissatisfaction Theory and subsequent quantitative studies conducted appear to provide one explanation of how school board members and superintendents are removed from their positions. Other studies provide explanations of exceptions to the Dissatisfaction Theory

and also suggest the need to move from quantitative studies to qualitative studies to better understand why superintendents left their current positions.

Downs (2014) conducted a qualitative study of retired transformative public school superintendents in Oregon. Downs attempted to gain a deeper understanding of the recollections, advice, and highs and lows of their positions.

This qualitative study utilized the Grounded Theory approach to examine superintendent turnover through a semi-structured interview process to better understand the lived experiences of recently retired superintendents.

Delimitations

This study was conducted in the state of North Dakota. Ten recently retired superintendents were interviewed. The superintendents had retired within one to five years at the time this study was conducted. The study did not include superintendents that intended to continue to serve full time. This study was conducted to gain a better understanding of recently retired superintendents' experiences throughout their careers regarding changing jobs in a school district.

Definition of Terms

Educational Reform – The process of leading change while taking into account the following: current research and effective practices regarding curriculum and instruction; federal and state policies that govern K-12 education; political, social, and economic forces that influence K-12 education while taking into account and valuing the needs and demands of differing interest groups at the local level.

Superintendent – A staff member who is the chief executive officer of a school administrative unit and works directly under a board of education. (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2015, p. 7)

School Board Member – An elected individual who serves the school district in which the individual resides. (North Dakota Century Code 15.1-07-14., 2017)

Professional School Board – A group of school board members who view educational policy making as primarily a technical, expertise-based process and therefore rely heavily on the recommendations of the superintendent. (Ikejiaku, 2000)

District Initiatives – Policy and programs approved by the local school board resulting in influence by federal and state mandates but also involves locally developed (grass roots) goals and action plans aimed at improving the educational culture at the local level. These goals and action plans take into account the differing social needs and demands of local interest groups within a community.

K-12 Education – Education provided to any student who reaches five years of age before August 1st of the year of enrollment in kindergarten and who has not reached 21 years of age by August 1st of their year of enrollment. (North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-01., 2017)

Class A School – All member schools with a total enrollment of 325 or over, and/or an enrollment of 160 or more pupils in an all-male school in grades 9-12. (North Dakota High School Activities Association, 2008)

Class B School – All member high schools, other than those designated Class A, shall be classified as Class B schools. (North Dakota High School Activities Association, 2008)

Grounded Theory – A specific form of ethnographic inquiry that, through a series of carefully planned steps, develops theoretical ideas. Throughout the process, it seeks to ensure

that the theory emerging arises from the data and not from some other source. (Crotty, 1988, p. 78)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – Under No Child Left Behind, each state establishes a definition of adequate yearly progress to use each year to determine the achievement of each school district and school. (U.S. Department of Education, 2004)

List of Acronyms

The following acronyms are utilized within this study. This list will clarify their meanings within the context of this study.

DPI-   Department of Public Instruction

NDCEL-   North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders

NDDPI-   North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

NDSBA-   North Dakota School Boards Association

NDU-   North Dakota United

MIS-   Management Information System

Organization of Study

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter I provided an introduction, need for study, purpose of study, research question, conceptual framework, delimitations, definition of terms, and organization of study. Chapter II provides a literature review of areas related to superintendents: (a) early public education, (b) origin and evolution of the superintendent, (c) school governance theories, (d) superintendent and board member longevity, (e) leadership longevity's effect on student achievement and culture, and (f) superintendent and school board relationships. Chapter III provides the methods used to gather and analyze data for the study. Chapter IV presents findings from superintendent interviews. Chapter V contains emerging

revelations and theory. Chapter VI contains a conclusion and summary of the data as well as

recommendations.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This qualitative study focused on recently retired K-12 superintendents from North Dakota. The researcher aimed to gain a better understanding of the turnover of superintendents serving in K-12 schools in North Dakota. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What lived experiences did recently retired North Dakota K-12 superintendents share throughout their career regarding leading change in school districts?

2. What rewards and challenges did recently retired North Dakota K-12 superintendents experience throughout their careers?

3. What factors influenced recently retired North Dakota K-12 superintendents to remain or leave their positions during their careers?

The primary conceptual framework that guided the study was the Push-Pull Career Movement Theory (Tekniepe, 2015). Tekniepe suggests that push factors (external pressures) force leaders from their current positions. Pull factors (professional opportunities) also attract leaders to move from their current positions. A supporting theory that was utilized for this study was the Dissatisfaction Theory (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). This theory suggests as a local school board does not respond to demands of special interest groups within the community that unrest builds and eventually leads to board members being removed from position. Within a few years

of a school board member being replaced, the superintendent either resigns or is removed from the position.

The web browser search engine utilized to research existing studies on the subject of the superintendency was located online through the University of North Dakota Chester Fritz Library. The primary data base utilized was Elton B. Stephens Co. (EBSCO). All the databases within the EBSCO database were utilized when conducting searches. Search terms utilized in the search process included: K-12 superintendent turnover, K-12 superintendent attrition, K-12 superintendent career advancement, Dissatisfaction Theory, Push-Pull Career Movement Theory, K-12 school board member turnover, school board member attrition, history of K-12 superintendents, and history of K-12 school boards.

K-12 Education

Public education has been, for many people, the means employed to realize the American Dream. As Horace Mann stated, "Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery" (1848). The structure of public education has evolved from the one-room school house of the 1800s governed by lay people. These early school boards oversaw everything from the hiring of a teacher to every aspect of the day to day operations of the school. As consolidation of schools occurred, it became necessary to hire an administrator (superintendent) to oversee the day to day operations of the district, including the curriculum for instructing students. As a result of consolidation, the local school board found itself less involved in the minutiae of school business. McCloud and McKenzie (1994) describe that the role of the modern-day superintendent did not exist, and duties were carried out by the school board. However:

As city populations grew, members of urban school boards were overwhelmed by the

enormity of their task. As a result, the office of the superintendent was created. From that

day until now, there has been tension and, often, strained relationships between the board

that makes policy and the superintendent who implements it. (p. 385)

The tension resulting from the creation of the position may be related to the inherent duties to be

performed by the person serving in the position. Crowson (1987) explained, "the

superintendency is a position strangely awash in contradictions and anomalies, and frankly, a

distinct puzzle to those who seek to make a bit of conceptual sense out of this intriguing job" (p.

152). This intriguing position, as mentioned by Crowson (1987), is one that is influenced by

many social forces that may be reflected by school board membership. These forces may or not

align with the individual superintendent's professional beliefs and as a result leads to constant

negotiations between superintendent and board members about who leads the district and how it

should be led.

Public Education and the Superintendent

The role of the superintendent throughout American history has been ever-changing to

accommodate the social forces that have influenced the institution. Callahan (1966) described the

evolutionary role of the superintendent in four stages. These changing roles included: teacher-

scholar (1850-1900), business manager (1900-1930), educational statesman (1930-1950), and

social scientist (1950-1967). The fifth role conceptualization utilized originated from Kowalski

(2003) and involved the superintendent as a communicator (1850-2003) (Barnett et al., 2005, p.

23). The superintendent, like public education, has evolved to meet the needs of the social forces

that influence public education. Some may interpret the evolution of the role as progressive

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while others regressive. Regardless, the role has evolved since the inception and continues to respond to reflect societal pressures.

Superintendent as Teacher/Scholar

The role of the superintendent was created in the 1830s (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). The primary responsibilities of the superintendent during this era was to implement curriculum and supervise teachers (Bjork, Glass, & Brunner, 2005). Financial responsibilities and human resources were the responsibility of the school board during this time with instructional specialist responsibilities reserved for the superintendent (Bjork et al., 2005). Although the role of the superintendent was created in the early 1800s, it was the Michigan Supreme Court decision on the Kalamazoo case that allowed local school boards to tax property owners in order to support secondary schools, in addition to elementary education. This fundamental change in tax law and the widespread addition to the secondary school system called for a full-time administrator to oversee the day to day operations of a K-12 facility (Candoli, 1995).

Superintendent as Business Manager

By the early 1900s America transitioned from an agrarian society to an industrial society. The introduction of the automobile ushered in the school bus which allowed the massing of students to offer programs to serve diverse needs. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1912 provided vocational programs allowing the training of workers needed in an industrial society (Candoli, 1995). American education responded by requiring educational leaders to have a business orientation, not just curriculum and instruction (Callahan, 1962). This era introduced the application of scientific management principles and helped influence the perception that superintendents should focus on time and efficiency (Barnet et al., 2005).

Superintendent as Democratic Leader

During the 1930s, scarce resources led superintendents to engage in political activity at the state and federal level to acquire needed resources. Bjork and Gurley (2003) viewed this new superintendent role as one of an astute political strategist. The role of political strategist continued to evolve with policy, politics joined in a democracy, and democratic administration. The continued ideological and moral differences among community groups demands facilitation of a political strategist (Keedy & Bjork, 2002).

Superintendent as Applied Social Scientist

After World War II, a growing dissatisfaction occurred with democratic leadership at all levels. Educational institutions were not isolated from this growing public dissatisfaction. Desegregation, the escalating Cold War, and WWII baby boomers entering public education led to additional challenges for school leaders of the time (Callahan, 1966). In addition to a growing dissatisfaction of public institutions, a rapid development of the social sciences found its way into public administration. After the 1950s, school administration professors shifted their focus from internal operations to how political, social, and economic systems affect organizations (Getzels, 1977). Theorists and model builders of the behavioral school of management included Egon Guba, Jacob Getzels, Charles Bidwell, and Joseph Letterer (Candoli, 1995). By the 1970s, the behavioral sciences were integrated into school administration literature (Johnson & Fusarelli, 2003). This new direction had to be applied to K-12 education and communicated to the stakeholders. The superintendent was the person charged with the task of providing a rationale for change and communicating the plan to achieve district goals and initiatives.

Superintendent as Communicator

As early as the 1970s, scholars predicted that society would shift from a manufacturing base to an information base. *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) called attention to the need for public schools to prepare students to be competitive in a global economy. This call to change how public schools prepared students demanded a change in the way superintendents led their organizations. In addition to the shift in workforce demands, the dramatic civic upheaval and social tensions brought additional pressure to school leaders. A growing challenge to the superintendency was dealing with a more involved citizenry and school board (Candoli, 1995). School improvement initiatives encouraged superintendents to work collaboratively with principals, teachers, parents, and other taxpayers to build visions (Gideon 2002). This collaborative process led to changing the culture of the organization. Conrad (1994) stated, "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). The role of the superintendent has matured from one of curriculum expert to manager to social scientist to expert communicator. These roles do not stand alone but are all required skills for superintendents. Perhaps in a previous time, a simpler time, the superintendent's role allowed the individual to appease most of the population, but the modern-day superintendent is charged with assuming many roles and appears to appease a few groups only part of the time.

The Superintendent's Role in the Future

Petersen and Fusarelli (2005) acknowledges that although education reform reports are critical for American public schools, these reports recognize that a sound education system is essential to the national wellbeing and public faith in schools (p. 12). Petersen and Fusarelli

continue to report that social pressures will continue to shape the future of the delivery of public education (2005). Perhaps the greatest pressure will result from an increased change in demographics. It was predicted that by the year 2020 the population in America will grow to 265 million people and one third of this population will be non-white (Hodgkinson, 1985, p. 5) The number of students of color attending public schools is projected to reach 48% by 2020. Superintendents and school boards will need to respond to the needs of all students and collaborate with the changing demographic population to ensure resources are provided to ensure a quality education for all students. Petersen and Fusarelli (2005) state that school leadership will need to shift use of power from one to make others subservient to one that "ensures that the voices of all citizens are valued; support the creation of communities of caring; and broaden the involvement of teachers, parents, and citizens in decision making and governance" (p. 17).

Gone are the days such as the 1890s when the Los Angelos superintendent assembled his teachers at the end of the month for a pep talk and handed them each a paper bag of cash for the month's salary (Tyack, 1976). The role of the superintendent has indeed changed to accommodate the social and economic pressures that have influenced K-12 institutions. To successfully maneuver these turbulent waters requires not only a superintendent who is capable of identifying and properly reacting to outside pressures but also a superintendent who is capable of working with his or her employers. Each board of education is elected by the citizens of the district and are often representatives of the special interest groups that influence public education at the local level. Working with school boards has provided challenges to many school leaders. Research has and continues to be conducted regarding public leadership including K-12 education. These theories attempt to explain how organizations function and also how and why turnover occurs.

School Governance Theories

What is the reason for frequent turnover of both superintendents and school board members resulting in shortened tenure? Several theories have been proposed in an attempt to explain the relationship between leaders and the community they represent.

Continuous Participation Theory

The Continuous Participation Theory (Zeigler & Jennings, 1974) explains that the governance of public schools through the local school board is non-democratic. Zeigler and Jennings (1974) maintain that lack of voter turnout, lack of serious competitors for board seats, lack of different political platforms among candidates, and target recruitment of candidates all disallow the local school board from being truly representative of their constituency and results in being undemocratic in its composition and function. Other theories continue to add to the Continuous Participation Theory's assertion of school board governance as an undemocratic process.

Responsiveness Theory

The Responsiveness Theory (Mitchell, 1978) also supports the idea of an undemocratic local school board governance. Proponents contend that governance of local school boards is affected by the limitations of economic and personnel resources; therefore, local schools cannot respond to the community's demands. This inability to respond to demands because of limited resources results in the school board's decisions to be incongruent and subjective. These theories tend to focus on school leadership directly involving school boards and the superintendent. Other research looks more closely at K-12 leadership and what factors affect tenure both of school board members and superintendents.

Dissatisfaction Theory of Democracy

The origin of the Dissatisfaction Theory of Democracy (Iannaccone & Lutz) begins with a thesis by Raymond Callahan (1970). In his thesis, Callahan (1962) suggests that "the behavior of the superintendent is subject to the political winds of the local school board dominated by the economic values of American businessmen" (Lutz & Iannaccone, 1986, p. 3). "Even the best may be fired for finally refusing to take action demanded by a school board for the same of economic efficiency" (p. 3). Through their later studies, Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) suggest that local school boards are democratic bodies involving local community politics that affect school board membership and superintendents. Public dissatisfaction can result in a school board member defeat or board members being forced into early resignation. Turnover of board members often lead to superintendent resignations or replacements as a result of the new board membership.

Push-Pull Career Movement Theory

The origin of the Push-Pull Theory was utilized by March and Simon (1958) when they explained job market conditions and labor market mobility (p. 68). The theory has been applied in numerous contexts in many studies, but Tekniepe and Stream have recently applied the Push-Pull Theory to leadership roles including county managers, college presidents, and rural superintendents to explain why turnover occurs among these groups (2012).

The Push-Pull Theory has been utilized to help explain population migration (Lee, 1966), internal migration in the United States (Greenwood, 1975), and workplace and residential location (Guest & Cluett, 1976). Several individuals have conducted research utilizing the theory to explain professional movement of employees. McAuley, Zeitz, and Blau studied work

commitment among professionals (2006). Kim and Park reported determinants of job satisfaction and turnover among public employees (2014).

Of the four theories attempting to explain the complex relationship between leadership and community, the Push-Pull Theory appears to acknowledge the diversity of the superintendent's professional role and captures the pressure a superintendent undergoes as he or she attempts to lead educational reform. The Dissatisfaction Theory and subsequent quantitative research conducted relating to the theory appears to explain potential school board member and superintendent turnover as it relates to community dissatisfaction. Although the Dissatisfaction Theory explains forces and circumstances that lead to a superintendent and school board member's departure from a leadership position, it does not provide a theoretical understanding of the reasons for a superintendent remaining or leaving his or her position. As Alsbury (2002) states, additional qualitative studies need to be conducted to more fully understand why superintendents leave. The Push-Pull Theory provides a theoretical framework for a qualitative study to examine the factors that may influence a superintendent to remain or leave a school district.

Superintendent Longevity

Successful initiatives require time and continuity among leadership and governing bodies to be fully realized. Research conducted by Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) revealed that successful reform requires a minimum of five years. Kowalski (2006) argued that significant change cannot be accomplished in a short amount of time. Hargreaves (2005) states, "One of the most significant events in the life of a school is a change in its leadership. Yet few things in education succeed less than leadership succession" (p. 163). Metzger (1997) supports Hargreaves: "The superintendency is the least stable and secure positions in education" (p. 44).

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Murphy (1994) states that the superintendency was once a "powerful, exciting, and rewarding position," but it has lately earned the reputation of being a "nearly impossible job…[rife with] invasion of privacy and public abuse" (p. 510). Carter and Cunningham (1997) further describe the challenges of a superintendent when they state that "school superintendents often bear…the same relationship to their communities as fire hydrants bear to dogs" (p. xi). Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000) report that the public perception of the superintendency is that of a job so daunting, few individuals desire to pursue the challenge. Research conducted by Glass and Franceschini (2007) yielded that the average superintendent tenure since 1923 has consistently been six years. Yee and Cuban (1996) reported that the length of tenure of superintendents declined over the past 90 years from 14 to six years. The National School Boards Association reported that the average tenure of urban superintendents in their current position is 3.4 years (2002). The Council of Great City Schools completed a study in 2003 of 59 urban public school superintendents that found that the average tenure was 2.75 years.

Research conducted at the individual state level appear to yield similar findings. Goodman (2012) reported that "superintendent turnover in South Carolina during the last ten years (2000-2010) revealed that the average longevity of superintendents is 3.1 years. In 29 of South Carolina's eighty-five districts, the average tenure has been 2.75 years or less" (p. 7). Byrd, Drews, and Johnson (2006) reported that Texas superintendents' average tenure rate was five years with males averaging 4.2 years and females averaging 6.2 years. A study conducted by Domene (2012) of California superintendents' tenure, in their present position, resulted in an average of 7.14 years (p. 67). This same study indicated that the superintendents' average tenure in a previous position was 5.81 years (p. 69). Research conducted by Giles and Giles (1990)

reported that between 1984 and 1989 an average of 97.09% of the persons serving as superintendents in California left and/or exchanged positions at least once (p. 4).

Lunenburg and Omstein (1991) stated, "It is common knowledge that when there is continued disagreement or a major conflict over policy between the board and the superintendent, the latter is usually replaced" (p. 319). Weller, Brown, and Quinn (1991) add that the defeat of school board members in local elections contributed to the turnover of superintendents.

Numerous studies have surveyed superintendents with the aim of understanding why they left their present positions. Byrd et al. (2006) reported that 62.5% of the superintendents surveyed in Texas left for better opportunities while 20% left the previous job because of inadequate support from the board (p. 14). Domene (2012) reported that California superintendents surveyed indicated the following statements enhanced their decision to leave their current positions: 77% career enhancement, 65% improve their compensation package, 46% work in a different size district, and 78% experience a new challenge. Domene (2012) also noted that when participants were asked why they might leave a district they responded that superintendent/board relationships had the strongest influence (p. 96).

Board Member Longevity

The challenge of superintendent tenure (6.5 years) not aligned with the necessary time for effective education reform (5-10 years) is further complicated by shortened tenure of school board members who also serve as part of the leadership structure in K-12 education. Funk and Funk (1992) reported that a quarter of all board members are new to the board at any given time. Nationwide, 60% of board members have fewer than three years of service. Hess (2002) conducted research and prepared a report for the National School Boards Association in which

2,000 school districts were surveyed. Results showed that the average length of school board service among respondents was 6.7 years (p. 5).

There may be numerous factors affecting tenure of board members. Board member training, or lack of training, may be one significant factor that affects both the relationship between board member and superintendent but also the ability to lead as a member of a governing board. Jones (1973) stated, "If a marine boot were sent into action with equivalent degree of training given a new school board member, when he assumes his important duties, casualties would soar" (p. 22). Everett and Sloan (1984) state, "School board members are lay people, generally the least trained people in the school system regarding the learning and education of children and hold the most power" (p. 2). This lack of training would be acceptable if their role did not affect both personnel and students. Recent research is beginning to link lack of leadership not only with the people that work for the organization but also the students.

Leadership Longevity and Student Achievement

As K-12 public education continues to be the focus of public scrutiny, studies have been conducted and link tenure of both superintendents and school board members to student achievement. Ikejiaku (2000) conducted research on 258 school board presidents in New York State. Results revealed that districts that had professional school board indicators also had student test scores above that state's average while districts with political school board indicators had student scores that fell below the state's average (p. 119).

Alsbury (2008) reported that there may be a relationship between school board member turnover and decrease in student state assessment scores. Alsbury states, "If, indeed, a relationship was demonstrated, it could be argued that school board and/or superintendent

turnover is an important variable to include when measuring the causes of student achievement change, although the level of that effect cannot be determined" (p. 217).

At the state level, studies examining superintendent turnover in Kentucky suggested a connection between superintendent tenure and student achievement. Johnson et al. (2011) analyzed data from Kentucky over a 10-year period of time. The authors reported that districts with no turnover had the highest overall student achievement ratings. Districts with two or more turnovers of superintendents had the lowest ratings. Simpson (2013) conducted a similar study in rural Appalachian districts in Kentucky. Results yielded superintendents who served in a district five or more years demonstrated more growth than districts whose superintendent served less than five years. Maritz (2006) examined superintendent longevity and board member longevity and the relationship to student AYP. Results indicated no statistical significance to superintendent tenure and student AYP achievement but did find a positive correlation between years of experience of board members and districts demonstrating AYP (p. 148). Perhaps even though superintendents come and go frequently, steady board membership results in hiring a superintendent aligned with the boards' vision, increasing continuity of initiatives being carried out to fruition, and potentially increasing student achievement.

Leadership Longevity and Culture

Although few studies with inconclusive results have been conducted regarding the frequent superintendent and school board member turnover and their link to affecting student achievement, other studies have been conducted that establish a connection in a relationship between leadership turnover and adverse effects on the culture of an educational organization. Fullan and Miles (1992) report that frequent administrative turnover may adversely affect a school's ability to provide staff with a feeling of stability, continuity, and purpose, especially in

an environment of change. Grady and Byrant (1989) report that frequent superintendent turnover may cause discontinuity in organizational goals, policy, and procedures and may negatively affect the entire organization. Yee and Cuban (1996) echo Grady and Byrant stating:

> Short tenures create public perception of increased instability, lower morale, a loss of organizational direction and "vision," and a general sense by the staff of "here we go again," that the district will undergo yet another round of short-lived programs and policies. (p. 615)

Superintendent and School Board Member Relationships

Quantitative, mixed, and qualitative research have been conducted attempting to explain why superintendents move from their current position to another district. The main reason for superintendents leaving their present position has been found to be strained relationships between the superintendent and board members. The second reason is for career advancement. An American Association of School Administrators survey of school superintendents reported that 14.6% of the superintendents left their last position due to conflicts with board members (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). Norton, Webb, Dlugosh and Sybouts (1996) stated:

> From the day the office of the superintendent was created until today, there has been a strained relationship between the school board that makes policy and the superintendent who implements it. This tension appears to become accentuated during periods of reform and as problems faced by the district become more numerous and unsolvable, a description of the circumstances many school districts find themselves in today. (p. 34)

Dileo (1999) studied 12 superintendents with 10 or more years of experience in their current district. He found a strong relationship between longevity and board/superintendent relations. Blumberg (1985) found that superintendents rarely fail because of budgetary or

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personnel mistakes. They usually fail because they make the wrong political decision, neglect a powerful faction in the community, or misjudge board support. Leitch (1997) states, "Superintendents have to learn to deal with public pressure, and those that do, experience longevity" (pp. 72-73).

Superintendents who have learned to develop working relationships with board members and maneuver through the political waters of the community tend to enjoy the rare luxury of tenure and reap the reward of possibly implementing meaningful systemic reform resulting in increased student achievement. This skill, apparently developed in a minority of superintendents, has not been studied in detail. Quantitative research tends to scratch the surface of exploring why superintendent tenure is short, and mixed method studies and qualitative studies are only now beginning to explore the experiences of the superintendency.

Alsbury (2002) conducted a mixed method study of the relationship between incumbent school board defeat and superintendent turnover in the state of Washington. Results were mixed with some studies supporting a causal link between incumbent school board defeat and superintendent turnover (Hoseman, Reed, & Maguire, 1987; Schoenefeld, 1986; Fritz, 1988; Jentges, 1988; Weninger, 1988; Maguire, 1989; Anderson, 1989; Johnson-Howard, 1990). Other studies found no significant relationship between school board member defeat and superintendent turnover (Ledoux, 1971; Flynn, 1984; Rada, 1984; Chmara, 1989; Poyourow-Ripple, 1990; Sullivan, 1990; Chance & Capps, 1992; Krise, 1994; Kitchens, 1994; Brackett, 1995).

Alsbury (2002) concluded that quantitative research has not been able to support the theory that links the relationship between incumbent school board member defeat and superintendent turnover despite the practical fit of the theory's chain of events in real-life

scenarios. Alsbury suggests that "through qualitative research techniques, it is possible to confirm essential tenets of the Dissatisfaction Theory taking place in local school politics in Washington State" (2002, p. 29).

Alsbury (2002) continues stating, "The quantitative portions of this study would seem to agree with the conclusions of recent researchers that do not support the Dissatisfaction Theory. However, this study purports the continued use of the Dissatisfaction Theory" (p. 29). Alsbury summarizes, "The main conclusion of this study is directed at the method of research necessary when studying the Dissatisfaction Theory in the current political environment" (2002, p. 30).

The presence of tension and strained relationships between governing board members and the superintendent possibly explains the dilemma of turnover among superintendents and board members. Grady and Byrant (1991) categorized critical incidents that damaged professional relationships with boards of education and eventually led to dismissal or voluntary movement of the superintendent. Lunenburg and Omstein (1991) stated, "It is common knowledge that when there is continued disagreement or a major conflict over policy between the board and the superintendent, the latter is usually replaced" (p. 319). Weller et al. (1991) add that the defeat of school board members in local elections contributed to the turnover of superintendents. Dlugosh (1994) reported that 40% of the superintendents surveyed in Nebraska indicated they would move to a similar position in another district during the next five years. One superintendent in the study noted, "I'm not certain we can plan to remain in the same position for five years" (p. 14). This turnover among leadership would go relatively unnoticed if it occurred in a vacuum, but research reveals that leadership tenure affects the success of educational initiatives and possibly student achievement.

Organization of Study

Chapter II presented a literature review on nine areas related to superintendent turnover: (a) K-12 education, (b) public education and the superintendent, (c) school governance theories, (d) superintendent longevity, (e) board member longevity, (f) leadership longevity and student achievement, (g) leadership longevity and culture, and (h) superintendent and school board member relationships. The literature review examined superintendent and school board member longevity and the potential impact on student achievement and organizational culture. Chapter III presents the method and research design utilized in conducting this study. Chapter IV contains data results with an analysis of the data. Chapter V contains emerging revelations and theory. Chapter VI contains a conclusion and summary of the data as well as recommendations.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study focused on recently retired K-12 superintendents from North Dakota in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the turnover of superintendents serving in K-12 schools in North Dakota. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What lived experiences did recently retired North Dakota K-12 superintendents share throughout their career regarding leading change in school districts?

2. What rewards and challenges did recently retired North Dakota K-12 superintendents experience throughout their careers?

3. What factors influenced recently retired North Dakota K-12 superintendents to remain or leave their positions during their careers?

To answer the research questions, a series of open-ended interview questions (Appendix B) were developed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the proposed study was to better understand turnover of superintendents of K-12 schools in North Dakota. This study focused on the shared experiences of ten superintendents who recently retired from serving in North Dakota K-12 schools. This study focused on a criterion-based sample of ten recently retired superintendents from North Dakota. The study addressed the lack of qualitative research involving superintendents and their experiences throughout their careers. The information from this study may assist university

leadership programs, state departments of public education, state administrative organizations, and the state school board association in preparing future superintendents. These entities may gain a better understanding of the experiences of superintendents throughout their careers regarding leading change in school districts, rewards and challenges they experienced, and what factors influenced them to remain or leave their positions during their careers.

Researcher's Awareness

The decision to conduct a qualitative study was an attempt to seek answers from other superintendents regarding their experiences during their tenure as K-12 superintendents. As a K-12 superintendent, the researcher posed potential bias. To assist in remaining as objective as possible, reduce bias, and increase validity of the study, the researcher chose to utilize memos, member checking, and peer debriefing throughout the study. Maxwell (2013) states, "You should regularly write memos while you are doing data analysis; memos not only capture your analytic thinking about your data, but also facilitate such thinking, stimulating analytic insights" (p. 105). The process of memoing allowed the researcher to reflect after each interview and analyze the participants' perspectives. Memoing allowed the researcher to consider to what extent his own experiences as a superintendent had influenced his interpretation of the participants' answers. Memos were compared to transcripts of the interviews and adjustments were made, as necessary. Member checking allowed me to compare collected interview data with the interviewed individuals. Maxwell (2013) states, "This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your biases and misunderstandings of what you observed" (p. 126-127). Peer reviewing allowed the researcher to receive input from colleagues about their interpretation of collected data. Bailey (2007) states

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that frequent discussions with a colleague, committee member, or friend are part of the process and should begin early and occur frequently (p. 188). The researcher utilized two peer reviewers to interpret collected data. At the time of the study, Erin Spies and Josh Grover were doctoral students involved in the Educational Leadership cohort with the researcher as he established the topic for this study.

Rationale for Qualitative Study

The purpose of the proposed study was to better understand the turnover of superintendents leading North Dakota K-12 school districts. The researcher selected qualitative methodology to better understand the perceptions of recently retired superintendents. Guided by the research, insights are provided for current and aspiring K-12 superintendents, school boards, and educational leadership organizations regarding the experiences of several superintendents relating to turnover through the theoretical lens of the Push-Pull Theory of career movement.

There is limited qualitative research on the topic of superintendent turnover in the United States. At the current time of this study, there was no current literature on the topic of superintendent turnover in North Dakota. Exploration is needed if there is a lack of literature about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). The researcher aimed to add to the literature base relating to superintendent turnover, both in the United States and North Dakota. The researcher believes this study has implications for the state of North Dakota, as superintendent turnover statewide from 2006 to 2016 was 76% for the first five years and 86% for the first seven years.

Research Method

Qualitative research "relies on the views of the participants" (Creswell, 2008, p. 46). Utilizing a qualitative methodology afforded the researcher the opportunity to elicit a better understanding of the professional experiences of each interviewed superintendent. A qualitative

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approach also draws out the rewards and challenges each superintendent experienced during his

or her tenure. Maxwell (2013) states, "In a qualitative study, you are interested not only in the

physical events and behavior that are taking place, but also in how the participants in your study

make sense of these, and how their understandings influences their behavior" (p. 30). By gaining

a better understanding of each superintendent's interpretation of their lived experience and

reaction to perceived push/pull factors that influenced them individually, the researcher

developed a collective understanding of rewards and challenges superintendents experienced.

Qualitative research provides a foundation to better understand the turnover of

superintendents of K-12 schools in North Dakota utilizing the lens of the conceptual framework

of the Push-Pull Theory. The Push-Pull Career Movement Theory attempts to explain why

individuals choose to leave a position. Push factors are placed into groups of four domains:

political conflict, internal pressures, external pressures, and fiscal stress. Pull factors include

professional, financial, or personal advancement (Tekniepe, 2015). Although the Push-Pull

Theory appears to be appropriate for this qualitative research, an earlier theory has provided an

explanation regarding superintendent and school board turnover in K-12 education. Numerous

quantitative studies have been conducted examining superintendent turnover utilizing the

Dissatisfaction Theory. The Dissatisfaction Theory comes to life when social or political changes

occur in a community and school leadership, including the school board and superintendent, and

they do not adjust to the wishes of social or political groups who want change. This inflexibility

from leadership often leads to board member replacement and within a short time of board

replacement, the superintendent is replaced (Iannaccone and Lutz, 1970). The researcher utilized

critical inquiry to better understand the phenomenon of superintendent turnover by interviewing

recently retired superintendents, seeking to understand their experiences relating to school board

relationships, and social and political influences while they served as school leaders. Crotty (1988) states:

> Critical inquiry keeps the spotlight on power relationships within society so as to expose the forces of hegemony and injustice. It is at all times alive to the contribution that false consciousness makes to oppression and manipulation and invites researchers and participants (ideally one and the same) to discard false consciousness, open themselves to new ways of understanding, and take effective action for change. (p. 157)

The research methodology to study recently retired superintendents in North Dakota was Grounded Theory. Glesne (2011) states, "Grounded Theory work involves specific procedures for data collection and analysis that include continual data sampling, coding, categorizing, and comparing in order to generate theory about social phenomena" (p. 21). Strauss and Corbin (1988) state that Grounded Theory is a "theory that was derived from the data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process" (p. 12). Each superintendent shared his or her account of the rewards and challenges experienced through an in-depth interview process. These rewards included leading educational change efforts. Challenges included attempting to adjust to local cultural norms, experiencing social push factors in the form of pressures from special interest groups, and establishing school board/superintendent relationships. Data analyzed through the Grounded Theory methodology will "allow theory to emerge from the data" (p. 12) and is "likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action" (p. 12). Utilizing these lived experiences as described by retired superintendents will provide a deeper understanding of the previously collected quantitative data regarding the professional rewards and challenges of the superintendency.

Reflexivity

"The researcher cannot be detached from his or her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise" (Hammersley, 2000). The unique perspective the researcher brought to the research should be noted but not detract from the validity of the study. Rather, it was the researcher's background and experience that could speak in conjunction with the stories of the interviewed superintendents. As a serving superintendent at the time of the study, the researcher has experienced many rewards in leading educational change in several school districts. Carrying out leadership duties has resulted in internal satisfaction but has not been achieved without consequences and challenges. Change does not occur with 100% satisfaction from teachers, parents, community members, or all board members. These challenges, although experienced during the researcher's career, may or may not have occurred in the lives of the participants. Because of this potential reality, the researcher was aware of his bias as a result of his experiences and continually focused on the experiences of the interviewed superintendents. The primary narrative focused on the stories of those interviewed, not the researcher's lived experience. Holley (2012) states, "The challenge results from the balance between the author's role in narrative development and the focus on the participants" (p. 118). The research was focused on the experiences of recently retired superintendents in North Dakota. The researcher's experiences were woven into these superintendents' stories only as a means of comparing and contrasting. It was not an attempt to invalidate their experiences but an attempt to contribute additional meaning to the experiences from the researcher's lived experiences and perspective.

Participant Selection

Participants in this study were selected from a list of recently retired superintendents provided by the director of the North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders. The researcher chose purposeful sampling referenced by Welman and Kruger (1999). The researcher selected the sample based on his judgment and the purpose of the research (Babbie, 1995; Greig & Taylor, 1999; Schwandt, 1997). Criterion-based sampling "specifies characteristics and attributes of the population to be studied" (Roulston, 2010, p. 81). For the purpose of this study respondents met the following criteria:

1. Recently retired superintendent from a North Dakota K-12 school district; recently retired is qualified as within the past one to five years.

2. Recently retired superintendent who was employed at least half-time and primary duties were that of a superintendent as reported to DPI utilizing the Management Information System (MIS).

The researcher contacted the director of the North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders in September 2017 for a list of recently retired superintendents. At the time of the study, 51 superintendents had retired in the past five years from North Dakota. Eleven fit the criteria set by the researcher as being employed full-time during the last year of service before retiring from the superintendency. Four fit the criteria of being employed half-time during the last year of service before retiring from North Dakota.

When soliciting input from human subjects and reporting the findings in a report form, the researcher was honest and acted in a transparent manner with the participants. This transparency resulted in trust from the participants and was established in order to conduct a

valid study. In order to ensure ethical research, the researcher developed a specific informed consent agreement based on Bailey's (1996, p. 11) recommended items including:

- They are participating in research

- The purpose of the research (without stating the central research question)

- The procedures of the research

- The risk and benefits of the research

- The voluntary nature of research participation

- The subject's (informant's) right to stop the research at any time

- The procedures used to protect confidentiality (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000; Kvale, 1996, Street, 1998)

The researcher submitted an IRB proposal including a consent form for participants to sign for approval to conduct research. Once approval was received, the researcher contacted all superintendents that fit the criteria for the study by email.

Data Collection

The researcher used several qualitative methods to collect data and this was referred to as triangulation. These methods included semi-structured interviews, observations, and notetaking. Triangulation "involves using different methods as a check on one another, seeing if methods with different strengths and limitations all support a single conclusion" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 102).

Interviews

The researcher used semi-structured interviews in the study. This format included a number of questions that were "open-ended and, after posing each question to the research participant, the interviewer usually followed up with probes to seeking further detail" (Roulston,

2010, p. 15). Interviews varied among participants as their answers and follow-up questions took the interview on different and unique paths.

Weiss (1994) states, "Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others. Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 103). Participants were contacted by mail. The correspondence explained the purpose of the study, methodology, confidentiality, and invited the participant to be part of the study. One week after the mailing, the researcher followed up with a phone call to each participant encouraging him or her to participate.

Initial interviews were conducted with each participant. Follow up interviews were then conducted until data saturation had been reached. Interviews were conducted in a location of each participant's choice. Each interview did not last longer than one hour.

Observations/Notetaking

The use of observations was utilized throughout the interview process and notetaking occurred both during and after each interview in the hopes of capturing both verbal and nonverbal gestures of the interviewee. Glesne (2011) advises, "As a participant observer, try to observe everything that is happening: make notes and jot down thoughts without narrow, specific regard for your research problem" (p. 69). Although a researcher attempts to observe everything, he or she may not be able to report all observations in the final study. Creswell (2014) states that a limitation of conducting participant research is that "private information may be observed that the researcher cannot report" (p. 191).

Patton (1980) describes qualitative data to consist of quotations from people and descriptions of events, activities, interactions, and situations in order to gain insight into a phenomenon by understanding the points of view of those involved. The researcher conducted

semi-structured interviews with ten superintendents who volunteered and met the criteria of the study. During the initial interview, questions emerged that were not included in the researcher's original interview questions. These questions were used in subsequent interviews including the second round of interviews with participants. The researcher began each interview by asking about the participant's experience in education and administration. They were then asked open-ended questions related to their superintendent experiences which allowed a deeper understanding by utilizing follow-up questions. Follow-up questions allowed interviewees to expand on their answers with more detail and descriptions (Roulston, 2010). The follow up questions allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the interviewee's perspective and reduce the likelihood that the researcher would impose his own perspective on the interviewee. Merriam (1998) stated that "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (p. 88).

The researcher utilized Grounded Theory questioning to collect data from each participant in this study. Guiding questions were utilized. Strauss and Corbin (1988) describe this questioning as "they begin open-ended and tend to become more specific and refined as the research moves along" (p. 78). Grounded Theory questioning focuses on a variety of open-ended questions. Interview questions were prepared and sent to individuals before scheduled interviews.

The interviews were conducted in person at each respondent's choice of venue. Interviews were held at a setting that provided sufficient privacy in order to audio-record interviews without interruptions" (Roulston, 2010, p. 100). The researcher ended the interview once all interview questions were asked.

Each superintendent was informed during the first contact that the interview would be recorded with his or her permission. The researcher used a digital audio recorder and video recorder to record each interview. The researcher recorded additional information by making handwritten notes. Creswell (2014) encourages researchers to take notes during an interview in case something happens to the recording equipment. Before each interview, the researcher tested the audio recorder and video recorder and ensured new or charged batteries. Before each interview, the researcher informed the interviewee about the study and reviewed the consent form with him or her.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

Creswell (2008) describes six specific steps to analyzing and interpreting qualitative data: organizing and preparing data, reviewing and coding data, building themes, reporting findings, interpreting findings, and validating accuracy. These steps informed the researcher's data collection and analysis.

Step 1: Organizing and Preparing Data

The researcher began analyzing data by transcribing the first interview. The transcription was completed verbatim. The remaining eight interviews were sent to a transcriptionist at Rev.com, Inc. immediately following the completion of each interview (https://www.rev.com, n.d.). Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher watched video and listened to audio-recordings and read interview transcripts to ensure data accuracy. Roulston (2010) stated that it is "valuable for interviewers to re-listen to audio-recordings, especially if they have been transcribed by others" (p. 105). The researcher organized the interview notes and recordings after each interview thus allowing him to learn from each interview and make improvements for future interviews (Glesne, 2011). Following is a sample interview.

Frank: I'm here with David. I'm conducting a second interview today. So David, as you ...
           We'll just start. I appreciate you taking the time in the first interview, and now this is
           our final follow up interview. And hope to glean more information about your journey
           as an administrator and the role of superintendent. So with [00:00:30] that, as you
           reflect on your career as a superintendent, did you have a particular school board that
           was the most supportive of your vision, and what separated them from other boards?

David: I've had multiple school boards that were supportive of the vision. And the thing that
           separated them from the boards that aren't is the boards that aren't started meddling in
           the daily operation of the district and became ... [00:01:00] Started to transition to
           administrative school boards rather than policy making school boards. Policy making
           school boards that I've had were always supportive. Not to say that they didn't
           challenge, or question sometimes, which they should, but when a board moves from a
           policy making school board to an administrative school board is when trouble starts to
           occur.

Frank: And my second question, and you [00:01:30] may have answered that in your first
           answer here, did you have a particular board that was challenging? And what separated
           them? And would you say dealt with that [crosstalk 00:01:37]?

David: Yeah, the most challenging school board I've had is the current one. Particularly in the
           past two years.

Frank: Would you like to expand a little bit?

David: Their fingers are so deep into the district. And one of my assistants in the office, getting
           a doctoral degree, was reflecting [00:02:00] on this in a conversation that she had
           during her program with other administrators. And I think that this person who told her
           this really described it well. He said that the job of a school board is to put its arms
           around a school district, not to put its fingers in the school district. And this school
           board particularly in the past two years has its fingers deeply into the school district. As
           I think I mentioned last time that [00:02:30] to the point where I go to conduct
           interviews, and we have to have school board members on interview committees, and
           they're handing out the questions. And I looked and said, "I thought I had the questions
           ready." And the school board member said, "Well, we changed them." Well, that wasn't
           the administrators and teachers changing it.

Step 2: Reviewing and Coding Data

         Once interviews were transcribed, the researcher utilized a Grounded Theory approach to

analyze data. The researcher read through transcripts several times to gain an understanding of

the data as a whole before breaking data down into smaller parts (Creswell, 2008). The

researcher wrote notes on the transcripts to elaborate on the data (Creswell, 2008) and analyzed

the qualitative data by "bracketing chunks" of text representing a category in the margins of

transcribed interviews as he looked for significant statements or themes (Creswell, 2014).

Significant statements relating to superintendents' experiences were identified from the

transcripts and codes were created. Significant statements not relevant to the topic were deleted.

Initial color-coded codes were created to represent (green) rewarding experiences and (yellow)

challenging experiences from each transcript. Upon a second reading of each transcript, text

boxes were created in each margin and additional codes were inserted in each text box.

Following is a sample of the interview coding.

Frank: I'm here with David. I'm conducting a second interview today. So David, as you ... We'll just start. I appreciate you taking the time in the first interview, and now this is our final follow up interview. And hope to glean more information about your journey as an administrator and the role of superintendent. So with [00:00:30] that, as you reflect on your career as a superintendent, did you have a particular school board that was the most supportive of your vision, and what separated them from other boards?

-Micro mgt
-Personal agenda

David: I've had multiple school boards that were supportive of the vision. And the thing that separated them from the boards that aren't is the boards that aren't started meddling in the daily operation of the district and became ... [00:01:00] Started to transition to administrative school boards rather than policy making school boards. Policy making school boards that I've had were always supportive. Not to say that they didn't challenge, or question sometimes, which they should, but when a board moves from a policy making school board to an administrative school board is when trouble starts to occur.

-Adm/Brd Roles
-Policy
-Micro mgt

Frank: And my second question, and you [00:01:30] may have answered that in your first answer here, did you have a particular board that was challenging? And what separated them? And would you say dealt with that [crosstalk 00:01:37]?

David: Yeah, the most challenging school board I've had is the current one. Particularly in the past two years.

-Adm/Brd Roles
-Policy
-Micro mgt
-Personal agenda
- No trust
-Prof. Relationship

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Frank: Would you like to expand a little bit on what-

David: Their fingers are so deep into the district. And one of my assistants
        in the office, getting a doctoral degree, was reflecting [00:02:00]
        on this in a conversation that she had during her program with
        other administrators. And I think that this person who told her this
        really described it well. He said that the job of a school board is to
        put its arms around a school district, not to put its fingers in the
        school district. And this school board particularly in the past two
        years has its fingers deeply into the school district. As I think I
        mentioned last time that [00:02:30] to the point where I go to
        conduct interviews, and we have to have school board members on
        interview committees, and they're handing out the questions. And I
        looked and said, "I thought I had the questions ready." And the
        school board member said, "Well, we changed them." Well, that
        wasn't the administrators and teachers changing it.

Step 3: Building Themes

Once codes were reviewed, categories were developed from the codes. Subsequently,

themes were developed from the categories. These themes were used to help answer the

questions of the study. Once the data reached saturation, further data collection became

unnecessary.

Step 4: Reporting Findings

To assist in categorizing data, the researcher constructed a code map. This map is

included in Chapter IV along with an explanation of themes that emerged from the data.

Participants' quotes are also included to strengthen the themes that developed from the data.

Step 5: Interpreting Findings

After reporting findings, the researcher reflected, compared, and contrasted his personal

experiences as a superintendent with the participants' experiences throughout their careers.

Chapter VI provides a summary of findings and meaning of the data (Creswell, 2008).

Step 6: Validating Accuracy

Striving to achieve qualitative validity allows the researcher to utilize procedures to check the accuracy of findings. Creswell and Miller (2000) stated that validity in qualitative research is about demonstrating that "studies are credible" (p. 124). In order to remain as objective as possible, reduce bias, and increase validity of the study, the researcher chose to utilize memos, member checking, and peer debriefing throughout the study.

Maxwell (2013) states, "You should regularly write memos while you are doing data analysis; memos not only capture your analytic thinking about your data, but also facilitate such thinking, stimulating analytic insights" (p. 105). The process of memoing allowed the researcher to reflect and analyze the participants' perspectives. Memoing also allowed the researcher to consider to what extent his own experiences as a superintendent had influenced his interpretation of the participants' answers. Memos were compared to transcripts of the interviews and adjustments were made as necessary. Following is an example of memoing used in this study.

Les – Post – Interview - 5.21.2018

Les stated that throughout his career most boards were supportive. Les spoke of his observation of the generational changes and how the institution of education is coming under fire by everyone from board members to parents to media. He was disappointed that his career has come to an end like it did with so many half-truths being spoke about him and his role as a superintendent.

Les is looking forward to retirement and grandkids but has no regrets regarding his career. 8.2.2018 – Developing a concept map(s)….struggling as some codes could also be categories. How do I best represent this in a diagram but also organize the narrative so it makes sense to the reader.

Set up a meeting with Dr. Stonehouse to receive input.

9.15.2018 – Appear to still be struggling with the concept maps… I am seeing two narratives emerge – professional evolution including career path through challenges and also advice… the second narrative involves emerging revelations… this narrative is a result of axial coding—

putting back together the cumulative interview coded data into a new form that if were looked at individually would not have been apparent to the researcher….

2.15.2019 – Add transition paragraphs and comments within the narratives… Add theory to the end… starting to take shape and tell the story of the participants.

At the beginning of this process I was worried about my bias influencing the research but the story of the participants are different than mine and I have become immersed in telling their story.

3.10.2019 – Continue to fine-tune paragraphs. Time for editor and formatter…. What is this I see… is it light at the end of the tunnel???

Member checking allowed the researcher to compare collected interview data with the interviewed individuals. Maxwell (2013) states, "This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your biases and misunderstandings of what you observed" (p. 126-127). Audio files were transcribed and sent to each participant to review and validate. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts and correct errors or dispute statements that they perceived as incorrect interpretations. Participants were also afforded the opportunity to provide additional information once they reviewed transcripts. A final report was shared with participants to make sure their statements had been reported accurately.

Peer reviewing allows the researcher to receive input from colleagues about their interpretation of collected data. Bailey (2007) states that frequent discussions with a colleague, committee member, or friend are part of the process and should begin early and occur frequently (p. 188).

In order to increase the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher clarified his background in the study. "This self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will

resonate well with readers" (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). The researcher's background provided experience of the rewards and challenges of serving as a superintendent in North Dakota. "Good qualitative research contains comments by the researchers about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background, such as their gender, culture, history, and socioeconomic origin" (Creswell, 2014, p. 202).

One audio file was transcribed by the researcher and the other eight were transcribed by Rev.com, Inc. (https://www.rev.com, n.d.). The transcriptions were sent to each participant to check for validity. Dr. Pauline Stonehouse reviewed codes, categories, and themes that the researcher had created from the data in the transcripts. The researcher also utilized two independent peer reviewers to process the data with an objective point of view.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher completed training by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of North Dakota. A human subject's review form was filed with the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to obtain approval to conduct the research once a committee had approved the topic proposal. The IRB's goal is to protect the rights of participants in a research study (Creswell, 2008).

The researcher contacted each superintendent to gain consent to conduct research. The researcher introduced himself, stated the purpose and background of the study, provided an overview of the interview process and methods of documenting data that were collected from interviews, and explained each participant's rights. Participants who agreed to be interviewed were sent an informed consent form (Appendix A) to sign before they engaged in their interview. They were also sent the list of interview questions (Appendix B) and a confirmation of the scheduled date and time for the interview to be conducted.

Participants were told everything they needed to know about the research before being asked to participate. Participants were informed that their privacy and confidentiality of their information would be respected. They were able to choose whether or not to participate in the research project. The researcher removed identifying information from the study. Participants' identities were hidden by using pseudonyms and pronouns. The gender of the participant's husband or wife was hidden by using the word spouse. School districts and cities were hidden by using the following words, a specific school and a specific city. Participants were able to review and edit all transcripts.

After completion of the study, research materials will be maintained according to law. The researcher will keep the recordings in his home office for four years and will delete the recordings after four years. Consent forms and personal data will be kept for four years and will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office. After four years, the researcher will shred the consent forms and personal data.

Summary

Chapter III presented the method and research design utilized in conducting this study. Chapter IV contains data results with an analysis of the data. Chapter V contains emerging revelations and theory. Chapter VI contains a conclusion and summary of the data as well as recommendations.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to better understand turnover of superintendents of K-12 schools in North Dakota. The study focused on the shared experiences of ten superintendents who recently retired from serving in North Dakota K-12 schools. The study addressed the lack of qualitative research involving superintendents and their experiences throughout their careers. The information resulting from this study may assist university leadership programs, state departments of public education, state administrative organizations, and the state school board association in preparing future superintendents. These entities may gain a better understanding of the experiences of superintendents throughout their careers regarding leading change in school districts, rewards and challenges they experienced, and what factors influenced them to remain or leave their positions during their careers.

Qualitative research methods were used to explore and better understand the perceptions of recently retired superintendents regarding their individual experiences while serving as superintendent throughout their career. Through the research process, several recently retired superintendents shared their experiences in K-12 education including rewards, challenges, and factors that influenced each of them to retire, leave, or remain in their position.

Participant Selection

Participants were selected using information from a comprehensive list of recently retired superintendents provided by the director of the North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders. At the time of the study, 51 superintendents fit the criteria of retiring within one to five years. Purposeful sampling was utilized to solicit a diverse participant profile to include schools served with varying student enrollment (Class A and Class B), gender (male and female), and ethnicity (Caucasian, Native American).

Group Profile

The initial group of superintendents who fit the criteria as retiring in the past five years included 51 with seven superintendents serving in Class A districts and 44 serving in Class B districts. Of the 51 superintendents, five earned doctorate degrees and 46 earned master's degrees.

Ten recently retired superintendents volunteered to participate in the study. One participant had been an administrator fewer than 10 years. One participant had been an administrator fewer than 20 years. Five participants had been administrators for fewer than 30 years. Three participants had been administrators for more than 30 years. Three participants were female, and seven participants were male. Four participants had recently served in a large Class A school district, and six participants had recently served in a small Class B school district setting. Three participants obtained their doctorate degrees from the university system. Seven participants earned their master's degree in educational leadership from the university system.

Data Analysis

After the first interview, the researcher listened to and transcribed the interview. From that point on, the researcher utilized Rev.com, Inc. to transcribe the remaining 19 interviews

(https://www.rev.com, n.d.). The researcher watched the video and listened to each interview to ensure the information was transcribed verbatim. The researcher sent the transcriptions to each participant for member checking. Participants responded with corrections to the transcriptions, and the researcher made corrections to the transcripts based on the participants' input. The researcher watched each video recording, listened to the audio, and read the transcripts several times to explore connections between codes and to reflect on the meaning of each participant's interview. After the first session of listening and reading transcription, the researcher color-coded key ideas to create general groups of related codes or categories. These two general categories included stressful experiences and rewarding experiences.

As the researcher analyzed data a second time, he developed 113 different codes and recorded 4,542 phrases with codes. As the researcher read the transcripts a third time and analyzed the codes, he began to combine and merge codes into 18 categories. As the researcher continued to analyze the data, he noticed an emergence of themes from the groupings of codes and categories.

Upon further analysis and axial coding, the researcher began to observe emerging revelations and from the 20 interviews conducted, the researcher reached a point of saturation at which point no new codes emerged from the interview data.

Two distinct narratives emerged from analysis of the 20 interviews. The first involved each superintendent describing his or her "professional evolution." Included in this narrative were the following themes: career path, administrative fatigue, and professional maturity. These themes emerged from the following categories: administrative duties, rewards/accomplishments, character/integrity, challenge = growth, admin bull in a china shop, financial career move/tipping point, superintendent/board member relationship, admin/board role confusion, admin/board

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differences, agenda, micromanage, board member turnover, tempered, balance – survival, personal sacrifice, family sacrifice, and throw in the towel.

The second narrative involved "emerging revelations" that developed from the themes. Four distinct emerging revelations included: generational disconnect, lack of respect for the institution, digression of the mainstream media, and negative impact of social media. The revelations resulted from the following themes: rewards/accomplishments, challenges, administrative fatigue, and professional maturity. These themes emerged from the following categories: superintendent career path, school board related, and superintendent insight.

The result of the four emerging revelations resulted in the majority of the participants retiring and leaving the role of superintendent before they had intended. This phenomenon is the proposed theory of the Accelerated Leadership Departure Theory.

Theme 1: Career Path

All participants began their superintendency in a smaller Class B school setting. Four participants began their superintendency in a neighboring state, then accepted superintendent positions in North Dakota while six served their entire superintendent career in North Dakota. Five participants served as superintendents in the Class B setting while five participants moved from the Class B setting to Class A setting later in their careers. Only one participant served as a superintendent in one school district until his or her retirement while the other nine served in at least two districts.

All participants served as classroom teachers and later became principals before accepting the superintendent role. Two participants served in a combination principal/superintendent position before accepting a position that involved only superintendent

THEME

Career Path

Categories

Admin Duties	Rewards/Accomplishments	Character/Integrity	Challenge = Growth

Codes

Admin Duties — Codes:
Adminstrative Wisdom
Choices
Communication
Cultural Change Agent
Educator of Adults
Flexibility
Informational
Job vs. Vocation
Length of Service
Life Toucher
Mentoring
Open Door Policy
Personal Connection
Board Member /
Superintendent Relationships

Frequency - 384

Rewards/Accomplishments — Codes:
Focus on Kids
Life Toucher
Lifelong Educator
Non-Student Accomplishments
Personal Connection
Personal Sacrifice
Professional Evolution
Restorer of Hope
Teamwork
Support All
Student Achievement
Setting the Example

Frequency - 411

Character/Integrity — Codes:
Correct the Injustices
Cultural Change Agent
Focus on Kids
Job vs. Vocation
Life Toucher
Philosophy
Resorter of Hope

Frequency - 424

Challenge = Growth — Codes:
Balance
Administrative 6th Sense
Cultural Change Agent
Life Journey
Professional Differences
Disconnect
Differences in Priorities
Lacking Relationships

Frequency - 263

Admin Bull in a China Shop	Financial Career Move	Tipping Point

Codes

Admin Bull in a China Shop — Codes:
Administrative Wisdom
Balance
Lacking Relationships
Tempered
Disconnect
Difference in Priorities
Board Member/Superintendent Relationships
Board Member/Superintendent Differences

Frequency - 347

Financial Career Move — Codes:
Admininstrative 6th Sense
Administrative Wisdom
Length of Service
Personal Sacrifice
Professional Evolution
Difference of Priorities
Professional Differences
Team Support
Lack of Trust
Context of Culture
Generational Respect
Paralysis of Initiatives
Restrictive

Frequency - 554

Tipping Point — Codes:
Admininstrative 6th Sense
Administrative Wisdom
Length of Service
Personal Sacrifice
Professional Evolution
Difference of Priorities
Professional Differences
Team Support
Lack of Trust
Context of Culture
Generational Respect
Paralysis of Initiatives
Restrictive

Frequency - 554

Figure 1. Code Map, Categories, and Theme (Career Path).

duties. One participant served as a superintendent of two school districts before accepting a

position that involved only superintendent duties.

Five participants described themselves as driven to climb the administrative ladder with

the vision of leading a school district. Martin stated, "So I was kind of career driven, Frank, to be

honest. Again, I was pursuing bigger schools and bigger paychecks at the time, to be candid."

David reflected, "But Ansonia was an opportunity that I could not pass up. So after eight years in

Bridgeport, we went to Ansonia. It was a larger district, there was more money, but Ansonia is

also a very high-quality district." Les reflected, "Then so as far as why did I leave Bristol, I think

for the same reasons I left Danbury. It was career advancement and personal and professional

development opportunities."

Not all participants described their experience as career advancement but rather referred

to it as more of an evolution or a result of circumstances that were not internally motivated but

rather influenced from outside sources. One participant assumed the role of administrator when

the present superintendent/principal retired. Tim reflected, "And I thought that I had a few more

years. My hopes were that I would be a principal for a while under the tutelage of this

superintendent. Maybe, you know, just get started and learn. And as soon as I was eligible, he

said, "I'm retiring." And so without any real mentoring or guidance, it was really stepping into a

position with very little experience or even ... So it was a challenge. It was very time consuming.

I was a superintendent, high school principal, and athletic director." Two participants were

coaxed into going into administration and moving into the superintendency. Tanya shared her

experience, "My principal, who had also been my principal when I was a high school student and

then when I was a teacher, had a heart attack and left. But he asked me if I would consider being

the principal, and I didn't have a license. I didn't really want to be, but if he'd asked me to walk

through a wall, I think I would have done it for him. I had a lot of respect for him." Vicky also shared her experience stating, "My principal said, 'Vicky, I think this would be a great job for you.' Foolishly, again, not knowing what I'm getting into, I apply. I became the superintendent for the Derby school system."

When participants were asked to describe their move from one district to another, three responded that they were pulled into the role of superintendent and viewed this as a step up in their career and pay/benefits. Seven participants described their movement from one district to another as a combination of pull and push factors. Myron experienced push factors throughout his entire career as superintendent. He bluntly stated, "I got along very well with staff, and I got along very well with students. My challenge was getting along with board members." Several participants experienced a combination of either pull factors or a combination of push/pull factors when moving from their first superintendent position to the final district. Finally, they were pushed into retiring before they had anticipated.

All participants stated they experienced push factors that led them to retirement or experienced push factors at some point in their career, but they also experienced a life-changing event that changed their priorities and led to retirement. Les reflected, "That's a lot of stress. I don't even know if I would go so far as to call it a lot of abuse, but these positions, they take their toll on people. So when I say I'm ready, it's more kind of that. But you have, I guess I'd call it a fatigue factor after so many years." Vicky shared one story of a push factor referring to the school board president, "And so, just kept wanting, expecting more, and more and more out of me. And I was doing more, and more and more until, like I said, my husband got hurt and said, what do you mean you're working 12/14 hours, like, all, and now they want you weekends. And he was saying, 'Vicky, you can't keep doing this anymore.'" Tanya shared her experience with

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her final board president, "So anything that's difficult or challenging that comes along is something that he would use to help push me out, and working under that kind of feeling is pretty icky." Martin shared one of his push experiences, "Well, I went from being a 'great leader' to 'it's time for him to go' in four or five years. From year one to year six, and I could just see it happening, decisions being made. It wasn't so much the board, although they started getting tainted because any of us, the more negative comments you hear, it wears on you, you get tired of it." Mitch stated the main reason for his being pushed out in year two of a three-year contract, "I won't say the board, I'll say the board chair just pushed, pushed, pushed in her micro management, and the way she wanted to micro manage things, that it just wasn't working for me."

Other superintendents did not experience direct push factors that led to their retirement but rather appeared to reach a point of fatigue in their career or experienced a change in priorities where they realized it was time to retire. Tim stated, "There were so many 12 and 15-hour days, and so yeah, that's probably the biggest reason on why I'm retiring, is now that I'm in a new relationship, I just wanna have time for that, and for me, this job was just ... It was pretty much my whole life, so the time factor is by far the biggest factor." Myron shared, "I remember telling my wife, or saying to my wife, 'what in the world are we doing here? You know, putting up with more of this stuff. I'm just not cut out to have to put up with this type of stress.' So that was that. She was all for it, being closer to grandkids." While stress also affected Julie, she explained that financial stability was also part of her decision to retire. Julie stated, "I think I have planned my whole life and made financial decisions along the way, so that when I got to a certain part, and I could financially leave my job and maintain a lifestyle that was desirable to me."

Administrative Duties

Administrative duties evolved from the following related codes: administrative wisdom, choices, communication, cultural change agent, educator of adults, flexibility, informational, job versus vocation, length of service, mentoring, open door policy, personal connection, and board member/superintendent relationships.

Of the ten participants interviewed, eight progressed from teaching to principal duties to superintendent duties. Of the remaining two participants, one shared duties of teacher, counselor, and principal while the other progressed from teacher to principal with shared activity director to superintendent with shared activity director duties. Each participant shared similar responsibilities as superintendent including working with school board members. This included providing training of new board members regarding roles of administration and board members and developing professional relationships with board members. Participants also described the importance of collaborating and developing professional relationships with teaching and classified staff. Advice was given by numerous participants to always stay connected to students and never get too involved with the administrative duties. Participants spoke of their experiences, both positive and negative regarding parents and the perceived generational differences of parents and district patrons. Participants shared their experiences of working with NDDPI personnel and spoke of the challenges that the department faces because of limited resources. Not all participants worked with legislators, but several positively shared that they had a collaborative relationship with them. However, they perceive that the new generation of legislators has become less willing to accept input from superintendents. Time devoted to NDDPI and legislators varied depending on the administrative job duty assignments and also the

priority set forth by the superintendent and school board relating to duties set forth for the superintendent.

Rewards/Accomplishments

Rewards/Accomplishments evolved from the following related codes: focus on kids, life toucher, lifelong educator, non-student accomplishments, personal connection, personal sacrifice, professional evolution, teamwork, support all, student achievement, and setting the example.

Each participant described his or her evolution as they traveled their respective career path from which emerged rewarding experiences and accomplishments. These were student-related in the form of developing new academic or emotional support programs for students or accomplishments including facility improvements involving brick and mortar. David was emotional while stating that the impact he had was personal and deep. David shared, "I look back on my career and I can say for sure, that there's at least one person who is alive today, and that has a family, and has her own children, because of me. As I said, I have a passion for public education, and I know the lives that we touch. Yeah, public education, I have truly valued my time serving the children that I have served, and the ones that I have gotten to know." Les discussed his passion for education on a more comprehensive scale. "That I wanted to make a difference and wanted to try and influence education and society in a positive way. I guess I've always been in positions where I've felt I've been able to do that. That's been motivating and so, I stayed in places probably longer than I felt that kind of reward, that I was making a difference." Myron reflected on his relationship with his staff. "I think people really appreciated that. That I was approachable. I would think that was one of the more positive things of when I was an administrator." Myron also shared his experience while leading a district consolidation. "But

anyway, ended up building it in the middle. And in the foyer area, they had all these pillars, you know, we ended up putting the name of every town on these pillars. So when people walked in that first time that had never been out there saw all the names of these towns, they were pretty impressed, you know."

Tanya reflected on her experience of leading people and developing a professional culture. "You know, you have these big, beautiful, 21st century buildings. We're moving toward a growth model. We've got more people on the right page in terms of what we call the five rocks in this district than a person would even believe. We're using data to make decisions, and it's growth data. We're focusing on the standards, and we're assessing against them. We have teachers in professional learning communities. We're just getting pretty vested with project-based learning. We're building a system that helps support the classroom teacher, so there's a multi-tiered system of supports. That's all really good work. I feel good about that."

While most participants shared related facility improvements as well as personnel and student improvements, one participant reflected on her accomplishments as a minority. Although she didn't realize her accomplishments, it did not go unnoticed by her constituents.

Vicky reflected on her accomplishments as a female and a Native American. She shared a conversation she had with a colleague. "'Vicky, do you know you've made history?' And I said, 'No, why?' He said, 'For Groton to hire a Native American,' he said, 'I never thought I'd see it in my lifetime.'" Vicky went on, "And again, I didn't see myself as that. I mean, to me, I'm educated, I'm a person. A female, I thought would be more of a struggle than this Native piece." Vicky continued to reflect on her accomplishments and impact she had over her career. "I think I did a lot of good things for the youth there, where, like you said ... education's very, very important, but if those children did not feel safe and supported in the school, it was really hard

for them to concentrate on education." She continued her story, "Putting in a day treatment program for these kids after they went to treatment because parents were still using and they were trying to get sober. Putting in an alternative school, you know, just drug and alcohol treatment programs."

Upon completion of the participants' stories, they each had a visible expression of accomplishment, pride, and fulfillment. They seemed to know that he or she made a difference in peoples' lives, and all the struggles and challenges were worth the effort. They still exhibited a tired and weary demeanor, but for a short time in the interview, they demonstrated a sense of pride showing that all the sacrifice was worth the effort since students' lives were positively impacted through their leadership.

Character/Integrity

Character/Integrity evolved from the following related codes: correct the injustices, cultural change agent, focus on kids, job versus vocation, life toucher, and philosophy.

During the interview process, participants were asked questions about what they perceived to be rewarding and challenging experiences. Questions were also asked pertaining to career defining decisions that they would repeat if given the same circumstances and questions relating to decisions that they made which they would do differently if they were in the same situation again. Participant shared specific stories relating to character building and being a person of integrity. These moments appeared to help solidify and define their character and develop them into leaders with integrity and each of these defining decisions had potential political consequences for each participant. These character defining decisions almost always directly affected their teaching staff's lives. Not all character defining decisions were related to inappropriate staff behavior but sometimes were related to the financial health and long-term

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viability of the organization. Les stated, "Then we went about the business of right-sizing that organization. It was a very hard thing to do. In six months I had a recommendation for the board to cut 64 teaching positions, 110 support positions, and it was not popular and yet ultimately people supported it because they knew something had to change. I was able to convince people to do that, you know, go with it, go with us, and we're going to reinvent this place, so it's going to be a better place."

All participants told stories relating to disciplinary decisions that needed to be addressed because of the impact on students. They all reflected that these decisions affected people, their families, and their livelihood, but ultimately, the decisions were made for the good of the students. David reflected, "So when I got rid of those five teachers, and then in another position when I got rid of a teacher because I knew that was going to cause me headaches, but I would do it again because it was the right decision particularly for the students." Mitch discussed several tough but necessary decisions he made, "Eliminating a couple of staff members and a building level principal, those were always tough. One principal came to school intoxicated, and that just was against my philosophy. I just couldn't ... It violated our policies and everything else. I just couldn't live with that." Tanya shared one of her stories of making the right decision but paying the price, "We had a teacher here who mishandled a student, happened to be a student of color with a profound disability who had a lot of post-traumatic stress. That was one where social media and the press were pretty hateful. I'd do it again in a heartbeat. That was the right decision for the kid. No question." She continued to reflect, "Then, I think there are just a number of hires that I've made based on the board's vision and what it's going to take to get the place to move that didn't always sit right because people wanted someone internal, home-grown. If that candidate could've got the job done, I think it would've been great. But, the idea was to match what was

needed with the current skillset that people offered. Those decisions I would make again. I might explain them better, but I would make them."

Vicky's reflection perhaps sums up the participants' feelings when making tough personnel decisions, "And I just said, you know, here's your choice, you either resign or I'm going to the board for dismissal, and we actually did end up even reporting it to social services, and there was some stuff that happened there. I struggled with that at first, I really thought, do I really want to do this? And first of all, I thought, I'm affecting somebody's life, but there are kids that are being affected too. It was that struggle, and then once I did it, and I knew it was the right thing to do, I slept well that night, but it was a defining moment."

All the participants admitted these decisions and experiences were challenging and helped them to solidify their character and moral compass when making decisions based on what was in the best interests of students. These difficult decisions moved the participants from simply managing a district and personnel to leading a district to attain its vision. Such decisions had both short-term and long-term consequences for the participants that ultimately may have led to leaving their positions earlier than anticipated. The participants realized this consequence but chose the leadership path and consequences associated with this path.

Challenge = Growth

Challenge = Growth evolved from the following related codes: balance, administrative 6th sense, cultural change agent, life journey, philosophy, professional differences, disconnect, differences in priorities, and lacking relationships.

All participants described personal experiences of professional evolution from teaching to administration, and in particular, years of making mistakes while learning the role of superintendent. Each participant shared specific stories of what he or she would have done

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differently early in their careers if the hands of time could be turned back. Each participant

defined mistakes as growth experiences. David explained, "There was one time I made a

recommendation about reorganization, and the board rejected it. That was actually a good thing,

because when they rejected it, I took off my blinders. I started looking at some things from a

different perspective. We actually did a better job of reorganizing it the next month." Myron

openly reflected on his relationship with what he considered difficult board members, "But like I

said before, I had trouble ... when I wanted something done one way, and some housewife who

didn't have a clue of what went on, said, 'No, we're doing this.' She's doing this because her

neighbor wants it, yeah, I had a tough time with that." Mitch admitted that sometimes standing

up to your employer was tough and he had regrets as he shared, "The school board chairperson

said absolutely no. I didn't have the character to stand up to her and say, 'This is who we are

hiring.' I had to go tell that person that they weren't getting the job. They knew why they weren't

getting the job – because of the school board chair person. It was a vindictive personal decision

by the school board chairperson."

Although the participants admitted to making mistakes and would take advantage of a do-

over, they stated that they learned from each experience and believed that they left the district in

a better place than when they joined the district.

Bull in a China Shop

Bull in a China Shop evolved from the following related codes: administrative wisdom,

balance, lacking relationships, tempered, disconnect, difference in priorities, board

member/superintendent relationships, and board member/superintendent differences.

The participants explained how they evolved regarding emotional growth and

professional knowledge. Early in their careers, participants tended to offend individuals when

making decisions and did not value collaboration but rather believed they would simply dictate directives expecting compliance and results. When each participant was asked what he or she would do differently, they each gave examples. David stated, "Over the years, I've learned to be more diplomatic." He shared a specific story when working with a teacher representative during negotiations. "'Mr. Jackson,' she said, 'the problem is, you take this stuff personally, and it's not a personal matter.' I looked at her and I said, 'No, I don't.' I walked out of her room and I thought to myself, yeah, you are. You are taking this personally. That was a big change for me, when I realized this isn't personal, it's business. That helped me deal with the issues better moving forward." David continued by reflecting over his entire career and how he evolved as a person, "Yeah, when I started out, I made mistakes. I thought that I could just make decisions and that people would just follow them. And I had to learn from those. And I did. And I'm much more collaborative now when it's the right thing to do, but there are, as you know, certain instances where there's one person that has to make the decision. So I understand a lot better those situational differences today. And I understand today a lot better that building faculty ownership and buy in results in a stronger decision when there's time and when it can be done. So I'd say that's the biggest difference. But as I said, when we talked last time, every position I've been in has been great because I've learned in every position that I've held. And I'd say that was a pretty big evolution over time."

The transition in the role performance from controller to collaborator described by each of the participants took years to develop. Not all district challenges allowed for collaboration and consensus building. The ability to determine when to collaborate and when to make a decision as the superintendent of the district also took years of trial and error to find an appropriate balance.

For example, Jim reflected on his career and stated, "It took a long time to not become defensive and to look at it that way. Like I always say is I would like my maturity now forty years ago, because I think a lot of situations, I would have handled differently and not get defensive. But I have learned to become a listener rather than trying to justify everything that's going on. I think in most cases now, you try to build relationships rather than win arguments, and that's kind of the maturation process that has taken place." Jim continued to explain his evolution as an administrator, "Well I think again, the maturity factor is ... When you're young and developing as a leader, I think you're a lot more aggressive and you want to see change now and you're just thinking what you're doing is the only way to do it. Where I think when you get older and have more experience, you kind of just sit back and want it to be a team effort rather than, 'Well, it's my job to get you to do this or change to this or whatever.' So I think the biggest thing again is just the type of relationships that you build, instead of trying to have you up here on top, like a lot of young administrators kind of were or are."

The challenge for the participants was realizing that effective district leadership is accomplished through team building and effort and collaborative efforts. These efforts were steered by the superintendent acting as a facilitator rather than the sole expert and took years for the participants to realize and to loosen the grip of their positional power and to begin to trust collaborative efforts.

While several participants reflected generally on their careers, others gave specific examples of their behavior as young administrators and lessons learned from these experiences. Les shared, "If somebody came in, like a parent or staff member, and was giving me heck or trying to influence me, I would be right in their face. I learned almost immediately that that was exactly the wrong way to lead." Martin shared his experience, "So I was a young buck, went in

and put a little pressure on them, too much. These guys were probably 50, 52 years old, maybe our age now kind of. I'm embarrassed a little bit. I never did fire. I maybe encouraged one to retire. The other one I was pretty candid and said, 'Hey, do you know the board wants you terminated?' and I was kinda almost cocky I think when I look back. I didn't mean to be, but that is something I can tell you I regret. I ran into one of them, I know he wouldn't want to see me because I'm sure he views me as this cocky young kid." Myron stated how he evolved with teaching staff and their individual teaching methods, "Well, it didn't take long to figure out everybody had their own way of doing the same thing. And that took a little time for me to figure that out. That it's not my way, it's the highway. And I think as time went on, I became very flexible in what, how teachers taught."

While several participants shared specific incidences, others reflected on how they wished they could have engaged in deeper introspection and reflected on aspects of personality and demeanor earlier in their careers. Tanya openly shared, "In a nutshell, learning more about yourself as a leader so you become the kind of leader other people want to follow. I wish I could've learned more about that when I was younger, because I'm a hard-driving person, and I'm a female. That doesn't always sit well with people who have a stereotypical vision of what a female is supposed to be. The outcome, I think, would have been less grief for me, but certainly more unity and symmetry from the board on down. So I own my part in that. I wish I would've known more about that." Vicky readily admitted her shortcomings, "Gee, I run into the wall and run into the wall, and it's like the definition of insanity. And it's not so much that I'm running into the wall. I think the thing is, I didn't step back to say, 'Oh, if I looked over that way, I could of went around the wall.' So, I just kind of kept going at things sometimes. And as I got older and more experienced, I did kind of, sometimes, step back, breathe. I think before, it was like I

always thought I had to figure it out all by myself. And so, I think that's something I would do differently, is that there were just some times that I just kind of beat myself up too much, rather than looking at things differently."

As several participants continued to reflect, it became evident that early in their careers, they were very driven without regard to consequences for how an initiative was implemented in the district. The initiative was focused on what was best for students, but the path for achieving the initiative was usually a straight line drawn by the superintendent. Participants wished they would have had a better understanding of their demeanor, cultural background, and gender as well as the impact of personal characteristics on stakeholders. Respondents perceived that this knowledge and understanding early in their careers would have resulted in less stress and greater success when implementing change initiatives.

Financial Career Move/Tipping Point

Financial Career Move/Tipping Point evolved from the following related codes: administrative 6th sense, administrative wisdom, length of service, personal sacrifice, professional evolution, difference of priorities, professional differences, team support, lack of trust, context of culture, generational respect, paralysis of initiatives, and restrictive.

Nine of the 10 participants relocated to another school district at least once while serving as a superintendent. Several experienced a pull to a more financially lucrative position while several experienced a combination of push and pull factors. Several participants moved several times throughout their careers as a superintendent, and these individuals experienced just pull factors at times, just push factors at times, and push/pull factors at times. Each participant shared that he or she knew it was time to move on. While sharing these experiences, most participants appeared to be emotional in their responses. David shared an observation over his lengthy career,

"But there also comes a point in time, where even if it's one school board member, a superintendent has a longevity in a district. The days of working in a district for 35 years are gone. When the time comes, we're the ones that have to make that decision. Here, yes. I am leaving because of this school board, but I'm also leaving because it's just time." Jim reflected on his successful career, "But at the same time, in each of the school districts, you knew when it was time to move on, because it became a lot more push factors. I do believe the fact that when you get there, you have a couple years and you work and you get to know people. But the longer you're there, there're certain issues or things that have happened that you know you're going to ... I'm not going to say make enemies, but make people that don't really feel comfortable with you. So eventually, it wears on you. I think that's why you end up, or I ended up in three different communities, was the fact that you just know when it's time to move on, and you've had enough issues and there's enough people out there that ... I'm not going to say you fight with, but you disagree with."

Early in each of the participant's career, the move was likely prompted by a combination of and desire for financial advancement but also involved a heightened level of stressors that emerged from making necessary but unpopular decisions. Later in the participants' careers, it became evident that moves were more related to stressors and those stressors eventually led to retirement.

Myron was blunt when explaining why he left his position and the effect it had on his wife, "When I left Harford, it was because I had two board members that didn't like me, didn't want me there. I had had enough. And it got personal. And I said, 'I don't need this.' Of course, our kids had all left at that time, and of course my wife was very happy, had a lot of friends and

all that, she was just devastated at that thing. But I made that decision, there's no way I can keep doing this. And it was because of two board members, very frankly."

While most participants stated strained relationships with patrons or board members led them to relocate, one participant stated that board relationships and patron stressors were not an issue, but rather the many duties assigned to the role of superintendent resulted in fatigue and contributed to his retirement.

Tim shared his experience that dealt with general stress that were not related to board members but to having an opportunity to move to a new district, "Yeah, the push factors would've been just so many ... I think we were understaffed administratively and so a lot of responsibilities, a lot of tasks, never feeling I was caught up, always wanting to do more. But then the pull factors, I guess, related to that here in Meriden, having two principals, having a full administrative staff, having a little bigger school, having a few more opportunities for my daughter."

Vicky stated her frustration with board members while serving in two districts, "I think in Groton, the push factor just ended up being some of these, I just call them the new ramrod loose cannon kind of individuals that really thought more of themselves than really they had the capability of doing." In her superintendency in Groton, Vicky commented on her frustration with the board president particularly, "There wasn't anything that I was doing that was unsatisfactory as far as performance, and she was one that she didn't like being told no, or you can't do this or that. And when you'd kind of not go her way, she was more subtle about undermining, I guess, my leadership then. And so, just kept wanting, expecting more, and more and more out of me. And I was doing more, and more and more until, like I said, my husband got hurt and said, what do you mean you're working 12, 14 hours, like, all, and now they want you weekends. And he

was saying, 'Vicky, you can't keep doing this anymore.'" Vicky continued her story, "And I

think that when he got hurt, that it was like, yeah. I guess I am doing all this. So to me, that was

the way of pushing me out, was that. And it seemed like with her, leadership ability to her,

almost people or other board members were afraid of her, some of those younger, young board

members did not want to go against her." Vicky continued to reflect stating, "And I thought, I

don't deserve this. You know, finally, it was that point where saying it wasn't just blatantly

evident, but you know, just after you put some of the pieces together, it was just like, you know,

I've worked long and hard enough. I don't need to be mistreated or being taken for granted. So, I

think part of the decision-making piece there was just kind of cutting back, and that's so

uncomfortable for me because usually it's 150% and you're going 100 mph and nothing at all

almost." Vicky finally reached the tipping point sharing, "Backing off just was so hard for me to

do. And you know, I thought, well they'll notice. They'll notice and say, 'Oh my gosh, Vicky, we

want you to keep' ... oh no, it didn't matter. So I was kind of like, okay, it's confirming that no

matter whether I'm working myself to death or just going at a normal rate, it doesn't matter."

Each participant stated that the job was a 24/7 position requiring both personal and family

sacrifice affecting personal health and wellbeing. The internal motivation to lead a district and

continue focusing on student wellbeing while attempting to deal with outside pressures led each

participant to reach his or her tipping point and retire. It appeared that each participant gave his

or her heart and soul to the superintendency. In the end, their efforts were not recognized or

considered adequate. During the interviews, the participants portrayed a tired and weary

demeanor.

Theme 2: Administrative Fatigue

All of the participants appeared to suffer from what they perceived to be fatigue. Several struggled with the prolonged stress associated with the duties of the position and the time necessary to fulfill the duties and lead a district. Other participants believed they were subjected to additional fatigue from intense push factors resulting in their decision to retire before they had planned.

David shared general factors that wore him down, "Unreasonable parents wear me down. I can deal with the kids all day long. But unreasonable parents and school board members that do not know their role as a policy making school board have worn me down over time. And occasionally employee issues because some of them ... I want to retract that. Not employee issues so much as association issues. Because as I said, the association places teachers above children. And that does wear me down because public education, I just love this profession, I have a passion for public education. And when people try and diminish the importance of that to the children by doing things that serve the association above children, that does wear me down. So those are probably the main things." David shared push factors from his most recent district, "This one is a push. I had intended to be a couple more years in this district, but the stress of this job with the school board is just not worth it. And so this one was 100% push."

Jim discussed the factors that wore him down over the course of his career, "Well, I would say, yes. Time is number one. I mean, when you're the face of the school, you're at the ball games. You're at the concerts. And I think people in smaller communities expect you to be there all the time. I think parents eventually got to you. Got to me, I should say. It seemed like a lot of issues that weren't important 20 years ago now become headlines and you have to deal with them. So basically, I think what's happening is the trying to keep up with the trends in

THEME

Administrative Fatigue

Categories

Superintendent/ Board Member Relationship	Superintendent/ Board Role Confusion	Superintendent/ Board Differences
Codes	*Codes*	*Codes*
Difference of Priorities	Difference of Priorities	Professional Differences
Disconnect	Disconnect	Disconnect
Lack of Trust	Micro-Manage	Differences in Priorities
Support All	Lack of Trust	Lacking Relationships
Support the Process	Teamwork	Teamwork
Teamwork	Support All	Micro-Manage
	Student Achievement	Lack of Trust
Frequency - 275	**Frequency - 235**	**Frequency - 242**

Agenda	Micromanage	Board Member Turnover
Codes	*Codes*	*Codes*
Professional Differences	Professional Differences	Generational Change
Disconnect	Team Support	Length of Service
Differences in Priorities	Lack of Trust	Personal Sacrifice
Lacking Relationships	Restrictive	Professional Differences
Support the Process	Micro-Manage	Team Support
Training of Board Roles	Personal Grudge	Lack of Trust
Personal Grudge	Lacking Relationships	Generational Respect
Teamwork		Support All
Micro-Manage		Mainstream Media
Lack of Trust		Social Media
		Stressors
		Family Sacrifice
Frequency - 363	**Frequency - 162**	**Frequency - 723**

Figure 2. Code Map, Categories, and Theme (Administrative Fatigue).

education. It's more and more demands on that, and then I would say parents were a big issue, a big reason to just move on."

Les echoed a similar response as Jim, "I would say, are the things that wore me down are just the pace of the position. Not that it wore me out, but just the 24/7 nature of the job. Always being on your game and always being the superintendent no matter where you were. You never really escape it. To this day I can walk anywhere and they'll want to bend your ear about something. Everyday school business. Then just the physical case of it. The hours that you put in, your time, your stress. For me personally, I've always been healthy until recently. So, I mean, that's been invigorating in some ways. You get tired, so I think."

Martin reflected on his years as a superintendent, "But all I can say now after 25 years in administration, and 37 years in education, it's nice to be out. Although I do miss working with kids, and working with staff. I do miss that. But boy, I do not miss working with school board members. I don't miss that. So I'm very happy to be where I'm at." Martin continued to share his frustration, "Well, I went from being perceived as a great leader to it's time for him to go in four or five years. From year one to year six, and I could just see it happening, decisions being made. It wasn't so much the board, although they started getting tainted because any of us, the more negative you hear, it wears on you, you get tired of it."

Mitch discussed the internal stress relating to the unpleasant but necessary duties of the position, "Dismissal of teachers and principals, that's always ... You look at it, it's in the best interest of the students, and some have gone smooth. Some have gone a little rocky, but you couldn't salvage that person, and that always bothered me a little bit. Not that they were bad people or anything of that nature, or they were victimizing kids to a tenth degree of some sort, but just dismissal of staff through mid-year, that takes a toll on you."

The majority of participants experienced fatigue related to the time required for the superintendency. They also experienced fatigue from the pressure of external forces and demands of the position. One participant did not recall any specific external pressures but rather felt stress from the day to day duties of the position.

Tim talked in general terms about the stressors of the position, "Yeah, I think superintendent is a very stressful position. With the responsibilities that exist, and I have a personality that worries about everything, it's very stressful. Even the little things became stressful, so yeah, there's definitely a lot of stress, I think. So there was push ... Okay, I was at Middletown for four years and here at Milford for six, and so there was definitely both push and pull with Milford." Tim continued, "It was the time factor. Spent way too much time with the position, and I always told the boards when they were hiring me, 'This is my job. It's my hobby. It's my entertainment. I do, I enjoy the ballgames. I enjoy the speech tournaments and the concerts.' I did enjoy all that, but that's a lot of time. There were so many 12 to 15-hour days, and so yeah, that's probably the biggest reason why I'm retiring, is now that I'm in a new relationship, I just wanna have time for that, and for me, this job was just ... It was pretty much my whole life, so the time factor is by far the biggest factor."

Vicky shared the general stress and push factors at a recent district, "Yeah, and then on top of that, you got your boss, I guess, saying, or your leaders saying, we need to do something about this, this, and this. Yeah, I know. Tell me what it is, you know, I wish we could all figure it out. But I don't think they realized that, there's no one answer. You know, and sometimes, that's what we said. We'd figure out one thing, and then you'd move right next to, you know, go to the next thing. So, I think that was just it. It was that fast pace kind of concept and you're just kind

of, you're juggling all these balls at the same time, and sometimes you put on a good show and sometimes you drop the balls."

Throughout the interview process, participants shared many stressors that led to fatigue. The role of the superintendent involves working with many entities and individuals on a daily basis which can cause stress on occasion. One entity discussed in depth by all participants was the school board and the importance of having a working relationship with this entity. All superintendents shared stories of difficult board members. A few participants expressed having a good working relationship with board members throughout their career. The majority of the participants discussed the affects that difficult board members had on the district and the superintendent as he or she attempted to carry out district initiatives.

Superintendent/Board Member Relationships

Superintendent/Board Member Relationships evolved from the following related codes: difference of priorities, disconnect, lack of trust, support all, support the process, and teamwork.

Of the ten participants that were involved in the study, all stated that they experienced many quality school board members. All but one participant reflected that they had a good working relationship with their board presidents. Each participant stated that he or she had encountered board members who appeared to have an agenda or an ax to grind when taking up a position on the board.

Several participants shared stories of quality board members. Quality board members could best be defined as a board member that over time was able to see the big picture regarding his or her role as a school board member. This person also understood the concept of having his or her arms around the district and not his or her fingers in the day to day operations of the district. David reflected, "The Vice Chairman of the School Board, in an executive session, he

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looks at me, and he told me, he said, 'You need to understand, if you ever need to use us, that's what we're for. We're here to support you.' I thought at that time, wow, that's a powerful statement." Conversely, David reflected on his most recent relationship with his school board, "Do we have a trusting relationship? Absolutely not. Because every time I turn around they're just looking for one little thing to complain about." Les discussed the importance of forming a working relationship with the board, "I think that's an important place to be, especially working with school boards also. I found that sometimes you've got to just ... Even if you don't agree with what's being said, you have to just listen and look for the opportunity to educate, and inform, and teach, and lead. Sometimes that takes more time than you may want to invest in it, but that's really the way change happens and good decisions are made." Les continued to reflect on how he formulated his practices when leading a board through a decision making process, "I think I started this way because, I was so young and inexperienced when I became a superintendent, I really didn't think I had the answers, so I had to do the research and I just think I learned over time that if I do the research, present the information to both sides of an issue. Then, make a recommendation, it's much better supported because the people on the board might be in different places in terms of pro or con." Les continued to discuss the importance of maintaining a working relationship with his entire board, "I remember many times working hard on this to not become a best friend with a board member. To also always involve all board members. To keep them all informed the same way. Try to give them all the same information, don't give one or two board members more information than another. I think that's real important, because you are working with the full board and sometimes that's hard." Les then discussed the importance of realizing each board member is a human with different views, "Try to understand each one of them for who they are, and what they bring to the board, look for their talents and their strengths,

try to help them shore up their weaknesses. Looking at it from the point of view that you are a leader to them, really, as an educator. It's your job to inform, educate, facilitate, not direct."

Over the course of their careers, David and Les understood the importance of working with their individual board members and educating them when the opportunity arose. They both realized that although they were hired by the board to run the day to day operations, the superintendent still answered to the board. Directing them, even though tempting to do, was not their role as a superintendent.

Martin explained traits of a quality board, "I think to me the common sense, business sense, just understanding how organizations work and politics and being able to process all that, that's what separates the good board members and good boards." Martin emphasized the importance of the board members knowing their roles, "To me, I just think you have to try and get your board members to understand that you've hired me to run this place, please allow me to do it, support me, because that will help us to be successful."

While Martin reiterated David's and Les' comments regarding the importance of understanding roles, Mitch described his experience with what he considered a quality school board, "I'd say my board at Steele was most supportive in being progressive, and also aggressive on making facility changes, making curriculum changes, making technological changes, and keeping education of our students at the forefront." Mitch explained this board's traits regarding professionalism, "They're very stable. They're very steady in the operation. They learn boardsmanship, they learn the policies, and they're very operational in what they do."

Tanya did not discuss the need to develop relationships with the board or educate them in boardsmanship. Rather, it appeared that her vision was aligned with the board that hired her, and

as a result of this alignment, she was able to effectively direct and lead the school with the board's assistance.

Tanya shared that her description of a quality board focuses on alignment of vision and commitment, "I absolutely did. My favorite school board was the school board of 2012 that hired me here in Derby. I was supportive of their vision as much as they were supportive of mine, so it was a match. They wanted a superintendent who would take a great 20th century school district into the 21st century. That was my marching orders. What separated them from other boards is this board was willing to do the hard work of change rather than talk about change and expecting it to happen magically without any dysregulation or discomfort. They supported the community, me, and the executive team through the discomfort to get where we are today. They're phenomenal." Vicky echoed Tanya's description of alignment, "This most recent board here at Groton has been the most supportive and then with our vision together, I think we built it together. But even when they hired, you know, they knew what they were looking for, and I think I knew what I was looking for too, so it was a good match from the start, and usually things are always good at the beginning."

All the participants expressed the importance of having a working relationship with their respective boards throughout their careers. When school boards and the superintendent aligned visions, it appeared that relationships were quickly established, and initiatives were moved forward quickly and effectively. Not all superintendents had this alignment, but through hard work establishing relationships and educating board members, they were able to move the district forward regarding the achievement of initiatives. Participants referred to these boards as "quality boards" as they were able to carry out initiatives, even though in most instances, the

superintendent found himself or herself needing to exert additional effort to educate and develop professional relationships.

Participants also shared stories about board members who did not realize their roles as board members and the difficulty that arose from this misinterpretation of roles.

Superintendent/Board Member Role Confusion

Superintendent/Board Member Role Confusion evolved from the following related codes: difference of priorities, disconnect, micromanage, lack of trust, teamwork, support all, and student achievement.

The role of the school board and that of the superintendent are clearly defined at the North Dakota School Boards Association's annual conference. Superintendents come to understand their role and responsibilities through their administrative preparation programs offered through the university system, the North Dakota Council of Education Leadership organization, and the North Dakota School Boards Association when they attend annual conferences with their school board members. In spite of these organizations' efforts, roles and responsibilities of board members and superintendents can become blurry. David perhaps best summed up the role of the superintendent and school board, "The board/superintendent relationship, there needs to be a clearly defined line of demarcation about the role of the school board and the role of the superintendent. Does the school board manage the school district? Yes they do, through their policies. But the superintendent runs the school district operations on a daily basis. That line of demarcation needs to be very clearly defined. When that line becomes blurred is when problems occur. And I would give new school board members the advice to listen to the tutelage of those that came before you that were very strong school board members about maintaining that line of demarcation."

This clear line of demarcation that David referred to appeared to be black and white. However, there is still a need for discussion between the school board and superintendent when determining the direction of the district and the best policy to adopt that meets the needs of the district.

Conversely, David described what causes a board to travel the slippery slope of dysfunction when roles are not defined and followed, "Policy-making school boards that I've had were always supportive. Not to say that they didn't challenge, or question sometimes, which they should, but when a board moves from a policy-making school board to an administrative school board is when trouble starts to occur." David then shared his most recent experience, "This is the most dysfunctional school board I have ever worked with. They tell the public they're a policy-making board, but they are an administrative school board … And yeah, they're completely out of control."

David reiterated maintaining clear distinction of roles but provided a meaningful metaphor to describe the role of a functional school board, "I've always believed in that clear identification of the board's role, and the superintendent's role, and that it's important for that not to get blurred." David continued, "The job of a school board is to put its arms around a school district, not to put its fingers in the school district."

Julie explained behavior of her most recent school board as being supportive and aligned with carrying out the district vision, "My very last school boards philosophy, 'What's good for kids.' And I think, I really felt that there wasn't ... They really truly felt that. That if anything that you brought to them, if you could justify that it was good for kids, and for their education, they supported that."

Not all school board members begin with an aligned vision of the district or superintendent. These individuals require additional assistance from the superintendent and other board members to help acclimate and educate the new board member of the role and responsibilities of the board and superintendent. In spite of this combined effort from the superintendent and board members, the rogue board member may remain misaligned throughout his or her tenure on the board.

Les described the turmoil that is created when a school board is not aligned in their mission, "Someone comes in and kind of wants to just upset the apple cart, then all there is, is controversy and turmoil and you've got to somehow right that apple cart. So, your time is spent focusing on that group dynamic and the tension or the turmoil that gets created from that, versus focusing on the mission and purpose of your organization. I find it to be, very much, a disrupter." Les then shared his frustration and belief relating to new board members, "I just feel if they'd come in and trust a little more, and take a little deeper dive in trying to know and understand the organization and why the board dynamic is what it is, why the relationships between the board members, or the board members and the administration and the staff are what they are, I think they'd be probably better served even as an individual board member. To be able to have that grounding versus just coming in and trying to get their way."

Myron shared similar beliefs regarding board members but admitted that just a certain individual board member could be challenging, "And I had people that were on the board, they weren't supportive, they were on the board for one reason, they had axes to grind with staff members, or policies, or whatever. Which made it tougher to work with. But you know, I don't think I ever had a board that was, that I didn't work well with. But I had individual board members who made life miserable." Myron continued, "I just think that there were way too

many people on the boards that, like I said, were on for the wrong reason. They weren't there for the… they maybe were there for the betterment of the kids, but they had an ax to grind, they had a certain teacher that they thought should not be there, or a certain policy that they wanted changed, and that's why they were there."

Tanya attempted to tactfully describe her most recently elected school board's direction regarding district culture. She stated, "But the continual confusion about what we're trying to get done here remains. My sense is some of the louder voices on the board want it to, the school district, to be like it was in the 1980s when they went to school, which is in direct contrast to what the 2012 board wanted. They haven't articulated that clearly, so I don't even know they know, and I surely don't know."

The majority of participants shared specific stories of individual board members or school boards that did not understand their role. These were challenging times for the participants and in numerous incidents led to the early departure of superintendents from their districts. Some board members entered their positions and then went rogue for their tenure. Several participants shared stories of acclimation and conversion regarding individual board members.

Throughout their respective careers as superintendents, all participants had individual board members with a different picture of what their role was compared to the other board members and superintendent. Participants described a transformation in some of these board members soon after becoming acclimated to their role and responsibilities.

Vicky shared a mixed example of how some board members evolved while others did remain focused on their own agenda, "I had a couple board members in Groton that, they were so selfish, or so, their egos were tied into it more so than some of those board members that may

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have started out that way, but then saw the big picture, really came around saying, I'm not just looking out for my kid or my relative in this situation. It's like, I'm responsible for all these kids, and came around." Vicky continued to discuss the cost of making decisions based on character and being a person of integrity, "You know what that line in the sand is and what your values are, because if you do come across those board members, at some point you just got to say, no, not going to do it. But you live with the consequences of that too, knowing that sometimes it means moving on, but every time I've moved on, it's always been a good moving on, a new door, new experience."

Superintendent/Board Member Differences

Superintendent/Board Member Differences evolved from the following related codes: professional differences, disconnect, difference in priorities, lacking relationships, teamwork, micromanage, and lack of trust.

Each of the participants described their relationships with board members. Several did not have experiences with board members that pushed them to another district. The majority of participants did have experiences that were stressful and caused the participant to search for another district that was better aligned with his or her vision. David discussed his experience early in his career, "There was just that one comment, and out of respect, he was a great guy. We just had different views on how it was supposed to be run. But I knew that it wouldn't work in the long-term." Julie explained her experience early in her career that was stressful, but she did not relocate, "Early in New Britain, I had one board member who I believed was adversarial with me, and that his intent at every board meeting was to call me out on something that was happening in the high school building at that time. That was very challenging because you could never prepare for it. I think in situations if you know that there's ... you have a problem and

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you're going to be called out on how you are addressing or not addressing it, you can at least have a spinning conversation in your head." Les shared his observation of the potential effect of one board member, "What I've noticed ... It's kind of an interesting phenomenon, is sometimes very treacherous, is the dynamic. You know, one member, and the personality of that member, or the style of that member, or the issues that member brings with them, can change the entire dynamic of the entire school board group."

Myron portrayed an open and honest demeanor while sharing his opinion of administration and board member differences, "Well, I think that was part of my biggest problem. I took a lot of the disagreements personally. I think that was one of my bigger issues that I had. I just had a tough time with the makeup of the board, and there were people on there with no experience in education, who felt that because of their position, they had more authority than I did. And that really bugged me. That just bugged the crap out of me." Myron continued, "But the people that we had on the board that were like that, that didn't know anything about education, voted on things because their neighbor wanted something done. There was so much politics going on in small school boards that I was at. I don't know if that goes on everywhere, but I'm assuming that a lot of it probably does. But I think if I could have learned not to take things personally, I maybe could have lasted longer."

Martin discussed his experience regarding differences he had with difficult board members, "Again, conversely I don't think they were as knowledgeable of the organization and how school is run. I don't think they trusted, they just didn't trust. Anything you said, there was just a lack of trust. They'd always have to verify. You could see it in their eyes, so that made it difficult. Not that they were all that way, but there was more than one and it wasn't as much fun."

Mitch discussed his experience of working with his most recent school board, "Lack of support, lack of direction, and the direction needs to come from the superintendent also, but I just felt there was no support there for what we wanted to do and needed to do for that school district." Mitch continued with a specific example, "I asked for another section of kindergarten and another section of second grade for '17-'18 school term. I was denied those sections by the New Haven school district school board. That really bothered me because I said, "Well, okay, that's where we're at. We're going to have 30 kindergartner kids in a section this year for '17-'18. We did. We do. That really bothered me because that was not good for kids."

Tanya described the traits of her most recent school board members that had a different vision from her previous board, "My current school board is particularly challenging in part. Probably 60% of them are challenging. What's separating them from other boards is they're not able to work through the discomfort of change. I suspect they're not able to work through the discomfort of change because they have very close family members and friends who are involved in that change process, and when they get a complaint, they want to fix it immediately. So they have a little bit of the hero cape on as individual cowboys trying to make everyone's life better as opposed to a commitment to make the system better for all kids. They're not bad people or good people. They're just people. They view their job very differently than the view of the board in 2012." Tanya then compared her previous board with her most recent board, "There's a difference in board leadership now, and leadership is critical. So, the leadership of the 2012 board was consistently that aggressive/progressive, 'We're going to get this done for the community throughout a period of growth.' The current board leadership is less able to have the long view and very thin-skinned in the short view, and so they're unable to lead."

Tanya described the differences of the two boards regarding leadership style, and in particular, the lack of vision to see the bigger picture of the district versus trying to fix immediate issues. Perhaps the board of 2012 was a board that could be considered a leadership board and the present board considered a managing board. A managing board is unable to carry out district initiatives but attempts to manage the day to day challenges of the district.

Vicky described traits of her challenging board members, "I think the board that was most challenging was my school board in Groton. And again, it was at my first superintendency. And I think the challenging part was it just seemed like they'd set expectations and want certain things, and we'd move along for a while that way, and then all of a sudden, they'd get detoured. And for different reasons, sometimes it was just personal reasons or it was political reasons, and it just seemed like ... and I still see that many times in Indian country with Native boards is, leaderships, Native leaders or non-Native leaders, have good intentions and work to implement something, and sometimes just out of their control they get taken off and it's so hard to bring them back." Vicky continued to share, "I think, the hardest part is that, sometimes they want to listen to friends and relatives instead of their leader. They had some good skills and they were very passionate, and they could do good things, but it was for the wrong reason. And, man, they could be a thorn in your side, and just raise heck with a lot of the things you're doing."

Board Member Agenda

Board Member Agenda evolved from the following related codes: professional differences, disconnect, differences in priorities, lacking relationships, support the process, training of board roles, personal grudge, teamwork, micromanage, and lack of trust.

While most participants shared differences between administration and board members, the participants shared specific examples of board members or collective boards that had a

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specific agenda that clearly overstepped their role as a governing body. David referenced his most current school board, "And with the current school board members in this district, there's no doubt there was an agenda. And the thing that changed the most is they wanted to be more in charge of the daily things that happen and think that it's the job of the school board to fix things that happen on a daily basis and meet with people. And they're an extremely administrative school board."

Les shared a story regarding a recently elected board member when she was a candidate. "I ask all of the candidates, 'If you're elected on the board what are the first three things you will do?' And her response was, 'The first thing I would do is fire the assistant superintendent. The second thing I would do is fire the superintendent. The third thing I would do is recall all the permanent board members.'" Les continued, "So, it's hard when someone comes on with that much of an ax to grind and any opportunity that she could find over those four years, she would look for it. That it could be the most trivial thing including a recent incident for this really changed my situation dramatically."

Martin reflected on two of his present board members, "One is the board chair, very supportive, the other one is actually very negative towards me, gave me one of the worst evaluations I had right out of the gate, right at my December/November evaluation, hadn't been there three or four months, to be honest, as far as working with her and there were no others."

Mitch stated early in his career of a board member that was elected with an agenda but then assimilated to the group. He explained, "We had a new board member that got on, and a lot of the votes went 6-1, 6-1, 6-1. About a year and a half that board member saw that they weren't going to be able to make the changes that they wanted to make. They were kind of ostracized by the rest of the school board members. They were being challenged."

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Tanya compared several of her new board members' vision or agenda compared to her previous board. She said, "Yes. Because I was still trying to do the work of the board of 2012. The mission and vision didn't change at all. It led to conflict and confusion because I think two of these more newer board members have a different mission and vision, but what it is, I don't know. They haven't articulated. I don't even know if they know. They just don't want anything bad to happen or any conflict ever. They want peace in the valley only. If that means only serving the middle class and higher income, two-parent, white kids, as one board member told me, 'Remember, that's who votes,' so then at that point, I do think I gave up."

Micromanagement

Micromanage evolved from the following related codes: professional differences, team support, lack of trust, restrictive, micromanage, personal grudge, and lacking relationships.

Those joining a school board with an obvious change agenda were perceived to be more likely to adopt a position described as "micromanagement." David shared the effects on administration when his most recent board began governing the district, "The administrators are less willing to take risks, because they don't know if something goes wrong what the reaction is going to be from elements of this school board because of how intertwined they are in the school district, it makes it hard to make decisions. Because, yeah, people are just unwilling to take a lot of risks right now." David shared his perception that "there's an element of the school board that just is looking for any one thing to go wrong so they can attack somebody. So it's made it more difficult when we have to justify and spend literally weeks talking with school board leadership about an issue because six people have complained about it." Les' observation of his most recent board echoed David's. Les stated, "I think what I've experienced more recently is people have come on the school board with an agenda specific to targeting the board and administration."

Martin summed up a previous experience with a school board, "I guess the easiest way to describe it is there were board members who wouldn't let me do what I think needed to be done. They wanted to micromanage. And from the get-go they wanted to micromanage." Mitch described his most recent experience with his school board, "The most challenging has just been the board of New Haven Public School District. It's a five member board that's being directed by one person right now, the board chair. I'd just say this, there's a lot of bullying being done by that board chair to the other board members, just a lot of micromanagement there from the board chair."

Micromanagement from school boards and/or individual school board members appeared to result in administrators being unwilling or unable to focus their energies towards district initiatives aimed to achieve the district vision and mission. Rather, participants found themselves justifying individual administrative decisions regarding district issues to board members which left little time to focus on vision and mission.

Board Member Turnover

Board Member Turnover evolved from the following related codes: generational change, length of service, personal sacrifice, professional differences, team support, lack of trust, generational respect, support all, mainstream media, social media, stressors, and family sacrifice.

Board Member Turnover evolved from the following related codes: administrative/board role confusion, admin/board differences, board member/superintendent relationships, differences in priorities, disconnect, lack of acceptance to be mentored, lack of trust, lack of willingness to be a team member, lacking relationships, micromanaging, personal grudge, fatigue, and professional differences.

Participants in the study discussed board members who shared a common vision and understood their role as school board members while others presented challenges to numerous superintendents. Participants also discussed board member longevity and board turnover. It appeared that most board members served for more than one term because their son or daughter were current K-12 students. Some board members just felt it was time to be done. Others did not run again for the school board because of the stress associated with the position. David shared his experience with board members who served for a short time, "And they look at me and say, 'I didn't know this was as complex as it is, and that there's so much going on.' Then they might leave after three or four years, and they're still not an effective school board member. Because that's not enough time to learn how complex this business is." David also discussed board members that served for a longer period of time, "I've had that happen here, both. And the incumbents that first left here left because they had been long-term school board members. I want to say like 12 to 14 years, both of them. And they felt that they had done their public service." David shared a story of board members that were defeated rather than choosing not to run because of the effect of special interest groups, "But then I had one get defeated. And that person was defeated because of the teachers' association. And it was an active campaign to get rid of that person. And I saw that happen in my previous jobs in the state, in a different state. And I sometimes wonder if that's not happening more in North Dakota. Which I think somehow the public needs to be made aware of that phenomenon. Because yeah, it makes it difficult for a superintendent when a school board member or school board members, when the association has their ear. But still believes that the role of the school board, to some degree, is to try and fix things with the association. And doesn't understand, in my opinion, that the association is more about teachers than it is about children."

Les reflected on his career over the past 40 years and weighed in on board turnover, "One of the things that I've noticed is the incredible turnover of the boards. That's been that way every place I've been. You know, I've been in four school districts as the superintendent through the years. Yet, I think it's become exaggerated. For example, with my current position, I'm in my 10th year as a superintendent here, and there's a nine-member board and only one of those members was on the board when I was hired 10 years ago." Les speculated why some board members chose to not run again or leave the position, "I think the other three are tired and disillusioned about being on the board. One of them is this critic, she's ... I'll just speak in general, I think they all are tired of the issues, you know, teacher negotiations, budget issues, facility planning has been a major issue in the community and will be in the next year." Les continued, "I just think they're burnt out. They just don't like the controversy, they talk about how they've lost friends. Some of them are concerned about their employment or business interests because of the controversies surrounding some of the issues in the district. Which are legitimate issues, but I think they just are disillusioned and they're tired and they're worried about the consequences and just don't want to do it anymore."

Martin echoed Les' speculation about board members choosing not to run and their frustration. He stated, "I mean board members aren't much different. They're in the public eye, the people that aren't happy are either coming to us as admin or they're going to the board members and they get worn out." Martin continued sharing his conversations with board members, "So anyway I've heard that from quite a few of them. They're just worn out as well. They're tired of the controversy, the stress. I had to convince this woman to run again and it was important because she's very good, but she doesn't have children in the district anymore in the school and was just getting tired."

Tanya shared her stories of board turnover at her most recent district, "That one board member actually resigned midterm because he couldn't handle tumultuous decisions. They affected his mental health and just didn't want to be part of it."

Board members choose not to run resulting in turnover while others run for re-election but do not actively campaign to be re-elected. Tanya discussed her experience with board members in her most recent district, "Incumbent board members kept their name on the re-election, but they didn't actively run. They didn't think they had to. Not many people run for the school board in a city this size. I think there was surprise on the incumbent that he should've worked harder."

Vicky shared stories similar to Tanya relating to incumbent board members being defeated after serving on the board and wanting to remain, "I also had some long-serving board members that have gotten defeated, which was actually, I mean, in a way, devastating to them, but I think the population out there was looking for a change, and I think just felt like the same old same old isn't making things change and happening at school." She continued, "And so, kind of the person I think still did that, thinking well I've done it for 10 years, 15 years, you know, and then finally, the population or the voters said no, no, no, not anymore."

While numerous participants shared experiences of board members leaving due to stress other participants discussed their experience of board member longevity and board member turnover after serving many years with apparently less frustration or stress. Tim described his experience, "When I came here, the board was very experienced. Every board member had been on for quite a while and there was very little turnover, and now quite a few have been replaced, but the personalities are so similar that the board members that are coming in have that same philosophy and same idea and I think have viewed the previous board members, I wouldn't say

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as mentors, but just as an example of how a board should work and how they should be." Tim continued, "They've been on for a long time. Their kids have graduated a number of years ago and they just feel, let's get somebody in who's got children on the school that can stay."

Although all participants experienced school board turnover, only several experienced board members leaving because they felt it was time to leave and did not experience fatigue or were defeated as an incumbent. Several participants had board members that experienced stress and felt pressure to leave the position on the board before their term was over or chose to not run again. Board members, like superintendents, are charged with the responsibility of leading a school district. Board members set policy and administration carry out the day to day implementation of that policy. Public discontent and pressure appear to affect not only the superintendent but also the policy makers.

Theme 3: Professional Maturity

As each of the ten interviewed participants described his or her individual journey as an educator, it was evident they all shared common paths regarding professional evolution. Their individual stories were different, but they all shared a common path and theme moving from behaviors that reflected lack of experience and ego to finding balance and reprioritizing their personal and professional life.

The participants reflected on their evolution throughout their respective administrative careers. All participants shared that they were student focused and the majority were career driven at the beginning of their tenure. The participants moved from a principal position to superintendent. Several participants were not driven to become a superintendent but accepted the opportunity to serve in that capacity. As superintendents, the participants remained focused on doing what was best for students and this focus required a commitment and personal sacrifice.

THEME

Professional Maturity

Categories

Tempered	Balance = Survival	Personal Sacrifice

Codes

Challenge = Growth
Emotion
Life Journey
Professional Evolution
Philosophy
Survival
Transitions
Bull in a China Shop

Codes

Administrative Wisdom
Professional Evolution
Philosophy
Tempered
Transitions
Bull in a China Shop
Personalize Less

Codes

Character
Integrity
Emotion
Family
Relationships
Survival
Tempered
Restrictive
Political Influence
Patron Support
Disconnect
Tipping Point
Generational Disconnect

Frequency - 510   **Frequency - 523**   **Frequency - 695**

Family Sacrifice	Throw in the Towel	Superintendent Insight

Codes

Character
Integrity
Emotion
Family
Relationships
Survival
Tempered
Restrictive
Political Influence
Patron Support
Disconnect
Tipping Point
Generational Disconnect

Codes

Survival
Disconnect
Generational Disconnect
Lack of Trust
Agenda
Superintendent/Board
Member Relationship
Board Member Turnover
Mainstream Media
Social Media
Administrative Fatigue

Codes

Administrative Wisdom
Administrative 6th Sense
Character
Integrity
Philosophy
Professional Evolution
Tempered
Bull in a China Shop
Survival

Frequency - 695   **Frequency - 621**   **Frequency - 747**

Figure 3. Code Map, Categories, and Theme (Professional Maturity).

Over the years, the focus on students remained, but the balance between focus on the district and time spent with family changed. Some of these changes appeared to be an evolution over time while others were specific life-influencing incidents.

David reflected on his decision to move to his final district, "We make a lot of sacrifices for our family, but our families make more sacrifices for our job. I could've continued to do that in Ansonia, and I think I would probably have been fine. But the ability to be able to retire, being in a different place in my life, like you said, aided that decision to come here."

Les shared a specific incident that influenced his priorities, "I went, and I remember thinking, 'Am I going to lose my job because I'm taking my family on a three-week vacation?' That was such a lesson to me, because I stood up to what was unreasonable power and unreasonable expectations of me, and what I was doing was reasonable. From that day forward I ... Not that I ever took a three-week vacation ever again, but I did take care of my family better and I took care of myself better. So that was very instructive for me." Les continued to reflect on what influenced his changing priorities, "Well, probably nothing to do with that. I mean, I think for me personally, it's just been a goal. I wanted to get to a certain point in my life, or I could probably enjoy life more and do some other things. We have four children, 10 grandchildren. I just want to spend time the way I'm not able to do when I'm working full-time. So, it's more about personal reasons, maybe they're professional."

Vicky shared in detail several specific incidents in a short period of time that influenced a change in her life priorities. She was very open and honest as she reflected about the recent loss of her husband and the importance of family, "And when he died, I just thought, okay now. You got your job, that's what you got and that's your family, and you feel close to everybody, until my daughter and grandkids came, and my daughter had a brand new baby, and she had two older

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girls. And the older one, actually, was going to be a teenager. And I remember looking at the

brand new little baby, and then look at the 12/13 year old, and I thought, you were just that baby.

And I missed out with my kids, because I started to be a superintendent when my youngest son

was five years, he was in kindergarten. My oldest daughter was, I think, a junior in high school,

and the others were kind of all in between there. I had kids in middle school and whatever."

Vicky continued, "And I thought, I want my grandkids to have good memories of me like that

too, not just grandma coming for the weekend. So, the retirement piece has nothing to do with

the school, the board, the staff, I just love it here. If I could, I would, but I know I need to do

something different. Because with my husband dying, being there one day, being there that

morning and gone that afternoon. And just other people that I've known, doesn't really matter age

or health, sometimes or whatever. I just think I really truly know now when they say life's too

short."

Each participant evolved over time and attempted to find a balance between work and

family. The majority of participants shared regret of the decisions they made early in their

careers when they chose career over family but were making amends as they adjusted their daily

schedules to accommodate family.

Tempered

Tempered evolved from the following related codes: challenge = growth, emotion, life

journey, professional evolution, philosophy, survival, transitions, and bull in a china shop.

Participants discussed their individual evolution from being assertive as an inexperienced

superintendent to adjusting how they dealt with their professional role as lead administrator to

involve working with a wide range of personalities. David shared his stories of how he had to

self-reflect and change his behavior, "That was a huge evolution for me right there because it

was at that moment that I realized I was taking it personally, and it wasn't personal, and it was business. And so when a board behaves professionally and just says no, I don't take those things personally." David also clarified his philosophy regarding character, "But when there is deceit, underhanded behavior, talking about the superintendent behind his or her back, yeah, I do take that personally. Because that's inappropriate on all levels. But in terms of the business decisions, if a board just says no, it is, it's just business. And yeah, so I don't take business decisions personally."

Les discussed principle-based decisions and his evolution as a leader, "I think I've worked really hard to not forsake those principles. Sometimes at a high cost when people get mad at you, they don't like you, they become retaliatory because like I said earlier, if you're not for them you're against them. Yet, I just feel that that's the only way you can sustain yourself as a leader and even as a person. To try to be grounded in principle. That doesn't mean to be so arduous that you can't listen to somebody else's point of view or their principles."

Martin discussed how his lens changed throughout his career when interacting with people, "That's why as you get older you realize, okay, you don't like this person or you want this done, instead of me just grabbing a hold of it because I think you're a person of credibility, maybe you're the board chair, maybe you're one of my fellow administrative, today I take a step back and treat people fairly, get to know them first and not be tainted by the comments and the biases you've heard coming in." Martin continued his reflection, "Again, probably not as critical. I think like I mentioned coming in and just ready to jump on things and change things. Definitely you listen more I think, you get more data before you move. I think more compassion, more understanding. I was ready to fire anybody that was even close to incompetence, let's get them the hell out of here. I'm still gonna get rid of them, but I'm gonna do it probably with a little bit

more grace and dignity for that person and treat them more like a human being than just somebody that's in the way and is a slug and no good. So I think just probably that would be one of the biggest things that I've changed with."

Tanya described how she perceived her personality and leadership style affected her staff, "I think when I began, I was pretty driven with the idea of this heavy responsibility and this office and kind of seeing it more as a CEO directive type thing. They entrusted me to do this work. This work is difficult. I'm going to do this work. I'm going to get this work done. As I end my career as a superintendent, it's almost flipped on its head where the superintendent really has no power at all. I mean, just none. What you have is political capital to spend. And if you can get support from the staff, facilitate them, keep the herd heading west without them realizing you're even a rider amongst the herd, continually giving credit to other people, stepping out of the lime light when you can and shooing other people in, that's the job of a superintendent. It's almost 180 different than what I thought it was when I came in."

Vicky discussed her inexperience along with bull in a china shop tendencies and how she evolved over her career, "I just think back to how I started as a new superintendent, not really knowing my vision, too, in a way, or in some ways thinking I know what I'm going to do, and you just kind of go and you think they're just supposed to all accept that. So, I think this experience helped, and for us knowing what we're looking for. And for me, and them, I think being flexible with building that vision together, building our strategic plan together. And then for me, coming with some experience as to how to implement it and carry it through helped a lot." She continued how she has developed coping skills and not to take criticism personally, "And so, I was able to, you know, brush it off. And then, more over the years, I mean, when people would talk about leaders that have thick skin or you can't let comments or things bother

you. And I remember thinking, yeah, that this is part of my job, I put it in perspective, I got to do what's best for this school. If people don't like my decisions, I do my best to try to give the reasons why, but over the years I just, for the most part, let things go. There's some things, take a little bit longer, but then I work through it to see that, that way." Vicky continued, "There have been times that I have affected people's lives, that when I look back, I think, should I really have done it that way. There might have been another way to do, you know, not some of these where they've hurt kids and I know that, you know. It's just some things, like you know, they weren't meeting expectations or you know, what could I have done more to help them." She concluded, "I think as I became more experienced as an administrator, I was much more patient and tolerant, and willing to give more and work with them than when, you know, in the younger years it was like, nope here's the rule and you didn't meet it, and so it's this, this."

The majority of participants were candid about how they viewed their position and how to implement change early in their careers. They admitted to overusing their positional power and failed to recognize the importance of using tact and establishing relationships and perhaps keeping their individual egos in check. They compared how they changed over time and realized that positional power does not guarantee achievement of district initiatives. Later in their respective careers, participants realized the importance of building relationships, seeking to understand before being understood, and how sharing the credit led to achievement of district initiatives.

Balance/Survival

Balance/Survival evolved from the following related codes: administrative wisdom, professional evolution, philosophy, tempered, transitions, bull in a china shop, and personalize less.

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All of the participants discussed what strategies they employed to maintain balance between work and family throughout their tenure as a superintendent. David shared, "The first thing that we stop and think about are what are the implications for my children in the district? That is the primary driving factor for the decisions we make. What is the best decision for my students? And I think that when those push factors start to happen that gets clouded. And so yeah, we spend more time, there's more anxiety, and we're less willing to take risks."

Jim discussed how he survived for two decades as superintendent, "The biggest one is just patience, and you kind of referred to it earlier is that you have to be able to divide your career and your personal life and what I mentioned about 24/7. You had to learn to leave everything behind, so when you walk out the door at 5:00, that you can go home and be a father or a husband or whatever it may be. But again, it took a lot of time to do that. It took experience."

Julie discussed how she coped in her position, "I think as I got closer to the point where it was the end of my career, and knowing that ... Early on it was so much as just keeping your job and ... I think, I don't know. It didn't make any difference but I was much more able to just let it roll of my back as I got closer ... Maybe it's age and maturity, that you don't take it personally, that you learn." She continued, "I think I learned to pick my battles. If it really didn't make a difference one way or the other in ... If it was related to a classroom teacher, you had a discussion with that classroom teacher and say, 'Okay, where's your comfort level? Where are you willing to pick the battle at?' Julie gave a specific example of picking her battles, "There are certain things that I think are black and white, and there's other areas that in the long haul it really doesn't make any difference whether that eighth grader stays in the instrumental part of

music, as long as they remained in the vocal part of it. Because it was disruptive to the entire atmosphere to ... Even though we always say if you start, you finish."

Les shared his evolution throughout his career regarding finding balance, "Realizing that you're more than just your position and your vocation and as important as that is, and as much focus as you have to have on that to be successful in this line of work, and you do it has to be almost a 24/7 job. You've got to find a way to compartmentalize that to a degree to take care of yourself. Your health, your family, your faith, all those things that are important. So, I won't say that I've mastered that totally in 30 years, but I know I've worked hard on it, and I know it's helped to be able to do that."

Myron echoed Les' description of compartmentalizing, "But I did have the ability not to bring things home with me. You know. And my wife would always say, she'd find out something happened, and she'd find out from somebody else. 'Why didn't you tell me?' 'Well, I don't tell you on purpose.' Just because I don't want to bring that stuff home, and I have the ability not to worry about it at home. So I think that's kind of what sustained me for all the years."

Martin discussed the stressors he experienced and how he strived to find balance throughout his career, "That doesn't always work, you're still getting beat up, it still hurts, we're human beings, but we talked a little earlier you get to the point where I'm not as concerned about relationships."

Mitch shared his most recent experience and how he dealt with stressors, "I kind of shut down a little bit. I kind of get withdrawn within myself. I'm not very joyful in the office maybe, I'm more withdrawn." He continued, "I'd get up on Saturday morning, Sunday morning, I'd ride my stationary bike for eight miles. I'd go down on the treadmill and walk for three miles with different intervals of training levels. Then I'd get on the elliptical and go two miles. I was always

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kind of pushing myself. Few free weights in between with that also." Mitch then concluded,

"Though it's still a job, it's your livelihood, and you still have to have fun at it. It's got to work for

you. You're also going to be the most disliked person at one time in the community, so you have

to be able to cope with that."

While extreme stressful situations occurred periodically for most participants throughout

their careers, a few superintendents attempted to find balance but admitted this was difficult.

Tanya described her journey through periods that involved push factors, "No. During push

factors, I could feel myself kind of falling apart, and I'm not a heavy drinker, and I'm not a

gambler. I just started walking, and I walk a lot. Then, I've gotten pretty picky about what food I

use for fuel, and that has helped me."

Tim did not experience extreme stressors but rather discussed what attributed to his

ability to survive with stressful situations. He shared, "Short memory, trying just to deal with the

problem. When it's done, forget about it." He continued, "A part of it, I'm sure, is getting older

and my memory's not as sharp, but I can let things go a lot better, and I think that's a very

important part of being an administrator, is kinda letting those things go."

Personal/Family Sacrifice

Personal Sacrifice and Family Sacrifice evolved from the following related codes:

character, integrity, emotion, family, relationships, survival, tempered, restrictive, political

influence, patron support, disconnect, tipping point, and generational disconnect.

While all participants employed strategies to maintain some level of balance throughout

their respective careers, all participants readily admitted that the position of superintendent

demanded personal sacrifice. David explained, "As you know, superintendents typically don't

have many hobbies. Because what have we done? We've worked. This is not a 9:00 to 5:00 job."

He speculated about retirement, "And it'll be a transition, but I'm going to try and enjoy the view and go fishing and find time to spend with my grandchildren and my children. And try and make up to my wife a little bit for the sacrifices that she has had to make for the time that I have spent in this profession of being a school superintendent." David concluded about his health, "Yeah, here I have done a bad job at maintaining my health."

Jim shared similar experiences as David, "That's the hardest thing. You do ignore it, because you put, a lot of times, your job ahead of your health, ahead of your family. Again, I think that's a mistake when I look back at it. But you just find the time and again, if you had to do it over with, I think you'd find more time and be more concerned about your health and some of the other issues that come up." Jim compared his full-time employed years to his present experience, "My last thought is, you don't know what you don't know in terms of how busy you are as a school administrator until you step back. I think all of us just, I'm not going to say get burned out, but you don't realize how fast of a pace that you live as a school administrator until you don't have to. I mean, you have meetings. You have games. You have activities. You have ... I mean, you just go, go, go almost constantly, and I know a lot of people are very busy in their lives, but I don't think people realize how busy school administrators and dedicated school administrators are either, so. It's nice to step back."

Julie reflected and shared her personal sacrifice, "But I wouldn't have gone back to work when my kids were three weeks old. It was quickly so you didn't lose salary, and you didn't lose your ... I'd have been present more with my kids, and I think that's ... I'm trying to do that now as an adult to be present because I do have regret that I didn't spend more time being a mom versus an educator."

Martin shared his thoughts about the sacrifice of the job, "I think it is stressful. I don't sleep well, never have, but I think will it shorten my life? Yeah, I think it will. I think even the weight we put on, the stress eating, the diets."

Mitch discussed health issues related to the position, "I've had more health issues this year because of the stress than I've ever had before. Maybe that's due to my age, which is 64 right now. I'll be 65 in October. I've had to have COPD test, I've had to schedule for a cardiac test in June. I've had a full blown physical this year. I've had more skin irritation type problems than I've ever had before. Stress. And I look at Jeff Schatz from Norwich. Jeff would be one to say, 'It's a stress killer.' People deal with that stress in different levels, and it comes out in different forms and stuff of that nature. I think mine just came out in, maybe I was sicker. I don't know."

Tim shared how coping mechanisms did not work at times, "Just completely worrying about the job. Exercising wasn't even enjoyable because I'd be thinking about, 'I should be doing this, I should be doing that,' so wasn't even enjoyable, and that's too when the meals were whatever was quick and handy. So no, there was a time in New London, the last years, where I was really worried about my health because I just wasn't taking care of myself at all."

Vicky talked about her sacrifice and the effect this had on family, "But I was career bound in my, you know, and I did a lot of things for my kids. And I remember asking them later, you know, I missed out on stuff, do you feel bad? And they said, you did mom, but you made up for it in other ways. And that's with my grandkids right now, because they're a distance away, like my oldest granddaughter, who's really kind of shy, I don't really know her." Vicky shared these thoughts about if she could do things differently, "I think one of the things I'd do differently is, even though work and career was important, I think I would have given a little bit

more some of the things for my kids, you know." She continued, "I just think there's some special times that I didn't give to my family, that I really should have."

Most administrators experienced personal sacrifice and family sacrifice. Each of them expressed a sense of guilt and regret wishing they could have maintained a better work/personal balance. Vicky shared her experience, articulating her regret and guilt and her conversations with her late husband, "I think towards the end, within the last year, I think I was, I don't know how to say this, with, like, my husband, we were there together, but I don't think I spent enough quality time with him. And part of it was a new job, new focus, learning new stuff, and I thought we had more time, you know? I thought, you know, year or two and I'll figure out the new things and this new school, and then, then we'll sit out in the morning and have a coffee. Because he'd always say that, you know, 'Geez, you got to go to work already?' 'Hey, you know, I want to get there before the teachers and do some things, and you know, I'll talk to you tonight' and all, so. Seven o'clock in the morning, I'm running over here, and then five o'clock at night, I'm going home, and he's like, 'Well, come talk to me.' 'Well, I'm tired now, we'll talk in the morning.'" She continued, "You know, that's why I said, when I really said, life's too short. I don't know how much time I have, and I don't want to gamble that it's a lot, because what if it isn't."

While each participant shared personal sacrifice as a part of the job, each one quickly added the effect the superintendency had on their family. Participants shared specific stories of these family sacrifices and how they could have better handled family stress. David shared what he does now compared to early in his career, "If my children call, if my wife calls, if they walk in the door, they get in my door. No matter what. Because I was bad at that in my first two jobs. And once about five years ago I almost violated that. And I stopped myself and I said, 'No, you made yourself a promise, and you made them a silent promise.' And so, I got a lot better about

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that, about taking care of my family before I took care of everybody else." David continued, "We make a lot of sacrifices for our family, but our families make more sacrifices for our job. I could've continued to do that in Ansonia, and I think I would probably have been fine. But the ability to be able to retire, being in a different place in my life, like you said, aided that decision to come here." David then shared a specific incident when he was at a restaurant with family and friends, "My brother looked at me and said, 'Who is that dumb lady that came up and talked to David? Because he was having a great time until she came in.' And then he shut down." David concluded, "And so they view you as a superintendent all the time and think that even when it's your time, it's their time. And over the course of my career when it was necessary, I have had to look at people and say, 'I'll be happy to talk to you about that, but right now this is what I'm doing.'"

Martin was candid explaining his experience regarding the public and their opinion of him and his family, "People do, they'll kick the tar out of you. They don't consider your family; they don't care about it. They don't and they say they do, and family is important. They speak out of both sides of their mouth. The patrons do, even your board can at times because they get pressured." Martin continued explaining what it takes to be perceived as a good superintendent, "Martin, you made a decision and here's the consequences. You've probably not been overly successful because you didn't put in the extra hours downtown being visible, social media, out there with students, and it does, but I said, 'You know what? Well, obviously I don't care enough. If I did, I'd being doing it more.' So that's the dilemma between if you want to be an awesome FBS college football coach or awesome school superintendent; your family is going to pay the penalty."

Mitch explained the sacrifice his family made as he worked in a different town where his wife and kids lived, "Our spouse has always been our best friend. Since my spouse and I were apart, other than weekends and phone calls and things like that, I didn't have that other person to lean on and share a lot with."

Tanya described her experience with the public and the effects the superintendency has had on her family, "I think I have a loud kind of pioneer personality. My husband is definitely a nurturer and a guardian type personality. He has been a steady support throughout my whole career. He's a good listener, at least he pretends like he is. But I have to balance what I tell him, because he's quicker to say, 'Throw in the towel and leave it. Get away from them. They're bad.' You know what I mean? It's a bad environment. It's not helping. And that I have a little bit more resiliency and stubbornness. But no, Terry has been, throughout my career, a very solid, steady sounding board." She continued to speak about the sacrifice a spouse has to make for the superintendent's role as educational leader, "I think if we're honest, they're also a public figure when they're connected with us. There's some friendships that get limited. There's some career moves that they just ... Terry has had to go when I go. He's had to just adjust to a career that works that way. There are, without question, impacts on the spouse. They carry some of your pain."

Throw in the Towel

Throw in the Towel evolved from the following related codes: survival, disconnect, generational disconnect, lack of trust, agenda, board member/superintendent relations, board turnover, mainstream media, social media, and administrative fatigue.

Each participant determined that they reached a point in their respective career where it was time to retire. All participants expressed stress and fatigue from the position. They also

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stated that they could retire without financial concerns. The participants decided on embarking on a new chapter that was more relaxing. Other participants stated that in addition to the aforementioned factors they experienced, prominent push factors led to leaving the position earlier than planned.

David shared, "As I said, I was pushed out. I can't deal with the stress of it anymore. Over the past few years, it's taken its toll on my marriage. It's taken its toll on me personally to the point where there was one month if I slept at all I slept for four hours a night. And that's not healthy. And I have a whole bunch of grandchildren and more on the way."

Julie shared about her decision, "I think it was finally a financial issue. I think I have planned my whole life and made financial decisions along the way, so that when I got to a certain part and I could financially leave my job and maintain a lifestyle that was desirable to me. And have absolute control of where I went, who I saw. I didn't leave because I couldn't handle the stress anymore, because honestly I didn't realize that I was under so much stress until I wasn't." She continued, "All of those feelings, they're not there anymore. I think about how I used to dread ... I used to love the end of May, those few days you had in the first part of June, because it was like they were freebies." Julie concluded, "And now I think of summer as, you know when it gets to be August, I can enjoy August. I don't miss any part if it and I really thought I would."

Les shared his frustration with the stressors that led to him choosing to retire before he had planned, "Again, with that intrinsic motivation, that was rewarding to me. In hindsight, I think, with what's recently transpired it's like, why did I do that? Why did I ... You know, I thought was doing things for the right reason. This is now how I'm going to end my career, and it's very troubling to me. I can convey to you properly just how troubled I am by it all, my career

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is ending. You know, it will be okay over time, but it's just not what I would have intended to have happen." Les continued to reflect, "After the type of career I've had, and the success I've led. The image I've had and the reputation. Again, I think it's very unfair, I mean, I think that's really, it's a school board dynamic and issue, because the obvious factions on the board and because of the interest of this one board member trying to get her way relative to my position. It didn't matter that I only have two and a half months left on the job, it didn't matter. It's just extracting blood, and I think that's really sad."

Martin discussed the constant stress related to his career, "Yeah, I think more than anything it's that confrontation, people wanting things, wanting to lead with curriculum and instruction, just that continual pressure in areas where you know the rest of the staff doesn't want to come along and you're the superintendent, 'Which way are we going?' That delicate dance and just the unrealistic parents. They want people fired, they're not happy, just unreasonable demands, tenacious, anger, won't look at you, won't talk to you. They're just badmouthing you, so the gossip and that hurts, all of that. So that, to me, would be probably the biggest factor for having me to say ... because the money is good. I get this is part-time. It really is. The compensation is fair in my opinion, but at the end of the day it's just I'm not enjoying this anymore because of those factors." Martin reflected on his career in a global manner, "So that's why at the end of the day, I'm not sure. I believe enough in this country, I hate to see it to go to hell in a hand basket, but yet the stress of the job. Would I want to do it again for 30 years, do I want my kids to do it? I'm not sure."

Mitch expressed the specific pressures associated with his early departure, "I won't say the board, I'll say the board chair just push, push, push in her micromanagement. And the way she wanted to micromanage things. That, it just wasn't working for me. I knew, once I made my

decision to retire at the February board meeting, I knew I was kind of a lame duck. I wasn't going to take on any new projects. I was coasting, in a way. That's kind of where it's at. Basically, I'd say the board chair pushed me out of that position." Mitch reflected on the fit of his most recent position, "I'd say this, New Haven was not the right spot for me. I still think I did a good job for them, but I just felt it wasn't the right spot."

Tanya discussed the fit of the position but also how changing board membership changes the match between superintendent and school board. She stated, "So this was a perfect match on the personal level. So, that pulled me here. The push factor for me leaving is I believe I have a board that I exactly can't align with." Tanya shared the details of her decision to leave, "I just had a pot of coffee. My husband got up. He said, 'Why are you up so early?' I said, 'I think we're done here.' He said, 'Well, okay. Let's go home.' What led me to that, I think, was, if I reflect on it, the constant friction of being so clearly directed about the work and the system we built so that the work is kind of an organic up, and then the board coming in and not being clear about what work they wanted, but it wasn't this. So, I never really understood what they wanted to get done. I took that personally for a while. Then, now, I'm just at a place where it kind of makes me smile a little bit because I think someone else will be able to come and do what they want to do, but I wasn't given that chance to know what it was. I suspect, even if they could've clarified it, I don't want to do that work."

Vicky's decision to depart was different from the other participants. She shared, "It was the loss of my husband, really. And you know, I thought ... and he always would say, 'Vicky, when you can retire, we're going to retire.' And in the back of my mind, I thought, oh no, when we get there, I'll talk you out of, you know, letting me stay a little bit longer."

Each participant shared his or her story of what led to the departure from the superintendency. These stories included the cumulative stress of the position but also included increased pressure from parents, patrons, school board, media, and social media. Although the majority of these stressors existed throughout their entire career, it appeared the frequency and intensity of these pressures increased during the latter part of their tenure leading to each superintendent leaving the position. One participant stated that financial stability led to her departure but discussed the other pressures that contributed to her choosing to retire.

Each participant experienced continued stress throughout his or her career that led to retirement. The participants expressed a form of guilt from not maintaining a better balance between work and family early in their careers but shared how they were looking forward to making amends in retirement. All participants yearned for do-overs, especially in Vicky's case. Vicky's story is an extreme example of how the demands of the superintendency can consume an individual.

Superintendent Insight

Superintendent insight evolved from the following related codes: administrative wisdom, administrative 6th sense, character, integrity, philosophy, professional evolution, tempered, bull in a china shop, and survival.

As the ten participants were interviewed and shared experiences, they reflected on numerous occasions that they would handle differently if given the chance. Each gave specific advice based on experiences throughout his or her respective career. David reflected on the main reason superintendents are in the profession, "Even if you're in a district of 250,000, there's still a student out there you can find. To make your life more sane, that would be my advice. Make sure you find them. Do that, because we can drive ourselves crazy if we get stuck in the office."

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David also shared his change in demeanor throughout his career, "At the beginning of my career I would have approached the position with less emotion and been more reflective." He then gave advice relating to the necessity of having mentors, "Have a good network of peers and mentors. Always tell them what you think is the best thing to do for the school district and the children, irrespective of the consequences."

Jim's advice focused on work and personal balance, "I would tell all young superintendents now that one thing you have to do is get away for a week or two in the summer or even the winter. Whenever it may be. But you have to kind of step away or you're going to get tired of the whole situation." Jim then focused on relationships, "I think the biggest thing would be the development of relationships. I think the whole school atmosphere environment now depends upon a superintendent that's positive and outgoing and willing to treat everybody as individuals and not make it, especially during negotiations where it's you versus them in terms of the teachers and it gets uncomfortable. I think I'd always make it a point that, again, it's a business, but we still have to respect each other, and it's not personal. Again, don't take it personal. So, I think my biggest thing would be develop relationships with students, with teachers, with board members, and with the community and just build on that."

Julie's advice to new superintendents related to roles, "I would definitely tell them chain of command, chain of command, chain of command. That it goes back to the One Minute Manager. This is your job, this is my job, this is communities' job. And just your expectations of protocol board meetings ... If somebody calls you and they are fussing about something, redirect them back." Julie then focused on communication and relationships, "I think it's listen, because sometimes people only need, they only need to be heard. And if ... Not give in but to listen, and

for them to know that you are always available to hear their concerns. And I think they come in less willing to fight if they know that you're at least open to listening to what their concerns are."

Les reflected on the years he spent in the role as superintendent, "I could turn a clock back, I probably would have stayed in a class room longer, or been principal longer, something like that. Because, I became superintendent at 28 years old. That's a long time to be at a high stress demanding position. That's one thing, I guess."

Mitch's advice related to relationships with the school board, "The advice I would give a new superintendent starting out their careers, I think a couple things. One is get to know your school board. Maybe not personally, but professionally. Know the direction they're coming from. Two is learn the district, learn the school. Don't try to take on too much."

Tanya shared advice relating to personal traits, "For a new superintendent, I would say learn about your own tendencies and triggers. Then, do your best to frame the issue and depersonalize it. Even though your heart and soul is in the work, they might just be talking about the work and not about your heart and soul, so depersonalize it. That would be my best advice." She then focused on expectations of parents, "Don't expect parents to be objective when they're talking about their children. They can't be. Be very interested in their children, and then interested in solving the issue, rather than just racing and trying to fix the issue." Tanya also stressed the importance of staff relationships, "Assume positive intent. Nobody comes to work hoping to do a poor job. Your job as superintendent is the same as teachers with a group of students. You want to engage them in learning, right? And the growth, as opposed to forcing them. So, for a new superintendent, I would say think of your staff as students and how can you engage them in the work, realizing they're the only lever you have to improve student outcomes. You don't have any other lever but your staff."

When sharing insights, the majority of the participants believed that staying connected and involved with students rather than dealing exclusively with district initiatives and finances was paramount. The purpose of the superintendent's role is to focus on students, and therefore, we need to have a finger on the pulse of our students and staying connected to them is crucial.

The majority of participants stressed the importance of having a mentor or mentors early in their career and establish a network of administrators throughout their career. Most participants stressed the need to maintain a work/personal life balance and also to develop and nurture professional relationships among the staff and school board. While establishing professional relationships was stressed, it was also stressed to have clear boundaries of roles and responsibilities between school board and the superintendent. Two superintendents admitted that they would have not moved into the superintendency so quickly and would have remained in the classroom or principalship longer. One participant stressed the importance of learning more about oneself, one's leadership style, and how to exert influence rather than use positional power to bring about change.

CHAPTER V

EMERGING REVELATIONS/THEORY

Emerging Revelations

The beginning of this chapter gives an overarching description of the coding,

categorizing, and theme development referred to as Emerging Revelations. These emerging

revelations were summarized as "changing culture" and were a result of utilizing axial coding.

Through the process of conducting semi-structured interviews, notetaking, and memoing, the

researcher effectively recorded raw data from each participant. The use of transcription services

allowed the researcher to engage in coding, categorizing, and the development of themes thus

establishing patterns from the data. To maintain validity of the research process, the researcher

utilized member checking, peer review, reflexivity, and advisor reviewing. From this process, the

researcher was then able to utilize axial coding to relate the different codes, categories, and

themes to each other resulting in a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the participants'

experiences as educational leaders.

Two narratives emerged from the coding process and development of categories:

professional evolution and emerging revelations. From these narratives, four distinct revelations

emerged that appeared to lead the majority of the participants into retiring from their role as

superintendent. Each superintendent understood and accepted the daily duties and stressors

associated with the superintendent's position and managed to navigate turbulent events

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throughout their careers. The four distinct revelations, as portrayed in Figure 4, appeared to evolve in the latter part of each participant's tenure.

Emerging Revelations

Changing Culture

Generational Disconnect   Lack of Respect for the Institution

Digression of the Mainstream Media   Negative Impact of Social Media

Figure 4. Emerging Revelations.

Changing Culture

"Changing culture" can perhaps best describe the four emerging revelations that evolved from the axial coding process. Each participant experienced rewards and accomplishments throughout his or her career. The participants acknowledged that leadership errors were made, and they experienced a professional evolution as they traveled their individual journey throughout their respective careers. The participants described their rewarding and challenging experiences while leading a school district and school board to achieve district initiatives. The participants then reflected on and compared the social changes that had impacted the culture in K-12 education and the culture of the various communities throughout their careers. Although the participants discussed their observations of the younger generation parent, student, teacher, patron, and school board members, they also included the effects of a perceived changing mainstream media and the perceived effects of an emerging and influential social media.

Generational Disconnect

Insightful revelations emerged from the themes involving career path, administrative fatigue, and professional maturity. These revelations involved specific stressors associated with the position of superintendent and leading a school district. These specific revelations emerged as each participant reflected on the stressors that changed over their careers. The first revelation related to generational differences with board members, parents, and patrons. David expanded, "I think there's a generational issue that we're facing. The newer school board members are from a different generation. I think they view their role differently, as school board members, than what school board members from the baby boom generation view their role. I do think there's a generational issue that we face." David advised, "So I think that maybe some in-depth discussion of generational differences, because ... I'll never forget when I was in Ansonia. I walked past this young teacher in the hallway in the high school office. I said, 'Good morning, Ms. Watson,' whatever her name was. She looked at me and she said, 'Hey.' I walked by and I thought, wow, that was different." David continued with a specific and personal story, "I was standing with two of my brothers, and I looked at the one who is also a baby boomer. I said, 'You do realize, they look at life differently than we do.' He said, 'What do you mean?' I looked at him, and I said, 'If your boss offers you two weeks off, or $5,000, what are you taking?' He said, 'The money.' I looked at my other brother, and he said, 'I'm taking the time off.' He said, 'Really?' I said, 'Yes. They value their time more than we do.' David then spoke of school board membership, "But I do think there are generational differences between school board members who are baby boomers and older, and the incoming Gen X/Gen Y school board members. I think they see their role differently and that's probably the biggest thing that I've seen." David then discussed generational differences relating to work ethic, "The longtime veterans, the baby boomers in

particular, have, for the most part, I don't want to say it's universal, but as a group have a different work ethic and a different philosophy for why they went into teaching. The younger teachers, again, it's not all of them, but a larger percentage of them are coming to see this profession as an 8:00 to 4:00 job. And it never has been and it never will be. And I think a lot of that is driven by the association. That's how the association views it. If the contract says you work from 8:00 to 3:45, that's what you should work."

The perceived desire to earn additional income versus the value of additional personal time appeared to be a fundamental shift regarding work ethic among the different generations. The need to work additional hours outside the regular school day is being challenged by millennial teachers. Is this perceived change in work ethic among generations also observed by the push from millennial parents regarding homework for their child? Has the concept of adults only working eight to four every weekday found its way into the K-12 setting regarding homework in the evening for students? Are present superintendents and leaders being challenged for attempting to maintain the concept of additional hours required to continue the perceived higher educational standards? Has this conflict between educational leaders attempting to maintain higher educational standards and young teachers insisting on only working a 40-hour week resulted in resentment and disrespect for the leadership role?

Les discussed generational differences and lack of respect for the superintendency, "I don't think authority is as respected and some of that is generational. I've had the opportunity to have some millennials on my more recent school board, and they're very open about it. I mean, they point blank say they don't respect men in suits. I've had that said to me. I've had a question when I'm throwing out, 'Well, I've been doing this for X number of years,' and they'll go ahead and say, 'That means nothing to me.'"

Les continued to discuss his perception of generational differences and the norming

process, "Now, what I see is ... Again, I think it's somewhat generational, I think it's also just

media, social media, just how people are thinking in our society today. But I see them less likely

to accommodate the group norms and are wanting for the group to accommodate their norms.

That's a huge difference and I think it's having, from my point of view, it's a negative affect now.

Because large organizations and complex organizations, there's an organizational memory, there

are procedures and policies and personnel in place that there has to be some continuity for them

to be productive." Les continued, "That's, I think, how they think. Their world is their smart

phone and social media. So, that's very different than it used to be. Before, you know, 30 years

ago, if somebody had a problem, they'd pick up the phone, or come and see you, or talk to you

with coffee after church, and that kind of thing. So, I think it's definitely different than it used to

be."

The majority of participants shared views that younger parents, patrons, and board

members viewed public institutions differently and perhaps with more suspicion than when each

participant entered the profession. This phenomenon is perhaps a result of the increased use of

social media as communication platforms where patrons discuss concerns openly without the

need to be physically present to accept accountability for the online comments.

Not only does there appear to be an attitude change among adults of different

generations, but there also appears to be a difference among students. Several participants

compared students from early in their careers to when they retired.

Les then reflected on generational differences among students, "I think what has changed

is just the social conditions that children find themselves in from birth and throughout their

school experience. Then with the social pressures, I see more substance use, abuse, more sexual

activity at a younger age. I think those all are things that are risk factors with children that concern me. I think it's hard for children in today's world to navigate through all of that."

Martin echoed other participants' opinions relating to generational differences. He shared the changing actions of parents, "But they were more, at the end of my career, more willing to defend their kid regardless of what the issues were. If their student was caught red-handed or something, they would still find fault with somebody or something to make it right what they did." Martin reflected, "So I always wonder is that what's caused it because you know how they respond, and do they think that they are an equal player. We've treated everybody like they're equal and we're not. There's a teacher, there's a coach, there's a principal, there's a superintendent, there's higher levels here and you need to show respect and we aren't always ready to do that. In fact, if we don't like that decision or that decision maker that's pressure that's being put on us, we're gonna get rid of you, and it's so intense."

From the participants' experiences, it appears that the traditional unquestioned respect given the K-12 education personnel and the superintendent has changed. The use of social media has intensified the perceived pressure felt by superintendents to involve patrons in the decision-making process or at least keep patrons more informed of how decisions were made regarding school issues.

Not only do parents, patrons, and school board members view their role differently regarding education, younger teachers also view their role somewhat differently. Mitch reflected on his most recent teacher hires compared to early in his superintendency. He stated, "As a millennial teacher coming out and what does that teacher want and need, and that desire to get that first job some place, land that first job, have that first contract in hand has kind of disappeared." He continued, "They're willing to sit and wait for the right job to come open.

They'll do what they have to do till that right job comes open for them. I see that, but I also see the new teacher coming out as not as dedicated to the profession as what the ones that are retiring, maybe four years ago, five years ago." Mitch then discussed work ethic. "These new teachers just don't want to put the time in. Don't want to put the reflection in. That commitment to your program reflects upon you."

Mitch then discussed his perception of how student behavior has changed from a generation ago, "One of the bad things I see is that they don't have the fortitude to stick something out. It's too tough, so I'll quit band. It's too tough, I'll quit this co-curricular activity. I can't get myself out of bed at 8:00 and get to school on time, so I want some leeway here, some leeway there. The sacrificing that we all did, and it wasn't always the easiest, but it made it better for us, but now we see things that have to be more accommodating to the students because of their lack of participation. Some of that's a home environment. I'll give that. I'll give that too. Some of it is radical parenting. I just see some of that."

Mitch reflected on board membership and how professionalism has changed among generations, "I'm going to speak, that I think the new millennial board members that are coming out today are of a different cut of the cloth. What I mean by that is that they want to do what they want to do and how they want to do it. They don't want to maybe follow a policy or the protocol that the board has established." Mitch then speculated, "I think you're going to see a lot of millennial turnovers in school board members and that the makeup of a board, maybe might have that nine year veteran that's been on there for a while conflicting with that new millennial board member, and somebody's got to go, or somebody's going to make a change or not run again, or whatever it be. I think sometimes we forget that we're here for the students, the district, the patrons, and that's who elected us and who we serve."

It appears that the new millennial parent, patron, and board member are comprised of a different social fabric from a generation ago. From the interviews, it appeared that parents, patrons, and board members of an earlier generation had differences with educational leaders, but they decided to handle these differences in person. For the most part, parents and patrons respected the leadership and institution. Although board members of an earlier generation may have had initial differences with existing board members, they ultimately acclimated to the membership and organizational norms. These members may still have worked to initiate change, but it was done within the parameters of the organization with respect given to existing leadership and veteran board members. Participants reported that the new generation of parents, patrons, and board members appears to disregard institutional policies and norms. Newly elected board members resist and disregard new board member training. They also refuse to acclimate to the existing organization and refuse guidance from veteran board members. If the new generation of parents, patrons, and board members possesses these characteristics, it is important to consider what this means for present and future leaders regarding implementing district initiatives and leading a school district.

Tanya weighed in on what she termed "millennial parents." She said, "Parents today are pretty good at finding blame in somebody else when their child's in trouble and could have a learning experience and learn and grow. I think they stunt that, actually, from their kids. I don't think kids get an opportunity to really truly be children as opposed to little mini adults with a sort of a video camera on their lives at all times."

If Tanya's assessment is correct, where and when are students allowed to accept responsibility for making mistakes and learn from those mistakes? Accepting responsibility for mistakes can be an uncomfortable experience. Have the consequences for mistakes made in the

K-12 setting been viewed as too severe by millennial parents? Is this a call for present and future leaders to accommodate for the changed societal view regarding student responsibility?

Tanya then discussed how teachers have changed, "That's definitely changed. I don't know that it's good or bad. Like I said, I didn't have work-life balance, but my career as a teacher was never a 40-hour-week job ever, and I didn't expect it to be. I think Gen Y teachers want a 35-hour-week job that begins and ends and there's never all of the outside stuff. Now, having said that, we have teachers who work phenomenally hard, but I'm starting to see with the Gen Y people that they don't quite understand why you would get out of work-life balance. They might be right for all I know, but I have seen a difference in terms of a willingness to commit the time it takes to teach well."

The struggle to balance work life and personal life is ongoing and appears to be shifting among generations. Participants admitted to working long hours and the perceived need to be available to the public around the clock. While some participants had second thoughts about the rewards of working long hours and the effects it had on them and their families, they also commented on the changing attitude of younger educators and their attitude towards the amount of time they are willing to devote to their careers. Is this just one indicator of a societal change in the work/life balance. If so, what then are the consequences of this societal change?

Tanya then expressed her beliefs about the changing culture, "We're a little bit of a sanitized society where we don't believe in struggle for our kids. Other kids, that's fine. I think the idea, even a project-based learning with hands-on, minds-on work, some people find either cute or dirty. They really want this more sanitized version of the perfect childhood where not everybody, but their own child is always stellar, and in the lime light, and doing perfectly. While I think we all want that, what we can't let happen is the opportunity for people to stumble and

grow. So when our board leaders become more of the people who want to vacate the struggle and have sublime perfection with no conflict, they're hoping for something that's not possible."

The new generation of board member appears to neglect one of the main purposes of public education. That purpose is to develop responsible citizens, and part of this development is making mistakes and learning from those mistakes. Do new board members need a more intensive on-boarding process from educational leaders and NDSBA? Would they be receptive to on-boarding?

Vicky shared her experience with generational differences among board members, "But then, towards the end there, we were getting some really young board members, and I didn't think they quite understood the vision or what it really meant to be a board member in the situation we had, where there was so many new things happening in the school district." Vicky continued, "So, I think that was the hard part, and I think I had shared with you last time, I used to have some older board members that I could at least bring into my office and say, 'Okay, here's why we do or don't want to do this,' and you could talk reason into them. Seemed like the younger couple that I got in the last few years in Derby, just didn't want to be rational about it, saw that their way was the best way and that was it."

Vicky transitioned to reflecting on commitment to teaching, "And then, also, kind of figuring out then that, their character and commitment. Seemed like the older teachers I worked with were more ... how can I word this. I'll say it, more committed, but I mean, they didn't take as much time off, but yet in a way their families were grown too. Whereas you had the younger teachers, it seemed like, you know, them needing more time off, but you know, sometimes it was younger families or maybe it seemed like I had single moms, you know, that kind of thing. And

then, kind of not that this is necessarily true too, but I mean that, working more than eight to five

or some of that commitment piece."

All participants observed generational differences throughout their careers. A few

participants did not observe a significant difference among their generation and the younger

generation of parents, teachers, students, or school board members. The majority of participants

were concerned with the perceived differences and its effect on the role of the superintendency to

carry out initiatives in a public education setting.

Lack of Respect for the Institution

Another emerging revelation appeared to be the lack of the respect for the institution

including the superintendent and teaching staff. Not all participants shared this opinion, but the

majority expressed concern that respect for the public education institution by either parents,

patrons, board members, and/or media has declined throughout their tenure in education. David

shared a story of how a veteran board member attempted to mentor young board members

regarding their responsibility in public education. David shared, "I just sat there, and he argued

with the other four school board members, who were very young. He sat there and argued with

them for about 10 minutes. When he was satisfied, when they pushed back enough, he looked at

them and said, 'Good. Now you remember this, because that's what you're supposed to do. You

are supposed to do what you think is right for this district, not what you think is popular in the

community.' I just marveled at that. To some degree, I think that's really been lost. That type of

leadership to provide that institutional memory, to provide that guidance, to provide that veteran

leadership and advice, I think that's been lost. And it's getting lost more and more."

Jim shared his viewpoint regarding trust of personnel and the institution, "Well, parent

involvement in terms of what they want has definitely changed. I think before, they trusted you.

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They trusted your teachers and they backed the teachers. In the last few years, I think it's almost the opposite, that they back the kid totally. And so, if there's a difficulty between a student or a teacher, now it's the student is right and the teacher's wrong. And the same way with administrators." He continued, "So I think the task of being an administrator has become a lot harder, and even a teacher, because of that perception that the parents don't have the same support that they've had in the past, or the school districts don't have the same support of parents, I should say."

Les described what he perceived to be the lack of respect for public education from the media in recent years. He stated, "They function with negativity and sensationalism and temporal immediacy. So, I think it's a huge disservice to K-12 education and to school boards and superintendents, the way media has morphed and evolved or devolved. The same with social media."

Les then discussed a perceived decline in the level of parental trust, "Because parents just trusted teachers and the principals and the superintendent to do their job. They trusted the boards would do the best they knew how. So, they weren't very involved, but they were more supportive, I think, is the difference. Today, some parents are involved, but in many cases, I think in a negative way. They're there to support their children despite what might be good for them."

Les continued, "I find that amazing, like, you would rather just push it out on your smart phone than to go talk to your child's teacher or principal. I think that's really dangerous. I guess you could say they're engaged but they're engaged in the wrong place."

Has the perceived lack of parental trust led parents to influence change through the use of social media? How do present and future superintendents engage this type of parent in

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meaningful dialogue regarding their child's academic and emotional growth and still carry out district initiatives regarding K-12 education?

Les expanded on not only the decreased respect from parents but also from the media, "Also, the respect for education profession – the teachers, principals, superintendents, school boards has definitely diminished over time. It's not just individuals or complainants but it's even the media. I just find the media very disrespectful. They do not look inside the schools to really see what's going on. They just try to sensationalize any kind of negative event, or activity, or topic that's even a non-topic in some cases. I find that disrespectful and non-supportive and that creates a community culture to them, so. So, no I think it's definitely changed over time." Les then summarized, "I don't know if it's me getting older and more crotchety, or things are actually changing. I think it's the latter, but I just think it's a different day where I don't sense that leadership is as respected, and I don't mean just the superintendency but all leadership."

Martin reflected on the pressure from the community on administration and staff and the perceived power they have gained in recent years. He shared specific stories, "There's still those parents out there, but there are more that they're gonna take, and we're dealing with it a lot this last year, I've seen it a lot ... in fact, probably more than any other position, where their children are right. This teacher is incompetent, this coach is incompetent, this principal is wrong, it's just wrong, wrong, wrong, pointing out. They never think once that maybe their child isn't looking at it from, first of all, a mature perspective. They're not looking at it from both sides, they don't have a full understanding of the organization and methodology." He continued, "It's kinda sad that within reason they will, they'll get rid of that superintendent, they'll get rid of that principal, they'll get rid of that coach or teacher because we're just gonna keep hammering you and we will win. They've learned that and so is that getting down to students? I don't know if I've seen it. I

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definitely see it with parents. Is it eventually gonna be there more prevalent and more pervasive with students? Possibly."

What is the consequence when parents appear to believe that their child's needs are not being met? What is the consequence when the traditional channels of face to face communication have been replaced with posting of social media and narratives from mainstream media? What is the consequence when an organization is pressured to change policy based on the demands of a small but very vocal group of parents and patrons?

Tanya shared her belief regarding the deterioration of respect for public education from a cultural view. She said, "Well, a social institution just falls apart. It can't perform its duty when the leadership in charge of it is unwilling to let kids have the kind of learning experiences you need in order to become a full-fledged adult. Parents who've always wanted their kids to have the blue ribbon, first place all the time, straight A, never a struggle when they're in charge of the place, the game is give them the easy blue ribbon, straight A, first place to avoid the fight. I think public institutions can't serve kids well in that environment. I could see that's already happening." Tanya continued to share when students are making the transition to the post-secondary world, "Then, where those parents will come back and be mad at you is when students take the ACT and they can't get into the college of their choice and shame on you. You didn't prepare them. Well, you didn't let us. It's, again, where kids are not allowed to have the struggle and learning is in the struggle, but they take that away."

Tanya then stressed the importance of public education and offered advice to new board members. She stated, "But, I'd continually remind them that a democracy is premised on a high-quality public education. Without that, democracy doesn't work." She continued, "Well, I would like the advice for new board members to actually be part of an on-boarding package for all

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potential board candidates. The board should be so crystal clear in how it governs and what it wants done that if anyone out there was going to run for the board, they'd come in and get on-boarded first with the mission and the vision, and then the work of the board. We don't buy pencils. We don't discipline anybody but the superintendent. We don't hire anybody but the superintendent. All of our work is done through the superintendent. I would hope the board would on-board new members. If not, I imagine the superintendent would have to do that." She continued, "They should work to support and work through the trials and errors because leading the very most grassroots, political body left in this country, is complicated work and it requires a team between the superintendent and the board. There's not good guys and bad guys. There's conflict. I think I don't know another way to work through conflict, but to just work through it."

The participants' perceived lack of respect for the institution was significant and concerning to them. It appeared that the younger generation of parents and school board members expressed a lack of trust in public school personnel and administration. This lack of trust appeared to manifest itself as a disregard to institutional norms and practices resulting in using any measure necessary to remove the present personnel or structure and replace it with what fit the disgruntled individual's or group's beliefs.

Digression of the Mainstream Media

All ten participants discussed their experience with the mainstream media. Several expressed having a good rapport with the media. These participants expressed knowledge of other communities and superintendents that had negative experiences with the media. They were happy that they did not have these experiences but acknowledged that they had seen a decrease in positive news coverage of public education both at the local level and national level. David expressed his observation, "Some of those in North Dakota where the media is looking for dirt to

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try and sensationalize issues. But I haven't had that experience. But I know that some of my peers have experienced that phenomenon."

Jim elaborated, "I think the biggest thing is that newspapers sell on stories, and most stories end up to be the negative." He continued, "I just think they concentrate always on the negative and don't give you enough support when things go well." Jim concluded, "I think they're a lot more editorial instead of their news stories. It used to be the news and they reported on it. Now they give their opinion on the news a lot more. You know what I'm saying? And in the same way with even sometimes in their editorials, they express opinions and to me, you know, when you report on news, it should be news rather than just their view of the news. That's the biggest change I think I've seen in the media."

How do superintendents counter the perceived narrative of negativity from what was once considered a trustworthy source, the mainstream media? Is leadership now charged with becoming proactive and writing a positive story about K-12 education? Would this approach have the intended impact that school leaders desired?

Julie expressed her frustration with the media, "When the newspaper came back, it said because of these kids and the extra we were forced to hire another teacher. They flipped this conversation from a positive to a negative." She continued, "Okay, we wanted them to come out and do a story on this. And when we called it was WDAZ I think or one of them. And we were told that if there wasn't anything more exciting going on, but they typically did not come out and cover the good stories. That if we had something negative going on, that that made better press. And I thought, holy cow, how many times you hear people say, 'Gosh, I wish they would tell us about something good happening rather than all the negative.' But obviously the negative sells, so they didn't end up coming out and showing up without us knowing it, because obviously there

wasn't something bad happening that morning to cover. But we were too far to come out in Norwalk to cover something positive."

Les reflected and compared the media early in his career to today's media, "I thought, wow. So, that's what I was used to there. Then, the media wasn't ... I think back in those days, and that's 20 years ago, it wasn't as caustic. I mean it was more factual, it was more focused on the real issues. What I've seen develop, and I'm certain about this, it's not just speculating, but the media has become where they have a narrative and they go out and try to find sound bites to fit their narrative." He continued, "But they'll come when they want either footage for the video or they'll want a sound bite from somebody that directly relates to an incident that happened somewhere else, in Texas. I mean, it doesn't have anything to do with us. That's frustrating. Or, it could be some social issue. Just because we happen to be in the town they work in, they've got to make it an issue here."

Les then concluded, "My entire morning is centered around reading the newspaper, and yet I've come to the conclusion that whatever I see in that paper I cannot trust as good information, why would I consume it? It's the same with even our local TV station. It's like, I'm not going to watch that because I know it's not accurate, it's not comprehensive, it's not conclusive, it's just gobbledygook thrown together to make something sensational. I find that real disappointing because our public schools exist in this democracy because people are supportive of them."

How do school leaders counter the perceived negative evolution of mainstream media and the increased narrative that is placed into print? If this phenomenon is occurring, how does the reader interpret the narrative as just that, a narrative rather than fact? What is the cost for the

parent and patron if narratives continue to be interpreted as fact? What is the cost to the student and the K-12 education institution?

Les then expressed his concern for society, "A democracy only functions with an informed electorate and our electorate is not informed, they're misinformed. I don't know how it's going to survive the way things are going. I don't mean to sound so fatalistic or negative, but I just see it manifests itself right in the school's district and at the board meeting. How things just take on a life of their own."

Tanya weighed in with her observation of the media, "I have seen the mainstream media become more superficial and less interested in the full story as opposed to the sexy story that will sell." She then expressed the power of media used by teachers' unions, "It has. I'm wise enough to know that often, for example, an issue with teachers, the union is able to use mainstream media to carry their water for them in a way that a person who has to hold employee private data more closely can't use the media, and the media does tend to stand on the side of teachers."

Vicky speculated the motivation of the media, "I know there's some media going on that it seems like they're picking more of the negative now, or just kind of ... but maybe they're not getting anything else, though, either, the full story and things."

Although the majority of participants viewed the mainstream media as moving from an organization that reported the news to an organization that prints a narrative, several participants did not experience this perceived phenomenon while they served as school leaders.

Martin expressed his views of the media and also his personal experience, "Well, I just don't ... media people are looking for things, and they're looking for negative things. I always felt that there was people snooping around looking for the negative." He continued, "That was the only negative. The rest when they've come in, you know I think of the referendums and things

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when I was in Norwich or even now, whether it was in Shelton or Stamford, pretty positive honestly."

Mitch expressed positive reviews of the media, "Yeah, always had a good relationship with the media. Nothing negative or anything."

Tim agreed, "Paper was always at the board meetings, but my articles were typically on positive things. It's always been, I think, I felt I've had a good relationship with the paper and try not to hide. There's nothing that's being hidden. Try to be as transparent as possible. They get all the information for the board meetings, so there's no surprises. It's been good."

All participants expressed a concern for the mainstream media and how it has affected superintendents and school districts throughout the state. The majority of participants had personal experience with the media and commented on what they perceived to be a negative evolution of the media. The comment was made by several participants that early in their careers, they observed that the media focused on facts with less emphasis on a narrative. Perhaps this change from fact to narrative has occurred with the emergence of social media, as well as the speed with which news and stories travel through the internet. Mainstream media has been forced to compete with a new medium of delivering not only news but also many versions or narratives of perceived news. Many of these narratives are not accurate but sell viewership for the media. The victims are the public institutions and their leaders who are scrutinized by an endless barrage of half-truths from narratives that are still interpreted as news just because they exist on paper, television, or radio. The ultimate casualty is the student body. The students are the recipients of an education designed and implemented by devoted educators who are forced to channel human resources in order to dispel half-truths by mainstream media. Consequently, the

institutions and their leaders are not able to focus their energies on implementing district initiatives.

Negative Impact of Social Media

All participants were familiar with social media. Participants referred to social media as the use of communication that utilized the internet. This could include Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, blogs, and other posting and communication sites via the internet. A few superintendents did not participate in social media and did not have bad experiences with it. However, these participants expressed that they heard concerning stories from other superintendents. The majority of participants had social media accounts such as Facebook but did not actively post anything school related. These individuals did not have a positive experience with social media and had been subjected to ridicule and scrutiny from parents, board members, and patrons.

David commented on his perception of social media and the burden it places on school leaders, "I don't like social media. It's too easy for people to anonymously go put something out that is 180 degrees away from the truth or to put out statements that are partial truths. And then we have to spend time dispelling that. This younger generation of school board members and teachers are on those social media sites, and that causes extra work for us because we have to dispel the myths that are created by falsehoods and half-truths." David continued, "And the immediacy and how rapidly things get on social media also complicates our job."

Jim weighed in on social media as well, "I think it can be both. I think at times, it's positive and in certain situations, it can be negative, because a lot of times, people still believe what they read, so if you get sent a message or something that has half-truths or opinions in it, they take it for what it is rather than the actual news, so. It's been a plus and a minus for us."

Julie echoed Jim's comments, "I think it's all bad. As far as ... Well, I shouldn't say that. It's not, because it's ... It's not all bad because we've used it to feature some things in the school that schools have Facebook pages and all of that. But I think it's a way of spreading information without there being a governor to make sure that it's accurate. I think for kids it's so negative, because there's no emotion tied to things that you post. You can say what you want to say about somebody without there being that emotional tag to ones ... the impact that it has on someone else."

Les expressed his frustration with social media, "The people that don't respect their leader, that don't respect what's coming out of the leader's mouth. They want to use it for some purpose that's selfish, so. Maybe it will evolve into something better than it is, but I think it's at a really poor state right now. I think it does change how we do business. I mean, there are many times where I have to rush, as a superintendent, to get something out to my school board because it's already on the social media." He continued, "I mean, sometimes it's even before we've made a decision. Somebody has leaked something that this decision is going to be made and here's what it is, and I haven't informed my board or staff or anybody. So, I mean, social media is just so immediate and it's not always accurate, which is problematic also." Les further explained his experience, "The older generation of our stakeholders, whatever they read or see, they believe is true. The younger generation, the millennials, they don't seem to care if it's true or not, it's whatever they're feeling or emoting. So, they'll pick up on a thread on Facebook or something like that and will all just be stating their opinions and if you go back in the thread, you'll see that it's a classic rumor mill. That they're not even talking about something that the original person is talking about." Les concluded with his recent experience with Facebook and Twitter, "What I find fascinating, back to social media, is where a parent will go online to Facebook, most

parents, or Twitter, and they will emote about something that happened to their child in school that day, and then it will come through the back door to me from a board member. Usually like, 'Have you seen on Facebook about what happened at such and such school?'"

How do our present and future leaders lead with the potential negative effects of social media? Is it possible to avoid the half-truths or respond in a timely manner to half-truths while maintaining confidentiality of students and avoid taking away human resources from the advancement of district initiatives?

Martin shared his experience with the media, "Yeah, that's a negative, it just is. I look back, I had people even when I was in Shelton, as an example, and I know it's probably happening in Torrington where you're getting beat up. I'm not in the social media." He continued, "Yeah, I'm sorry. Like at Shelton it did. I know there's people, they're influenced by it. If they have a friend that says, 'Hey, William did this,' or 'He's not reasonable, he doesn't listen, he doesn't care,' people believe that. They take it as truth even though they didn't get all the details. They didn't know the decision-making process. They're not gonna ever hear my side of it. So yeah, social media is a negative."

Mitch elaborated on his experience with social media, "They want to know everything and anything, that includes Facebook and Twitter and those type of things. Like I said before in the first interview, I'd never have a Facebook account just for socialization as long as I was a superintendent." He further commented, "People feel like they need to have a, I'm going to say a crutch to support them during their crisis time, if I can call it that, or dilemma or whatever it be. I wish social media would disappear, myself."

Although most participants were aware of social media and its effects, a few participants were not aware of the negative social media impact. Tim talked about his involvement with

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social media. He shared, "Almost none. I stay away from ... I'll get a Facebook page now that I'm done, but no Facebook, no Twitter. I've just avoided it by choice, and I know some, it's been very beneficial for some schools. They have the Twitter account and the Facebook pages, but I've never done that, and so it's been very, very limited."

Tanya gave her perspective regarding the effects of social media, "My experience with social media is that I'm so disappointed in how humans behave in general that I have stepped away from social media. I have a Facebook account. I don't ever open it or look on it. I find the commentary on the news sites heartbreaking, and it's as though we're watching civilization unravel. Little hyperbole, but I think it's true." She then reflected, "At first, it was a real positive, upbeat way to communicate with people. But as it became so casual, and I suspect many people are on social media when they're intoxicated or deep in their brain stem as we say, what they say can be quite ugly to me, to the people I care about, to the work we're doing, and so I'm not on social media much." Tanya continued to express her concern, "The other thing that added weight to that was social media. People on their keyboards in their brain stems spewing nasty stuff. I don't want to be a public figure if that's where civility has gone."

Tanya then gave advice to young administrators, "I think, I would add to that to say the young superintendents who are on social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, even Facebook, always need to remember that they are standing in a self-built echo chamber."

Constant and relentless personal narratives posted on social media seem to drown out the importance of using traditional face to face meetings with district constituents in order to lead district initiatives. Social media gives patrons a voice, and most of the participants recognized the detriment but also the positive impact of this reality. Several participants reflected on the process utilized in the recent past regarding processing initiatives and involving district patrons.

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Tanya then reflected on her original board and how they processed issues, "If I go back to the work of the 2012 board, we got what we got done in this community because we held forums where people physically came to, and spoke, and talked to us, and argued, and fought, and cried. We kept working to wrangle some resolution out of it. You can't do that on social media, and it makes it worse, in my opinion. Not only do people behave worse, but you can build yourself an echo chamber."

All the participants were familiar with social media, but a few of them chose not to engage in social media. They stated that they were unaware of any negativity relating to their role as a superintendent and social media posting. As they were not engaged in social media, it is possible that they were not aware that negative social media posts existed. The majority of participants did comment on the negative impact that social media had on their attempts to lead district initiatives. These participants reflected on the additional amount of human resource time that was needed to dispel the half-truths and inaccurate narratives about district incidents. Dispelling these social media narratives took time and effort away from achieving district initiatives. Participants expressed deep concern and frustration about how to combat the negative effects of this new medium. As some participants expressed, student incidents were prematurely posted on social media, plagued with half-truths and narratives. This happened before school officials were given a chance to make a public statement. By the time the statement was made, the perceived reality was dominant throughout the community, and the institution's position was viewed with suspicion, doubt, and mistrust.

Theory – Accelerated Leadership Departure Theory

The purpose of the proposed study was to better understand the factors that led to the turnover of superintendents of K-12 schools in North Dakota. Through the use of Grounded

Theory method, ten participants were interviewed on two occasions. The participant shared their experiences while they served in the role of superintendent in K-12 school districts throughout their respective careers. Upon reading and listening to each of the transcripts, codes were assigned to each statement. From the codes emerged categories, and from the categories, emerged themes. Through the axial coding process, emerging revelations became evident. From the emerging revelations, a theory evolved. Figure 5 shows the emerging revelations in the Accelerated Leadership Departure Theory.

Figure 5. Accelerated Leadership Departure Theory.
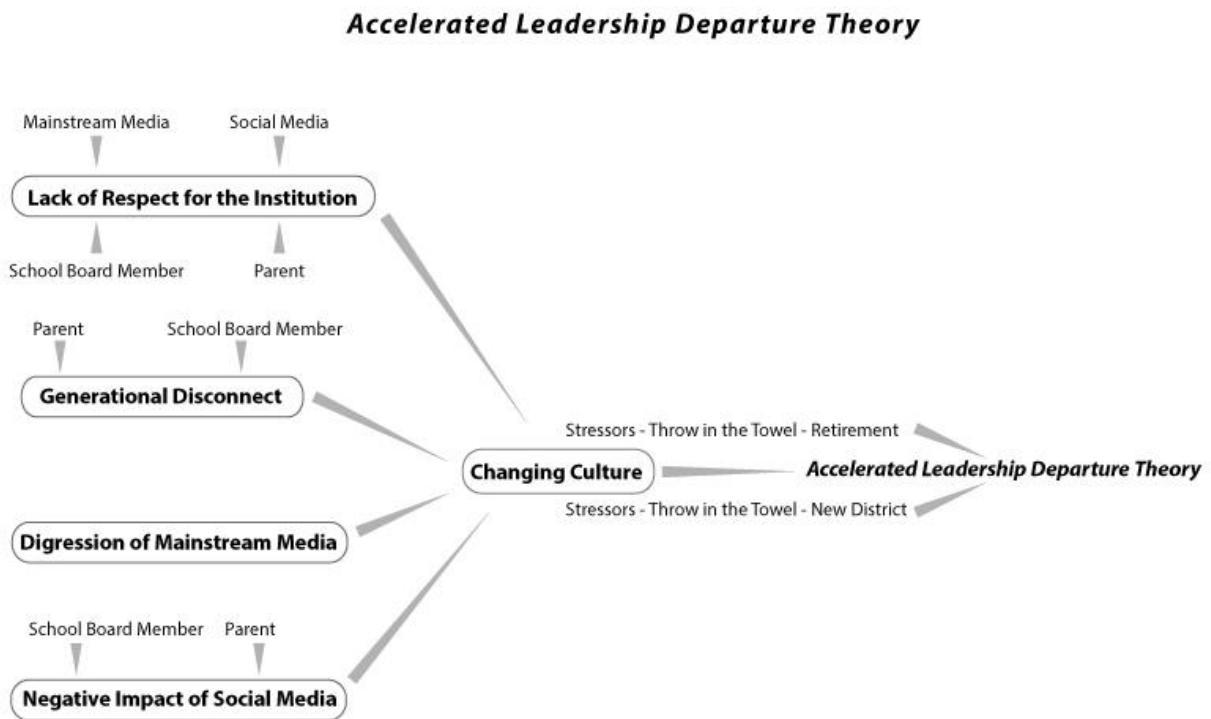
Each of the ten participants shared his or her individual story of his or her professional evolution. All participants in the study were retired or at the end of their careers serving as superintendent. Even though the individual participants' years of serving as a superintendent ranged from fewer than 10 to over 30 years, all participants were at least 50 years of age and had

been in the field of education for decades. This experience in the education field gave each participant the unique perspective to compare experiences throughout his or her educational career and share professional opinions of change as well as observations and rationale for those observations.

Through the coding process, categories were developed, and from the categories, three themes emerged: career path, administrative fatigue, and professional maturity. Although each participant shared unique stories related to each theme, the rewards and challenges appeared to be in line with the research studies related to K-12 superintendents.

Cultural Shift

The majority of participants discussed challenges with parental and patron issues, school board member challenges, staff and student issues, and mainstream media concerns. Social media was not a concern early in each participant's career as it did not exist. What appeared to change from the beginning of the participants' careers until they chose to retire was perceived intensity of the challenges each participant faced on a daily basis. This change in intensity was best defined as a "changing culture" over the course of their respective careers.

Several participants shared their perspectives on a global level regarding society's role in public education. Les stated, "I find that real disappointing because our public schools exist in this democracy because people are supportive of them." He continued, "In order to be that way, they have to know and understand them. A democracy only functions with an informed electorate and our electorate is not informed, they're misinformed. I don't know how it's going to survive the way things are going. I don't mean to sound so fatalistic or negative, but I just see it manifests itself right in the schools, district, and at the board meeting."

Tanya also shared her observation of public education over her career, "The cornerstone of democracy, the public school, is seen as a commodity that you pay for while you use it, and then what you ... I see some of that. I certainly don't see it with the generation older than us. I don't see it in our generation. I see it somewhat in the generation, like the people who are in their 30s and 40s probably. Then, the people who are like 35 and younger, the Gen Y, I see that." She also commented on the potential effects of the perceived cultural shift, "Well, a social institution just falls apart. It can't perform its duty when the leadership in charge of it is unwilling to let kids have the kind of learning experiences you need in order to become a full-fledged adult. Parents who've always wanted their kids to have the blue ribbon, first place all the time, straight A, never a struggle when they're in charge of the place, the game is give them the easy blue ribbon, straight A, first place to avoid the fight. I think public institutions can't serve kids well in that environment. I could see that's already happening."

Generational Disconnect – Lack of Respect for the Institution

Participants reflected that early in their respective careers, parents and patrons that had issues with a decision made by a superintendent or school board would come to the office and have face to face meetings with the superintendent or would address the school board at a meeting. In most instances when a decision was made, the parent or patron supported the institution of public education and the policies set forth by the school board to govern the district. Newly elected school board members assimilated to serving on the school board, become informed of state century code governing district policies, practices, and norms before attempting to implement change. Mainstream media took time to solicit both sides of a story and attempted to balance the reporting of the story.

Participants then described parents, patrons, and school board members near the end of their respective careers. In most incidences, parents and patrons that had an issue with the administration or school board did not want to meet or attend a school board meeting to resolve the difference. Instead, they posted a message on social media with a one-sided narrative and placed the school district in a negative light. The school district did not find out about the issue until after the one-sided narrative was posted.

Participants shared that a growing number of newly elected school board members came to the board not with the intentions of assimilating to existing school board members, but rather insisting that existing board members assimilate to their ideals of what needs to change in the school district. New school board members often showed resistance or resentment toward new board member training.

The stories shared by the majority of participants led to the conclusion that over the span of thirty years there has been an observation of increasing lack of respect for the institution of K-12 public education. A fundamental attitudinal shift appears to have occurred from not agreeing with an institution, but supporting the core beliefs and purpose of the organization, to not trusting an institution and chipping away at its core beliefs and purpose with the replacement of what is good for an individual parent, patron, or school board member.

Digression of the Mainstream Media – Negative Impact of Social Media

Participants reflected and compared the role of mainstream media early in their respective careers up until the time of the interviews. Most participants stated that early in their careers, the mainstream media's tone in the news regarding public education was positive and promoted the institution. Participants expressed that the media regressed from reporting news to competing with the unchecked narrative of social media. News stories that once reported both sides of an

issue have been replaced with a narrative that tended to portray the institution of K-12 education in a negative light.

Participants discussed the impact of social media and how it has affected their daily job duties. Numerous participants began using social media to communicate with the public in the hopes of promoting K-12 education at the local level. Other participants did not engage in the medium and did not use it for school related functions with the exception of sharing webpages and superintendent newsletters. Participants that began using social media to communicate with the public quickly realized that this medium appeared to be dominated by negativity and half-truths about K-12 education in their district. The intensity and ferocity of the negative narratives caused the few participants who were using social media to withdraw from it completely. Most participants attempted to distance themselves from the negativity of social media as they did not have a solution to counter the intensity of the numerous narratives. These narratives appeared to still find their way to the superintendent through colleagues, spouses, friends, and school board members. In turn, this caused the superintendent to question not only the political ramifications of the daily decisions he or she makes, but also the effect that the social media narratives may have on the implementation of potential district initiatives.

The stressors associated with the job of superintendent and leading a school district and school board was readily accepted by the participants in this study. These stressors appeared to be manageable by each participant early in his or her career. However, the effect of the perceived cultural shift from parents, patrons, and school board members respecting the institution to the perceived lack of respect for the institution, coupled with the never-ending negative narrative on social media and mainstream media, led numerous participants to leave their respective role as

superintendent before anticipated. This intensity of endless stressors took a toll on participants and their families.

The Accelerated Leadership Departure Theory evolved from the emerging revelations that developed from the ten participants' shared experiences. The majority of participants chose to leave their positions before they had intended and referred to being pushed out by stressors. The Accelerated Leadership Departure Theory best encapsulates the shared experiences and professional journey of the majority of the participants involved in this study.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, VALIDITY, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative research study was conducted using Grounded Theory methods to better understand the perceptions of recently retired superintendents. The study focused on ten recently retired superintendents from North Dakota. The study focused on the lived experiences of the superintendents throughout their careers regarding leading change in a district, what rewards and challenges they experienced throughout their careers, and what factors influenced them to remain or leave their positions during their careers. Two in-depth interviews (Appendix C) were employed to better understand the perceptions of ten recently retired superintendents. The first interview lasted approximately one hour each. Follow-up interviews occurred after transcriptions were initially coded. The purpose of the second interview was to solicit a more in-depth understanding of the data collected and coded during the first interview with the intent to reach a point of data saturation. The second interview lasted approximately one hour each. After transcriptions were analyzed and initially coded, the researcher was confident that a point of data saturation was achieved.

The beginning of this chapter gives a summary of the research findings in order to explain the experiences of the superintendents throughout their careers. It then discusses conclusions reached as a result of the interview process, coding, developing categories, themes, and finally conducting axial coding resulting in emerging revelations relating to the experiences of the ten superintendents. The conclusions are organized according to three themes and four

major revelations. The three themes are (a) career path, (b) professional maturity, and (c) administrative fatigue. The four major revelations are (a) generational disconnect, (b) lack of respect for the institution, (c) digression of the mainstream media, and (d) negative impact of social media. Next, recommendations are discussed for (a) superintendents, (b) school board members, (c) North Dakota University System Educational leadership programs, (d) North Dakota School Boards Association, (e) North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, and (f) for further research. The chapter concludes with the researcher's final thoughts on the study.

Conclusion

The researcher used the following questions to guide the qualitative Grounded Theory study:

1. What lived experiences did recently retired North Dakota K-12 superintendents share throughout their career regarding leading change in school districts?

2. What rewards and challenges did recently retired North Dakota K-12 superintendents experience throughout their careers?

3. What factors influenced recently retired North Dakota K-12 superintendents to remain or leave their positions during their careers?

The conclusion from this study is that recently retired superintendents chose to retire from their most recent positions as a result of push factors related to school board relationships, parents, patrons, mainstream media, and social media or a life-altering experience resulting in a reprioritization of work/life balance activities.

Discussion

The results of this study stem from two theories: the Push-Pull Career Movement Theory (Tekniepe, 2015) and the Dissatisfaction Theory of Democracy (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).

Tekniepe (2015) suggests that push factors (external pressures) force leaders from their current position. Pull factors (professional opportunities) also attract leaders to move from their current position. The Dissatisfaction Theory of Democracy suggests that if a local school board does not respond to demands of special interest groups within the community, unrest builds and eventually leads to board members being removed from their position. Up to a few years after the school board member is replaced, the superintendent either resigns or is removed from the position.

The conclusions from this study follow the research questions, themes, and emerging revelations. The four emerging revelations are best described by a "changing culture." This "changing culture" was observed by all the participants but with varying degrees from the time they began their administrative careers to their retirements. The following is a discussion of the themes, emerging revelations, and conclusions based on this research.

Career Path

All of the participants advanced from being a teacher to principal to superintendent throughout their respective careers. All participants believed they had a positive impact on students, staff, and culture of the institution where they served. Each participant shared stories of leading district initiatives relating to student services and brick and mortar projects. Each participant described his or her professional evolution from being somewhat of a "bull in a china shop" and overusing positional power to becoming more tempered in demeanor and realizing the importance of collaboration and building relationships when processing and implementing district initiatives. Candoli's (1995) research supports the importance of collaboration. A growing challenge to the superintendency is dealing with a more involved citizenry and school board (Candoli, 1995). Participants reflected and shared stories of challenging experiences they

encountered and how these challenges resulted in personal and professional growth, thus helping them become wiser and more tempered educational leaders.

Professional Maturity

Each participant described his or her respective career path including rewards, challenges, and growth. This professional evolution moved from young and assertive to reaching a state of professional maturity. Participants became tempered in their demeanor and appeared to increase their use of collaboration while still maintaining their principles to guide their day to day decisions regarding personnel and the implementation of district initiatives. Gideon (2002) stressed the importance of collaboration stating that school improvement initiatives encouraged superintendents to work collaboratively with principals, teachers, parents, and other taxpayers to build visions. Participants learned to maintain a balance between work and family, moving from sacrificing family engagement early in their respective careers to reprioritizing their time to value family engagement.

Administrative Fatigue

As the participants reflected on their career paths and professional growth, they all shared that they experienced professional fatigue. This increased fatigue has been noted in many studies. Murphy (1994) describes superintendency as the "once powerful, exciting, and rewarding position" that has lately earned the reputation of being a "nearly impossible job…[rife with] invasion of privacy and public abuse" (p. 510). Carter and Cunningham (1997) further describe the challenges of a superintendent when they state that "school superintendents often bear…the same relationship to their communities as fire hydrants bear to dogs" (p. xi). This fatigue appeared to be a gradual process for several participants but for others seemed to be accelerated either by a singular life changing event, resulting in a reprioritization of their

work/life values, or the perceived acceleration of professional stressors in their daily work. Participants that experienced life changing events simply determined that as a result of their reprioritization, sufficient time could not be devoted to the role of superintendency. The stressors associated with the position were more than the individual was willing to tolerate any longer. Participants who perceived an acceleration of professional stressors shared that they were physically, mentally, and emotionally affected by the increased stressors. They also shared that these stressors moved into their personal lives and was affecting family. These two factors led each of the ten participants to a "tipping point" whereby he or she chose to leave the present position of superintendent.

Generational Disconnect

The majority of participants shared that a generational disconnect was evident with board members, parents, patrons, and teachers. This perceived generational disconnect is just one of numerous social pressures that influence K-12 education. Petersen and Fusarelli (2005) report that social pressures will continue to shape the future of the delivery of public education (p. 12). A few participants included that they also observed changes in students throughout their respective careers. Millennial members tended to view their role differently than older board members when they were first elected to the board. Millennial members entered the new role with a perceived distrust and lack of respect towards veteran board members and administration. The traditional norming process where a new member would acclimate to the existing board was resisted by the millennial member. A reverse norming process appeared to be expected by the millennial board member where the veteran board members were expected to acclimate to the millennial member's views. Millennial members chose to disregard existing policy and protocol

rather than attempt to become educated regarding district policy, past practice, and board

member duties versus administrative duties.

A generational disconnect was also expressed by participants when reflecting on the

behaviors of young parents compared to parents a generation ago. Millennial parents viewed the

K-12 education institution with suspicion and tended to defend their children more. Millennial

parents also tended to blame other entities for mistakes their children made and resisted

consequences set for their children. Millennial parents believe they are an equal player and

should have an equal voice. Millennial patrons had similar traits as millennial parents regarding

the belief that they had an equal voice and viewed K-12 education with suspicion. Both believed

if they could push hard enough, they could force administration and board members out of their

positions if their views differed from the parent or patron.

The majority of participants reported that millennial teachers have changed compared to a

generation ago. Work ethic was a primary concern among the participants stating that the

younger teachers believed that the job hours were eight to four and required no additional time

before or after school. Several participants perceived that the younger teachers value time more

than money, which translated into young teachers being less willing to sign up for additional

duties to earn extra money.

Lack of Respect for the Institution

A second revelation that emerged from the interview data related directly to the

disrespect for the institution of K-12 education including a disrespect for the superintendent,

administration, teachers, and school board. In spite of the apparent dissatisfaction with K-12

education, public perception recognizes the difficulty of leading a school district. Cooper et al.

(2000) report that the public perception of the superintendency is that of a job so daunting, few

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individuals desire to pursue the challenge. Participants reiterated the theme that parents, patrons, individual board members, and mainstream media appeared to have a lack of trust in the institution of K-12 education. Parents of today defend their children and blame the teachers without inquiring about the school's perspective. Parents reach for their smart phone and utilize social media to post their narrative of why they and their children were wronged without seeking the school's perspective. Mainstream media has changed and now appears to function with sensationalism. In many cases, mainstream media reports negatively about K-12 education and its leadership. This constant barrage creates a community culture comprised of citizens possessing suspicion and negativity towards education. Millennial board members reject new board member training and refuse to implement the advice given to them as they accept their role as new board members. This general lack of respect for the institution leaves superintendents and veteran board members struggling to move ahead with district initiatives, and in many cases, leads to a stalemate with polarized views of how the district should function and who should carry out the day to day operations of the district.

Digression of the Mainstream Media

All the participants agreed that they have observed a digression of the mainstream media at the local and national level regarding public education. The majority of participants experienced this phenomenon directly throughout their respective careers. Early in the participants' careers, mainstream media was focused on reporting accurate, comprehensive, and conclusive news stories. This involved the media entering the school to get both sides of an issue then finding the correct balance to report to the public. Participants echoed similar descriptions of the mainstream media of today. The media tends to be negative and sensational. The mainstream media is less focused on reporting the whole truth and appears to focus on finding

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sound bites to fit a narrative. Participants observed that local media finds sources or sound bites to create a local issue that emulates what was in the national news. This fabrication of factitious news may sell papers and increase viewership, but it does not benefit the institution of K-12 education at the local level.

Negative Impact of Social Media

Social media is a relatively new communication medium with minimal guidelines in place to sensor individual opinions and narratives. Although social media is a new means to communicate, the discussion relating to the role and responsibility of the superintendent as a communicator continues to evolve. Conrad (1994) stated, "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). The role of the superintendent has matured from curriculum expert to manager to social scientist to expert communicator. These roles do not stand alone but are all required skills for superintendents.

The coffee shop was once a place where a group of individuals would meet daily to speak to each other in person and share their views of the reported news from the newspaper, television, and radio. Local stories were reported, and disagreements were processed face to face with eye contact made between disputing parties. Today's coffee shop has been replaced by a medium void of boundaries, direct human contact, and accountability. Social media has made way for unchecked opinions and half-truths relating to an event, person's character, or the institution. The majority of participants reported that they did not utilize social media and viewed it negatively. They viewed the medium as a hinderance to their job since it caused them to exert extra time and effort into dispelling half-truths regarding school personnel, district initiatives,

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and incidents. Participants expressed frustration in attempting to stay ahead of the half-truths. They struggled help patrons realize that these online narratives were not based on facts but emotions.

Validity of the Study

This qualitative study involved ten participants that were interviewed on two occasions. In an attempt to ensure an accurate representation of superintendents in the state, participants were selected on certain criteria. Three of the participants were female, and seven were male. Four participants served in Class A schools, and six served in Class B schools in their most recent position. One participant's ethnic background was Native American. The other participants were Caucasian. Participants were veteran superintendents at the end of their respective careers. Therefore, perspectives of superintendents who were in their first years of the superintendency were not solicited. It was the intent of the researcher to solicit information from recently retired superintendents. The researcher believed that current superintendents may be cautious in their responses. Throughout the interview process, participants were exceptionally candid and also stated that sharing their stories was therapeutic for them. Several participants had recently retired and still felt the frustration of being pushed out of their positions despite their efforts to carry out district initiatives.

Another concern of this study was the researcher's potential bias. At the time of the study, the researcher was a veteran superintendent near the end of his career. To minimize research bias, member checking and peer review was utilized in the process of analyzing data. Participants were given transcripts to read and provide comments. Participants provided clarification on a few statements, but overall, they agreed that transcriptions matched the intended interview responses. Peer reviewers were given transcripts and codes developed by the

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researcher. Peer reviewers provided feedback with similar coding as the researcher. The researcher shared transcripts, coding, category, theme, and emerging revelation process with his advisor who provided input and agreed with the data results. Utilizing member checking, peer reviewers, and an advisor greatly reduced, if not removed, any bias the researcher may have brought into the data analysis process.

Recommendations

This study showed that although recently retired superintendents reflected on their career as being rewarding, they left the profession in a state of fatigue. In a few instances, this fatigue was a gradual process, but for some it was either accelerated by a singular life-altering event resulting in a reprioritization of work/life balance or by stress factors that affected the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of the superintendent. These accelerated stress factors pushed the superintendent to retire before he or she anticipated.

The following recommendations are for five stakeholder groups:

1. Superintendents/North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders
2. School board members/North Dakota School Boards Association
3. North Dakota University System leadership programs
4. North Dakota Department of Public Instruction
5. Further research

Superintendents/North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders. As discovered in this study, superintendents evolved from early in their respective careers until retirement. This evolution included professional skills like collaboration and professional maturity. Superintendents presently serving and aspiring superintendents should consider the following:

1. Spend additional time to make sure one's leadership style and vision of K-12 education matches the school boards' and community needs. Do some research before taking the first available superintendent position.

2. Develop a network of fellow superintendents that can be mentors at the beginning of and throughout one's career.

3. Utilize positional power less and collaboration and building collegial relationships more.

4. Spend time educating staff, board members, parents, and patrons in person regarding the K-12 system, roles, and responsibilities of each entity.

5. Spend additional time developing relationships with board members. Make sure new board members are subjected to an on-boarding process that involves veteran board members and involves NDSBA with specific training with the local board if necessary.

6. Provide training for board members regarding a clear line of demarcation regarding duties of the school board and the duties of the administration. Constant education and reminders may be necessary for board members. Include the board president in these conversations.

7. Recognize that superintendent longevity appears to be less than it was 20 years ago. Be cognizant of the climate of the community and monitor the governing school board. Know when it is time to find a new community whose vision aligns with one's vision. Don't take it personally if encouraged to leave a school district. It may simply be an indicator of a change in elected leadership because of one's leadership style or vision of K-12 education.

8. Support colleagues. When arriving at a new school district, refrain from participating in the reputation bashing of the predecessor (if it occurs). Realize that the predecessor may have had a different leadership style and started out with different school board members. Remember, "blowing out another person's candle doesn't make yours burn brighter."

School Board Members/North Dakota School Boards Association. In this study, the majority of participants stated that one of the major stressors leading to their departure from the superintendency was school board relationships and blurred lines regarding duties of the board and duties of the superintendent. Current and future school board members should consider the following:

1. Conduct a thorough superintendent search to ensure that alignment exists between the leadership and vision of the governing board and the superintendent candidate. If the alignment does not exist, the board should continue searching for a candidate that better matches the district's vision. The board should also reflect on its present vision and assess if it is aligned with current educational trends. Spending additional time ensuring alignment exists will increase the potential that district initiatives will not be derailed or slowed as a result of a change in the superintendent.

2. Take time to become educated in the role and responsibilities of the board and the role and responsibility of the superintendent. The board's primary role is to hire a qualified superintendent it trusts. The role of the superintendent is to oversee and carry out the day to day functions of the district. The importance of becoming educated regarding district policies and roles is embedded in research. Everett and Sloan (1984) state, "School board members are lay people, generally the least trained

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people in the school system regarding the learning and education of children and hold the most power" (p. 2). This lack of training would be acceptable if the board's role did not affect both personnel and students.

3. Listen respectfully to parent and patron concerns but direct them to the proper level to be addressed. Remember, one is only a school board member when the school board meeting is in session.

4. Utilize positional power that a school board member possesses less and use collaboration and team building more.

5. Strive to develop and maintain a collegial relationship with the superintendent.

6. Realize that turnover of the superintendency results in stalled district initiatives and student achievement.

7. North Dakota School Boards Association should continue to self-reflect on the organization's vision and provide repetitive training for new and veteran board members on the importance of selecting a superintendent that matches the district's needs. Provide ongoing training for school board members regarding maintaining clear lines of demarcation pertaining to the duties of the school board and duties of the administration.

North Dakota University System Leadership Programs. The North Dakota University System leadership programs need to continue to solicit input from new superintendents, mid-career superintendents, and recently retired superintendents to gain a better understanding of individual experiences while serving in the educational leader role of the superintendent. With input from superintendents, faculties can adjust programs to better serve superintendent candidates as they enter the district leadership role. Programs should also include new board

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members and veteran board members. A better understanding of the superintendent/school board relationships would allow NDUS leadership personnel to develop a more comprehensive preparation program for aspiring superintendents and assist in the education of serving school board members. North Dakota University System leadership programs should consider the following:

1. Continue to develop specific preparation programs for superintendent candidates to better prepare them for the role of the superintendent. A balance of theoretical underpinnings in addition to extensive real-life application scenarios would better prepare aspiring superintendents for their first position as district leader.

2. Provide assessments for superintendents to better understand their demeanor, leadership style, and other personality traits, which may also assist them in understanding the motives and demeanor of colleagues they are charged to work with on a daily basis to implement district initiatives.

3. Provide ongoing seminars giving veteran superintendents the opportunity to speak to novice and aspiring superintendents about specific district leadership topics.

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. As discovered in this study, superintendents are charged with leading their local school districts while working within the parameters of federal law and state century code relating to K-12 education. This task becomes a balancing act and is an additional stressor for superintendents as top-down mandates require time and resources at the local level which tend to be in limited supply. North Dakota Department of Public Instruction leadership and personnel should consider the following:

1. Continue to provide and develop an on-boarding process for new superintendents.

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2. Revisit the vision of the DPI. Although federal law and state century code place parameters on the implementation of programs, encourage DPI personnel to strive to portray the department as a service agency in spite of the fact that top-down regulations need to be implemented and enforced.

3. Approach differences between individual school district leadership with the intent to understand the unique circumstances of the district and attempt to find the "grey area" to accommodate the district.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research may be warranted to better understand the experiences of superintendents serving in North Dakota. The purpose of this research was to better understand turnover of superintendents of K-12 schools in North Dakota. The following research topics are recommended to further develop and verify the findings of this research:

1. This study was conducted with ten recently retired superintendents. A study could be conducted with superintendents that are midpoint in their careers. The results may not replicate generational differences but may add to the current findings regarding mainstream media, social media, and lack of respect for the institution.

2. Conduct a longitudinal study examining the content of mainstream media.

3. Conduct a study examining the experiences of superintendents of differing age groups regarding their experience with social media, their use of social media, and the effects of social media on the implementation of district initiatives.

4. Conduct a study examining the experiences of superintendents of differing age groups regarding their experience with parents, patrons, and school board members.

5. Conduct a study examining the experiences of veteran K-12 school board members regarding their experiences serving as board members and their experiences with parents, patrons, and superintendents.

6. Conduct a study examining North Dakota University System leadership preparation programs regarding responsiveness to current and perceived future demands of administrative positions including principals and superintendents.

Concluding Thoughts

The data gleaned from the experiences of ten recently retired superintendents in North Dakota revealed that they followed a similar professional path. They began by energetically assuming leadership roles but lacked superintendent experience. In the beginning of their careers, the superintendents tended to overuse positional power but later developed skills for relationship building and collaboration that became effective in achieving district initiatives. The participants shared success stories of facility improvements and increased student achievement. They were confident that as result of their educational leadership skills, they helped improve the various school districts they served.

The majority of superintendents discussed stressors or push factors that emerged throughout their tenure and shared experiences of these push factors. Once these push factors reached a tipping point, they knew it was time to leave a district or retire. As superintendents developed professional maturity, they became tempered in demeanor. Each attempted to find a balance of work/life activities including finding additional time for family.

The superintendents discussed generational differences among school board members, parents, patrons, and students. Although generational differences have occurred throughout

history, what appeared to be different in their observations was a lack of respect for the institution of K-12 education and the superintendency.

The superintendents shared that they overused positional power and failed to appreciate the power of collaboration and team building. As participants shared, this appeared to be true for new school board members as well. The superintendents expressed that while overusing positional power, both superintendents and new school board members tended to fall into the "bull in a china shop" trap. This conflict between board members and superintendents was exasperated by social media and mainstream media. They expressed concern for what they considered a digression of the mainstream media and the negative impact of social media on K-12 education. The superintendents appeared alarmed by the rate and intensity of half-truths and unfounded narratives posted on social media.

Several of the superintendents shared that these push factors led them to prematurely leave a district or retire. As discovered in this study, the effect of the accelerated leadership departure has left school districts without the continuity in leadership required to implement long term change within a district. This phenomenon appears to align with the research showing that a superintendent averages 6.5 years in a school district (Yee & Cuban, 1996). Short superintendent tenure could potentially affect student achievement and implementation of district initiatives. Yee and Cuban (1996) report, "Short tenures create public perception of increased instability, lower morale, a loss of organizational direction and 'vision,' and a general sense by the staff of 'here we go again,' that the district will undergo yet another round of short-lived programs and policies (p. 615).

Current superintendents need to develop skills and proactive education measures to reverse the apparent disregard and lack of respect for our country's institution of local public

education. Parents, patrons, and school board members need to exhibit responsible use of social media, become more actively involved in K-12 education, and support district leaders in the development and implementation of district initiatives. State organizations including NDCEL, NDSBA, NDDPI, NDU, along with the mainstream media, need to educate their membership regarding their organizations' visions and focus on reporting factual and positive events that occur each day in K-12 education throughout North Dakota.

The journey the researcher embarked on led him to discover that the dissatisfaction he experienced in 2012 when he resigned as a result of push factors is more common than he originally imagined. The majority of the participants in this study experienced push factors throughout their respective careers and left their position before they had intended as a result of these push factors. It is the researcher's hope that the findings and recommendations contained in this study will be considered and implemented. In doing so, the findings and recommendations may contribute to an increased longevity of superintendents serving in a K-12 school district, thus providing continuity and the proper implementation of district initiatives. Additionally, it is crucial that local communities and school boards strive to establish continuity of leadership. It is only then that district initiatives will be fully realized resulting in an educational culture conducive to the development of our most precious resource: our youth and future citizens.

APPENDICES

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE: Exploring K-12 Superintendent Turnover: Career Advancement or
                                 Dissatisfaction Realized?
PROJECT DIRECTOR: Francis Schill
PHONE: 701-520-9674
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH
A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such
participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the
research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research
projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your
decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?
You are invited to be in a research study because you served as a superintendent in North
Dakota. The purpose of this study is to better understand the shared experiences of recently
retired North Dakota superintendents and to better understand factors that lead to turnover of
superintendents of K-12 schools in North Dakota.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?
Between eight to ten people will take part in this study across the state of North Dakota.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?
Your participation in the study will include two interviews, each lasting 45 to 60 minutes. If you
consent to participate, the researcher will go to your requested location and interview you. Any
follow-up questions will be completed at your requested location.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?
You will participate in interviews at a location of your choosing. The interviews will last about
45-60 minutes. The interviews will be audio and video-recorded with your permission. After the
interviews, transcripts of the interviews will be created and shared with you to ensure the
accuracy of your responses.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?
There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?
You will not benefit personally from being in this study. However, future superintendents may benefit from this study because they will have a better understanding of the experiences of a superintendent serving in North Dakota K-12 districts.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY
The alternative to participating in the study is to choose not to participate in the study.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?
You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?
You will not be paid for participating in this research study.

WHO IS FUNDING THE STUDY?
The University of North Dakota is receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. Your study record may be reviewed by Government agencies and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.
Any information obtained for this study that can be linked to individuals will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.
The researcher will keep recordings for three years at his home office and will destroy the record after three years. Consent forms and personal data will be kept for three years and will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home office. The researcher, researcher's advisor, and UND IRB will have access to the recordings, consent forms, and personal data for that period of time. No name or identifying factors will be used in any publication or presentation.
If we write a report or article about this study, we will describe the study results in a summarized manner so that you cannot be identified.

IS THIS STUDY VOLUNTATRY?
Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS?
The researcher conducting this study is Francis Schill. You may ask questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please contact Francis

Schill at 701-520-9674. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Pauline Stonehouse at 701-777-4163.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at **(701) 777-4279** or **UND.irb@research.UND.edu.**

- You may also call this number about any problems, complaints, or concerns you have about this research study.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach research staff or you wish to talk with someone who is independent of the research team.
- General information about being a research subject can be found by clicking "Information for Research Participants" on the website: http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.cfm

I give consent to be audio recorded during this study.

Please initial: ____ Yes   ____ No

I give consent to be video recorded during this study.

Please initial: ____ Yes   ____ No

I give consent for my quotes to be used in the research; however I <u>will not</u> be identified.

Please initial: ____ Yes   ____ No

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subject's Name: _____

_____   _____
Signature of Subject   Date

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject's legally authorized representative.

_____   _____
Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent   Date

Appendix B
Interview Questions

(District)

1. Where and when did you begin your administrative experience?

2. Where and when did you begin your superintendent experience?

3. Describe the experience.

4. What were highlights of the experience?

5. What were the challenges of the experience?

6. What impact do you believe you had on the school district? Elaborate.

7. How long did you stay at your first district in the capacity of superintendent?

8. What factors led you to move on?

9. Would you classify the move as a career advancement or strained relations with the school board or other?

(School Board)

10. How was your relationship with board members? Share positive experiences. Share challenging experiences.

11. How was your relationship with the board president? Share positive experiences. Share challenging experiences.

12. Explain your experience when new board members were elected to the school board.

13. Upon relocating to your new school district, did you do anything differently regarding leadership, relationships, other from your previous location?

14. Did you orient new board members regarding their role and the role of the superintendent and if yes, how did you do this? Was it beneficial?

15. Did your new board members attend the new board member training offered by NDSBA? Do you believe this training was beneficial? Elaborate please.

16. Do you think board members should receive board member training yearly offered by the NDSBA? Elaborate please.

17. Do you think board member candidates should receive board member training before the school board election takes place? Why or why not?

18. Do you think locally elected school boards assist superintendents in moving K-12 education forward or hinder the efforts? Elaborate.

19. Do you think the concept of locally elected school boards should be examined? Elaborate.

(Legislative Process)

20. What was your experience with ND legislative assembly process regarding K-12 education and in particular, the impact it has had on you as a superintendent in charge of leading a school district?

21. Were there any particular pieces of legislation that assisted you in leading the school district?

22. Were there any particular pieces of legislation that challenged you in leading the school district?

(DPI)

23. What was your experience with DPI regarding K-12 education and in particular, the impact it has had on you as a superintendent in charge of leading a school district?

24. Were there any administrative rules or mandates that assisted you in leading the school district?

25. Were there any particular administrative rules or mandates that challenged you in leading the school district?

(Leadership Preparation)

26. From what institution did you receive your Educational Leadership degree? Level?

27. Did the program of study prepare you adequately for the role of principal? Superintendent?

28. What specific aspects or courses in your POS assisted you as an administrator?

29. What additional specific courses or areas of concentration would assist aspiring superintendents to be better prepared for the role of superintendent?

Appendix C
Follow-up Interview Questions

(School Board)

1. As you reflect on your career as a superintendent, did you have a particular school board that was the most supportive of your vision and what separated them from the other boards?

2. Did you have a particular school board that was challenging and what separated them from the other boards?

3. As board membership changed while you worked **at a school district,** did anything change relating to the type of board member that was being elected?

4. As board membership changed over your **career as a superintendent,** did anything change relating to the type of board member that was being elected?

5. Did incumbent board members choose not to run or were they defeated by a new person running?

6. If the incumbent chose not to run, speculate why he/she chose not to run?

7. Describe the personality of the new board member that replaced the incumbent.

Push-Pull Factors

8. As you reflect on your career, was there a concentration of push or pull factors at certain times throughout your career? Expand.

9. Explain your journey from not taking disagreements personally and realizing they are just part of the position?

10. As you experienced push factors, did this affect your decision-making ability?

11. Did push factors drain your ability to focus on district initiatives?

12. As you reflect, what coping skills did you acquire to deal with push factors?

13. As you reflect over the span of your career, did multiple factors wear you down? If so, what were those factors?

14. What led you to retirement?

15. How did you maintain personal health throughout your career?

16. How did you maintain personal health during push factors?

Media

17. What has your experience been with the mainstream media?

18. Has the mainstream media changed throughout your career?

19. Has the mainstream media affected you throughout your career as a superintendent?

20. What has your experience been with the social media?

21. Has social media affected you throughout your career as a superintendent?

22. Has parent involvement and support changed throughout your career?

23. Has parent involvement affected you throughout your career as a superintendent?

24. Talk to me about the teaching profession throughout your career.

25. Have students changed throughout your career?

26. Have district patrons (taxpayers) changed throughout your career?

Accomplishments

27. What are three things you are extremely proud of regarding your career as a superintendent?

28. What are three things you would do differently throughout your career? With what outcome?

29. What three things (decisions) that were stressful throughout your career, but you would you do it over again if faced with the same situation (Character builders or helped define who you are).

Advice

30. What advice would you give a new superintendent when dealing with a school board?

31. What advice would you give a new superintendent when dealing with parents?

32. What advice would you give a new superintendent when dealing with staff?

33. What advice would you give a new superintendent when dealing with patrons?

34. What advice would you give a new superintendent when dealing with the mainstream media?

35. What advice would you give a new superintendent when dealing with social media?

36. What advice would you have for new board members regarding board/superintendent relationships and moving a district forward?

37. What advice would you have for NDSBA relating to new board and returning board member training that would assist superintendents in moving a district forward?

38. What advice would you have to Educational Leadership programs in better preparing superintendents for their position?

39. How did you view your role as superintendent in the community?

40. Describe yourself as a leader when you started out as a superintendent.

41. Describe yourself as a leader when you ended your career as a superintendent.

42. If you could have a do-over, would you choose the same career path again? Why?

Frank: I'm here with David. I'm conducting a second interview today. So David, as you ... We'll just start. I appreciate you taking the time in the first interview, and now this is our final follow up interview. And hope to glean more information about your journey as an administrator and the role of superintendent. So with [00:00:30] that, as you reflect on your career as a superintendent, did you have a particular school board that was the most supportive of your vision, and what separated them from other boards?

-Micro mgt
-Personal agenda

David: I've had multiple school boards that were supportive of the vision. And the thing that separated them from the boards that aren't is the boards that aren't started meddling in the daily operation of the district and became ... [00:01:00] Started to transition to administrative school boards rather than policy making school boards. Policy making school boards that I've had were always supportive. Not to say that they didn't challenge, or question sometimes, which they should, but when a board moves from a policy making school board to an administrative school board is when trouble starts to occur.

-Adm/Brd Roles
-Policy
-Micro mgt

Frank: And my second question, and you [00:01:30] may have answered that in your first answer here, did you have a particular board that was challenging? And what separated them? And would you say dealt with that [crosstalk 00:01:37]?

David: Yeah, the most challenging school board I've had is the current one. Particularly in the past two years.

Frank: Would you like to expand a little bit on what-

David: Their fingers are so deep into the district. And one of my assistants in the office, getting a doctoral degree, was reflecting [00:02:00] on this in a conversation that she had during her program with other administrators. And I think that this person who told her this really described it well. He said that the job of a school board is to put its arms around a school district, not to put its fingers in the school district. And this school board particularly in the past two years has its fingers deeply into the school district. As I think I mentioned last time that [00:02:30] to the point where I go to conduct interviews, and we have to have school board members on interview committees, and they're handing out the questions. And I looked and said, "I thought I had the questions ready." And the school board member said,

-Adm/Brd Roles
-Policy
-Micro mgt
-Personal agenda
- No trust
-Prof. Relationship

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"Well, we changed them." Well, that wasn't the administrators and teachers changing it.

Frank: As board membership changed while you worked at a district, did anything change relating to the type of [00:03:00] board member that was being elected. And the kind of context, the next question talks about over your career. This just talks about at a particular district. And if you want to use your most recent example, that's fine as well. But anything change relating to the type of board as you worked within a district?

David: Well, the first district I didn't have any turnover that recall. In the second one I had some. And the only time it changed was when there became an issue, [00:03:30] and I think he was elected to try and address that issue. And while we didn't always agree, we had least had a professional relationship. Then, excuse me, my third district I had one that ran with an agenda. And he and I did not see eye to eye at all. And [00:04:00] he was an administrative school board member and tried to be. But for the most part the other school board members prevented that, but not completely. And with the current school board members in this district there's no doubt there was an agenda. And [00:04:30] the thing that changed the most is they wanted to be more in charge of the daily things that happen and think that it's the job of the school board to fix things that happen on a daily basis and meet with people. And they're an extremely administrative school board.

Frank: So as you reflect over your career now as a superintendent, [00:05:00] talk to me about anything change as far as board membership just in general and I'll refer to as personalities or traits of board members. Do you see anything over the length of your career of just a general change in the type of board member that has served?

David: Well, I think probably the best thing I can say is just to reiterate what I said before, and I haven't [00:05:30] studied it enough to be able to be definitive, but I do think there are generational differences between school board members who are baby boomers and older, and the incoming Gen X, Gen Y school board members. I think they see their role differently and that's probably the biggest thing that I've seen.

Frank: Okay.

David: [00:06:00] I don't know if that gets to the question.

-Micro mgt
-Personal agenda
-Prof. relationship

-Generational Gap
- Admin/Brd Role

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Frank: It does. Care to expand any more? Your thoughts just about that and the role of the superintendent and changing role of superintendent with that type of board member?

David: Why don't you mark that and we'll see if we can come back to that?

Frank: Okay, good enough. [00:06:30] So you had incumbent board members that you, maybe you did, maybe you didn't, did you have incumbent board members that chose not to run, or were they defeated by the person running? Did you have that situation occur?

David: I've had that happen here, both. And the incumbents that first left here left because [00:07:00] they had been longterm school board members. I want to say like 12 to 14 years, both of them. And they felt that they had done their public service. Then I had another incumbent, two more that did not run again. The first one, well both of them actually had been long term board members. And I think felt the same way, that they had done their public service. But then I had one get defeated. And that person [00:07:30] was defeated because of the teacher's association. And it was an active campaign to get rid of that person. And I saw that happen in my previous jobs in the state, in a different state. And I sometimes wonder if that's not happening more in North Dakota. Which I think [00:08:00] somehow the public needs to be made aware of that phenomenon. Because yeah, it makes it difficult for a superintendent when a school board member or school board members, when the association [00:08:30] has their ear.

-Brd Turnover

-Brd Turnover
-Political Influence

Frank: So along those lines to some extent, describe the personality, if you would, of the new board member that replaced the incumbent, if you can reflect back.

-Agenda
-Admin/Brd roles
-Political Influence
-Restrictive

David: The personality is a direct [00:09:00] conversationalist, gets to the point quickly. I don't think this person is an automatic vote for the association. I think if that's what the association believes I think they're wrong. But still believes that the role of the school board, [00:09:30] to some degree, is to try and fix things with the association. And doesn't understand, in my opinion, that the association is more about teachers than it is about children.

Frank: Come back to that other question later. I'm going to transition to push pull factors. As you reflect [00:10:00] on your career was there a concentration of push or pull factors at certain times throughout your career? And just, I'm sure you remember, but I'll just reiterate, the push factors are those that the stressors in a position that could be school board relationships, could be

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unions, could be just patrons in general, those pressures that cause a superintendent to learn earlier and pull at [00:10:30] those that are attracted to go to another position.

David: My first position was, as I said, it was a push and a pull. I almost doubled my salary, went from a tiny school district to a school district of about 900 students, which was an opportunity to grow in my profession. But there was a disconnect between my management style and the expectations of some school board members. Second one, [00:11:00] when I left my second position, that was 100% pull, because again it was a larger district and more money. The third one I would say was minimally push. After being in that district for 14 years that's a long run. The days of school, as I said before, the days of a superintendent being in a district for 35 years are gone. [00:11:30] But that was also a pull. This one is a push. I had intended to be a couple more years in this district, but the stress of this job with the school board is just not worth it. And so this one was 100% push.

-Financial pull
-Sup. Longevity
-Push-Stressors

Frank: . [00:12:00] Can you explain your journey from not taking disagreements personally and realizing they're just part of the position, I'm assuming that's evolved from the first time you sat in the superintendent's chair and had disagreement. So if you could talk about that, that'd be great.

David: Yeah, yeah. As I mentioned last time there was a time when I was meeting with an association president in my second job. And she looked at me and she said, "You take [00:12:30] these things personally." And I said, "I do not." But as soon as I walked out of the room I thought, "Yes you do." That was a huge evolution for me right there because it was at that moment that I realized I was taking it personally, and it wasn't personal, and it was business. And so when a board behaves professionally and just says no, I don't take those things personally. [00:13:00] But when there is deceit, underhanded behavior, talking about the superintendent behind his or her back, yeah, I do take that personally. Because that's inappropriate on all levels. But in terms of the business decisions, if a board just says no, it is, it's just business. And yeah, so I don't take business decisions [00:13:30] personally.

-Admin. Duties
-Professional Evolution
-Push-Stressors
- Lack of respect for superintendent

Frank: As you experience push factors, did this affect your decision making ability?

David: Absolutely.

Frank: Can you expand a little bit?

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David: You become less willing to take risks. [00:14:00] I feel like there's more anxiety when you have to make a difficult decision because you always have to ask, "What are the implications? And how is this person going to react to this when this person did this in a previous situation?" And so you spend, I think, a lot more hours on decisions that shouldn't be so difficult. [00:14:30] Just as you have, throughout your career, the first thing that we stop and think about are what are the implications for my children in the district? That is the primary driving factor for the decisions we make. What is the best decision for my students? And I think that when those push factors start to happen [00:15:00] that gets clouded. And so yeah, we spend more time, there's more anxiety, and we're less willing to take risks.

Frank: Kind of along those lines, focused more, do the push factors drain your ability to focus on district initiatives? Like you're carrying out your strategic plan. What did it do with timeline?

David: [00:15:30] I think it does, particularly when, as I've said, school board members start to get too deeply involved in the daily operations and think that after going to a conference, "Boy, we'd like to see this happen in the district," and they don't stop and think about the big picture. Because school board members, particularly if they're new to the school board, don't have that big picture vision. As [00:16:00] you know, you have teachers who sit at the classroom level, principals who sit at a building level, assistant superintendents and superintendents who sit at a higher level, and then a superintendent also above that. Not only looking at it from a district and classroom perspective, and a building perspective, but also from a community perspective. Because we have to think about the culture of the community, [00:16:30] the culture of the school district. And so yeah, can you repeat that for me?

Frank: I'm wondering just about district initiatives and adjusted your focus.

David: Yeah. And then the school board members come and they say, "Well, we should be doing this, we should be doing that." And they're looking at things at a micro level when you're sitting here as a superintendent looking at it from a macro level and going, " [00:17:00] Well, not only does that not comport with the culture of the school district, it doesn't comport with the culture of the community as I know it, as I know that culture." And so yeah, it does affect your ability to do things when you have to spend time fending off things that you don't think are appropriate that have not gone through any proper channels in terms of engagement and study to become a district initiative. [00:17:30] To become a district initiative, it doesn't happen with the superintendent

| -Push-Stressors |
| -Admin duties |
| -Professional survival |

| -Micro Mgt. |
| -Global Perspective |
| -Admin/Brd Role |
| -Culture |

| -Micro Mgt. |
| -Global Perspective |
| -Admin/Brd Role |
| -Culture |

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saying, "Thou shalt go do this." We have to build buy in, we have to do things according to change theory. And we have to get people engaged in the conversation. And it could very well be that the superintendent's idea is not the exact course to go, that it will evolve through those conversations. And [00:18:00] so when we have to fend off things that happen because a school board is not following its role as a policy making school board it does detract from our ability to do things on a larger scale.

Frank: As you reflect, what coping skills did you acquire to deal with push factors? [inaudible 00:18:28].

David: I [00:18:30] take my pen and hold it under the table and spin it in my fingers. I'm a little bit ADD. And I've also become much calmer over the course of my career in terms of just listening. I have excellent listening skills. [00:19:00] And then the other thing is I have a great wife. She's my sounding board. And then you also talk to your advisors, people that advise you on a daily basis. Not just in the central administration office but to principals, new cabinet members. [00:19:30] And just try and be reflective. And like I said, I spin my pen under my table to control my ADD.

-Tempered
- Family
-Admin Wisdom

Frank: As you reflect over the span of your career, did multiple factors wear you down? If so, what were some of those factors?

David: Unreasonable [00:20:00] parents wear me down. I can deal with the kids all day long. But unreasonable parents and school board members that do not know their role as a policy making school board have worn me down over time. And occasionally [00:20:30] employee issues because some of them ... I want to retract that. Not employee issues so much as association issues. Because as I said, the association places teachers above children. And that does wear me down [00:21:00] because public education, I just love this profession, I have a passion for public education. And when people try and diminish the importance of that to the children by doing things that serve the association above children, that does wear me down. So those are probably the main things.

-Push – Stressors
-Micro Mgt.
-Union Stressors
-Student Focused
-Vocation

Frank: [00:21:30] What led you to retirement?

David: As I said I was pushed out. I can't deal with the stress of it anymore. Over the past few years it's taken its toll on my marriage. It's taken its toll on me personally to the point where [00:22:00] there was one month if I slept at all I slept for four hours a night. And that's not healthy. And I have a whole bunch of grandchildren and more on the way.

-Push – Stressors
-Throw in the Towel
-Family
-Integrity
-Wisdom
-Philosophy

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And I also, when I was reflecting on whether or not to resign, thought of myself a bit as a hypocrite, because over the course of my career I have been asked to give speeches to senior [00:22:30] classes. And one of the things I always told them was about something that Anna Quindlen said. Anna Quindlen was a syndicated writer, or columnist, and she's a writer. But she would talk about this story about a guy, homeless guy sitting on the coast on a bench. And she went and visited with him about [00:23:00] trying to go to the homeless center and prove his life. And the sun was coming up on the coast. And he just looked at her and he said, "Look at the view, little lady, look at the view."

And then I would also talk about a guy who owned a truck and made deliveries, and he was sitting there fishing and a young man came up and talked to him. " [00:23:30] What do you do?" "Well, I have a truck." "Well, did you ever think about getting more trucks?" And he said, "No." And the guy said, "Why not?" And he said, "Well, why would I want more trucks?" He said, "Well, then you'd have a bigger business, you could make money." And the guy said, "More money." And the guy said, "Why?" He said, "Well, if you had more money you'd have people working for you and you'd make even more money." And the guy said, "Yeah, but why?" And he said, " [00:24:00] Well, you might be able to go fishing." And he said, "What do you think I'm doing right now?"

And so I've told those kind of stories to kids over the time and related about Paul Tsongas who said, "No man on his deathbed ever wished he spent more time in his office. So I thought of myself kind of as I was making this decision as a bit of a hypocrite. And I thought, "Maybe it's time for you to [00:24:30] go fishing, enjoy the view, and not worry about spending more time in your office." Because life is too short. I don't know how many years I have left, but I know it's way less than what I've lived so far. And so that's what I'm going to do. And it's going to be a transition because as you know, superintendents typically don't have many hobbies. Because what [00:25:00] have we done? We've worked. This is not a 9:00 to 5:00 job. And it'll be a transition, but I'm going to try and enjoy the view and go fishing and find time to spend with my grandchildren and my children. And try and make up to my wife a little bit for the sacrifices that she has had to make for the time that I have spent in this profession [00:25:30] of being a school superintendent.

Frank: Throughout your career how did you maintain your personal health?

David: I was a lot better at it before I moved here. I have not done as good a job of that in this position. I used to run, lift weights, ride

| -Push – Stressors |
| -Throw in the Towel |
| -Wisdom |
| -Family Stress |
| - Emotion |

| -Personal Health |
| -Sacrifice |

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a bicycle. [00:26:00] I would officiate high school sports. And those were the things that I did to take care of my health. That's something that I need to get better at. That is one of my goals for when I'm done.

Frank: The next question to ask about how'd you maintain during the push factors? And I think you just kind of indirectly answered that since you've been here.

David: Yeah, here I have done a bad job at maintaining [00:26:30] my health.

Frank: It's consumed you.

David: Yes. Particularly in the past two years. And yeah, I've really done poorly at that.

Frank: Well, let's focus on the media for a bit. What's your experience been with the mainstream media as you go through your career, as you reflect?

David: Mainstream media being?

Frank: News channel, radio-

David: Radio and [00:27:00] television?

Frank: Newspaper.

David: Yeah. My experience has been positive. I can't say that I've ever had negative experience with the media in any position that I've had. I can say that I've learned from my first interview that you don't leave open ended statements. You make very definitive points that are clear [00:27:30] and concise. But no, I've had positive experience with the mainstream media in my career.

-Media
- Communication

Frank: Okay. Have you seen the mainstream media change throughout your career? They're remained basically the same? [crosstalk 00:27:47].

David: Talking to some of my peers and some of the things that they deal with, I would say yes. In some other districts I haven't had that experience personally, [00:28:00] but there are some instances, and some of those in North Dakota where the media is looking for dirt to try and sensationalize issues. But I haven't had that experience. But I know that some of my peers have experienced that phenomenon.

-Push
- Media
-Stressor

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Frank: Okay. Has the mainstream [00:28:30] media affected you throughout your career as a superintendent? And I think you've kind of indirectly answered that as well.

David: Not negatively. I have not had a negative experience.

Frank: Let's switch gears to the social media. What's your experience been with the social media?

David: I don't like social media. It's too easily for people to anonymously go put something out that is 180 degrees away from the truth, or to put out statements that are partial [00:29:00] truths. And then we have to spend time dispelling that. This younger generation of school board members and teachers are on those social media sites, and that causes extra work for us because we have to dispel the myths that are created by falsehoods and half truths.

-Push – Stressor
- Lack of Respect for the Institution

[00:29:30] And the other thing is it seems like people today want immediate feedback. When you have an emergency, you have to lock down one of your buildings. Well, before you can even, as a superintendent, get out and explain what happens, there's all this firestorm on social media about what's going on. And the [00:30:00] immediacy and how rapidly things get on social media also complicates our job.

-Push – Stressor
- Communication
-Survival

Frank: Okay. That's my next question, which you kind of answered. Has social media affected you throughout your career as a superintendent, and you've just given an example as to-

David: That would be just most recently. In the last, I want to say ... Well, in the last nine years it has been a much larger issue [00:30:30] than any other time in my career.

-Push – Stressor

Frank: This isn't a question on paper, but David have you ... We know that there's some superintendents that engage social media and have their sites and do whatever. Have you ever jumped into that pool or have you stayed out of that for the most part?

David: I've stayed out of that pool. I contemplated that about five or six years ago. And then I just decided, because [00:31:00] I think I said this when we talked last also, I carry a cellphone because I have to. You and I are from the generation where I you needed to make a phone call you pulled a dime out of your pocket. Or you went over to Mrs. Bartlett's house and asked to use her phone. That was what we did. So no, I'm not on any social media sites at all. [00:31:30] To some degree because I just don't want to, but to another degree because I value my privacy. I've had to tell my children that, "No, you won't put anything on Facebook with my

-Generational
-Family

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photo." And the way I characterized it to one of my daughters, who has our oldest grandson, I said, "So just imagine this scenario, all right? You put a photo of me with my grandson [00:32:00] on Facebook. Then the next week I expel a high school student from high school. And he happens to have a younger brother who's in the classroom with my grandson. And he tells his younger brother to go beat up my grandson." And I said, "That could easily happen." And so I value my privacy and the privacy of my family. [00:32:30] So no, I'm not on any social media sites.

Frank: [inaudible 00:32:37 Parent involvement and support, how has changed throughout your career?

David: Again, for the most part it's still positive. But the number of challenging parents that we have is increasing rapidly every year. [00:33:00] Some of it's affected by the drug epidemic in our nation. I think some of it's affected because 50% of the children in this nation right now are born in a household with no male figure. And so you have all these single parents trying to deal with daily issues when there should be two people dealing with it. I think that's complicated [00:33:30] our lives. But the number of challenging parents we have has increased a lot. And it seems to increase more and more every year.

-Push – Stressor
-Parent Role
-Philosophy
-Culture
-Culture

Frank: Talk to me in general about the teaching profession. Throughout your career, as well as with associations, just about the [00:34:00] traits of teachers from the time you started to the traits now.

David: The longtime veterans, the baby boomers in particular, have, for the most part, I don't want to say it's universal, but as a group have a different work ethic [00:34:30] and a different philosophy for why they went into teaching. The younger teachers, again, it's not all of them, but a larger percentage of them are coming to see this profession as an 8:00 to 4:00 job. And it never has been [00:35:00] and it never will be. And I think a lot of that is driven by the association. That's how the association views it. If the contract says you work from 8:00 to 3:45, that's what you should work. Because people fail to realize we have limited resources. [00:35:30] And the job does require, the profession of being an educator does require more time. But we knew that when we went into it. But I do think that's changed a little bit. As I said, there's a larger percentage of the younger teachers who view it as an 8:00 to 4:00 job.

-Vocation v. Job
-Generational Gap
-Culture
-Work Ethic

Frank: Students. [00:36:00] Have you seen students change throughout your career?

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David: Again, when 50% of the children in the nation are being raised by one parent, that causes big difficulties, that causes big changes. And the mental health issues that our children deal with today are way more than what they were [00:36:30] when we grew up and what they were 40 years ago when I started in this profession. They have more adverse childhood experiences. And I see that, if I was going to be in this district, that would be the next thing that I would try to do is to address the mental health issues of our children and put tools in the hands of teachers for how to respond to certain situations. That would take, I would estimate, [00:37:00] five to seven years to have the necessary things in place. And a lot of resources. But combining the question about children and teachers together, if I can-

Frank: Absolutely, I was going to go in that direction.

David: One of the things that I've seen happen in public schools is that, and this is not a disparaging comment about females, [00:37:30] but there are less and less males working in the public school systems today. I went to an event, a retirement event at one of our buildings yesterday. And when I'm in the gymnasium I looked around. There was me and two other males in the room. Everybody else was female. Well, our male students need male role models also. [00:38:00] And somehow that has to change. I don't think that that's a positive thing. There needs to be a good blend. It shouldn't be all male and it shouldn't be all female. There should be a good blend of the genders so that both genders have not only role models of their gender, but role models of the opposite gender. And I think that to some degree [00:38:30] that contributes to some of the challenges we face with our children.

Frank: The follow-up question I was going to ask from my mind was being led [inaudible 00:38:42], you talked about teachers of this generation seems to be an 8:00 to 4:00 position. But yet there's a challenge to deal with the mental health issues of students. Is that a challenge? [00:39:00] Do you foresee that, even though you won't be around for it, do you see that as a challenge of how does an administrator get the buy in of teachers if they view this just as a job and not necessarily as a vocation to address those pressing needs, mental health issues of students?

David: I think it starts at a local level. And please understand, all the solutions at the local level need to be made by [00:39:30] decisions at the local level. But I think the communication of the issue needs to start at a higher level. At the governor's office, at the legislative level, at DPI, that there is this issue out there. The solutions need to be made locally, but there needs to be a [00:40:00] larger voice behind the issue, and there needs to be resources provided. And I've already communicated this to one

-Family Unit
-Culture
-Institutional Responsiveness

-Family Unit
-Male Role Model
-Pressure on Educational Institution
-Institutional Balance

-Political Influence
-Restrictive Framework

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of our local legislators that there needs to be some resources put into this.

One time in my career I remember it was in the middle of the winter in a previous state. Same kind of cold winters we have here in North Dakota. And [00:40:30] parent makes his kid, when it's like 15 below zero, walk to school from about 10 blocks away with no coat. And the principal just holds this child on her lap for literally an hour, just sobbing. Now just think about what that did to that child moving forward. And that's just one example of the things that children face [00:41:00] today.

-Political

So the whole mental health piece needs a large voice behind it, resources to solve the problem, and then solutions at a local level because what's right for this district is maybe not necessarily right for your district.

-Local Role

Frank: Switching gears here, accomplishments. What are three things you're extremely [00:41:30] proud of regarding your career as a superintendent? If you have more that's fine as well.

David: Pardon?

Frank: If you have more than three that's fine.. share [inaudible 00:41:39].

David: I've always maintained my focus on doing what's right for the children everywhere I've gone. I've made decisions full well knowing that there were going to be repercussions for me, but they were the right decisions for my children. [00:42:00] And as I said previously I have always worked hard, even though it becomes more difficult. When we get into larger districts I have always worked hard to maintain at least some relationships with children. I was just teasing one child who is challenged, a disabled child, last week. Having a fun conversation [00:42:30] with her.

-Student-Focused
-Character
-Integrity
-Work Ethic
-Relationships

And I've always followed my own personal self imposed professional ethics. We don't have a ... There's a list of things that we get. But I've had self imposed professional ethics [00:43:00] that I have never violated. And another thing that I've done in my career, because I've made this mistake in my first two jobs, but in my next two superintendencies, the first instructions that I gave to my assistants were that I don't care who I'm in the room with, [00:43:30] I don't care what I'm doing, if my children call, if my wife calls, if they walk in the door, they get in my door. No matter what. Because I was bad at that in my first two jobs. And once about five years ago I almost violated that. And I stopped myself and I said, "No, you made

-Character
-Family
-Integrity

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yourself a promise, and you made them [00:44:00] a silent promise." And so I got a lot better about that, about taking care of my family before I took care of everybody else.

And I don't know if these are accomplishments, if this is what you were looking for-

Frank: No, that's fine.

David: I've always dealt honestly with people. I made that ... And I learned early in my career because I made that mistake [00:44:30] one time. I told somebody I would do something and then as it turned out I couldn't. And I had to take my berating. And I deserved it because I didn't deliver what I said I was going to deliver. And I promised myself from that point on I would never again leave people with false hope, and I haven't. Because [00:45:00] it's important for me for people to believe that I'm an honest person, and that I'm an ethical person. And I guess those are more personal things.

-Character
-Integrity

Frank: No, that's good.

David: From a perspective of doing my job in a way that I thought was best, I think those things are much more accomplishments [00:45:30] than bricks and mortar. But if you want a broad, general statement, I've left every district that I served better off than when I got it, in a lot of different ways.

-Cultural Change Agent

Frank: What are three things you'd do differently throughout your career? And with what outcome would you predict if you did them differently?

David: At [00:46:00] the beginning of my career I would have approached the position with less emotion and been more reflective. But you have to understand that I've been very blessed, I've had some great mentors in my career. People that I could call [00:46:30] and say, "What about this?" So early in my career I would have been calmer and not so ... Like I said, take things personally. As I said, the mistake that I made with the one person, not give people false hope, not make promises [00:47:00] I can't follow through on. And I'm trying to think. Those are probably the big ones.

-Admin Wisdom
- Mentors
-Less Emotion
-Admin. Duties
-Bull in China Shop

Frank: Okay.

David: I'm trying [00:47:30] to reflect on the later part of my career.

Frank: I'll lead the witness a little bit here. This position you said definitely was a push. As you reflect and you bring your own

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ethics and all your experiences from your previous positions and you get here, could there be anything, as you reflect [00:48:00] this position, that you'd do differently? And would it have made a difference?

David: There is, now that you phrase it that way. I have an inexperienced school board at this time. So I thought, particularly with the previous school board president, and she resigned the same month I did, [00:48:30] and she was dealt a difficult hand, and she [inaudible 00:48:33] only had, I believe, well, less than four years of experience on the school board. So I thought maybe it would be a good thing for you to meet with her regularly and do some coaching about being a school board president, and how to guide an inexperienced school board. And that didn't turn [00:49:00] out the way I thought it would because I think that, to some degree, helped fuel the impression that a school board should be involved in the daily operations of a school district. I think there might have been a disconnect between my intent and how it was envisioned by the school board president. So I wouldn't do that again. [00:49:30] Do I think it would make a difference in my current situation? No. I think I'd still be leaving.

-Brd Inexperience
-Admin/Brd Relations
-Brd Training
-Admin/Brd Disconnect

Frank: Okay. Yeah. What three things or decisions that were stressful throughout your career you would do over again if faced with the same situation? And I just have parenthesis, character builders or helped defined who you are?

David: In my first position [00:50:00] when I got rid of five teachers. I remember I called one of my mentors about it, and at the time I was approaching my deadline according to state law. And he asked me, he said, "David," he said, "How long have you known you were going to make this decision?" I said, "Since January." And this was four months later. And he said, "Then why didn't you do it in January?" He [00:50:30] told me, he said, "If you have something unpleasant to do you put it at the top of your list, you do it, you get it over with, and you move on." And I have followed that advice since that day.

-Student Focused
-Character
-Integrity
-Admin Duties
-Admin Mentor
-Admin Advice

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So when I got rid of those five teachers, and then in another position when I got rid of a teacher because I knew that was going to cause me headaches, but I would do it again [00:51:00] because it was the right decision particularly for the students ... But he was from a well connected family. And I was trying to think. Trying to get a person in my current position a promotion. She deserves it. [00:51:30] But it reached a point where I just had to throw up my hands and say, "It's not going to happen." But would I do it again? Yes. She's earned it, she's the right person for the job. She has the skillset for that position. But again, this was meddling by the school board. So those would be the three big ones that come to mind right now.

Frank: Okay, thanks. [00:52:00] You're at the end. So it's time to give some advice. What advice would you give a new superintendent when dealing with the school board?

David: Have a good network of peers and mentors. Always tell them what you think is the best thing to do for the school district and the children, [00:52:30] irrespective of the consequences. And as I said, if you have something unpleasant to do you put it at the top of your list and get it done and be done with it. And recognize that, this is my belief anyway, that superintendents [00:53:00] are basically middle managers. We have a board that oversees us. Then there's us. Then there's everybody else. And the everybody else need our support as much as we can give it so that they can do their job on a daily basis, to do what's right for the children of the district and then try and improve education. We are the expendable [00:53:30] ones. And I think the sooner we recognize that. And I think that frees us to make the decisions that are right for the district and be as supportive of the people that do the work of this school district on a daily basis as we can.

Frank: What advice would you give a new superintendent when dealing with parents?

David: Be honest with them, listen to [00:54:00] them, stop and think about what their life is like as much as you can. Sometimes we don't know. But before I meet with any parents I always call my principal and say, "What can you tell me about this situation?" Understanding their situation helps us to understand sometimes their perspective.

[00:54:30] And also don't be afraid to say you're sorry. I had a situation a year or two ago, mom was upset about something. And I was on my third phone call with her. And finally I hung up on her because she was being rude, full well knowing she would call me back. And she called me back in 20 seconds. And when she picked [00:55:00] up the phone I said, "Hello Mrs. Johnson.

-Student Focused
-Character
-Integrity
-Admin Role
-Admin/Brd Role
-Micromanage

-Student Focused
-Character
-Integrity
-Relationships – staff
-Tempered

-Relationships
-Accountability
-Communication
-Personal Connection

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I'm going to tell you right now if you holler at me one more time, if swear at me again, I'm going to hang up the phone and I will not take a return phone call." That deescalated the situation, and in 20 seconds I was able to say, "Mrs. Johnson, on behalf of Dickinson [inaudible 00:55:26] public schools I'm sorry," because she finally [00:55:30] told me what she was really after. And I don't think there's any harm in us looking at a parent and saying, "You know what? I'm sorry that happened."

Frank: What advice would you give a new superintendent when dealing with staff?

David: Similar to the parents, try and understand their perspective, [00:56:00] their reality, and what they're facing. But I actually just made this comment about a month ago to some staff members that sometimes there does come a point in time when staff members need to make career choices, because this may not be the right fit. It may not be the right district. And I think we need to treat our staff members ethically, I think we need to treat them fairly, I think we [00:56:30] need to see that they're treated fairly and ethically. And if one of the people we supervise is not doing that I think they need to be called to task for that. And I've done that in the past. But at the same time, when dealing with our staff members we have to make sure that it's the right fit for the school district and that they're doing what they need to do for children on a daily basis. That needs to be the primary focus. [00:57:00] But they do need to be dealt with professionally, honestly, and ethically.

- Integrity
-Accountability
-Communication
-Student-Focused

Frank: What advice would you give a new superintendent when dealing with patrons?

David: Again, very similar. Be honest with them, try and understand their reality and where they're [00:57:30] coming from, and don't hesitate to express the philosophies of the school district. And again, if it's necessary to say I'm sorry, then say I'm sorry. And apologize. And if we can help them with the issue, if there is an issue, then help them however we can. But again, the focus has [00:58:00] to be on our children.

- Integrity
-Communication
-Student-Focused

Frank: Okay. Advice to that superintendent when dealing with the mainstream media.

David: Never leave an open ended statement. Did that once. It didn't hurt me but I still had to ... Yeah, I had somebody call me about it. And I had to say, "Did you look at the quote?" And I said, "This portion was in a quotation [00:58:30] marks. I did say that. But the portion that was after that I didn't say that, and it's not in quotation marks." So don't leave an open ended statement. But

- Integrity
-Professional
-Communication
-Admin Wisdom
-Philosophy

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again, be honest with them, and as open as you can. Because there are things we can't tell the media. We have certain situations that we have to be respectful of people's rights to privacy. [00:59:00] And we can't divulge everything. And I would also say dealing with the media is we don't have to accept their question. They can ask a question but we can give a different answer. And I don't think there's anything wrong with looking at the media and telling them, "That's not a question that I can answer right now."

[00:59:30] And so we have to be careful. But at the same time the media can be a powerful, positive tool for the school district. And I think new superintendents need to understand that also, that the media's not always out to hurt the school district. They can be a very positive force for the school district.

- Political

Frank: Okay. What advice would you give a new superintendent when dealing with the social media?

David: [01:00:00] Since I don't do social media I don't really know. But I would say the advice I would give is we don't have to respond to everything that goes out on social media. One of the great things about our nation is that everybody in this nation is entitled to their opinion, no matter how uniformed and ignorant it is. And [01:00:30] we don't have to respond to everything. But there are some things that we do need to respond to, and some things that we do need to quash. And that those need to be balanced, because it's not possible to monitor everything that happens on social media.

- Support the Process
-Balance

Frank: What advice would you have for new board members regarding board superintendent relationships and moving a district forward?

David: [01:01:00] The board superintendent relationship, there needs to be a clearly defined line of demarcation about the role of the school board and the role of the superintendent. Does the school board manage the school district? Yes they do, through their policies. But the superintendent runs the school district on a daily basis. That line of demarcation needs to be very clearly defined. When that line becomes blurred is when problems occur. [01:01:30] And I would give new school board members the advice to listen to the tutelage of those that came before you that were very strong school board members about maintaining that line of demarcation. And I would also tell school board members that when issues get to the school board it is not the job of the school board to substitute [01:02:00] its judgment for that of the administration. If a grievance gets to the school board the job of the school board is to look at the procedure. And if the

- Admin/Brd Roles
-Mentoring
-Roles

procedure has been followed and if policies have been followed, the school board should not be substituting its judgment for that of the administration.

And I would advise school board members to clearly understand their policies [01:02:30] and read them and study them so that they know the role of the school board, not only their policies, but the school board code of conduct that is in place to make sure that they are diligent and with fidelity adhere to the chain of command in the school district. [01:03:00] When those things happen things operate more smoothly.

Frank: Yep. What advice would you have for North Dakota School Board's Association relating to new board and returning board member training that would assist superintendents in moving a district forward?

David: Same thing that I just said. That needs to be, as I said previously, I think the fact that school board members are required to go [01:03:30] by the century code [inaudible 01:03:31] that new school board member training is a great thing. I think the training is lacking. And I think the things that I said about advice to the school board are things that need to be driven home on an annual basis. And I don't know if it's necessary to be done by the school board association in terms of delivering the message, but organizing the delivery of the message and having [01:04:00] veteran school board members from North Dakota talk to other school board members I think would be great. And as I said, it needs to be happening on an annual basis, it needs to be driven home, driven home, and driven home. Because when that line gets blurred, as I said, is when problems begin to occur.

Frank: Okay. What advice would you have to educational leadership programs in better preparing [01:04:30] superintendents for their position?

David: And I know I talked about this in the last time, but I think there needs to be some study about generational differences. And I also think having had time to think about that question a little bit longer that understanding and more in depth [01:05:00] explanation of the situation in our society today with what children face in their lives and how things are so different in terms of 50% of the children being born and living in a single parent household and all of those things and understanding some of the implications for the mental health, how that impacts the mental health of our children. And that's just one example. But I [01:05:30] think those two things in a leadership program would be helpful moving forward.

- Micromanage

- Admin/Brd Roles
- Brd. Member Education

- Brd Training
- Lack of Institutional Leadership
- Mentors

- Generational
- Culture Challenges

The change theory, understanding school finance, those are all good. But I think we need to do a better job of remembering that we deal with people. [01:06:00] And I have this situation going on right now in my school district with ... I have a situation going on in my school district. And I suspect that when it gets to my desk that I'm going to hear that we want all the kids treated the same. And I'm hoping they say that, because I'm going to look at them and say, "I'm going to tell you the same thing that I've told other teachers [01:06:30] that have told me. When a teacher looks at me and tells me, "I treat all my kids the same," I tell that teacher, "Then you're telling me you're not doing your job, because they're not all the same.""

And I think that in leadership there's a lot of great theory and a lot of great courses that were taught. But I think that that human piece, understanding that they're not all the same, and that the challenges our children face today [01:07:00] are way more significant than what they faced even 10 years ago would be good.

Frank: How did you view your role as a superintendent in the community?

David: You're always viewed as a community leader. [01:07:30] And in certain communities you might be viewed as the primary leader, depending on the size of the community. You're viewed as a communicator. The community wants to know that what you tell them they can trust. They want to know that while [01:08:00] you can't tell them everything that you're not necessarily afraid to tell them, "Yes, we can do better in this area." And in honesty that's one of the stressors of the job is you're always the school superintendent, 24 hours a day.

I remember I was out in a previous district, the principal was leaving, and so his siblings came and we went out to dinner. [01:08:30] And we were out in public just relaxing, eating dinner, socializing. And I had a parent walk up to me, kneel down, and talk in my ear. The next day the principal's siblings left and I was talking with the principal. He says, "Yeah," he said, "My brother looked at me and said, "Who is that dumb lady that came up and talked to David? Because he was having a great time until she came in."" and then he shut down.[inaudible 01:08:54].

And so they [01:09:00] view you as a superintendent all the time and think that even when it's your time it's their time. And over the course of my career when it was necessary I have had to look at people and say, "I'll be happy to talk to you about that, but right now this is what I'm doing. And I'll have my assistant call

- Student-Focused

-Changing Culture

- Admin Role
- Culture Change Agent
-Push - Stressor

- Personal
-Admin – Stressor 24/7
-Personal Sacrifice
-Balance

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you and get you on my calendar next week." And so superintendents have to remember that too. [01:09:30] That yeah, you're always a superintendent. But if somebody wants to talk to you it doesn't have to be dealt with when you're on your time. It doesn't mean you can't, but you do have that choice. I don't know if that answers your question.

Frank: It did, but I'm going to sideline it a little bit. It's because my advisor and I had a different with this question, posing it. So I'm going to come back to my original. [01:10:00] Have you ever, when you come to the community, how did you view yourself? And I'm leading you with this, David. Did you ever, at any of your stops, did you ever view as, been accepted as, "I am part of the community," or, "This is really close to being my home." Or did you view yourself more as, "I'm here, I'm here for a period of time to do a role." Talk to me about that connection or that distancing, [01:10:30] that disconnect.

> - Culture Change Agent
> -Sacrifice

David: You're never, I never viewed myself as part of the community to the degree where the long term deeply entrenched families are a part of the community. No, I never had that vision.

One of my previous jobs, 14 years, that's the longest I've ever lived anywhere in my life. And I [01:11:00] told a principal that I hired a long time ago, and this principal was an internal candidate who I had encouraged to get an endorsement. But was born and raised in that community, had deep roots in that community. And there was actually two of them. And I looked at them when the interview was over and I said, "I have one more question." [01:11:30] And I asked them, I said, "How many friends are you willing to lose for this position?" And there was one of them looked at me and said, "What?" I said, "How many friends are you willing to lose for this position?" And that's it. Superintendents, every decision we make we make one person happy and one person angry. And we have to be willing to do what's right for the school district and for the students because that's [01:12:00] our job. So I never did ever really view myself as a, for lack of a better word, pillar of the community or deeply entrenched in the community because I know that when I'm done here I won't be getting phone calls and invitations.

> -Student-Focused
> -Push – Stressor

Frank: [01:12:30] Describe yourself as a leader when you started out as a superintendent. And obviously the next question is describe yourself as a leader as you end your career.

David: Yeah, when I started out I made mistakes. I thought that I could just make decisions and that people would just follow them. [01:13:00] And I had to learn from those. And I did. And I'm much more collaborative now when it's the right thing to do, but

> - Reflection
> -Admin Evolution-
> -Maturity
> -Relationships
> -Collaboration

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there are, as you know, certain instances where there's one person that has to make the decision. So I understand a lot better those situational differences today. [01:13:30] And I understand today a lot better that building ownership and buy in results in a stronger decision when there's time and when it can be done. So I'd say that's the biggest difference. But as I said, when we talked last time, every position I've been in has been great because I've learned [01:14:00] in every position that I've held. And I'd say that was a pretty big evolution over time.

I've reflected back on some decisions I've made in my second superintendency, particularly when I was doing my doctoral study. And when I was doing my doctoral study I went, "Oh, that's why that didn't work." And I think it helps to understand the change theory and how people respond to change. [01:14:30] And so yeah, I'm more collaborative. But at the same time, as I said, there are certain instances where it's one person taking the advice of my advisors, looking at the options and saying, "This is what we're doing."

-Relationships
-Communication

Frank: Final question. If you could have a do over would you choose the same career path again, and why?

David: [01:15:00] I would take the same career path, but I wouldn't do it as soon as I did. I was 28 years old when I became a superintendent. And I loved teaching. I had great relationships with the kids. And of all the grade levels that I taught, seven through 12, I love junior high kids the best because not only did you have [01:15:30] a chance to mold them but they were fun, you could deal with their emotional ups and downs as they were going through entering their teenage years. And so that would be the one thing I would change. I would spend more time in the classroom and more time molding those kids. But yes, I would have eventually become a superintendent.

- Reflection

Frank: [01:16:00] Okay. Any final thoughts? This is our last get together.

David: I did have one here just a second ago, but now I've lost it. The job of being a school superintendent has changed dramatically in the time that I had it, 34 years that I have done it. Excuse me, 33 years. But [01:16:30] I think that it's important for people who might be aspiring to this position to remember that it's not fruitless labor. It has a lot of rewards. As I told you last time, I think, I know that today, because of me becoming an administrator, there is at least one young woman alive with a family. And I think that that's the important thing for superintendents to [01:17:00] remember is in amongst all of the muck and the mire that we get stuck in sometimes, no matter

- Admin Duties
-Change of Duties

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what happens, we're still touching the lives of children every day. And I regularly use the quote from Christa McAuliffe. And right before Challenger blew up, she made the comment, she said, "I touched the future, [01:17:30] I teach." And I think that that's what superintendents need to remember. Yeah,

we're administrators. But at the same time we're still teaching. We're still touching the lives of children. May not be directly, but through our leadership, through our guidance to the people who are also supposed to be leaders, [01:18:00] and through our guidance to teachers we still touched the lives of children. And it's important for that not to be lost in the daily work.

Frank: David, thank you. I've learned a lot about you.

- Rewarding
- Life Toucher
- Student-Focused
- Keep Perspective of Job

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