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## STRATEGIC EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE POLICY- MAKING ARENA: THE PROMULGATION, PASSAGE, AND PRACTICE OF TENNESSEE'S HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL DISTRICTS FLEXIBILITY ACT OF 2013

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STRATEGIC EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE POLICY-MAKING ARENA:  
THE PROMULGATION, PASSAGE, AND PRACTICE OF TENNESSEE'S  
HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL DISTRICTS FLEXIBILITY ACT OF 2013

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Education  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Robert Lawrence Hullett, Jr.  
Brentwood, Tennessee  
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Lexington, Kentucky  
2021

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### STRATEGIC EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE POLICY-MAKING ARENA: THE PROMULGATION, PASSAGE, AND PRACTICE OF TENNESSEE'S HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL DISTRICTS FLEXIBILITY ACT OF 2013

In 2010, Tennessee's 106th General Assembly passed the First to the Top Act (2010), a companion legislation for the federal Race to the Top Act (2009) program launched by the Obama Administration. A provision of this state law required that half of teacher and principal evaluations be based upon student achievement, which included a component of required continuous academic growth. For school districts whose students scored at the highest academic performance levels, the continuous growth component would negatively impact their teachers' and principals' annual evaluations. In 2012, the Williamson County Schools (WCS) superintendent requested mitigation for relief from the Tennessee Commissioner of Education regarding the inadvertent negative impact of this evaluation provision. Without relief, this provision of the law could jeopardize the continued employment of teachers and principals who could not meet the growth score threshold. This imminent threat to WCS and other similarly situated high performing school districts became the catalyst for development and passage of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). This law allowed high performing school districts to seek relief from any state government mandate that the district believed "inhibits or hinders the district's ability to meet its goals or comply with its mission statement" (Tennessee High Performing School Districts Flexibility, 2013).

This qualitative exploratory case study sought to better understand the political role of one school district superintendent in promulgating Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) as well as the influence relationship between local and state leaders and key stakeholders who facilitated the process. This study is unique in time and place where an analysis of publicly available demographic data suggests that the WCS district is the primary beneficiary of the Act as well as the only district to utilize its waiver provision since its inception. Participants interviewed included the WCS superintendent, select members of his administration, board of education members, state legislators, and other integral individuals. Five major themes emerged including roles, politics, influence, ethics, and organizational frameworks.

Tennessee's Commissioner of Education's refusal to grant relief jeopardized the employees of Williamson County Schools and other similarly situated high performing school districts. However, with the realization that a remedy was necessary to protect the school district, the WCS superintendent and other leaders and key stakeholders utilized influence relationships to create an ethical, political solution. It was evident that conflict resolution through compromise could not have produced a lasting solution to this problem and required legislative intervention: the promulgation, passage, and practice of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

Keywords: Superintendent, Leadership, Policy, Politics, Ethics

Robert Lawrence Hullett, Jr.

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May 4, 2021

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(Date)

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## DEDICATION

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1: 5–11

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have walked along many paths in my life, opening and closing not only chapters, but books of experience that have defined who I am today. Education has always been a cornerstone, anchoring the foundation I have built my life upon. My maternal grandmother was the salutatorian of her graduating class in high school, but never attended college. My maternal grandfather attended college but left before graduating to enter the workforce. When I was in the junior year of my bachelor's degree, I called my grandparents one night to discuss the possibility of me taking a semester or year off from school to work. They did their best to dissuade me, however when we ended the call, I was still certain it was the right thing for me to do. The next morning at 7am, there was a knock at my apartment door. As I opened the door to find both of them standing there, momentarily I couldn't believe they had driven 350 miles through the night to see me, and then I remembered they were my grandparents who had come with unconditional love and some very stern words for their grandson about the importance of education. We sat and talked for a few hours, had lunch together, and as he walked with me to my car, my grandfather put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Son, this is one of the most important decisions you will ever make in your life." The following December, I graduated with my bachelor's degree.

Through high school, college, drum and bugle corps, a variety of unique and impactful careers, the EDL program at the University of Kentucky, and many other experiences, mentors have influenced my life. To all of my learned professors, I thank you for your devotion to our field of study and your dedication to those of us under your tutelage. To my cohort, what a trek this has been and I share in your excitement as you share in mine. To my committee, you motivated me and I am grateful to you for that inspiration. Dr. Kristina Hains shared alternative perspectives which allowed me to delve deeper into my interests. Dr. Justin Bathon's challenge



to my construct inevitably changed the direction of my study. The methodological expertise of Dr. Beth Rous, coupled to the knowledge gained from her courses, guided my conceptual framework and enhanced my research. And to my Chair, Dr. Lars Björk, words of gratitude cannot begin to express my thanks. His wisdom, experience, and mentorship were instrumental in my doctoral journey. Dr. Björk's belief and interest in this study encouraged me more with every conversation, discovery, and iteration towards this final work. Thank you Lars.

As I write this acknowledgement, at times it is still hard to grasp that we did it. I say we, because without my family, you would not be reading these words. To my incredible wife, Kristin, your time, patience, and most importantly love has sustained and focused my efforts. Your sacrifices provided me the opportunity to pursue this ambition. And to my boys, Aslan and Carter, I hope you will always value the struggles and rewards of hard work, commitment, and perseverance. As I complete this work, I am 50 years old and I want you to remember that you can achieve anything you set your heart and mind to, at anytime and anyplace in your life. Time is our most valuable asset and no matter what deadline approaches or how busy life gets, there will always be time to throw baseball in the yard and take a few swings in the cage.

To all those within these words both directly and indirectly acknowledged, this dissertation belongs to you.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Our nation's education system has been defined and redefined over time, reflecting the dynamic relationship between schools and society. As the needs of society have changed, education reform policies have been developed by local, state, and national authorities to meet the challenges facing schools. Over the past several decades, education reform policies have emerged that have supported, constrained, and, in some instances, contradicted previous reform initiatives focused on improving public schools. Labaree (2010) observes that school reform is an arduous path wrought with modest success and failure, where resistance to implementing change is the norm rather than the exception. Many scholars and policymakers have criticized the juggernaut of educational reform launched and sustained by the federal government that appears to eclipse state prerogatives and local interests. These national reform initiatives have become political beacons. However, some policy analysts suggest that they have a downside. For example, Lonsbury & Apple (2012) note that, "although we cherish the rhetoric, we as a society are willing to shrug away a bit of democratic equality as long as our schools are functioning effectively as credentialing institutions" (p. 761).

The 2012–2013 school year brought a level of concern not seen before to the superintendents of school districts in Tennessee that had consistently achieved at the highest levels of academic performance, as recorded by the state department of education. The federal education reform initiative, Race to the Top Act (2009), found success in the state of Tennessee for phase one of the competitive application process (Finch, 2017). Building upon the momentum of phase one, both houses of the state legislature, Tennessee's 106<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, passed companion legislation for the Race to the Top Act (2009) in 2010.

Tennessee's First to the Top Act (2010) and its provisions had considerable influence on the state's efforts at education reform. In the years that followed, measures to reverse, repair, or remove the effects of both the Race to the Top Act (2009) and its companion legislation, First to the Top Act (2010), would be pursued by state and local officials.

### **Context of the Study**

The First to the Top Act (2010) was passed with an overwhelming majority and was signed into law by Governor Phil Bredesen. This companion legislation included six provisions:

(1) Established an Achievement School District allowing the commissioner of the state Department of Education to intervene in consistently failing schools; (2) required annual evaluations of teachers and principals; (3) created a 15-member advisory committee charged with the task of recommending guidelines for these evaluations; (4) removed restrictions against using teacher effect data until data from 3 complete years are obtained; (5) required personnel decisions (promotion, retention, tenure, compensation) be based, in part, on evaluations; and (6) mandated that 50% of teacher and principal evaluations be based on student achievement data. (Finch, 2017, p. 489)

As noted, the sixth criteria of the First to the Top Act (2010) required teacher and principal evaluations to be largely based upon student achievement data. This achievement data includes the growth score component, with no relief for high-performing students where little growth was achievable.

The laws of the state of Tennessee appear in the Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA), which is updated annually. Title 49 holds all laws, powers, and duties pertaining to education. One such power allows the commissioner to waive any statute or rule enforced by the state board of education by application from a Local Education Agency (LEA) which believes the statute or



rule interferes with the goals or mission of the LEA. However, under the standard powers and duties afforded, the commissioner is not required nor compelled to grant the waiver request for the LEA. Therefore, the power is highly discretionary with ample opportunity for political influence leveraged subjectively with no recourse (Powers and duties, 2018). With teachers serving in high performing districts in danger of losing their jobs under a continuous improvement mandate, the superintendent and Board of Education in Williamson County, Tennessee, began theorizing and advocating for corrective legislation that would become the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). This exploratory case study will examine the promulgation, passage, and practice of this legislation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The genesis of national influence on education began in 1965 with the landmark Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which focused on combating poverty in the United States (Tirozzi & Uro, 1997). Two decades later, the release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) launched what is regarded as the most significant and enduring efforts to reform education in recent American history (Björk, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). It heightened public concern for the condition of public schools and questioned their capacity to prepare students to meet the demands of a competitive, global economy and preserve the economic well-being of the nation. Since then, political efforts to improve public education have intensified. For example, an impactful recent federal education reform initiative, Race to the Top (RttT) was initiated under President Obama in 2009. Race to the Top became a symbiont of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) for funding, however the mechanisms for disbursement were not without requirements (Howell & Magazinnik, 2017). As is common across many federally

funded education reform initiatives, the provisions of ARRA included requirements for states and local education authorities to provide matching funds. In addition, the federal government required state and local education agencies to comply with federal rules, regulations, and policies. In many instances, state and local policymakers perceived them not only as being contradictory to their constituents' wishes but also regarded them as executive overreach (Pelsue, 2017). Although the influence of the federal government on education reform was significant, state legislatures promulgated a wide array of education policies that were perceived to be more closely aligned with constituents' needs and interests.

The Race to the Top Act (2009), RttT, was efficacious in Tennessee (Finch, 2017). In 2010, the state found itself as one of two successful states in phase one of the competitive application process (Finch, 2017) and laid an important foundation for subsequent state-level education reform initiatives. Understanding the political landscape of Tennessee is important to framing these educational reform initiatives between 2010 and 2019. During 2009, both houses of the state legislature, Tennessee's 106<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, were controlled by Republicans. However, Democrats held 47% of the seats. The near balance in state legislature, combined with a Democratic President, Barack Obama, and a Democratic Governor, Phil Bredesen, who had a near 70% approval rating, created an uncommonly positive environment for the state to apply for and launch this RttT policy initiative. In 2009, Tennessee announced its entry into the Race to the Top education reform competition which was funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009). During the spring of 2010, Tennessee fulfilled its application commitment by passing its RttT companion legislation, the First to the Top Act (FttT). The act was passed by the state legislature with only eleven dissenting votes, and subsequently was

signed into law by Governor Bredesen. It had considerable influence on Tennessee's efforts at education reform.

Although the Tennessee state legislature has been more proactive in launching education reform initiatives than during previous decades, they continue to reflect a conservative political orientation. Scholars note that, "A history of Tennessee education is a story of inadequacy. State and local appropriations have been inadequate, often reflecting a lag in the state's economic development" (Achilles, Payne, & Lansford, 1986, p. 30). Shortly following passage of the First to the Top Act (2010), a need for continued education reform was recognized. In 2010, Republican Governor, William "Bill" Haslam, was sworn into office, accompanied by a majority of Republican lawmakers in both the state Houses of Representatives and Senate. Several observers suggest that as a consequence, efforts to launch and sustain education reform began in earnest.

In 2012, a number of superintendents expressed concern that the high performing school districts in which they served were being inadvertently punished by criteria within the First to the Top Act (2010). For example, the sixth criteria of the First to the Top Act of 2010 "mandated that 50% of teacher and principal evaluations be based on student achievement data" (Finch, 2017, p. 489). This achievement data included the growth score component, with no mitigation for high performing students where little academic growth was possible. With teachers in danger of losing their jobs, the superintendent and Board of Education in Williamson County, Tennessee, took the lead in advocating for corrective legislation, which resulted in the promulgation and passage of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) outlines five criteria, of which a majority must be met, in order to receive designation and recognition by the state as a high performing school district. These five criteria include:

(1) achieving a graduation rate of 90% or higher; (2) exhibiting an average American College Testing (ACT) score of 21 or higher; (3) demonstrating a Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) three year average composite normal curve equivalent score of 55 or higher; (4) establishing a Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) three year average composite normal curve equivalent gain of 1.75 or higher; and (5) meeting or exceeding the achievement and gap closure annual measurable objectives and receiving an exemplary or similar status from the State Department of Education.

Under the provisions of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act, school districts that meet a majority of these criteria, may submit waivers for relief to the Tennessee Department of Education and seek approval by the Commissioner of Education. Waivers are sought when a high performing school district believes a state mandate, initiative, or law prohibits the district from achieving its educational mission and vision. An analysis of Tennessee school districts that may be affected by Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act indicates that Williamson County Schools would be the primary beneficiary. Data also suggest that the superintendent, board of education, and the Williamson county state legislative delegation played important roles in the passage of this legislation.

## **Summary of Literature**

### **Superintendent Roles and Dispositions**

In Tennessee, the state board of education is responsible for providing oversight to ensure that all school districts comply with education policies, rules and regulations, while local boards of education and the superintendent, also called the director of schools, ensure that they are well-run and serve the needs of students in their respective districts. Although superintendents are responsible for carrying out federal, state, and local school board policies and managing the affairs of the district, Kowalski (2013) describes five role characterizations of superintendents that present a more comprehensive understanding of their responsibilities. For example, as a teacher-scholar, superintendents were responsible for curriculum, learning, and teaching. As the size and complexity of school districts grew, the responsibility of serving as a business manager emerged and included handling budgetary concerns, personnel and facilities management, and general business operations of the system. As a democratic leader, the superintendent had responsibility for engaging a wide array of stakeholders in the organization and community, as well as securing scarce resources from government entities to ensure the delivery of education services. During the mid-1960s, dissatisfaction with schools, particularly with regard to serving minority students, influenced the emergence of their role as applied social scientists. This role required superintendents to collect and use data on the demographic characteristics of the population as well as on district, school, and student academic performance in making administrative decisions. Although the superintendent's role as communicator is woven throughout other roles, it underscores the importance of engaging a wide array of stakeholders in the organization and community. These five roles evolved over time, providing a useful

framework for understanding the nature of superintendents' work (Björk, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014).

Kowalski (2013) describes several normative leadership dispositions for superintendents that encompass democratic, moral and ethical, transformational, and servant leadership qualities. In this regard, superintendents' leadership directives are governed by the will of people, objective moral values, the capacity for and commitment to change, and the conviction of placing others' needs above pursuits of self. Hoyle, Björk, Collier, and Glass note, "A strong stand based on ethical principles demonstrates to students, staff, community, and the board that the superintendent is a person of character and purpose" (2005, p. 193). Taken together, these role characterizations and dispositions help frame the work of school district superintendents.

## **Leadership**

Rost (1991) examined the notion of leadership and offered a scholarly definition and practical assumptions that include clarity of communication, specificity of criteria, and usability both by practitioners and scholars. According to Rost (1991), "Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 102). He offers his definition as an alternative to a commonly accepted, "leadership is management" perspective. This definition of leadership includes four caveats including: "The relationship is based on influence. Leaders and followers are the people in this relationship. Leaders and followers intend real changes. Leaders and followers develop mutual purposes" (p. 104). The first hallmark of leadership rests with the nature of influence. It is relational, multidirectional, and noncoercive. He recognized that the exercise of power is central to leadership. For example, authoritative, dictatorial, and coercive approaches prohibit successful influence relationships from flourishing. In addition, he recognizes that leaders and followers

mutually define and redefine these respective roles as an iterative process, as opposed to being the product of hierarchical organizations saying, “Followers are active, not passive, in the relationship” (Rost, 1991, p. 112). Furthermore, he suggests that the focus of leadership is real change, and that it is purposeful and future-oriented. This dimension of leadership works symbiotically to bond the relationship through time and effort and strengthens the notion of developing mutual purposes. Mutual purposes, rather than simple goals, emerge through influence relationships exercised in a noncoercive fashion (Rost, 1991).

Bolman and Deal (2017) discuss leadership in organizations using a four-frame model. “A frame is a mental model – a set of ideas and assumptions – that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate a particular ‘territory’. A good frame makes it easier to know what you are up against and, ultimately, what you can do about it” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 12). The four organizational frameworks include structural, human resources, symbolic, and political. They are useful in understanding the nature of organizations and implications for leadership. Although each frame may be used individually, the process of reframing suggests that they may be used in concert with one another to address the complexity of organizations and to enhance the effectiveness of leaders.

The structural frame adheres to the goals of scientific management which are established and applied to organizations with the singular purpose of efficacy. “The human resource frame centers on what organizations and people do to and for one another” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 113). The culture of an organization and symbols that communicate meaning are reflected in the symbolic frame. The political frame however is rooted in the notion of power and, “the neatest thing about power is that we all understand it” (Shafritz, Ott, & Yang, 2011, p. 271). Power and influence reach beyond the stratified rational expectations of organizational systems.

Organizations viewed through the political lens are seen as both a system of individuals, but also coalitions, “each having its own interests, beliefs, values, preferences, perspectives, and perceptions” (Shafritz, Ott, & Yang, 2011, p. 271). Consequently, the exercise of power is the principal instrument of advantage used to acquire scarce resources (Shafritz, Ott, & Yang, 2011).

### **Politics in the Policy-making Arena**

Education reform initiatives are not immune from political influence. Bolman and Deal (2017) view this arena through the lens of power, conflict, and coalitions. Power bears influence, creating a means for competing interests and individuals to achieve their ends. Conflict is inevitable in politics and “can be productive or debilitating,” challenging leaders to “be a persuasive advocate for their group on a political field with many players representing competing interests” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 197). The coalitions coalesce into brokers of power, ultimately affecting the decision of “who gets what, when and how” (Lasswell, 1936/1951, p. 13). There are several concepts that might help explain the politics of education in the era of education reform, including macro and micro politics, power, incrementalism, and punctuated equilibrium theory (PET).

Bolman and Deal (2017) describe the effects of a jaded view of politics as one that jeopardizes both individual and organizational effectiveness. They also note that politics may influence positive outcomes in organizations. In both instances, politics influences decision-making processes and often determines the effectiveness of change efforts. Blase and Björk (2010) characterize the macro mechanism of politics within the scope of education as the larger, external environment coupled to various aspects, relationships, and interactions with local, state, and federal levels of government. Additional externalities, such as interest groups, frequently contribute to these often-acrimonious debates.



Societal value patterns are commonly influenced by the bases of power that govern the distribution of resources. Lasswell (1936/1951) recognized these political paradigms as a direct approach of “who gets what, when and how” (p. 13). He believed that the *elite*, those who acquire the most of what is available, influence or dictate to the rest of the populace, or the *mass*, what will be contributed, received, and shared. Conversely, the notion of micropolitics refers to the negotiations among groups and individuals regarding power and influence that determines who benefits. The national discussion in education reform takes place within the state and local arenas for political control over initiative scope and implementation. This is accomplished where, “micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations” (Blase & Björk, 2010, p. 240). Björk and Blase (2009) note that as political interaction intensifies, new micropolitical mechanisms develop and acquire the focus of stakeholders.

Consequently, at the local level, superintendents must have political acuity in serving as transformative leaders to accomplish education reform. In many instances, their political decision-making processes respond to prevailing conditions and appear to be short term and incremental in nature. In these circumstances, resource allocation was situational rather than being rational and long-term. Lindblom (1959), described these actions in *The Science of “Muddling through”*. The concept of *muddling through* limits innovation and long-range effectiveness in policy-making due to a narrow focus of what is required for implementing substantive change and improvement.

During recent years, protracted discussions on education reform have included the notion of Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET). For example, Baumgartner, Jones, and Mortensen (2018) provide a unique perspective into the policymaking process noting that, “The result over

time has been institutionally reinforced stability interrupted by bursts of change. These bursts have kept the U.S. government from becoming a gridlocked Leviathan despite its growth in size and complexity since World War II” (p. 62). However, we seem to be moving into a time where the frequency of bursts of reform explained by PET may be increasing. This may be ironic and contradicts the definition of PET in that there is little or no stability over time. Scholars observe that in many instances, politics has become a rush to judgment on issues followed by a perceived need for policy change. Jones and Baumgartner (2012) provide some insight into PET saying, “Change is generated by elections, which shifts the preferences of policymakers by replacing them with other policymakers, who in turn shift policy. This among many is taken as the essence of democratic accountability” (p. 5). In sum, politics is essential to the functioning of a democratic society and continuous change. However, it is a complex and challenging arena for those engaged in education reform.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Over time, public schools in the United States have become the proving grounds for social and economic policies motivated by political agendas, power struggles, and ethical and moral mandates at the local, state, and federal levels of government. This political leverage, as Lasswell (1979) refers to it, is a gambit of influence by those with the ability to affect change or constancy. Additionally, Lasswell states that these politicians believe that their efforts serve the common good and will of the public. Within this political framework, as Bolman and Deal (2017) explain, a dichotomy of positive and negative consequences emerges within the concept of organizational effectiveness and its impact upon individuals. Where political influence exercises power, conflict creates coalitions in both macro and micro political landscapes. Lasswell’s (1936/1951) notion of “who gets what, when, and how” captures the purpose of

political power and the influence desired and feared by the populace. Bolman and Deal (2017) support Lasswell, stating, “The political frame stresses that the combination of scarce resources and divergent interests produces conflict as surely as night follows day” (p. 196). Ultimately, the political influence relationships strengthened and damaged through conflict management drive the efforts of policy-making where the ethics and belief systems of those with power set the agenda, not just for change, but for purposeful reform. Pfeffer (1981) states that purpose compels behavior. When purpose is molded by a belief system of ethics and morals, movements coalesce. These movements accelerate in consonance as well as dissonance, where respect earned through leadership affords a willingness to consider divergent perceptions and principles.

Nevertheless, where conflict endures in the irreconcilable differences of coalition-built beliefs, power and influence gain control over change within the political domain. Northouse and Lee (2019) suggest that change is a scale on which the goals of society can be measured. Through change, the role of ethical and moral leadership is bifurcated according to Burns (1978), where societal and personal concerns and responsibilities may not always exist in harmony. Ethical and moral leadership, however entwined with politics, power, and influence, can lead to change considered fruitful, while cultivating stronger stakeholder relationships. As stated powerfully by Burns (1978), “the ultimate test of moral leadership is its capacity to transcend the claims of multiplicity of everyday wants and needs and expectations, to respond to higher levels of moral development, and to relate leadership behavior-its roles, choices, styles, commitments- to a set of reasoned, relatively explicit, conscious values” (p. 46). Though politics and power may exert dominance of Lasswell’s (1936/1951) notion of “who gets what, when, and how”, ethical and moral leadership motivates the “why” of influence relationships from transactional to transformational.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this exploratory case study is to examine the leadership strategies supporting the creation and implementation of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). During the past several decades, many school district superintendents in Tennessee have contributed to the development of state-level educational reform policies. Understanding the role of Williamson County Schools' superintendent, board of education, and other stakeholders in the development of the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) in concert with the Tennessee state legislature's Williamson County delegation, offers a unique opportunity to understand the politics involved in enacting one part of Tennessee's education reform. In addition, this exploratory case study may contribute to understanding the perceptions of the Williamson County Schools superintendent acting to protect professional educators from perceived threats inherent in newly-passed legislation and its regulatory mandates from the Tennessee Department of Education. In summary, this exploratory case study will examine the politics of education reform from the standpoint of who benefits (Lasswell, 1936/1951) and the political role of the Williamson County Schools superintendent as he generated support for passage of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

## **Significance of the Study**

This exploratory case study may contribute to the knowledge base by enhancing our understanding of the political role of superintendents in education reform contexts (Björk & Blase, 2009). The unique focus of the study on a specific piece of education reform legislation, Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), may extend understanding of how one superintendent's involvement in promulgating state-level education policies that

supports and protects his school district. Although scholars recognize that education reform contexts may intensify interest group politics, understanding the purpose of one superintendent and interest group members' formative role in state level policy development that directly supported and protected their district may be both unique and informative. Bolman and Gallos (2011) provide a measure of insight into how leaders may act politically through enacting four strategic competencies including: (a) agenda setting; (b) mapping the political terrain; (c) building coalitions and networking; and (d) bargaining and negotiating. Using this framework in analyzing a superintendent's role in formative policy contexts at both local and state levels may contribute to the literature on how they may enact their political role. Additionally, the notion of moral leadership, (Burns, 1978; Lax & Sebenius, 1986) provides a framework for understanding how influence patterns affect decision making processes. Findings from this exploratory case study may provide insight into the moral dimension of leadership (Burns, 1978). For example, Lax and Sebenius (1986) discuss four cornerstones of moral judgment including: (a) Mutuality, that encompasses stakeholders' situational awareness and understanding; (b) Generality, which questions similar situations and the standards applied to them. (c) Openness, which examines the transparency and contention of the situation and (d) Caring, which looks deeper into the concerns and desires of others. These aspects of moral judgment may provide insight into the moral dimension of a superintendent's political behavior.

### **Research Questions**

In qualitative research, the final research questions may not develop until a considerable amount of data are collected and analyzed (Maxwell, 2013). Informed by a descriptive analysis of publicly available demographic data, Williamson County Schools (WCS) was identified as the only school district that benefitted from passage of Tennessee's High Performing School

Districts Flexibility Act (2013). This exploratory case study is directed towards developing a better understanding of the political dynamics and ethical perspectives of the superintendent and other stakeholders involved in its development and passage. The following research questions will guide this study including:

1. Why was Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) developed, promoted, and enacted?
2. How were influence relationships of leadership developed by the Williamson County Schools (WCS) district superintendent with other stakeholders?
3. What political and ethical behaviors created barriers and opportunities for the development and passage of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013)?

### **Research Methodology**

Babbie (2007) identifies exploration, description, and explanation as the three primary purposes of social research. "Exploration is the attempt to develop an initial, rough understanding of some phenomenon" (Babbie, 2007, p. 115). This exploratory case study is grounded on a descriptive analysis of publicly accessible demographic data that identified Williamson County Schools (WCS) as the primary beneficiary and catalyst for the development and passage of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). Collection and analysis of data utilizing interviews, documents, and archival records is focused on understanding the motivation, influence, political and ethical dimensions of the WCS superintendent and stakeholders in developing the legislation. The utilization of a case study approach to this research also follows Babbie's (2007) purpose of applying a descriptive mechanism to yield explanatory insights.

The researcher will use qualitative data collection and analysis techniques to better understand the phenomenon, including exploration of leadership strategies supporting the creation and implementation of Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). Towards this goal, Patton (2002) suggests that “why questions presume cause-effect relationships, an ordered world, and rationality” (p. 363). Fieldwork began with the creation and utilization of a data generation concept chart to facilitate identifying promising lines of inquiry, including focused interviews with an open-ended structure and document and archival records analysis. A preliminary review of publicly available archival records concluded that the WCS district was unique in Tennessee as being the only state department of education designated “high performing” eligible district to utilize the benefit from passage of Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act. These data helped to focus the study on one school district and also helped to identify key stakeholders, including superintendents, board of education members, and other community members. focused interviews with an open-ended structure attempted to understand the phenomena from the perspective of those who experienced events. Interviews also collected their reflections on historical contexts, current opinions, and other pertinent information, through the lens of participants.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This exploratory case study examined the leadership strategies supporting the creation and implementation of Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). Several constraints on the study may have constituted limitations, including: (a) Stakeholders’ availability to interview could impact the process; (b) Participants may not be entirely candid in interviews due to the sensitive and political nature of the topic; (c) Participants’ recollection of events could be influenced by the passage of time; (d) The relevance of Tennessee’s High

Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) and/or its utilization may have changed over time; (e) Qualification or disqualification of the school district in the state's recognition as high performing may be amended; (f) Prior to the study's commencement, the participants' awareness of the legislation, both at the time of its inception and current application, is not known; (g) The COVID-19 pandemic may directly or indirectly influenced participation or adversely impact the interview process. Taken together, these limitations may have constrained data collection. However, this exploratory case study of a Tennessee educational reform policy initiative is unique in time and place and may provide insight into the political nature of superintendents' roles in influencing other state-level education reform policy initiatives.

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 provided an overview directed towards understanding the leadership strategies supporting the creation and implementation of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). The study is situated in the broad context of educational reform in the post-1983 era at the national, state, and local levels. Circumstances surrounding the development and passage of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) suggests a unique opportunity to better understand the role of school district superintendents in educational policymaking. Chapter 2 provides an overview of national and state education reform initiatives, a detailed discussion of the unique context of the study, and an analysis of publicly available data that identified the WCS district as the focal district for the study. In addition, a review of relevant literature on the role of the school district superintendent, a discussion of leadership, the nature of politics within the policy-making arena and ethics is included. Chapter 3 presents the research design and exploratory case study approach as well as research methods used to gather data. The plan regarding human rights protection, data analysis, quality assurance, and the role of the



researcher are also addressed. Chapter 4 presents findings of the study in the form of a descriptive narrative and accompanying research themes. Chapter 5 analyzes the data and answers the research questions posed. In addition, findings will be discussed with respect to extant literature and identify how it may contribute to the field's knowledge base on superintendents' political and ethical leadership role in a state's policy arena.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Societal needs and demands ebb and flow with time, trends, and perspectives of the populace. The relationship between society and our schools is inherently bound and remains responsive, both proactively and reactively, to the cries of the constituency for these necessities and ultimatums. The constant goal of improvement drives this relationship, defining and redefining the American education system at local, state, and national levels of engagement. Biaggini (1939) eloquently states, “Too long have we entertained the hope that things will right themselves, or that they can be righted by the efforts of those devoted teachers and enlightened writers who are taking an appropriate stand in an environment increasingly hostile to our best values” (p. 173). From generation to generation, federal and state influence upon the American public school system has increased through new reform initiatives or by “borrowing strength,” where the federal government builds upon existing local and state policies to achieve its own reform agenda (Galey, 2015). Initiatives built upon the foundations or ashes of previous reform efforts often support, constrain, or contradict the former ideas of education improvement. These efforts both succeed and fail while being riddled with resistance to change (Labaree, 2010). Following the 1965 passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which is also referred to as “Title I”, the subsequent five decades of education reform have gradually shifted from a focus on funding specific subgroups of the student population, “to policies focused on using measurable educational outputs, particularly student performance on standardized tests, to evaluate schools and teachers (Galey, 2015, p. S14). The political firebranding of federal education reform initiatives often sparks visceral reactions. However,

Lonsbury & Apple (2012) state that society is willing to surrender bits of democratic equality for the effective operation of our schools.

Race to the Top (2009), a federal education reform program initiated by President Barack Obama's administration, became a political rally cry for school systems and their communities across America. Both positive and negative reactions built coalitions surrounding the efforts of Race to the Top. In Tennessee, phase one of the Race to the Top application process found support and success (Finch, 2017). Building upon the momentum of phase one, both houses of the state legislature, Tennessee's 106<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, passed Tennessee's First to the Top Act (2010) as companion legislation for the Race to the Top Act. The provisions of the First to the Top Act, however, created an adverse effect upon a specific set of similarly situated school districts in Tennessee. For school districts in Tennessee with the highest levels of academic performance, an unforeseen negative impact of the First to the Top Act emerged. With this perceived threat to their educational community, the 2012–2013 school year became a call to action for superintendents of these high performing school districts as endeavors to reverse, repair, or remove the damages caused by the Race to the Top Act and its companion legislation, First to the Top Act, moved to the political forefront.

This exploratory case study examines a unique phenomenon where a politically charged federal and state education reform agenda focused on improvement yet produced a detrimental result for the highest academic performing school districts in Tennessee with no recourse. A chronological approach to education reform efforts, including federal, state, and local objectives introduces this research study on development and enactment of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). The roles of the superintendent, including the interactions and associations within the political arena, are important to understanding the

leadership, and ethical and moral perspectives in accomplishing education reform. The following literature review will help situate this study in time and place and provide a framework for understanding superintendents' leadership role.

### **National Education Reform Efforts**

Over time, national commissions and task forces have shaped the nature, direction, and scope of education reform in America. The year 1965 brought the passage of one such reform as landmark legislation, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was enacted to combat the effects of poverty on education in the United States (Tirozzi & Uro, 1997). Less than twenty years later, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) was published, initiating one of the most influential and resolute education reform efforts in American history (Björk, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). The future of the nation, through the lens of student preparedness, was in question. The concerns of the national populace were raised in regards not only to the conditions of public schools, but also the ability of our school systems to prepare students to face the rigors of an ever-growing global competitive economy, while securing America's own economic constancy. With ESEA as a catalyst, public education reform efforts have become political capital at all levels of government. In 2009, President Barack Obama launched Race to the Top as a federal education reform incentive. Simultaneously, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was introduced, loosely coupled to Race to the Top as the funding component. Allocating the funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, however, was wrought with requirements (Howell & Magazinnik, 2017). Common to federally funded education reform programs, requirements to receive funding are outlined to pursue and achieve goals set by the President's administration. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act required that states

and local education authorities comply with rules, regulations, and policies set forth by the federal administration, as well as provide matching funds for the program. State and local policymakers considered this executive overreach and incongruous to their constituents' wishes (Pelsue, 2017). Federal government influence is often significant, especially when funding hangs in the balance. However, these federal agendas can incite an insurgence of education reform policies at state and local levels at the behest of their citizenry's demands.

### **Education Reform in Tennessee**

Recent years have brought a more proactive posture to education reform by the Tennessee state legislature; however, these efforts remain conservative in nature from a political perspective. As Achilles, Payne, and Lansford (1986) state, "A history of Tennessee education is a story of inadequacy. State and local appropriations have been inadequate, often reflecting a lag in the state's economic development" (p. 30). To this point, a newly elected President Barack Obama launched an aggressive education reform movement. The Race to the Top Act (2009) was a nationally competitive program for states and Tennessee entered the race to win. Phase one of the application process was successful for Tennessee, where in 2010, only two states achieved this recognition (Finch, 2017). This accomplishment laid the groundwork for the state's ensuing education reform proposals. The political landscape in Tennessee in the early 2010s is essential to understanding motivations and provocations of the legislative agendas at the state level. In 2009, Republicans held both houses of the 106<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. Democrats, however, controlled 47% of the legislative seats. This legislative near-equilibrium, coupled to a Democratic President, Barack Obama and a Democratic Governor, Phil Bredesen, who carried a nearly 70% approval rating, fostered a camaraderie-like support for Tennessee to enter the Race to the Top initiative, paired with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009).

As a requirement of Race to the Top (2009), in the spring of 2010, the Tennessee state legislature enacted companion legislation, the First to the Top Act (2010). Again, with overwhelming bipartisan support, only eleven legislators voted against the proposal, allowing Governor Phil Bredesen to sign the bill into law. This companion legislation included six provisions that would influence education reform legislation in the years that followed, intended to reverse, repair, or remove the effects of the Race to the Top implementation. These provisions included the following:

- (1) Established an Achievement School District allowing the commissioner of the state Department of Education to intervene in consistently failing schools;
- (2) required annual evaluations of teachers and principals;
- (3) created a 15-member advisory committee charged with the task of recommending guidelines for these evaluations;
- (4) removed restrictions against using teacher effect data until data from 3 complete years are obtained;
- (5) required personnel decisions (promotion, retention, tenure, compensation) be based, in part, on evaluations; and
- (6) mandated that 50% of teacher and principal evaluations be based on student achievement data. (Finch, 2017, p. 489)

2010 not only brought about the passage of Tennessee's First to the Top Act, but also the election of Republican Governor, William "Bill" Haslam as well as a continued Republican majority of lawmakers in both houses of the state legislature. With these politicians in place, a number of observers note that education reform efforts increased in earnest.

Superintendents of academically high performing school districts in Tennessee began to raise concerns in 2012 that their districts were suffering inadvertent consequences of the First to the Top Act (2010). Most notably, the act's sixth criteria "mandated that 50% of teacher and principal evaluations be based on student achievement data" (Finch, 2017, p. 489). The growth

score component is integral in the achievement data, however the criteria for the First to the Top Act (2010) includes no mitigation for those students at the top of the academic achievement range where little to no growth is possible. The superintendent and board of education in Williamson County, Tennessee, realized that teachers were in jeopardy of losing their jobs based on the newly passed legislation, and became the leading advocates for change at the state level. These efforts culminated in the promulgation and passage of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

This legislation delineates five criteria. Of these requirements, a majority must be met for a school district to receive designation and recognition by the state as high performing. These five criteria include:

(1) achieving a graduation rate of 90% or higher; (2) exhibiting an average American College Testing (ACT) score of 21 or higher; (3) demonstrating a Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) three year average composite normal curve equivalent score of 55 or higher; (4) establishing a Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) three year average composite normal curve equivalent gain of 1.75 or higher; and (5) meeting or exceeding the achievement and gap closure annual measurable objectives and receiving an exemplary or similar status from the State Department of Education. (Tennessee High Performing School Districts Flexibility, 2013)

With a majority of these criteria met, school districts receiving designation as high performing may request relief from a state mandate, initiative, or law which the district believes prohibits the district from achieving the mission and vision set forth for their educational community. These waivers of relief are submitted to the Tennessee Department of Education and seek approval by the Commissioner of Education, who then grants or denies the request.

## **The Recognition and Designation of High Performance**

To become recognized by the Tennessee state department of education, under Chapter 2 – Local Administration – Part 702, Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) states:

Any LEA meeting a majority of the applicable criteria in § 49-2-102 may, by action of its local board of education, declare itself to be a high performing school district. Such designation shall be in effect beginning July 1 following the local board action. The designation shall last for three (3) years, at which time the LEA shall be eligible to declare itself a high performing school district under this part again if a majority of the criteria are met.

Placing the onus solely upon the local education agency, this statute of the law allows each school district to self-declare the district as high performing if the district meets a minimum of three criteria. All board of education resolutions are public record, and the verification of this claim is only completed in two ways. The first is through public perception and challenge. This process in the court of public opinion and scrutiny would emerge as a challenge to an LEA’s self-declaration of high performance. Although there are no legal ramifications for false recognition, other than admonishment from the state department of education, the political damage to the reputation of the school district could affect the economic viability of business, real estate, and other vital societal influences. The second verification path routes through the Tennessee state department of education coupled to the waiver for relief application process. Once a school district’s board of education has proposed and passed the resolution of designation as a high performing school district, the superintendent may then submit the waiver for relief to the state department of education. The risk versus benefit of public scrutiny and challenge to the



status of high performance of a school district influences the decision to pursue or not pursue the recognition. The recognition as a high performing school district and waiver submission process are symbiotic in nature. Therefore, those school districts that apply for recognition under Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) and access the provisions of the law, are one in the same.

**High Performing Designation: The Williamson County Schools District**

Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) was signed into law by Governor Bill Haslam and became effective for the 2014–2015 school year. Through public access archival records review from the Tennessee department of education’s website, all five of the most recent, complete school years from 2014–2015 to 2018–2019 were reviewed for this study. Initial discovery reveals the following number of waiver requests identified by school year in Table 2.1. These waiver requests made to the state department of education, are not limited solely to Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) requests.

Table 2.1

*District waiver requests submitted to the Tennessee Department of Education*

School Year	Number of Waivers
2014–2015	87
2015–2016	10
2016–2017	8
2017–2018	16
2018–2019	20

Note: Data are from Tennessee Department of Education Data Downloads & Requests (Tennessee Department of Education, 2020a)

Of note in this discovery, in the 2014–2015 school year, only one school district, Williamson County Schools (WCS), applied for relief through Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) waiver process and did so three times. One additional waiver request was made by WCS through the standard channels of relief requests. Interestingly, in five years and 141 waiver requests encompassing all Tennessee Code Annotated provisions, including but not limited to Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), WCS is the only school district to utilize Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) provisions waiver request. Although other school districts in Tennessee were eligible to self-declare as high performing, none did so.

For this exploratory case study, the school year of 2014–2015 was examined, and as a result of Williamson County Schools (WCS) being identified as the only school district to utilize Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) waiver provision, WCS is examined in comparison and contrast to other school districts in aggregate across the state of Tennessee (Tennessee Department of Education, 2020a). Table 2.2 shows the first analysis of the 87 waivers for relief, submitted to the commissioner of education, identifying the school district seeking relief, examining the purpose of the waiver, the TCA referenced, and the decision of the commissioner.

In all instances excluding weather related waivers, Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) requests and the single late start schedule request made by Williamson County Schools, the Tennessee commissioner of education granted the waivers under the provisions of TCA § 49-2-201(d)(1), as defined previously. For the districts seeking relief as an increase to class size for elementary, middle, and high schools, all noted that enrollment shifts and budgetary concerns were the crux of the request. Districts requesting relief

Table 2.2

*2014–2015 waiver requests for relief*

District Requesting	Purpose	TCA Referenced	Decision
Achievement School District	Class size maximum waived within reason	§ 49-2-201(d)(1)	Granted
Anderson County Schools	Class size maximum waived within reason	§ 49-2-201(d)(1)	Granted
Cleveland City Schools	CTE class size maximum increased to 25 students	§ 49-2-201(d)(1)	Granted
Kingsport City Schools	Number of librarian information specialists per average daily student attendance waived	§ 49-2-201(d)(1)	Granted
Kingsport City Schools	CTE class size maximum increased to 25 students	§ 49-2-201(d)(1)	Granted
Maryville City Schools	CTE class size maximum increased to 25 students	§ 49-2-201(d)(1)	Granted
Metro Nashville Public Schools	CTE class size maximum increased to 25 students	§ 49-2-201(d)(1)	Granted
Morgan County Schools	Class size maximum waived within reason	§ 49-2-201(d)(1)	Granted
Paris Special School District	Number of librarian information specialists per average daily student attendance waived	§ 49-2-201(d)(1)	Granted
Promise Academy Charter School	Grading requirements to include TCAP scores to be waived, as long as TCAP is administered	§ 49-2-201(d)(1)	Granted

Table 2.2 (continued)

District Requesting	Purpose	TCA Referenced	Decision
Williamson County Schools	Permission to develop independent rigorous local curriculum standards	§ 49-2-704(b)	Granted
	Permission to make local adjustments to the school calendar	§ 49-2-704(b)	Tabled
	Request streamlined approval of school and district improvement plans	§ 49-2-704(b)	Granted
	Permission to manage improvement process of the single focus school without oversight	§ 49-2-704(b)	Granted
	Request authority to grant teachers tenure at the end of 5 years without TVAAS data	§ 49-2-704(b)	Denied
	Class size maximum waived within reason	§ 49-2-704(b)	Granted
	Request for a late start schedule to be named, Power Mondays	§ 49-6-3004(e)(1)	Granted
Other Various	Natural Disaster or Serious Outbreaks of Illness Relief	§ 49-6-3004(a)(6)	Granted

Note: Data are from Tennessee Department of Education Data Downloads & Requests

(Tennessee Department of Education, 2020a)

in Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses sought to increase the capacity maximum of class size to 25 students. Districts noted in their waivers that approval of the request would allow more students to participate in the CTE curriculum and experience. Districts seeking relief in the number of library information specialists related to average daily attendance of students did so due to budgetary concerns, but with an assurance to the commissioner of education that all student needs pertaining to library services would be fulfilled. One charter school, the Promise Academy, requested relief from including Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) scores as a percentage of the students' final semester grades in grades 3 through 8, as this requirement hinders the school from pursuing its mission and goals. This request was granted with the commitment from the charter school that the TCAP would continue to be administered and scores reported to applicable agencies. The 2014–2015 school year witnessed an abnormal winter season during the school spring semester, which forced many school systems to close for an excessive amount of days, primarily due to poor road conditions within their respective counties. On February 21, 2015, Governor Bill Haslam declared a Level 2 State of Emergency (Major Disaster) in Tennessee due to the extreme winter weather conditions. Districts that had exhausted their bevy of planned inclement weather days, requested relief of instructional days from the commissioner and all were granted, a total of 74 waiver requests in all.

Williamson County Schools (WCS), the only public school district to self-identify and declare itself as a high performing school district and file waiver requests based on this recognition, filed two such waiver requests during the 2014–2015 school year. The initial waiver request submitted by the superintendent of schools, Dr. Mike Looney, was transmitted to the state department of education on September 12, 2014 (Appendix A). Within this waiver were

five requests for relief including: (1) permission to develop independent rigorous local standards, (2) permission to make adjustments to the local school calendar, (3) request for streamlined approval of school and district improvement plans, (4) permission to manage the district's lone focus school improvement without oversight, and (5) request for authority to grant tenure to teachers at the completion of their fifth year of teaching without consideration of Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) data. "The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) measures student growth year over year, regardless of whether the student is proficient on the state assessment. In calculating a TVAAS score, a student's performance is compared relative to the performance of his or her peers who have performed similarly on past assessments" (Tennessee Department of Education, 2020b).

With no relief for exceptional teachers who might show little or no growth in their higher achieving classes, the granting of tenure was denied, placing their professional careers in possible peril. As further research will seek to establish, this politically charged issue became the catalyst in the promulgation and passage of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). WCS additionally requested relief during the spring semester of the 2014–2015 school year for class size requirements due to capacity issues and budget constraints. Where other systems had requested similar relief under the general powers of the commissioner of education provision of the law and had been granted relief, Williamson County Schools made the request under the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) and was granted relief as well.

Williamson County Schools (WCS) stands as the only public school system in Tennessee with documented waiver requests to the state department of education referencing the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), not only for the school year 2014–2015, but

4. <u>High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act</u>			
Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of the Board vote to declare itself a high performing school district pursuant to the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act.			
Ms. Mills moved to approve the recommendation and Mr. Mezera seconded the motion.			
Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.			
Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P.J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes
Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried			

Figure 2.1. Williamson County Schools Board of Education vote to self-declare as high performing

comprehensively since the inception of the law. Appendix B, the WCS board of education minutes from May 20, 2013, exhibits the vote and action of the board to declare itself a high performing school district. As seen in Figure 2.1, an excerpt of Appendix B, the action required no debate, was motioned and seconded, and then approved by unanimous vote (WCS Board, 2013). The High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) consists of five criteria, of which a majority (3) must be met for a public school district to self-declare as high performing under the law and be recognized by the state department of education as such. As recorded and reviewed from the state department of education’s website (Tennessee Department of Education, 2020a), Williamson County Schools achieved recognition based upon criteria results of prior years leading to the self-declaration of 2013:

- (1) Achieving a graduation rate of 90% or higher. For the 2013 reporting period, WCS demonstrated a graduation rate of 93.8%.

(2) Exhibiting an average American College Testing (ACT) score of 21 or higher. In 2013, WCS reported a composite ACT score of 23.4.

(3) Demonstrating a Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) three year average composite normal curve equivalent score of 55 or higher. In 2013, the WCS three year average scores were reported as Math: 68, Reading: 69, Science: 69, and Social Studies: 74.

(4) Establishing a Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) three year average composite normal curve equivalent gain of 1.75 or higher. In 2013, the WCS three year average gains were reported as Composite: 4, Literacy: 4.3, Numeracy: 3.6, and Literacy and Numeracy: 4.

(5) Meeting or exceeding the achievement and gap closure annual measurable objectives and receiving an exemplary or similar status from the State Department of Education.

Having met 4 of the 5 criteria, WCS did not report this statistic during the self-declaration process in 2013. (Tennessee High Performing School Districts Flexibility, 2013) (Tennessee Department of Education, 2020a)

Having met the burden of a majority of the criteria set forth in Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), on May 20, 2013, at a regular meeting of its board of education, WCS self-declared as a high performing school district. In the time since becoming state law, WCS is the only public school district in the state of Tennessee, as evidenced by state recorded data, to utilize the waiver request provisions of the law for relief.

When exceptional teachers had little or no room for growth, the Tennessee state department of education refused relief under the statutes of the First to the Top Act (2010), which in turn jeopardized the possibility of tenure and even their retention of employment. Thousands of high



performing professional educators would be deemed low performing when 50% of their performance evaluations demonstrated a minimal growth level due to the high levels of prior academic achievement from their students. Recognizing this at the onset of the Race to the Top (2009) and First to the Top (2010) legislation, the Williamson County Schools superintendent and board of education took the initiative to protect, enhance, and share their educational community's standards, mission, and goals with similarly situated high performing school districts across Tennessee. This step into the policy-making arena brought focus to the building of relationships between superintendents and stakeholders both locally and across the state, including influence in the political process. To achieve and maintain academic and operational success, superintendents' roles and dispositions must be flexible, as well as adaptable to the situational circumstances affecting the students, staff, and community of their districts.

### **Tennessee and Williamson County Schools**

To further understanding of WCS as being unique, school district and state-level data are compared and contrasted. Data analyzed include Tennessee department of education's report card archives for the 2014-2015 school year. The department of education's report card database selectively allowed the researcher the following demographic options of choice including: All, All Students, Asian, Black or African-American, Economically Disadvantaged Students, English Language Learner Students, Hispanic or Latino, Native American/Alaskan, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Students with Disabilities, and White (Tennessee Department of Education, 2013).

As identified in Appendix C, WCS is a PK (pre-kindergarten) to 12 (high school senior) public school district, whose superintendent during the selected school year, 2014–2015, was Dr. Mike Looney. Dr. Looney served as the superintendent for Williamson County Schools for

nearly a decade, from 2009–2010 through 2018–2019. With consideration of the state’s aggregate data, WCS was comprised of 3.6% of the state’s student population, 3.5% of the state’s professional educators, 2.7% of the state’s administrators, and 2.2% of the state’s schools. The state of Tennessee report card archive allows for demographic isolation when examining selective statistics.

Appendix D provides the perspective of ethnicity as it pertains to both the state in aggregate and to WCS individually as a district. Both the state and WCS have a majority population of white students, with WCS consisting of 18% more than the state, 82.9% to 64.9%, respectively. While the state’s Black or African-American population is significantly higher than WCS, 19.1%, conversely WCS supports an Asian population of 5.8% compared to the 2.2% of the state’s enrollment. The state’s Hispanic or Latino population, 8.5% was slightly higher than that of WCS, 5.3%. Although both the state and WCS reported a majority of white students, the state demonstrated a higher percentage of diverse students across all public school districts.

Attendance rates are evaluated in two distinct groupings, for kindergarten through 8th grade (K–8) and for 9th grade through 12th grade (9–12). For K–8, attendance is measured by the daily attendance rate and promotion rate. The daily attendance rate compares the average number of days students are enrolled compared to the average number of days students attend school. The promotion rate displays the percentage of students who are promoted to the next grade each year. The 9–12 average daily attendance is compiled in the same manner as the K–8 statistic. The graduation rate is the percentage of graduation eligible students for that school year who go on to graduate from high school. The cohort dropout rate considers four years of high school, recording students who enter the 9th grade but dropout of school by the end of their 12th grade year. The event dropout rate examines the number of all students who dropout in a given

school year. Appendix E indicates the attendance measurements of the state of Tennessee in aggregate and WCS, respectively. As presented, Tennessee's K–8 average daily attendance rate was 95.7%, with WCS demonstrating 96.7%, slightly above the state average. The state's K–8 promotion rate was 98.4%, while WCS was nearly perfect with a rate of 99.9%. When compared and contrasted, both the state and WCS demonstrated high rates of attendance and promotion, with WCS being slightly above the state average in both. Regarding high school attendance rates and measurements, the state's average daily attendance rate was 94.1%. The WCS rate was a nearly identical, but still slightly higher at 94.9%. The graduation rate of the state was measured at 87.8%, while WCS returned a rate of 95.5%, marking a dramatic disparity in students completing their high school experience. This can be coupled to the dropout rates where the cohort rate of the state was 6.0% and the event rate was 2.6%. The WCS dropout rates were markedly lower, at 1.7% for the cohort rate and 0.8% for the event rate. These measurements demonstrate strong average daily attendance across both the state collectively and WCS individually; however, the commitment to completion of high school in the state was lower than that of WCS.

In some instances, attendance issues can be related to discipline issues in the school environment. The Tennessee Report Card Archive measures both suspensions and expulsions from school, identifying students by gender and ethnicity. Appendix F identifies the discipline measurements for both the state of Tennessee collectively and WCS, respectively. Suspension is defined by the state as a period of time, no greater than ten days where a student remains on the school rolls but is not allowed to attend school. Expulsion, the most severe disciplinary consequence, is defined as a student who is not allowed to attend school for period of time that is greater than ten days and is removed from the school rolls during such time. Expulsions are

commonly enforced for a time that encompasses the remainder of a school year. Students who are expelled effectively lose a year and with consideration, are allowed to return the following year to repeat the grade level from which they were expelled. Examining all students in the state of Tennessee, 61,646 were suspended, which is a collective rate of 6.2% of the student population. Of those suspended, Black or African-Americans were the demographic with the greatest number, 38,233, which is over half of incidents reported. From the perspective of gender, 42,100 of the 61,646 students suspended were male. WCS reported 83 students, 0.2% of the district's student population suspended, all white, with 68 of the individuals being male. In category of expulsions, the state recorded 2,021 cases, only 0.2% of the overall student population. Of these incidents, over half, 1,388, were Black or African-American students. The gender divide of expulsions revealed a 75% majority of male students over female students. Regarding both suspensions and expulsions, the WCS reports of disciplinary actions are well below the state's accounting of occurrences, with disparity in ethnicity, only white students suspended, but similar trends in gender with male students receiving an overwhelming majority of the disciplinary action.

Financial support of education is an important success factor for public school districts. The Tennessee Report Card Archive examines per pupil expenditures and three funding mechanisms, including local, federal, and state allocations. Per-pupil expenditure is defined as expenses recorded on a per student basis such as instructional materials, maintenance, and transportation provided through local, state, and federal funds. These financial fulcrums for both the state of Tennessee collectively and WCS, respectively, are depicted in Appendix F. The state of Tennessee on average spent \$635.20 more per student than WCS. This reality is disproportionate to the levels of funding allocated to Williamson County Schools. Local funding

accounted for 55.5% of the WCS education budget in comparison to the state's average of 40.34%. Local property taxes in Williamson County and throughout Tennessee as a whole carry the majority of the financial burden for county needs such as education and other essential services. In Williamson County, two-thirds of the county's annual budget is allocated to education. In contrast, the funding from the state and federal levels is greater to the state with averages of 47.38% and 12.28% respectively, than that to WCS with averages of 40.38% and 4.11%, respectively. The citizens of Williamson County pay more for the education of the county's students, than other residents across the state of Tennessee, by average, contribute to their districts' education. Additionally, compared to WCS, the districts across the state receive greater levels of funding from outside sources.

Other specific demographics such as economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners (ELL) are discussed within the report card analytics with reference to achievement. Achievement, or academic excellence, was the main focus of the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) and a catalyst for Williamson County Schools' initiative in pursuing change at the state level. Returning to the components of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act, four of the five items were utilized by Williamson County Schools to self-declare itself as a high performing school district pursuant to TCA § 49-2-704(b), fulfilling a majority of the criteria required. These four criteria are evaluated with data from the state of Tennessee averages compared to the WCS data reported in the Tennessee Report Card Archive. Criteria one states that a district must achieve a graduation rate of 90% or higher. Appendix H recounts the graduation criteria of the state of Tennessee and WCS, respectively. All students across the state of Tennessee are compared with those within WCS. The rate of WCS is higher than the state average and at 95.5% is well above the threshold

of 90% required by the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). The diversity amongst graduates is also displayed in Appendix H. Each ethnicity reported in both scopes is within ten percentage points of the other. Although disparity exists, there are no excessive gains or losses in graduation rates, based on ethnicity comparatively across the state of Tennessee's averages and that of WCS. Of note, WCS did not have a native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander concentration large enough to be measured for this statistic. For all relatable ethnicities, WCS exhibited higher graduation rates of ethnicities identified, than that of the state averages.

The first analytic component to engage the demographic criteria of economically disadvantaged students, the graduation rate displayed in Appendix H compares the rate of these students to that of all students in both the state of Tennessee's averages and WCS, respectively. The Tennessee Report Card Archive (2014–2015) defines economically disadvantaged students as those students whose families meet specific income criteria, giving the children and eligible status to receive free or reduced cost meals at school. The state average reports that 83.5% of students identified as economically disadvantaged graduated high school, while that percentage for WCS was 86.2%. This is interpreted as Williamson County Schools graduated more students in the 2014-2015 school year who were eligible for free or reduced meals than the state of Tennessee average.

Students with documented disabilities are also observed related to graduation rates in Appendix H. Seventy percent of students with disabilities across the state of Tennessee average graduated high school during the 2014–2015 school year. For Williamson County Schools, 75% of students with disabilities graduated high school, again placing WCS above the state average for graduation rates. The final demographic criteria related to graduation rates in Appendix H from the Tennessee Report Card Archive analysis is English language learner (ELL) students. By

definition, these are students whose native language is not English. For the state of Tennessee, an average of 74.8% of ELL students graduated during the 2014-2015 school year, while 69% of ELL students in Williamson County Schools graduated. In this demographic, WCS rated below the state of Tennessee average for graduation rates.

The second criteria of the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) requires public school districts to exhibit an average American College Testing (ACT) score of 21 or higher. Appendix I displays not only the composite data requirements, but also the individual assessment components, as well as the three-year averages for both the state of Tennessee and WCS, respectively. The WCS composite score of 23.8 exceeds the required score of 21. Both the composite score of the 2014–2015 school year and the three-year average composite scores of WCS are above those of the state of Tennessee collective averages. With the state of Tennessee average composite score of 19.4 for the 2014–2015 school year and the three-year average composite score of 19.4 as well, the goal score of 21 to meet one of the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) criteria presents a daunting challenge. Other demographic components such as ethnicity, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and ELL students are not included as separate ACT criteria in the Tennessee Report Card Archive. Tennessee is one of the few states who requires all students to take the ACT.

The third criteria for consideration of the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) requires that a public school district demonstrate a Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) three-year average composite normal curve equivalent score of 55 or higher. Appendix J reports these scores for both the state of Tennessee and WCS, respectively. As reported, the state of Tennessee average remained close to the score of 55 marked across all three years—2013, 2014, and 2015. The Williamson County Schools scores remained more than ten

points above the threshold score required, receiving all “A”s for the level of achievement on the TCAP assessment.

The fourth and final criteria utilized by Williamson County Schools in the self-declaration process to be recognized as a high performing school district by the state of Tennessee required establishing a Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) three-year average composite normal curve equivalent gain of 1.75 or higher (Tennessee Department of Education, 2020b). TVAAS measures the impact of teachers, schools, and districts on the academic progressions of students from year to year. Appendix K identifies WCS’s level of growth across literacy, numeracy, and literacy and numeracy in grades 3–8 on statewide assessments. TVAAS reports annually on a scale of 1–5. Levels 4 and 5 signal that a school or district is exceeding the expectations of growth. Expectation is the key term in this analysis in relation to growth scores. Level 3 suggests expected growth is being made. Levels 1 and 2 represent less than expected growth is being achieved (Tennessee Report Card Archive, 2014–2015). Apart from other criteria previously discussed, TVAAS scores are not reported for the state as a whole or an average. Williamson County schools reports an overall TVAAS score of 2, which exceeds the required 1.75 growth score of the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). These data indicate that Williamson County is the only school district in the state that would benefit from Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act.

### **Superintendents Roles and Dispositions**

For nearly two hundred years, some form or function of the school district superintendent has existed (Kowalski, 2013). It is important to understand the historical perspective of the role in order to properly assess, characterize its development and, situate their current activities in public education. From its earliest inception, the superintendent was a task master assigned by



boards of education to ensure that the requirements issued by the state were fulfilled. Of note, in 1837, a “school inspector” was appointed in Buffalo, New York, and the first official superintendent emerged (Brunner, Grogan, & Björk, 2002). The absence of trust and the influence of political motivations made the appointments of superintendents tumultuous where subservient managerial skills were valued above the qualities of leadership (Kowalski, 2013). At the turn of the twentieth century, corruption and incompetence riddled school systems with failure. As the self-contained one-room schools evolved into grade level schools, the need for a greater role in the superintendency grew. This role included an operational need for hiring and supervision of teachers, oversight of instructional content, and financial control. Still, the bias and apprehension in appointments of superintendents continued. As noted by Callahan (1962), three specific criteria, not operational in origin, but rather descriptive in nature of the individual were utilized as appraisal criteria. These standards included the physical appearance of what a leader was considered to be, the regard as an effective teacher, and the relationships possessed in the political realm with those in power. As the role of the superintendent has matured, the identifiable qualities and characterizations of the position have emerged. Kowalski (2013) distinguishes these five role characterizations of superintendents, including Teacher Scholar, Manager, Democratic Leader, Applied Social Scientist, and Communicator.

One of the original expectations of a superintendent transcended the years of transformation, and the teacher-scholar surfaced as the subject matter expert. As Callahan (1966) discovered, the superintendency at the beginning of the twentieth century held the heart of a teacher close to the classroom based on the four following aspects. First, the teaching profession remained a focus of their responsibilities. Recognized for the high caliber of their educational expertise in the classroom prior to their appointment, superintendents valued this distinction as

an educational leader in the district. Second, the National Education Association held power and prestige, and as a collective, superintendents became exceedingly influential in the pursuit of education initiatives. Third, superintendents shied away from duties outside the scope of instructional leadership as they wished not to be perceived as politically motivated or simply managers of business operations. Lastly, coupled with this assumption of duties, superintendents kept their local officials at a safe distance politically to ensure their responsibilities were not seized or appropriated under the guise of experience and understanding. As a legitimate profession, teaching and the superintendency could not be assumed and accomplished by someone outside the profession. As the years have progressed, the duties regulated to management through business operations have increased. This aspect, often tied to political motivations, has led to public elections, rather than appointments, of superintendents, as well as the deregulation of state licensing for the role allowing noneducators the opportunity of staffing the position.

As the superintendent's role evolved, the teacher-scholar identity was challenged with the responsibilities of a business manager. As America grew through the twentieth century, urbanizing and industrializing, school systems matched the growth in size and scope. This expansion forced boards of education to focus on resource management (Kowalski, 2013). The struggle for scarce resources created a growing dissatisfaction with schools. The managerial responsibilities of the superintendent now required oversight of budgetary concerns, personnel and facilities management, and general business operations of the system. This reality caused some superintendents to abandon the role of the professional educator to add credence to the appearance of their ability to be administrative authorities. The political gains in this gambit could result in local public officials ending their attempts to seize the duties of the

superintendent. This ploy left superintendents reluctantly in the middle, opposed by both the local public officials and by the academic intellectuals. The local public officials feared the loss of power and control if handed over to the superintendent as a managerial function of their role. The academic intellectuals felt as though the shift would ostracize the local public officials, threatening the much-needed partnership between the schools and government (Kowalski, 2013). As a business manager, superintendents must conduct the day-to-day operations of the district. The duties may not be preferred, but they are nonetheless essential to the success of the district.

“The role of democratic leader is equated with statesmanship” (Kowalski, 2013, p. 21). The statesman lives in the gray area, representing the wishes of the constituency, while negotiating and partnering with the political elite. As a democratic leader, the superintendent must tactfully and purposefully engage in the political realm, all the while remaining true to the populace, his or her educational community. This role mandates the actions of a political actor, where the superintendent strives to secure scarce resources from government entities, while maintaining the professional leadership persona associated with the position (Kowalski, 2013). Björk and Gurley (2005), however, believed that the role of democratic leader rested in the superintendent’s ability to strategize politically in order to achieve governance goals. By the mid-twentieth century, the characterization of democratic leader had become problematic. Superintendents who reacted to society’s needs, desires, and whims, were perceived as detriments to the prominence of the position, as well as a stumbling block to the implementation of reforms and other initiatives of the school district (Kowalski, 2013). A return to the path of professional knowledge and skills, rather than a constantly changing philosophical frequency, was needed to stabilize both the democratic leader characterization and the role of the superintendent (Björk & Gurley, 2005).

The role of applied social scientist became a reality following World War II. Callahan (1966) describes four major influences impacting the role, including:

1. Growing dissatisfaction with democratic leadership after World War II.
2. Rapid development of the social sciences in the late 1940s and early 1950s.
3. Support from the Kellogg Foundation.
4. A resurgence of public dissatisfaction with public schools. (Callahan, 1966, pp. 220–223)

These effects also triggered a paradigm shift in higher education, where degree programs began incorporating the social sciences into their curriculum, while also adopting systems theory.

During this 20-year period from 1950 to 1970, the theory movement in educational administration flourished. As dissatisfaction with the school systems increased, superintendents once again distanced themselves from the instructional element in an effort to demonstrate their ability to both lead and manage the district's needs and resources. The argument developed that the administrator's role was more challenging than that of a teacher, and that more academic preparation was necessary to successfully execute the responsibilities. The duties then of both the administrator and the teacher were able to be comparatively weighed against one another to provide a sharper division between the philosophies of both vocations (Kowalski, 2013).

The role of an effective communicator requires situational agility. It incorporates other characterizations of the superintendent's role into the delivery method of message. As one of the most salient points regarding communication, Kowalski (2013) states "in an information-based society, administrators are expected to engage in relational communication consistently" (p. 24). Especially in the age of social media where direct messages, public posts, "likes," and emojis are accepted forms of dialogue, the superintendent must be well-versed in multiple modes of

communication. The initiatives of school reform and improvement necessitate open discourse in multiple channels, purposefully including the stakeholders of the educational community, government, and the administration of the school district. In a more digitally accessible world, districts which choose to work in isolation or insulation struggle with effective communication (Kowalski, 2013). For superintendents, more education and training should be focused on communication, as it has become a priority in their annual evaluations.

Kowalski's five roles have evolved into what Björk, Kowalski, and Browne-Ferrigno (2014) call, "the CEO of the school district." These responsibilities and duties of the superintendent must "withstand the rigors of continuous public inspection and criticism" (p. 8). Additional normative dispositions of leadership for superintendents are noted by Kowalski (2013) as having Democratic, Moral and Ethical, Transformational, and Servant Leadership aspects. The superintendent's leadership directives, moral compass, ability to recognize the need for and implement change, as well as serving others before self, are driven by the will of the district's communities. Hoyle, Björk, Collier, and Glass (2005) state, "A strong stand based on ethical principles demonstrates to students, staff, community, and the Board of Education that the superintendent is a person of character and purpose" (p. 193). The superintendent exhibits these role characterizations and dispositions in the essence of their work.

### **Politics of the Superintendency**

"The politician, in the here-selected "best" sense of the word, uses persuasion on behalf of his conception of public right" (Lasswell, 1979, p. 47). Lasswell considered politics a means to leverage influence by the influential. Influence shares a positive and negative impact on those within the political arena. The positive perspective of influence achieves the desired results of the influential party. The negative effect however, as Bolman and Deal (2017) describe it, creates

a jaded view of the political process that jeopardizes both individual and organizational effectiveness. When influence is exercised, some suggest that leaders may wield power, create conflict, and build coalitions interwoven into macro and micro political environments. Blase and Björk (2010) illustrate the purpose of macro politics within the scope of education as the larger external environment consisting of relationships and interactions, and other various aspects with local, state, and federal levels of government. Additional externalities, such as special interest groups, often contribute to these often-acrimonious negotiations with regard to “who gets what, when, and how” (Lasswell, 1936/1951, p. 13). The function of micropolitics, contrarily, considers the impact of the external environment on an organization. Education reform, within the national discussion, occurs at the state and local levels, where stakeholders vie for political control over the initiative, its scope, and the implementation processes. This is surmised where “micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations” (Blase & Björk, 2010, p. 240). Björk and Blase (2009) state that as political exchange escalates, new micropolitical milieus develop and acquire the attention of stakeholders. Consequently, at the local level, superintendents must have political acuity as transformative leaders to achieve the goals of their educational community. The decisions made through these influence-laced practices are enacted and enforced through authority viewed as an extension of power.

French and Raven’s (1959) bases of power remains wholly applicable in the realm of politics. Societal value patterns are often influenced by these bases of power, which directly affect the governance of the distribution of resources. Lasswell (1936/1951) asserted that the elite—those who acquire the most of what is available—influence or dictate to the rest of the populace what will be contributed, received, and shared. Bolman and Deal (2017) build upon this

notion, somewhat mirroring French and Raven (1959), and offer six bases or sources of power, including positional, rewards, coercive, information or expertise, reputation, and personal. Position power is hierarchal in nature and authority driven. The superintendent's role inherently possesses this power, however its application is varied and determined by the individual. Reward power yields the propensity to grant incentives for efforts. Coercive power is foundationally punitive, where fear is often weaponized. Reward and coercive powers in leadership are expounded upon by Machiavelli's (1532/2019) direct question regarding the desire to be feared or loved. The coercive state of power exists through fear of negative consequential actions, whereas the reward form of power incentivizes and generates gratitude. For superintendents, coercive power is not a preferred means of motivation. However, reward power, coupled to coalition building, inspires individuals with a byproduct of appreciation. Information or expert power relies on the proficiency of subject matter and competence to execute in the decision-making process. For superintendents, this power rests in Kowalski's (2013) teacher-scholar role. Reputation power inspires and motivates based on the accomplishments of past experiences. Superintendents can build trust through reputation, assuring their community that knowledge and experience provide exceptional guidance to their leadership. Personal power relies solely on the individual's positively perceived respective attributes and actions. For superintendents, this is a litmus test of likability.

Bolman and Deal (2017) state, "Partisans' multiple sources of power are always a constraint on authorities' capacity to make binding decisions" (p. 194). This alludes to types and sizes of change in education reform where incrementalism is a common standard. State-level policies most commonly arise from three primary sources or initiatives: federal, state, and local. From these environments, conflicting objectives will undoubtedly emerge and Kowalski (2013)

further details the origins of conflict as territorial, value, tangible, and personal. Although his discussion is associated with board of education and superintendent relations, these four types of conflict apply to state-level policy contexts as well. Superintendents must first assess the conflict and then choose how to appropriately engage and manage the process. Thomas (1977) provides five distinct approaches to conflict management, including competition, collaboration, compromise, avoidance, and accommodation. The competitive approach is utilized for vital, urgent matters. Collaboration develops from an integrative need where consensus is valued. Compromising occurs when an impasse exists and collaboration and competition have failed. Avoidance precludes any issue where time is not a necessary constraint and the matter cannot or should not be addressed in the present situation. The accommodating tactic repairs mistakes and allows importance to shift. Superintendents are liaisons to a variety of stakeholders. Consequently, choosing the correct conflict management strategy ultimately determines success or failure in these relationships. To this point, Bolman and Deal (2017) state, “The political frame stresses that the combination of scarce resources and divergent interests produces conflict as surely as night follows day” (p. 196). In the state-level policy perspective, scarce resources and divergent interests are core attributes of every initiative. Successful conflict management is often a defining characteristic in the achievement or failure to reach the goals of a superintendent’s educational community.

From conflict, interests coalesce and coalitions emerge, both formally and informally. These groups and movements coerce and compromise towards accomplishing common goals and objectives and are viewed as a component of their daily existence (Bolman and Deal, 2017). Superintendents are affected in some form or fashion when coalitions are in action. In a state-level policy context, coalitions of special interests can be harnessed or even weaponized for or



against an initiative based upon preference of outcome. Where coalitions and outside interest groups are considered, the concept of rational choice rests on a fulcrum of personal perception. “Behavior is not accidental, random, or rationalized after the fact; rather, purpose is presumed to pre-exist and behavior is guided by that purpose” (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 282). Pfeffer is explicating that belief drives the intent of movements, which can lead to conflict. For the superintendent, these beliefs and movements can further complicate or better facilitate the path to policy wins at the state and local levels, where their educational community will feel best served or betrayed. The crucible for the superintendent endures in the ability to sink or swim in treacherous political waters.

### **Leadership**

Definitions, including those of leadership, are often haphazardly constructed with little reflection invested across time to strengthen the arguments foundational to their recognition and acceptance. Rost (1991) surmises that definitions in the social and behavioral sciences therefore can be difficult to isolate into a focused, concerted perspective. Rost (1991) posits that “Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (p. 102). Acknowledging this challenge with his own direction to defining leadership, Rost scaffolds his concept upon four crucial conditions.

The first condition necessitates that leadership is a relationship based on influence, though the influence can be multidirectional and noncoercive (Rost, 1991). With regard to the effects of coercion, a dichotomous perspective of influence between engaged individuals emerges where the bases of social power, as identified by French and Raven (1959), are coupled to the illustration. These social power bases, which include reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert, are selectively enmeshed with Rost’s four conditions of leadership and applied herein

as the discussion of each develops (French & Raven, 1959). For example, coercive power stems from the expectation of consequences or punishments levied upon the follower by the leader. Coercive power can be evaluated through an equation of, “the probability of punishment for nonconformity minus the probability of punishment for conformity” (French & Raven, 1959, p. 322). The level of control exhibited through coercive power, coupled to the unidirectional application of power absent of influence, better supports Rost’s first criteria of leadership.

The second condition of leadership examines the participants of the influence relationship, the leaders and followers. Rost (1991) states that the followers are not passive, but rather active in the relationship, which is key for the multidirectional component of the first condition. Within the relationship, multiple leaders may exist and convey influence. Conversely, followers must not exist in isolation. Confronting these principles, “the relationship is inherently unequal because the influence patterns are unequal” (Rost, 1991, p. 103). The bases of power are innately referenced here though not limited to coercive power, as any of the five powers are capable of unbalancing the scales of influence between the leaders and followers. Referent power acknowledges the attraction between leaders and followers and the desire to belong, thus empowering the followers to engage the leaders as active participants in the influence relationship (French & Raven, 1959).

The third condition mandates that changes intended by the leaders and followers are purposeful, desired, and real. These substantive and transformational changes are projected in the present, but executed in the future, if realized at all (Rost, 1991). This condition of the influence relationship dictates actionable accountability for leaders and followers, allowing a wider applicability of power bases and multidirectional interactions. The elements of change provide

opportunity for all social power bases, with the exception of coercion. Coercive power can be utilized to create change, however the influence relationship of leadership is jeopardized.

The final condition defining the existence of leadership stipulates that purposes developed by leaders and followers must be mutually shared. These shared purposes are objectives, not goals, and are developed absent of coercion to create reflective changes, allowing for transformation into common purposes (Rost, 1991). The multidirectional and noncoercive components of Rost's criteria are fully engaged here as well. French and Raven's legitimate, reward, and expert power are possible catalysts in the third and fourth conditions of leadership. Legitimate power here is based in a sense of hierarchy from an organizational field of view. Reward power emerges from the outcomes and results of the changes which are purposeful, desired, and real. Expert power is possible through trust in the shared purposes of leaders and followers and their commitment to change (French & Raven, 1959). For true leadership to exist, the influence relationship must be symbiotic in nature even with an imbalance of influence present. The word transformational has become trivialized in today's society; however, Rost believes that "leadership is about transformation" (Rost, 1991, p. 123). Rost's leadership is not a refurbished definition of terminology, but rather a new school distinction with a paradigmatic shift separating the models of leadership and management.

Is leadership not management? Kuhn and Beam (1982) posit this argument, resolving that if this is the commonly held belief, attempts to differentiate the two are futile. Rost disagrees, defining management as "an authority relationship between at least one manager and one subordinate who coordinate their activities to produce and sell particular goods and/or services" (Rost, 1991, p. 145). Building upon this definition, Rost outlines four facets as the criteria for management including an authority relationship, at least one manager and one subordinate, their

activities must be coordinated, and the production and sale of goods and/or services must be the result of these efforts. One primary difference in management from leadership emerges in the relationship of participants. Where leadership involves leaders and followers, implying the notion of choice to participate in the relationship, management employs managers and subordinates where authority and hierarchy are essential elements to the relationship. Rost's distinctive perception holds that, "if both the manager and the subordinate are part of the relationship called management, it follows that they both are involved in management" (p. 147). However, this in no way implies equity in the relationship or its transactions. Coordination to produce and sell goods and/or services is nonnegotiable in the management model. The root cause of production and sales in the management process is that, "they identify what the relationship is all about" (p. 148).

In retrospect, French and Raven (1959), note that legitimate, coercive, and expert power are most commonly associated with the notion of management. Legitimate power exists in the hierarchal structure prescribed by management. Coercive power is possible through the threat of intended consequences should the performance of the subordinate fall short of the expectations of the manager. Expert power is possible through organizational structure created by applied skill and/or knowledge. Rost's four conditions that frame leadership compared with those that characterize management are intentionally incongruent. The influence relationship of leadership is absent of coercion, whereas the authority relationship of management produces a singular direction of impact on people from consequences based on results. The individuals involved in these authority relationships are bound or released by choice. For leaders and followers in leadership, the relationship is chosen in a participatory fashion. For managers and subordinates, the relationship rests with hierarchal structure and expectations of duties. Although these four

types of individuals can transcend their monikers to assume a role of the other, the roles themselves are not synonymous or interchangeable (Rost, 1991). The intentional pursuit of real change is fundamentally distinct from producing and selling goods and/or services. The difference exists within the purpose of the desired outcome. Leadership strives to create real change, where management focuses on producing and selling goods and/or services. Coupled to these results-based paths, leadership employs mutual purpose to affect real change, while management utilizes coordinated activities to produce and sell goods and/or services. Mutual purpose stimulates collaborative efforts of leaders and followers. Coordinated activities are directive and purposeful in achieving desired, measurable outcomes.

Kowalski (2013) provides insight to the public school district superintendent's roles and responsibilities, stating, "In summary, management is a function that focuses primarily on how to do things. Leadership is a function that focuses primarily on making decisions about what to do" (p. 194). The approach to leadership through strategy and style adds depth to Kowalski's concept through a discussion of leadership behavior underpinnings. The superintendent's strategy can be focused through either authority, where control is exercised or disseminated, or associations, where competitive and collaborative relationships are established and cultivated. The style with which a superintendent leads is channeled through either motivation, utilizing transactional or transformational methodologies coupled to French and Raven's (1959) bases of power, or philosophical, where the decision-making authority and process is unilaterally controlled by the superintendent or shared with other stakeholders to gain consensus.

Public school district superintendents must harness and effectively dedicate themselves to a balance of leadership and management to achieve success for their educational community. Good, quality management allows the operations of the district to excel. In, "The Superintendent

as CEO”, the authors outline a theoretical framework with five indicators of successful management including making and implementing operational plans, applying a systems perspective, defining roles and functions, delegating, determining accountability, monitoring and assessing progress, and understanding school finance (Hoyle, Björk, Collier, & Glass, 2005). These indicators provide structural knowledge for the superintendent, enabling the decision fulcrum for operations through the use of scarce resources, to be better balanced, educated, and executed to the benefit of the school district. Management implies that a school district is run well. Leadership, not conversely, but concertedly requires the district to be well run. Further regarding leadership’s parallel but distinctly separate path from management, Hoy and Miskel (2013) state, “It involves more than mastering a set of skills, finding the right situation, exhibiting a certain style of behavior, combining these factors in a contingency approach, or even deciding to become a transformational leader” (p. 453). Leadership is inspiring. Leadership motivates individuals to action. The role of the superintendent is inherently managerial from a hierarchal perspective. However, to be truly transformational and not just transactional, a superintendent must find strength to reach success through the leadership of their educational community.

### **Ethical Duty and Influence**

Just as Rost (1991) defined leadership as an influence relationship, Northouse (2019) provides a broad-scope concept of characteristics on which to balance leadership through the fulcrum of ethics. “Ethics is concerned with the kinds of values and morals an individual or a society finds desirable or appropriate” (Northouse, 2019, p. 336). This first principle of consideration for ethical definition allows for a skewed interpretation based upon perceptions of beliefs and values. One individual or society’s opinions of the proverbial right and wrong might

differ from another. The decision-making process is inevitably enveloped in value-based assessment, the heart of which is morality. Discovering how the concept of ethics is interwoven into the influence relationship of leadership is fundamental to understanding the impact of leaders and followers upon each other.

In Figure 2.2, Kohlberg (1984) identifies six stages of moral development categorized in three levels, which provide an underpinning for discussion to develop.

<b>LEVEL 1: PRECONVENTIONAL MORALITY</b>	
<u>Stage 1</u> Obedience and Punishment	<u>Stage 2</u> Individualism and Exchange
<b>LEVEL 2: CONVENTIONAL MORALITY</b>	
<u>Stage 3</u> Interpersonal Accord and Conformity	<u>Stage 4</u> Maintaining the Social Order
<b>LEVEL 3: POSTCONVENTIONAL MORALITY</b>	
<u>Stage 5</u> Social Contract and Individual Rights	<u>Stage 6</u> Universal Principles

*Figure 2.2.* Kohlberg’s (1984) stages of moral development

Level one, pre-conventional morality, bears stage one, obedience and punishment, and stage two, individualism and exchange. Pre-conventional morality is weighed by the consequences of actions taken or not taken. In the initial stage of obedience and punishment, individuals are bound by rules where the corollary of nonconformity results in punishment as a consequence. The boundaries of choice are often clear to the individual, as the risks and penalties are known in advance. The individualism and exchange of stage two places the onus wholly on the person, where freedom of choice reigns and is exercised based upon the benefit to the individual as the outcome of the decision (Kohlberg, 1984).

Broadening the scope of morality leads to level two, conventional morality, where the expectations and perspectives of society are measured, guiding the field of view of the

individual. Interpersonal accord and conformity define stage three, where the individual seeks to conform with society to fit the persona of those viewed favorably as moral people. This matures into stage four, maintaining the social order, where the individual is concerned for the entirety of society. The threat of anarchy is held at bay by a majority of society pledging and contributing to following the rules and accepted behaviors of the community (Kohlberg, 1984).

Level three's postconventional morality centers the belief and value-based systems within the individual, where personal ethics and morals are developed and observed. This principled level creates the platform for stage five, the social contract and individual rights. This culmination of beliefs and ideas of conformity balance upon what the individual believes is best for society. The idea of doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do governs the individual's decisions. The awareness of differences in societal values exists but the individual only considers these secondarily to their own primary ethics and morals philosophy. The heightened sense of stage six, the universal principles, incorporates a comprehensive perspective of norms and mores of justice applicable to all of society (Kohlberg, 1984). The field of education often struggles in these constructs, as there are varied opinions, beliefs, and methodologies to what is deemed "best" for the edification of students. Beliefs and actions where ethics and leadership are concerned are evaluated in the theoretical frameworks of conduct and character (Northouse, 2019).

Examining the conduct of ethical leadership, Northouse (2019) points to teleological origins where an individual's actions are evaluated based on the resulting consequences and whether or not the outcomes are desirable. These consequences stem from a decision-making process influenced by the application of ethical egotism, utilitarianism, or altruism. "Ethical egoism states that a person should act so as to create the greatest good for her- or himself"



(Northouse, 2019, p. 339). A public school district superintendent could be viewed as an ethical egotist, as the decisions they make and fight for concern those stakeholders within their own educational community. The utilitarianism perspective seeks achievement for the greatest common good. Political notions aside, the United States Department of Education exists as a symbol of utilitarianism, where the education of our nation's students serves as an edict established by the presiding presidential administration. Standing in direct contrast to egoism, altruism places the benefit to and for others before self. Servant leadership implements altruism, but the purposeful application is more complex than a simple definition. Altruism in the field of education can be challenging from a perspective of content, methodological delivery, and assessment observation, as stakeholders and leaders seek to serve those closest to their educational reach.

Building upon these teleological theories, the deontological theory appraises the ethicality of an act not only on the outcomes, but on the basis of the action itself. "Telling the truth, keeping promises, being fair, and respecting others are all examples of actions that are inherently good, independent of the consequences" (Northouse, 2019, p. 340). Educational policies are viewed and reviewed over time through the deontological lens. As societal norms change and evolve, policy initiatives must coincide with the ethical beliefs of the community. Examining character perspectives, rather than the actions and conduct of ethical leadership, virtue-based theories are examined where Pojman (1995) surmised that virtues are essentially the core of who the individual is and reveals the heart of the person. Society can positively and negatively influence the morality of an individual. The teachings of the family and community provide guidance, however the ultimate choice in decision-making rests with the individual. The

repetition of good deeds or actions over time builds positive virtues, which then in turn positively influence future actions. (Northouse, 2019).

However, from person to person and community to community, these positive virtues, values, and beliefs can vary in some sense, creating conflict. Heifetz (1994) understood that conflict was not a downfall, but rather an opportunity for leaders. Providing structure, guidance, and security for followers to navigate conflict provides growth possibilities, strengthens leader-follower relationships, and manages change that might directly impact the values of employees. Moving deeper into the influence relationship between leaders and followers, Burns (1978) felt an obligation existed for the leader to connect with their followers on a more personal level where conflict and struggles arose. This interaction touched the follower's core needs and wants, both intrinsic and extrinsic. The perspectives of both Heifetz and Burns were that not only was the follower's engagement and loyalty heightened, but also the leader's morality, virtues, and values were bolstered through the relationship's exchange (Northouse, 2019).

A commonly recited statement, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Lord Acton, 1887) prefaces for what Northouse (2019) refers to as the dark side of leadership. Bad actors in leadership roles with vulnerable followers in poor conditions and situations create optimal opportunities for abuse and corruptible circumstances. These three elements can result in a cyclical pattern from which deviation is difficult. Northouse's (2019) caveat to this discussion falls on the narrow scope of research into the dark side of leadership. Returning to the foundations of ethical leadership, Northouse and Lee (2019) recognize five cornerstones essential to the influence relationship between leaders and followers (Rost, 1991), including respect, service, justice, honesty, and community. Respect requires responsibility and an openness to opposing perspectives and values. Tolerance is not synonymous with acceptance

but is important in interpersonal exchanges. Service returns to the issue of altruism, where serving others before oneself rises to precedence. Where justice is considered, the notion of fair cannot be confused with the impression of equal. Being fair with the individual or society becomes a value-based proposition. Justice is a difficult concept to impart, as it is holistically based in perception of what is fair and/or equal. Honesty shelters a leader from the dark side of leadership previously mentioned. “Ethical leaders do not lie, nor do they present truth to others in ways that are destructive or counterproductive” (Northouse & Lee, 2019, p. 127). The fortification of community is indispensable to ethical leadership. The goals of the individual as well as those of society are weighed in consideration of actions to affect change (Northouse & Lee, 2019).

The common belief according to Northouse (2019) is that all leadership should in some way be inherently ethical. Unethical decisions by leaders in any business, organization, movement, or relationship will produce negative returns, ultimately resulting in the destruction of relationships across the reach of stakeholders. Marion and Gonzales (2014) examine the leader-member exchange theory (LMX). This exchange can create and strengthen or even damage or destroy relationships between leaders and followers. “LMX theory is not just about the overall social appeal of the leader, it is about two-way, differentiated relationships-leaders who build interactive relationships and who have different types of relationships with different followers (some positive, some negative)” (Marion & Gonzales, 2014, p. 143). To create stronger ethical bonds with followers, the core of this theory finds leaders inherently charged with the task of relationship building. These relationships will not be identical or equal, simply because followers are not identical or equal. Fairness, however, is a pillar of these sometimes cross-functional interactions in order to have follower support. This approach to leading

develops inspirational motivation among followers, empowering transformational leadership to exceed transactional and laissez-faire archetypes of managing masquerading as leadership (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

Through the lens of educational leadership, “reflective superintendents will be able to objectively evaluate their professional practice to see if they have done the “right thing” as well as doing the “right thing” correctly” (Hoyle, Björk, Collier, & Glass, 2005, p. 193). Harnessing this personal integrity alone does not fulfill the role of an ethical leader. Modeling recognized ethical standards and moral paradigms in all interpersonal exchanges builds trust and support with individuals touched by the influence relationship of leadership. The superintendency exists not only to lead the instructional and administrative efforts of a school district, but also to be both a beacon and a bridge to the community in which they serve. Those who grow in this role to fruition become “Managers of Virtue” (Hoyle, Björk, Collier, & Glass, 2005).

Returning to the broader scope of ethical leadership, Burns (1978) described the structure of moral leadership as a dichotomy. This internal value-based scale is weighted on one perspective with grander, overarching societal concerns leveraged against the more personal attachments of subjective virtues and responsibilities. “But the ultimate test of moral leadership is its capacity to transcend the claims of multiplicity of everyday wants and needs and expectations, to respond to higher levels of moral development, and to relate leadership behavior-its roles, choices, styles, commitments-to a set of reasoned, relatively explicit, conscious values” (Burns, 1978, p. 46). Burns so eloquently surmises the discussion of ethical leadership in this distinct definition of a moral, virtuous, and engaged leader. The transformative assertiveness to ethical leadership disregards the laissez-faire mindset, employs and controls the

transactional exchange, all while inspiring, motivating, and influencing the relationships essential to healthy, productive, human bonds.

### **Leading through the Lens of Organizational Frameworks**

A frame is a construct, a scaffold upon which concepts are hung, or as Bolman and Deal (2017) refer to it, a mental model. These mental models can be viewed as maps and, “like maps, frames are both windows on a territory and tools for navigation” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 15). A good frame provides optics as well as options to situations, encounters, and approaches. Through experience, frames can be fortified or broken, which is an essential step to the reframing process. Understanding of an array of frames along with the ability to apply the concepts of these mental models becomes beneficial to leadership in environments that are often agile and emergent. Just as enduring within a followed frame provides continuity and security, there are risks and benefits to reframing within an organization. Reframing creates vulnerability as well as visibility where it might not have existed previously. Reframing can also create coalitions for common causes, building strength and focused stability in times of change and uncertainty. Reframing changes the field of view, creating multiple perspectives of the same experience shaped by advantages and hazards. Through their four organizational frameworks of Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic, Bolman and Deal provide pathways to better understanding the daily innerworkings of interactions in life. To fully understand what it is to reframe leadership, the four essential frames must first be explored. This review will encompass the strengths of leaders along with the risks and weaknesses inherent to each frame.

Jim Collins wrote “*Good to Great*” in 2001 and viewed the concept of structure with the idea of getting the right person in the right seat on the right bus, or more broadly, beginning with “who before what” (Collins, 2001). The Structural frame finds agreement through the

assumptions of “putting people in the right roles and relationships” to “accommodate both collective goals and individual differences” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 48). There are six assumptions to the Structural frame as delineated by Bolman and Deal:

1. Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives.
2. Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and appropriate division of labor.
3. Suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh.
4. Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures.
5. Effective structures fit an organization’s current circumstances (including its goals, technology, workforce, and environment).
6. Troubles arise and performance suffers from structural deficits, remedied through problem solving and restructuring. (p. 48)

The theory of Scientific Management, or more commonly known as Frederick Taylor’s (1909) “one best way”, cleanly executes efficacy in the attainment of goals and objectives. Taylor’s theory posits that finding the best person, method, and tools, would ultimately lead to achieving optimal outcomes with the greatest returns. This mechanized approach to organizational behavior and workflows emerges as a core principle of the structural frame, while efficiently realigning organization theory, specifically in the industrial and operational fields (Taylor, 1909 in Shafritz & Ott, 2011). The strength of leaders in the Structural frame rests in four distinct actions including situational research or homework, reevaluating the interplay of structure, strategy, and the environment, focusing on implementation, and experimentation (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The

Structural frame provides opportunity for methodologies of efficiency and effectiveness to work in harmony towards Taylor's "one best way". With a focus on implementation, this frame strives for a goal of completion through productivity. The strength of experimentation affords leaders the opportunity to try and fail and then succeed in an environment of expectations. In the shadows of these strengths lie the weaknesses of the Structural frame. Forsaking all else but the "rational scope of tasks, procedures, policies, and organizational charts," removes the organization's human component (Bolman and Deal, 2017, p. 323). The lack of incentivization from anything other than consequences for missed deadlines and unachieved quotas, enhances the machine-like stereotype of the Structural frame while reinforcing the lack of personability, political discourse, and cultural sensitivity. The power of authority and the authority of power are not synonymous.

Standing in contrast to the Structural frame, the Human Resources frame more adequately serves the needs of the individual within the organization. A symbiotic relationship develops between employees and their organization. This "fit between human needs and organizational requirements" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 118) is explored through four assumptions:

1. Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse.
2. People and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities.
3. When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer.  
Individuals are exploited or exploit the organization – or both become victims.

4. A good fit benefits both. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed. (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 118)

From these assumptions, it can be surmised that an organization struggles to operate effectively and profit when the fit for the individuals is poor. Elton Mayo's research resulting in the "Hawthorne Effect" from the Western Electric Studies found that "workers are not isolated, unrelated individuals; they are social animals and should be treated as such" (Roethlisberger, 1941, p. 170). The discussion of individuals interrelated within a collective segues fluidly into Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation. From his original thirteen concepts, which he believed must be present in any theory of human motivation, Maslow synthesized them into five categories of goals or needs as descriptors, ordered in a hierarchy of significance and immediacy. The Human Resource frame exists within human capital engagement. The investment in the individual marks the primary difference in managing and leading within the frame. Bolman and Deal (2017) exemplify this by noting, a "skilled and motivated workforce is a powerful source of competitive advantage" (p. 131). This notion aligns with the strengths of leaders within the Human Resource frame including the communication of a strong belief in people, being visible and accessible, and striving to empower others. Once an organization achieves notoriety for meeting the needs of their employees and customers, job seekers and potential clients gravitate to the organization with a willingness to invest their own time, talent, and finances. The impact and weakness of a focus on the relational aspects and needs of human capital can create a vacuum where scarce resources and conflict escalate. These cultural and social needs must exist in balance with the stark reality of business operations.



The Structural frame demonstrates the power of organization and execution. The Human Resource frame connects the interdependence of people with the organization. The Political frame explores systems of control. Competing interests, often with needs for scarce resources and divergent objectives, are affected by influence both by and upon the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Power, and the conflict it breeds, are commonalities in the political arena. These concepts culminate in five assumptions of the Political Frame including:

1. Organizations are coalitions of different individuals and interest groups.
2. Coalition members have enduring differences in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.
3. Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources – deciding who gets what.
4. Scarce resources and enduring differences put conflict at the center of day-to-day dynamics and make power the most important asset.
5. Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation among competing stakeholders jockeying for their own interests. (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 184)

Organizational goals leveraged with and against the competing interests of public and private stakeholders are varied, exist in possible conflict, and can be difficult to achieve based on these factors. Both occupational and personal belief systems, with their own inherent values, can be non-negotiable for the individual or interest group. These perspectives are not easily swayed, and the influence of power often coupled to conflict are vital components in the final decision-making process of allocation and implementation. Resources, both tangible and intangible, influence the organization's goals based upon decisions related to their provisioning. Time, financial support, sponsorship, and resources all have specific value to the organization.

Stakeholders who receive the resources often receive control as well. This provisioning potentially breeds conflict. It is important to note that conflict is normal, inevitable, and valued. Conflict is not a hallmark of failure or a mistake. It should be embraced, planned for, and utilized for improvement. Conflict can also set the stage for bargaining and negotiation amongst competing stakeholders. When common interests are shared, negotiation is utilized through compromise to reach a desired, or at the least acceptable outcome. Bargaining is an often inequitable exchange, where commonalities are absent. This knowledge is powerful and when exercised by leaders in the Political frame, their strengths will include clarifying wants and available resources, assessing the distribution of interests and power, building relationships with key stakeholders, and persuading first, negotiating second, and only using coercion if necessary. These strengths are all means of direct approaches and involvement. This, in turn, can expose weaknesses of the Political frame as well. Bolman and Deal (2017) summarize the perspective of the political frame, stating, “A fixation on politics easily becomes a cynical self-fulfilling prophecy, reinforcing conflict and mistrust while sacrificing opportunities for rational discourse, collaboration, and hope” (p. 323).

The Symbolic frame addresses the transference of meaning between the subject of the experience and the observer. This meaning can resonate in consonance or dissonance with individuals or groups based on personal beliefs, values, and perceptions. The Symbolic Frame provides a lens into how “humans make sense of the chaotic, ambiguous world in which they live” (Bolman and Deal, 2017, p. 236). The meaning we seek cannot be unequivocally crafted for us, rather it must be defined by our own dogmas. This field of view within the Symbolic frame is punctuated by five assumptions, including:

1. What is most important is not what happens but what it means.
2. Activity and meaning are loosely coupled; events and actions have multiple interpretations as people experience situations differently.
3. Facing uncertainty and ambiguity, people create symbols to resolve confusion, find direction, and anchor hope and faith.
4. Events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than for what is produced, their emblematic form weaves a tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories to help people find purpose and passion.
5. Culture forms the superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise to accomplish desired ends. (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 241–242)

When symbolic interpretations are shared and valued within a culture, whether it be personal or organizational, the ties that bind are fortified by individuals through these values and beliefs.

Belief is a powerful component of the influence relationship that is leadership. Strengths of leaders in the Symbolic frame include leading by example, using symbols to capture attention, framing the experiences, communicating a vision, telling a story, and respecting and using history (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Crafting a culture with symbolism strengthens the relationship between leaders and followers. Belief in a vision empowers the individual to pursue the goals of the organization with zeal. This fervor to believe and follow can inadvertently lead to weaknesses within the Symbolic frame. A disingenuous rogue influencer can manipulate those who are quick to believe and follow, leading them to ruin. Leaders and followers in the Symbolic frame should hold one another accountable, with acceptance of belief systems coupled to a firm grasp of reality.

Concluding the discussion of reframing leadership, “each frame highlights significant possibilities for leadership, but each by itself is incomplete” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 356). The authors make a valid point. No single frame should be used in isolation, but rather in concert with each other or, as Bolman and Deal (2017) refer to it, a multi-frame approach. All leaders have innate strengths and should build upon those within the framework most suited to their fortes. Expanding the bounds of their own preference of frame will undoubtedly improve their leadership presence. Reframing their own leadership in this fashion will only provide greater opportunities to succeed.

### **Summary**

The release of *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) launched a nation-wide education reform movement in the United States. Although the pathways of education reform are paved with good intentions, many initiatives proved disappointing and some counterproductive. Lane (2010) states, while we “proclaim their good intentions,” our students, schools, and communities continue to suffer the unintentional harm of these failed processes in education reform. Education reform efforts at the state and federal levels of government increased pressure on school district superintendents to enact a wide array of leadership roles in serving their respective communities (Kowalski, 2013). During the early 2010s, Tennessee sought to holistically improve education across the state while simultaneously securing funding for these practices from the federal government. The detriments to the state’s highest academically performing school districts were rooted in the criteria of the self-imposed state’s legislation, First to the Top Act (2010). This act, a state-level companion to the Race to the Top Act (2009) left no room for mitigation with regard to student academic growth scores. For the state’s high performing school

districts, these circumstances had a profoundly negative impact on teachers' performance evaluations and jeopardized their jobs. To protect these employees, superintendents of these similarly situated districts expanded the scope and intensity of their political leadership roles in influencing Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

Kowalski's (2013) five role characterizations of superintendents, included those of Teacher Scholar, Manager, Democratic Leader, Applied Social Scientist, and Communicator. To impact the policy-making process at the state level, the roles of democratic leader and communicator in the policy arena were highly relevant. As a democratic leader and political actor, the superintendent not only worked with their local communities, but also influenced elected state-level policy makers (Kowalski, 2013). They developed an acuity for political leadership as state governance launched educational reforms to improve learning and teaching (Björk and Gurley, 2005). Effective communication allows for open discourse in a variety of modes and methods. Kowalski (2013) notes that a superintendent who is skilled in communication may have a greater level of influence in their district as well as shaping the direction of state-level education reform.

The nature of leadership (Rost, 1991), political influence (Bolman & Deal, 2017), concepts of power (French & Raven, 1959), as well as notions of ethics and morals (Northouse, 2019), provide a solid foundation for understanding the roles and leadership qualities of superintendents in an educational reform context. They are particularly useful in understanding the role of one superintendent in shaping Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

The dynamic relationship between society and politics is evident in recent education reform movements at the national and state levels of government. Scholars observe that politics, power, and leadership play an influential role in shaping and implementing legislation. This exploratory case study examines one education reform initiative, Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), along with Williamson County Schools as a unique research setting of the study, and the political role of one superintendent and other stakeholders involved in its promulgation and passage. This chapter will present the research methodology used in this exploratory case study. It will describe the purpose of the study and then define the goals of research, present research questions that guided this study, followed by a discussion of the conceptual framework, research design components, validity, and the case study approach. In addition, it will present research procedures, data sources, interview process, data analysis, quality assurances, the role of the researcher, as well as the study’s limitations.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose statement provides a foundation for making a wide range of decisions about how to conduct a research study. For example, Patton (2002) notes, “Decisions about design, measurement analysis, and reporting all flow from purpose” (p. 212). In addition, when the researcher begins the study with the end in mind, it not only enhances its validity, but also provides additional opportunities for increasing clarity. Caelli, Ray, and Mill (2003) state, “Enough detail about the study, the approach, and the methods needs to be included so that the reader can appropriately evaluate the research” (p. 4). The unique nature of this exploratory case study requires the researcher to ensure clarity of the research design and methods.

The purpose of this exploratory case study is to better understand the political role of one Tennessee school district superintendent, in promulgating the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) as well as influence relationships between local and state leaders and stakeholders who facilitated the process. As noted previously, development of state-level education reform policies in Tennessee over the past several decades was influenced by public school district superintendents. Acquiring a deeper understanding of the political role of one school district superintendent who played a key role in the development of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) and benefitted from its passage is unique in time and place. This exploratory study used a case study approach and qualitative data collection methods to more fully understand the policy-making context, motivations and leadership experiences of this superintendent, as well as the role of the other stakeholders involved in the promulgation and enactment of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. Why was Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) developed, promoted, and enacted?
2. How were influence relationships of leadership developed by the Williamson County Schools (WCS) district superintendent with other stakeholders?
3. What political and ethical behaviors created barriers and opportunities for the development and passage of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013)?

Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) provide insight to designing exceptional mixed methods research studies and use the concept of timing with regard to the order and flow of the research questions. This approach serves the qualitative method of this study, where the sequential order of research questions was purposeful, in that data gathered to answer the first question informed those that follow.

### **Research Setting**

A single provision of Tennessee's First to the Top Act (2010) required half of a teacher or principal's evaluation to be determined from student achievement data (Finch, 2017). Because student growth scores were included in this academic achievement data, public school districts with students scoring at the highest levels of achievement had little to no room to demonstrate growth. As one of the highest performing school districts in Tennessee, Williamson County Schools (WCS) made attempts with Tennessee's Commissioner of Education to find common ground for relief from this legislation. But it was to no avail. Along with the State Legislative delegation from Williamson county, WCS helped initiate new legislation which became Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). Initial exploratory research revealed that WCS was not only the first, but also the only public school district to request relief under Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act since its inception. These unique circumstances enabled the researcher to identify the focus of the study as Williamson County Schools, as well as identify the principal actors who were involved in developing, promulgating, enacting, and implementing the law.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Maxwell (2013) discusses the conceptual framework of a study as the thoughts and theories the researcher holds regarding the phenomena. He notes, although these thoughts and



theories may be tentative, they are important in guiding the research design as a whole, evaluate and enhance objectives, assist in the development of pertinent and pragmatic research questions, and recognize possible threats to the validity of the study's findings and conclusion. "These theories and beliefs may be drawn from the literature, personal experience, preliminary studies, or a variety of other sources" (Maxwell & Loomis, 2003, p. 245). Tracy (2013) concurs noting that the foundations of knowledge, or epistemology, guide research. In this regard, theories and beliefs help define the nature of this study, as well as elucidate its epistemological orientation. Although Maxwell and Loomis (2003) believe that paradigmatic unity on the identification and use of a single paradigm in the research process is not required, relational connectivity of paradigms is possible. However, paradigmatic unity for this study is not in question.

Phenomenological constructivism governs the theories and beliefs that guided this exploratory research study. "Constructivists focus on the role of ideas, norms, knowledge, culture, and argument in politics, stressing in particular the role of collectively held or 'intersubjective' ideas and understandings on social life" (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p. 392). Maxwell (2013) provides additional insight with regard to epistemological constructivism stating that, "Our understanding of this world is inevitably our construction, rather than a purely objective perception of reality, and no such construction can claim absolute truth" (p. 43). However, Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006) note that epistemologically, the constructivist interrelationship of the researcher and the participant, being subjective in nature, promotes the "coconstruction of meaning". Constructivists or norm entrepreneurs (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001) are individuals or groups who seek to change existing rules and regulations often through political influence. They are unique in that agents of change commonly have little power or leverage to influence organizations. Although understanding events that contributed to the

promulgation and enactment of Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) may reflect a constructed reality of participants, it provides a unique opportunity to understand the nature of political influence in educational policy making processes.

## Research Design

### Rationale

Exploration, description, and explanation are defined by Babbie (2007) as the three central objectives of social research. “Exploration is the attempt to develop an initial, rough understanding of some phenomenon” (Babbie, 2007, p. 115). This exploratory case study reflects the tenets and employed a qualitative design that was appropriate to its purpose and offered methods to help answer the “W”s: questions of who, what, where, when, and how of the research study. In addition, Maxwell and Loomis (2003) discuss an interactive approach to research design that allows greater connectivity among research components. These foundational aspects of the interactive model of a research design include purpose, conceptual framework, research questions, methods, and validity that will provide a scaffold upon which the research methodology and approach of this study are built (Figure 3.1).

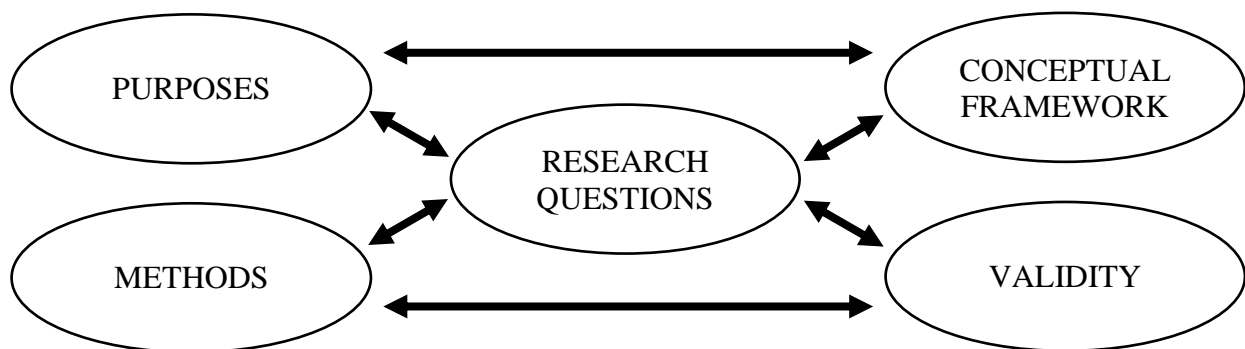


Figure 3.1. Interactive approach to research design. Adapted from Maxwell & Loomis, 2003, p. 246.

Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) describe additional dimensions of design, both primary and secondary, presented in (Table 3.1). Although focused on a mixed methods approach, these elements align and support the components of Maxwell and Loomis' (2003) model of interactive design (Figure 3.1) and together provided the scaffolding upon which the research methodology and approach of this study was built.

### **Design Components**

Maxwell and Loomis (2003) identify four design components within a study's methodology. These components include: (1) the relationship between the researcher and those being studied, (2) timeframes of data collection along with selecting site, participant, and setting criteria, (3) data collection methods, and (4) data analysis strategies. The first component, the relationship of the researcher to study participants and any influence shared between them opens the study to intended or unintended impacts. The qualitative approach regards the relationship between researcher and participants as a process that may have both positive and negative consequences. The second component, timeframes of data collection, is surmised through sampling. Qualitative sampling seeks participants and conditions that are most likely to provide relevant and valuable evidence allowing the researcher to test specific theoretical constructs (Maxwell & Loomis, 2003). The third component, the collection of data, embodies the qualitative approach more than any other design component. Data collection through qualitative methods allows for flexibility, inductive interpretation, and an open-ended composition resulting in descriptive, contextual rich results. The fourth and final component, data analysis, invokes descriptive, contextual rich results. Schoonenboom and Johnson's (2017) point of integration, which is applicable to mixed methods approaches, rather than holistic qualitative studies.

Table 3.1

*Primary and secondary dimensions of design*

Primary Dimensions	Secondary Dimensions
1. Purpose	1. Phenomenon
2. Theoretical Drive	2. Social scientific theory
3. Timing (simultaneous and dependence)	3. Ideological drive
4. Point of integration	4. Combination of sampling methods
5. Typological vs. interactive design approach	5. Degree of participant similarity or difference
6. Planned vs. emergent design	6. Degree of researcher similarity or difference
7. Complexity	7. Type of implementation setting
	8. Degree of method similarity or difference
	9. Validity criteria and strategies
	10. Full study vs. multiple studies

Note: Adapted from Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017)

Qualitative fieldwork for this study began with the creation and utilization of a data generation concept chart that facilitated identification of promising lines of inquiry, including planning focused interviews with an open-ended structure and conducting a review of pertinent

documents and archival records. Preliminary archival records review enabled the researcher to identify “high performing” school districts in Tennessee. Archival records examined included board of education resolutions, school district waiver requests, and Tennessee State Department of Education communications regarding Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) helped to outline the requirements, district needs, and the process through which individual school districts formally requested a variant path from state law and regulations. The state’s decision on these respective applications included in descriptive data that provided a foundation for the study. These data enabled the researcher to identify the Williamson County Schools district as the only beneficiary of this act, as well as identify the superintendent and stakeholders who were involved in its promulgation and passage. Subsequently, focused interviews with an open-ended structure enabled the researcher to examine the WCS superintendent and the role of local and state stakeholders associated with the enactment of Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (Appendix C). These interviews enabled the researcher to understand the phenomena from the perspective of those who experienced events. Interviews also enabled the researcher to collect their reflections on historical contexts, prevailing opinions, and other pertinent information.

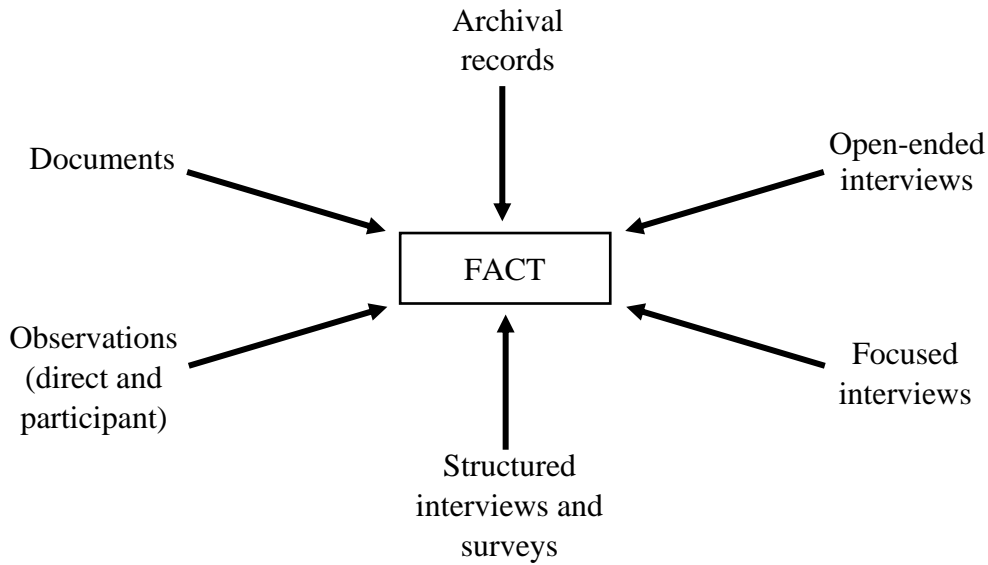
### **Validity**

The final component of Maxwell and Loomis’s (2003) interactive approach to research is validity. Maxwell (2013) explains that validity in qualitative methodology can be a work in progress. The qualitative researcher “must try to address most validity threats after the research has begun, using evidence collected during the research itself to make these ‘alternative hypotheses’ implausible” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 123). Researcher bias and reactivity are two validity issues that were monitored throughout this study. As a member of the Williamson

County Board of Education, the researcher was cursorily involved in the creation and promulgation of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). The threat of bias existed. However, the researcher incorporated an introspective journal process to check his bias and endeavored to understand how personal values and expectations may have influenced the study. Reactivity, or the effect of the researcher on the participants and setting of the study, is not an anticipated risk or issue of importance due to the nature and design of the study (Maxwell, 2013). None of the researcher's personal experiences were included in the study's data collection, analysis, and reporting. Through member checking, participants were given the opportunity to review, modify, retract, and approve all statements given, prior to publication of the study to ensure their perspectives were accurately depicted (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

### **Case Study**

When research examines a singularly unique phenomenon, case study methodology is an appropriate approach (Simons, 2009). Yin (2009) also notes that these phenomena are not always easily observed in everyday life. Consequently, these circumstances suggest the need for triangulation based on multiple sources evidence, including data collected and analyzed that may provide foundational knowledge (Yin, 2009). "With triangulation, the potential problems of construct validity also can be addressed, because the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (Yin, 2009, p. 92). Figure 3.2 depicts Yin's (2009) concept of convergence where multiple sources of evidence are utilized in triangulation to reach a conclusion of corroboratory conviction and accuracy. This exploratory case study's multiple sources of evidence included focused interviews with an open-ended structure,



*Figure 3.2.* Convergence of multiple sources of evidence (single study). Adapted from Yin, 2009, p. 93.

documents, and archival records. Interviews were conducted with study participants utilizing digital discussions through email. Documents, as Yin (2009) defines them included letters, newspaper articles, and minutes of meetings. Archival records included organizational records such as those of Tennessee’s Department of Education and House of Representatives.

The availability of multiple sources of data including various participant’s perspectives on events creates an optimal opportunity for case study utilization (Tellis, 1997). Yin (2009) discusses three applications of a case study in research. The first application is exploring causal links in reality-based interactions. The second application is, in describing the reality-based context of the phenomenon, stakeholders will have the opportunity to broaden the understanding of their experience. The third application is in describing the phenomenon itself to gain a greater current understanding of the experience as it emerges, while also allowing the possibility of unforeseen nuances to be revealed (Yin, 2009). This exploratory case study meets all three of Yin’s (2009) applications for case study research. It is significant in that it focuses on the

promulgation and enactment of Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) that was unique in time and place. The study was grounded in an examination of descriptive data on school districts that may benefit from flexibility and individuals who were substantively involved in events. It was bounded in time by events during the 2014–2015 school year and presented an opportunity to understand events from perspectives of participants.

### **Study Participants**

The Williamson County Schools superintendent and other key individuals were identified as having participated in building a political coalition with other education stakeholders in order to petition state legislators to enact Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). Participants in this study included: (1) Dr. Mike Looney, Superintendent of Williamson County Schools during the events of this case study; (2) Jason Golden, JD, current Superintendent for Williamson County Schools (WCS); (3) Denise Goodwin, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools (retired); (4) Dr. Charles Farmer, Principal of Freedom Middle School in the Franklin Special School District (FSSD) and former Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Schools for WCS; (5) Gary Anderson, Executive Director for COVID Response for WCS and former WCS Board of Education member for thirty years, serving as Board Chairman and Vice Chairman; (6) Rogers Anderson, Mayor of Williamson County; (7) Glen Casada, who represents the 63<sup>rd</sup> District in the Tennessee State House of Representatives; and (8) Jack Johnson, Tennessee State Senate Majority Leader. A more complete discussion of these individuals’ background is included in Chapter 4.



## **Research Procedures**

### **Data Sources**

The researcher concentrated on collecting three types of data to develop the case study narrative including focused interviews with an open-ended structure, documents, and archival records. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher used constant comparative analysis techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to guide the interview process. Interviews enabled the researcher to collect firsthand descriptions of their experience regarding the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). These data were gathered from the Williamson County Schools superintendent and other key stakeholders in the educational community, who were directly involved in supporting Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act. Documents were used to collect data pertinent in describing relationships between the superintendent, board of education members, legislators, and others as appropriate. These efforts highlighted actions taken, both directly and indirectly, by the elected officials, government entities, and other relevant stakeholders related to promulgating and passing Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act. Finally, online searches of local and state governmental websites facilitated archival records collection, review, and analysis. These records included the meetings of the Williamson County Board of Education, Tennessee Department of Education achievement and growth data coupled to demographic identifiers, and Tennessee State Legislative records pertaining to Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act.

The researcher used the Atlas.ti platform to facilitate data collection and analysis. The platform provided a range of coding capabilities, direct import from various sources and

applications, as well as providing data security through an immersive editing suite. Atlas.ti provided a reliable and secure platform to store data collected during this exploratory case study.

## **Interviews**

Following the IRB protocols, informed consent was required and received from study participants. Due to safety precautions and restrictions regarding the COVID-19, or Coronavirus, pandemic, interviews were conducted via email. During the window of opportunity to complete these interviews, participants' schedules were not conducive to an in-person experience due to professional workloads and personal time constraints. As a mitigation, the researcher proposed conducting in-depth interviews by email with the understanding that an open digital dialogue through these emails would be maintained for potential subsequent questions and clarifications. All participants chose this communication method and the interview guide (Appendix N) including the process and instrument, was sent to each of the eight participants of this study. Fritz and Vandermause (2018) note that although in-depth email interviewing is not as widely utilized as in-person interview techniques, it is a reliable method of data collection. Table 3.2 depicts the advantages and disadvantages of in-depth email interviews.

The interview instrument emailed to the participants contained items intended to elicit perceptions concerning aspects of leadership, relationships, decision points, and specifically how these elements affected the promulgation, passage, and practice of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). The interview instrument began by eliciting information on their respective experiences, both professional and personal, to help lay a foundation that enabled the researcher to better understand their contributions, comments, and insights. The instrument continued with items involving interactions, motivations, choices, and reflections.

Table 3.2

*Advantages and Disadvantages of Email Interviewing*

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Convenient</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not location bound</li> <li>• No coordination with transcriptionist needed</li> <li>• Data that most directly answer the research question are easier to locate because there is less superfluous data such as “well, uhm” and “pause” and “sigh”</li> <li>• Potentially shorter transcripts</li> <li>• Audit trail easy to follow</li> </ul> <p>Cost reduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No payment to transcriptionist</li> <li>• No travel costs</li> <li>• No travel time</li> </ul> <p>Clear, concise, rich data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depth of response may increase due to participant ability to respond at a later time, when thoughts are well formed</li> <li>• High quality discriminative data emerges when participants have time to carefully craft responses</li> </ul> <p>Comfortable venue for participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants can engage from home</li> <li>• Not being seen or being in the presence of another human may decrease the stress of participant when discussing sensitive issues</li> </ul> <p>Sample diversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitates inclusion of disabled, homebound, or location-bound persons</li> <li>• Facilitates inclusion of working persons who otherwise would not engage in research due to scheduling issues</li> <li>• Expands the geographic region for conducting research</li> </ul>	<p>Effort</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More time and effort is required when typing than speaking</li> <li>• Some persons still “finger peck” resulting in time-consuming efforts to respond</li> </ul> <p>Reflexive responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unable to capture “aha” expressions</li> </ul> <p>Cues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability to observe, interpret, and act upon real-time visual cues</li> <li>• Potential loss of silence</li> </ul> <p>Potential technology failures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computer crashes</li> <li>• Poor connectivity</li> <li>• Breaches of confidentiality if emails lost in cyberspace</li> </ul> <p>Sample bias</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Populations with Internet access may still represent persons with higher income and higher education</li> </ul>

Note: Adapted from Fritz and Vandermause (2018)

## Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Tracy's pragmatic iterative concept which, "alternates between emic, or emergent, readings of the data and an etic use of existing models, explanations, and theories" (Tracy, 2013, p. 184). Coding qualitative data was accomplished using a primary-cycle coding process that was then finalized through use of a minimalized axial coding stage. The axial coding development through similarity (Maxwell, 2013) allows the researcher to synthesize similarly situated responses within larger connected objectives. Substantive categories emerging in the coding process are described by Maxwell as being, "primarily descriptive, in a broad sense that includes description of participants' concepts and beliefs; they stay close to the data categorized, and don't inherently imply a more abstract theory" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 108).

The Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software platform facilitated an inductive approach to analysis that was coupled with a constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) approach to generate a grounded theory. As Glaser and Holton (2007) state, "The generated theory explains the preponderance of behavior in a substantive area with the prime mover of this behavior surfacing as the main concern of the primary participants" (p. 56). Additionally, Glaser and Holton (2007) state that data conceptualization through coding is fundamental in the development of grounded theory. By coding, the researcher can differentiate the data away from an empirical level to a conceptual plane where grouping of the codes explains what is happening in the data (Glaser & Holton, 2007). I followed Creswell's (2015) example by utilizing twenty-two codes which were subsequently combined into five major leadership themes including roles, politics, influence, ethics, and organizational frameworks (Table 3.3). Several sub-themes were identified including teacher scholar, manager, democratic leader, applied social scientist, communicator, political influencer, power leader, conflict leader, influence leader, ethical leader,

Table 3.3

*Code-Document Table*

	<b>Roles</b>	<b>Politics</b>	<b>Influence</b>	<b>Ethics</b>	<b>Organizational Frameworks</b>	<b>Totals</b>
	Q: 183 C: 5	Q: 136 C: 3	Q: 148 C: 1	Q: 190 C: 6	Q: 131 C: 4	
<b>Looney</b> 35 Quotations	18	12	18	23	10	81
<b>Golden</b> 37 Quotations	24	16	23	21	11	95
<b>Goodwin</b> 37 Quotations	34	27	23	33	22	139
<b>Farmer</b> 39 Quotations	22	13	16	26	11	88
<b>GAnderson</b> 34 Quotations	30	23	23	31	26	133
<b>RAnderson</b> 35 Quotations	14	12	13	15	12	66
<b>Casada</b> 37 Quotations	20	14	13	20	18	85
<b>Johnson</b> 33 Quotations	21	19	19	21	21	101
<b>Totals</b>	183	136	148	190	131	788

*Note.* Q = Quotations. C = Codes

moral leader, utilitarianist, altruist, LMX leader, reflective leader, structural leader, human resources leader, political leader, and symbolic leader. These sub-themes will be discussed in Chapter 4 and analyzed in Chapter 5.

### **Quality Assurances**

Tracy (2013) defines eight foundational criteria for qualitative research to be deemed credible, ethical, and significant. These factors include a topic that is worthy, rigor that is high, sincerity, credibility, resonance, a significant contribution to the field of study, ethical in nature, and having meaningful coherence. Quality assurance falls within these guidelines, specifically in

the areas of ethics, credibility, and sincerity. As a component of sincerity, transparency requires an open and honest approach to the research. From this approach, credibility is established in trust, dependability, and reliable results. The ethical treatment to research is paramount to quality assurance and “should be involved in *every* aspect of design” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 7). Through qualitative data collection and analysis, the researcher employed ethical standards and protection of human participants throughout the study. During the interview process, participants were provided a detailed informed consent form that was approved by the University of Kentucky Institutional Review Board (Appendix L). This form guaranteed the protection of human subjects, ensured confidentiality where necessary or appropriate, outlined the parameters of the interactions with the researcher as well as defined the role of the researcher. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to reassess, revise, remove, and accept all statements given, prior to the publication of the study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The opportunity afforded by this exploratory case study is unique in time and place. My personal experience as a member of the Williamson County Schools Board of Education during the events which are the subject of research, provides insight, access, but also the risk of bias. As a member of the Williamson County Schools Board of Education, through edification of, deliberation on, and voting for the measures which led to Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), I became an integral component of this case study’s events. Maxwell (2013) notes that experience such as mine has traditionally been considered potentially influential with a need to be excluded from the research design rather than viewed as a beneficial waypoint. However, the interest and knowledge of the researcher must be accounted for. “*Any view is a view from some perspective, and is therefore shaped by the location (social and*

theoretical) and lens of the observer” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 46). This convergence of setting, perspective, and involvement of the researcher in the events of this case study provide an exceptional opportunity which might not otherwise be explored. Coupled to these aspects are the relationships of the study participants to the researcher. Each participant in this study is a former professional colleague and current acquaintance or friend of the researcher. The personal experience of the researcher in the events of this case study are recognized through notations to self and consistent mental cautioning to create separation and safeguard against preconception of the study’s findings and analysis. However, this lived experience of the researcher enhanced the understanding of the events while preventing distortion of the narrative.

Furthermore, Tracy (2013) states that a more traditionalist perspective of the observer is one that listens, avoids premature judgement or evaluation, or interpersonally interacting in the research efforts. In this approach, reflexivity is considered. Berger (2015) notes that reflexivity is a constant inner exchange and self-assessment of the researcher’s positionality. This active recognition acknowledges the possibility that the research process and results may be affected by these attributes. These facets of the researcher may influence the study in three primary respects including access to the field of study, influence between the researcher and participant of the study, and the lens through which the researcher crafts the study based upon their own experience (Berger, 2015). With my experience in the events of this study, I chose the approach which Kvale (1996) terms deliberate naivete. Coupled to the quality assurances, this tactic, where predispositions are placed aside and an inclination to receive new information and perspectives, opens possibilities to authentic data collection and analysis. Removing the impact of my own experiences safeguards against bias, however, harnessing my interest in this research fuels the study in an effort to bridge a specific knowledge gap.

## **Limitations of the Study**

This exploratory study examined the development, promulgation, and enactment of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). Several constraints on the study may constitute limitations including: (a) The availability of stakeholders to participate in the interview process; (b) The sensitive and political nature of the topic may have contributed to participants not being entirely candid in interviews; (c) The passage of time may have influenced participants' recollection of events; (d) The relevance and/or utilization of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) may have changed over time; (e) Changes in the school district may have led to qualification or disqualification of the state's recognition; (f) The participants' awareness of the legislation, both at the time of its inception and current application, is not known prior to the study's commencement; (g) The use of only one coder, the researcher, to examine and analyze the data may influence the evaluation; and (h) The direct and indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced participation or adversely impacted the interview process by altering the in-person methodology to digital discussions by email. In-depth email interviews do not account for the nuances of body language or other visual cues and require additional time for follow-up questions if needed. Individually or taken together, these limitations may have constrained data collection during this exploratory study.

## **Summary**

This exploratory case study provided an opportunity to understand motivations, leadership strategies, and characteristics of a superintendent as well as other local and state stakeholders regarding Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). The study is situated in the broad context of educational reform in the post-1983 era at the national, state, and local levels. Circumstances surrounding the development and passage of



Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act provided a unique opportunity to better understand the political leadership role of school district superintendents in educational policymaking.

The notion of phenomenological constructivism guided the qualitative research design of this exploratory case study (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). Qualitative research methodology offered an in-depth framework for this case study (Maxwell, 2013). Focused interviews with an open-ended structure were conducted with the Williamson County Schools superintendent, board of education members, state legislators, and other key stakeholders to gain their perspectives on Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). Insights gained through interview data collection and analysis provided a better understanding of the reasons why efforts were made to change Tennessee state law. Findings of this research are presented in Chapter 4. Discussions, conclusions, and recommendations for future research and practice are presented in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

This exploratory case study endeavored to better understand the role of the one school district superintendent in Tennessee who participated in promulgating Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). Additionally, the influence relationships of the Williamson County Schools (WCS) superintendent with local and state leaders and other key stakeholders who facilitated the process were examined. This school district championed the creation, support, and enactment of a new law intended to protect high academically achieving school districts from the inadvertent negative impacts of previously passed education reform legislation. Three questions guided the study, including:

1. Why was Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) developed, promoted, and enacted?
2. How were influence relationships of leadership developed by the Williamson County Schools district superintendent with other stakeholders?
3. What political and ethical behaviors created barriers and opportunities for the development and passage of Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013)?

The WCS district superintendent and seven key participants involved with the conception, promotion, and enactment of Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) were identified, and focused interviews with an open-ended structure were conducted to elicit their perceptions of events. Documents and archival records were collected and examined, including state level achievement and demographic data, minutes of local board of education meetings, and reports regarding relationships of Tennessee superintendents, the

Commissioner of Education, and other key stakeholders. These interviews, documents, and archival records enabled the researcher to develop a chronological descriptive narrative of events from the perspective of participants. A brief background situates the study in time and place, and participants are introduced before the Williamson County case study is presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of emergent themes and subthemes that will be analyzed in Chapter 5. Five themes emerged from the study including roles, politics, influence, ethics, and organizational frameworks.

### **Background of the Study**

Since the end of World War II, national education reform initiatives have been fraught with partisan political influence. The release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) expressed the nation's heightened concern for the condition of education and its economic well-being, and is viewed as the beginning of a protracted effort to reform schooling. The principal focus of these reform efforts was to enhance the capacity of America's students to compete in a global economy. Since 1983, successive Presidential administrations launched a wide array of education initiatives, including one such measure passed during the Obama administration—the Race to the Top Act (2009). This act inadvertently created the circumstances in which the WCS district in Tennessee sought relief from its provisions that disadvantaged teachers.

President Barack Obama was elected in 2008 and sworn into office in January 2009. The United States had suffered an economic recession leading into President Obama's first term in office. In 2009, as a stimulus to the economy, the President introduced the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and, soon after, the Race to the Top Act, a competitive federally funded

education reform initiative. Once qualified for the Race to the Top program, a state was required to match funding, adhere to its rules, and pass companion education reform legislation.

In 2009, bipartisan relationships in the Tennessee legislature enabled the state to lay important groundwork to enter the Race to the Top (2009) education initiative. Tennessee achieved success in phase one of Race to the Top in the spring of 2010 when the Tennessee state legislature followed through with the federal requirements for state level companion legislation and passed the First to the Top Act (2010), which established six provisions, the last of which became the catalyst for Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). The sixth provision uses student achievement data to evaluate teachers and principals on their performance. Inherent in this provision is the growth component score. As the Tennessee state legislature rushed to draft and pass the First to the Top Act to maintain the Race to the Top status, mitigation for high performing schools was not included. Concerns of superintendents of high performing school districts first began to arise in 2012. High performing school districts had little or no room to demonstrate growth. Consequently, a high performing school district's achievement score would be lower. This is important because the achievement score would then be utilized as 50% of teacher and principal evaluations. The potential negative impact this score could have on an employee's evaluation could eventually place their employment in jeopardy. As the highest academically achieving school district in the state of Tennessee, WCS became acutely aware of the negative impact of this calculation on its employees and realized that it had to take corrective action. This case study chronicles the development, promulgation, and enactment of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act.

## **Participants of the Study**

In order to better understand case study events, individuals who were key actors in the creation of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) will be introduced. These eight individuals served in leadership roles in WCS, Williamson County government, or the Tennessee State Legislature, and were case study participants. The initial item from the interview instrument asked participants about their role, what brought them to Williamson County, and the history of their role and accomplishments. These data assisted the researcher in introducing them before the case study is presented. These are the participants.

Dr. Mike Looney is currently the Superintendent of the Fulton County School District in Georgia. Prior to his move to Atlanta, Dr. Looney served as the Superintendent/Director of Schools for Williamson County from 2009 to 2019. He has served for 24 years as a classroom teacher, assistant principal, principal, central office supervisor, and superintendent of schools. His move to Williamson County was facilitated through an executive search firm engaged by the Williamson County Board of Education. Dr. Looney, as Superintendent/Director of Schools, was the chief architect of the initiative which came to fruition as Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). His cabinet included Deputy Superintendent of Schools, Jason Golden, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools, Denise Goodwin, and Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Schools, Charles Farmer.

Jason Golden, J.D., is the Superintendent for WCS. Prior to this appointment by the WCS Board of Education, Mr. Golden held the role of Deputy Superintendent as well as District Counsel for WCS. In addition, his more than 20 years of experience in the field of education also includes serving as Chief Operations Officer and County Commissioner. His employment with Williamson County Schools began as the Board of Education's attorney with "an opportunity to

do the work I loved in a high performing community that needed my work” (J. Golden, email interview, January 22, 2021).

Denise Goodwin recently retired from Williamson County Schools where she had served as Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools for 10 years. Mrs. Goodwin and her family relocated to Williamson County from Nashville, Tennessee primarily for the educational opportunities for their children. At that time, Mrs. Goodwin began her WCS career as a part-time elementary school teacher. Her nearly 30 year career as a professional educator included roles as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal, prior to her appointment as the Assistant Superintendent. Under her leadership, five WCS elementary schools achieved the honor of being named a National Blue Ribbon School, along with others selected as Reward Schools each year.

Dr. Charles Farmer is currently the Principal of Freedom Middle School in the Franklin Special School District (FSSD). FSSD is a sister district within Williamson County, centered around the city of Franklin. FSSD educates children from kindergarten through eighth grade and then the students matriculate to WCS high schools. Dr. Farmer’s education experience spans 23 years as a teacher and coach, assistant principal, principal, collegiate graduate assistant and researcher, university supervisor of student teachers, and Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Schools for WCS. Dr. Farmer had previously worked with Dr. Looney prior to his move to WCS. With an existing trust and work rapport, Dr. Looney recruited Dr. Farmer to open Summit High School in WCS’s Spring Hill area as Principal.

Gary Anderson is known anecdotally as the living repository of knowledge and history concerning the WCS Board of Education. Mr. Anderson was first elected to the Board in 1990 and served for 30 years until 2020. He moved his family to Williamson County in 1982 after learning that Davidson County, where he lived at the time, was under a court order for focused

busing. Mr. Anderson strongly believed in the community school concept and WCS provided that opportunity. Mr. Anderson is currently the Executive Director for COVID Response for WCS. His role as a WCS Board Member included eleven years as Chairman and other various years as Vice Chairman. His full-time employment was also devoted to education, where he worked for Murfreesboro City Schools as Assistant Superintendent for Administrative and Support Services in neighboring Rutherford County. Additionally, Mr. Anderson held adjunct faculty positions for Nashville State Technical College and Belmont University for teaching and management courses.

Rogers Anderson is the Mayor of Williamson County, where he has served in that capacity for nearly 20 years. Mr. Anderson is a veteran of the United States Air Force, having served in Africa and Vietnam and has dedicated a majority of his life to public service, which began in 1986 with his election to the Williamson County Commission. During his 16 years as a County Commissioner, Mr. Anderson was elected by his peers to the role of Vice Chairman of the legislative body for eight years and Chairman for four years. In his capacity as Mayor of Williamson County, Mr. Anderson holds a wealth of experience in boards pertaining to public health, intergovernmental relations, economic development, and transportation, among others. Prior to his public service commitments, Mr. Anderson's 26 year career in commercial insurance provided him with the opportunity to travel to the mid-state area of Tennessee and the new territory provided him the chance to move to Williamson County.

Glen Casada represents the 63<sup>rd</sup> District in the Tennessee State House of Representatives, where he has held that seat for nineteen years. Mr. Casada's public service experience began in 1994 with his election to the Williamson County Commission. Following seven years in that role, Mr. Casada was elected in 2001 to the Tennessee State Legislature. Representative Casada

expresses his value in education by stating, “Tennessee schools have risen from 48<sup>th</sup> in the nation on standardized tests to as high as 19<sup>th</sup> in some tested areas with our lowest ranking being 39<sup>th</sup> in math levels at our high school level. Tennessee has ranked the most improved state in standardized test scores for 2016 and again in 2017” (G. Casada, email interview, December 6, 2020).

Jack Johnson was elected to the Tennessee State Senate in 2006, serving the 23<sup>rd</sup> District, which includes all of Williamson County. Mr. Johnson is currently the Senate Majority Leader of Tennessee, serving in that role since 2018. Mr. Johnson’s previous leadership roles in the Senate included Chairman of the Government Operations Committee as well as Chairman of the Commerce and Labor Committee. Mr. Johnson’s move to Williamson County was initiated by his employment, however, “the quality of life Franklin offered, the lower taxes and higher-quality Williamson County School System were the big draws that led my wife and me to move our family there” (J. Johnson, email interview, January 4, 2021).

### **Case Study of Williamson County Schools**

Understanding the social, economic, and political context of the WCS district is important and begins with the community. Nashville, the state capitol of Tennessee, is located in Davidson County and Williamson County is on its southern border. The town and country lifestyle of Williamson County has always been attractive to families and businesses alike. Corporate headquarters including those of Nissan North America and Mars Petcare have relocated to Williamson County, contributing to its continuous growth. When asked what brought him to Williamson County, Tennessee State Senator, Jack Johnson, stated:

When I decided to move from Davidson County to Franklin, my job in banking was primarily centered in Williamson County, so that was a large part of the decision to



move. But ultimately, the quality of life Franklin offered, the lower taxes and higher-quality Williamson County School System were the big draws that led my wife and me to move our family there. (J. Johnson, email interview, January 4, 2021)

The quality of Williamson County Schools is a common thread amongst responses to the questions of why this area and county was attractive to families and businesses. Each participant in this case study either referred to themselves as a Williamson County transplant or as a first-generation resident. For example, Gary Anderson served on the Williamson County Schools Board of Education for 30 years in various roles including Chairman and Vice Chairman. His wealth of historical experience is unparalleled and many regard his words as a voice of wisdom and reason within the school district. When asked about his move to Williamson County, Chairman Anderson replied:

I moved to Williamson County in 1982 to give my children the opportunity to attend WCS. Previously we lived in Davidson County and were informed that my children would not be attending the local community school since Davidson County Schools were under a court order for forced busing. Since we strongly believed in a community school concept, this was not acceptable to my wife and me. (G. Anderson, email interview, January 1, 2021)

The accomplishments of the Williamson County Schools district to maintain community-based schools and stress academic achievement was broadly understood by the community, politicians, and educators. For example, when asked about these successes and progress during her tenure, Denise Goodwin, former Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools, provided a perspective on Williamson County Schools accomplishments, saying:

Our academic successes had and continues to outperform all other districts. During my tenure, WCS added at least five National Blue Ribbon Elementary Schools and at least twenty Reward Schools each year. (D. Goodwin, email interview, December 2, 2020)

Williamson County families, citizens, and school district employees are unified in support of WCS. Concerns for economic stability and well-being motivated parents of school-age children to seek superior educational opportunities in Williamson County. The school district employs and maintains an exceptional workforce of professional educators led by a dedicated superintendent and central office team. The Williamson County tax rate remains low. This was attractive to non-WCS residents who pay taxes that support the school district. The academic quality of the school district and coupled with business opportunities, contributed to property values in Williamson County being among the highest in the state and provided long-term benefits to residents.

Over several decades, Williamson County Schools has been led by a number of superintendents, who were both elected and appointed. Processes, norms, and mores of the board of education changed as well over the years. For example, Gary Anderson describes his role as the Chairman of the Williamson County Schools Board of Education:

Probably one of my biggest achievements while on the school board was totally restructuring how the board functioned. The first time I was elected as chairperson of the board, I changed the board's functions from multiple committees in addition to two board meetings per month, to a work session and one board meeting per month. Also added the board's policy committee since that is one of the major functions of the board. That process is still being used today over 25 years later. (G. Anderson, email interview, January 1, 2021)

As a manager of the board of education, he handled the day-to-day business of the district, including the hiring, supervision, and, in 2009, the replacement of the current superintendent. The board of education decided to replace the superintendent and interviewed, selected, and hired Dr. Mike Looney. Dr. Looney brought 24 years of educational experience to the position, and as he liked to say, had a laser-focus on academic achievement and growth in athletics and the arts. At the time of his hiring, WCS was regarded as being at the top of the list of highest academically achieving schools in the state of Tennessee. A student-first mentality with a focus on academic growth was a long-standing mission of Williamson County Schools. As growth scores steadily increased, academic achievement maintained its excellence and the education gap in Williamson County narrowed.

Governor Bill Haslam was elected in 2010 and appointed Kevin Huffman to the role of Commissioner of Education. Building and maintaining relationships was a priority for Superintendent Looney. When asked to describe his relationships with students and parents as well as county commissioners and other elected officials, Dr. Looney states:

I am no longer employed by the WCS Board of Education but maintain a professional and congenial relationship with members of the Board and district staff. I continue to enjoy professional friendships with Board members in districts where I have served. I had courteous and professional relationships with county commissioners, but at times our interests did not align. I had a positive relationship predicated on mutual accountability and support with the district's faculty and staff. I believe the students and parents in the district respected the work we accomplished and appreciated my accessibility. The school district is known for its value add to the community and they generally support the district's leadership and initiatives. (M. Looney, email interview, January 11, 2021)

Dr. Looney made a concerted effort to foster relationships with stakeholders regardless of their respective stances for or against his education initiatives. For example, school zoning is an important issue for most families in the school district. Hearing the news that your child has been rezoned to another school can have an immense impact. These zoning decisions affect relationships beyond the families who may have their children moved to a new school. In many instances, the superintendent and board of education balance a rezoning effort against the financial burden of new school construction. The political tradeoffs include having a few unhappy families whose children are assigned to another school, better utilizing existing facilities at no cost to the taxpaying residents of the county, or building a new school. Williamson County Mayor, Rogers Anderson, describes the responsibility of managing the needs of the entire county, rather than a single subset of residents:

I always listen to those who want to discuss concerns relative to the school system in our county. Often times, community members who no longer have children in the public education system have a different perspective on the importance of public education in our community. Their thoughts and concerns must be considered, as well, when I weigh the decisions regarding funding the annual budget for our schools. (R. Anderson, email interview, November 25, 2020)

Mayor Anderson's response indicates his desires to achieve the greatest common good for all citizens in the county. One of the most common debates occurring in the county revolves around economic outcomes. Williamson County continues to invest in the public school system and that investment offers stability and growth of property values. This includes those who pay taxes to fund the schools but have no children in the school system. Mayor Anderson, Representative Casada, and Senator Johnson felt that they had a strong working relationship and enjoyed mutual

trust with the Superintendent and his leadership team. Senator Johnson commented on the relationship, saying:

Overall, I believe that we have a great working relationship with each other. We may not always agree on everything, but at the end of the day, our goal is the same – and that is to make the best decisions possible to ensure the best outcomes for the students, parents, and teachers of Williamson County. (J. Johnson, email interview, January 4, 2021)

At the time of Dr. Looney's hiring in 2009 and during his first several years serving as the superintendent of WCS, the country had begun the economic recovery process. During these first two years of President Obama's first term in office (2008–2010), the Race to the Top (2009) education reform initiative was launched, and Tennessee took its initial steps of entering the program. It applied to participate in the federally funded program and Tennessee passed companion legislation, the First to the Top Act (2010). Their efforts were neither heralded by local news media nor were of concern to local levels of government including the state's public school districts. However, in 2012, WCS General Counsel and Deputy Superintendent, Jason Golden, took note of a requirement in the recently passed First to the Top Act (2010) that could adversely impact the employees of the school district. After discussions with Superintendent Looney, the matter was brought before the Board of Education for discussion. The item of concern was the sixth and final provision of the First to the Top Act, which required student achievement data to comprise half of teacher and principal evaluations. Unbeknownst to the lawmakers who had crafted the First to the Top Act, student achievement data included an academic growth score component with a requirement for positive progress in growth. This provision also posed a problem for school districts similarly academically situated to Williamson County Schools. However, WCS was already at the pinnacle of both achievement and growth

and had little room for growth. As a consequence, the growth score component would negatively impact the employment evaluations of those teachers and principals where students were currently performing academically at the highest levels.

Dr. Looney requested mitigation for this provision of the First to the Top Act (2010) from the Tennessee Department of Education and Commissioner Kevin Huffman, but to no avail. Superintendent Looney discussed his frustration with the Department of Education, saying:

The Tennessee Department of Education's leadership failed to recognize the uniqueness of individual school district's and had adopted policies and practices impeding local decision making and control. I believe select elected officials and State Department of Education officials resented the district's high performance. (M. Looney, email interview, January 11, 2021)

Dr. Looney, confronted with this conflict, explored several avenues of compromise. The Commissioner of Education's power is outlined in the Tennessee Code Annotated. It states that the Commissioner was authorized to provide relief through mitigation of the newly enacted First to the Top's (2010) sixth provision. Commissioner Huffman, however, chose not to provide such relief. Superintendent Looney then brought a new idea to the Williamson County Board of Education. Dr. Looney and the WCS General Counsel developed a proposal of legislating a path around the Commissioner of Education, designed specifically to address his refusal to provide relief. The idea would not only assist the Williamson County Schools district, but also other high performing school districts in the state. This approach would not be detrimental to other school districts that were not considered to be high performing. The proposed bill's concept, authored by the Williamson County Schools General Counsel's Office, would need to address the specific issue where the growth score provision was inadvertently negatively impacting the evaluations of

exceptional teachers and principals. Denise Goodwin describes the spark for Tennessee's High Performing School District's Flexibility Act (2013):

The basic catalyst was to have those implementing State of Tennessee's Education Department mandates to recognize the success and autonomy of high performing districts, granting them relief from mandates, which these districts were either already practicing, or in educational non-alignment. WCS's belief in our researched based educational practices were strong and evidence data. The Act granted WCS (and others) true flexibility in many areas, the first and most important (in my opinion) was in how we evaluated teachers. The conversations of how to handle unneeded mandates were always on the table, which included options like asking for waivers directly from the TDOE Commissioner and working in direct understanding of disagreement with the State with district autonomy using effective data to rebuff the mandates. (D. Goodwin, email interview, December 12, 2020)

The political leaders of Williamson County worked in concert to realize real change, and the concept of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) emerged. The efforts of the Williamson County Schools district leadership team, coupled with the county's state legislative delegation was summarized by Senator Jack Johnson:

I think the catalyst was Williamson County's desire to make changes that they felt were in the best interests of the children in their district, but the Department or Board by law wasn't able to provide them with the flexibility. I think they definitely felt this was an impediment to their district's achievement and growth. Ultimately the bills passed with overwhelming majorities in both houses, so in general most everyone was supportive or

at the very least not working against the bill. (J. Johnson, email interview, January 4, 2021)

The legislative process, as detailed in the bill's history, first described the purpose of the bill as one that would allow high performing school districts to accomplish two goals without first requesting or acquiring approval from any other state or local government agency. These two goals were:

(1) Utilize a teacher evaluation system that varies from the evaluation system established by the department of education as though a flexibility waiver had been applied for and granted to the district, as long as the alternative teacher evaluation system used complies with all rules of the state board; and (2) Add educational days to that district's school calendar, so long as the minimum number of school days required by law is met.

(Tennessee High Performing School Districts Flexibility, 2013)

The first provision focused on the teacher evaluation system, which was the driving force for the creation of this bill. The second provision allowed high performing school districts to alter their school calendars which created more freedom around holidays, testing windows, and scheduled breaks. The all-encompassing provision that followed the first two stated, "Additionally, a high performing school district may apply to the commissioner of education for a waiver of any state board rule, regulation or statute that inhibits or hinders the district's ability to meet its goals or comply with its mission statement" (Tennessee High Performing School Districts Flexibility, 2013). The waivers remained at the commissioner's discretion with the exception of violating other named state and federal laws within the bill. Prior to the Tennessee legislature voting on the bill, two amendments were adopted by the Senate. Senate Bill (SB) 592



was passed as amended that became Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). These two amendments facilitated passage of the Act.

These two Senate amendments demonstrate the continued conversation around local control of government. The first amendment provided additional local control and freedom to the Local Educational Agency (LEA) regarding funding restrictions by allowing high performing school districts to conduct two actions without seeking or obtaining prior approval from any other local or state governmental body. These two actions were:

- (1) Appropriate additional funds as needed from the fund balance of self-sustaining or self-sufficient funds, including, but not limited to, the central cafeteria fund and the extended school program fund; and (2) Reappropriate funds between major categories of its budget to provide for an expenditure that constitutes an immediate educational need.

The reappropriation may only occur by action of the local board and, if the reappropriating LEA receives funding from its local legislative body, the reappropriation must be approved by the county mayor or city mayor, whichever applies. Further, if the LEA receives funding from its local legislative body, the local legislative body will establish a maximum amount for such reappropriations; provided, that the maximum amount may not be less than 75,000. Whenever reappropriation occurs under this bill, the local board must provide notice of the board's action to the local legislative body within seven days of the action. (Tennessee High Performing School Districts Flexibility, 2013)

The first action dealt with programs supported by self-sustaining or self-sufficient funds. This allowed programs, specifically the central cafeteria and extended school programs, to utilize capital within the fund balance of the programs where needed without having to put the request before a local or state government agency for approval. This allowed a greater flexibility for

these programs to flourish and grow. The second action related to the first amendment was negated by the second amendment itself, which read: “AMENDMENT #2 removes authorization for high performing LEAs to reappropriate funds between major budgetary categories to provide for an expenditure that constitutes an immediate educational need without first seeking or obtaining approval from any other state or local governmental agency or unit” (Tennessee High Performing School Districts Flexibility, 2013). As a procedural issue, the first amendment was passed with the knowledge that the second amendment would follow and remove the second action of the first amendment. The second action of the first amendment was an attempt to create greater local control at the LEA level. The legislature viewed this as an overreach and voted to pass the second amendment.

When a bill is presented and considered by the Tennessee State Legislature, a key component is the fiscal note. In other words, what will this cost the taxpayer? Appendix O lists the fiscal impact of the original bill as being not significant. To reach this conclusion, there are several assumptions regarding the bill as amended:

- (1) Any increase in state expenditures to grant waivers or approve alternative teacher evaluation systems is estimated to be not significant.
- (2) No change in the Basic Education Program (BEP) funding formula.
- (3) Any permissive increase in local expenditures as a result of using an alternative teacher evaluation system, adding additional days to the school calendar, or receiving a waiver for certain rules and regulations is estimated to be not significant
- (4) Any re-appropriation made by a local legislative body may not be less than \$75,000. However, appropriations made from self-sufficient funds are not limited to any minimum amount.

(5) It is reasonably estimated that permissive appropriations or re-appropriations of local funding will exceed \$100,000 per year statewide. (Appendix O)

The first assumption simply addresses the teacher evaluation waiver and that no increase in state funding would be significant. The second assumption regards the Basic Education Program (BEP), which is how all school districts receive funding from the state. The BEP formula exists as a matter of great contention among those school districts that benefit less, and of less importance for those school districts who benefit more. The economically disadvantaged school districts benefit more from the BEP funding formula by design. Counties which are not economically disadvantaged pay more into the state's coffers based on tax base and revenue. The BEP is essentially a revenue sharing formula based upon a county's ability to pay. The BEP is one of the facets of education legislation that is rarely, if ever, modified. The political implications of altering a program intended to assist all students uniformly across all public school districts is viewed as being far too detrimental by several lawmakers. The assumptions state that the use of the bill will not result in any significant cost creation or increase. The final two assumptions are based on expected funding allocations of reappropriated funds and are generally deemed as not being significant.

As influence leaders, Senator Johnson and Representative Casada knew Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) would require differentiation from other education reform initiatives. To address the model of high performance, five requirements were established that included:

- (1) achieving a graduation rate of 90% or higher;
- (2) exhibiting an average American College Testing (ACT) score of 21 or higher;
- (3) demonstrating a Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) three year average composite normal curve

equivalent score of 55 or higher; (4) establishing a Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) three year average composite normal curve equivalent gain of 1.75 or higher; and (5) meeting or exceeding the achievement and gap closure annual measurable objectives and receiving an exemplary or similar status from the State Department of Education. (Tennessee High Performing School Districts Flexibility, 2013)

WCS was already meeting these criteria, as were other school districts in the state. The measure created a delineation that boldly identified those districts that could be deemed high performing and those that could not. To achieve this goal, school districts would need to meet a majority, or a minimum of three, of the five criteria to qualify. Additionally, in the original draft of the bill, more operational liberty was granted to local education agencies. However, Senator Johnson notes:

In order to pass the bill, my staff and I worked with the Department of Education, the State Board, and the Chairman and Members of the Senate Education Committee to refine the language to something that everyone could support. The bill passed the Senate Education Committee unanimously and passed the Senate Floor with no one voting against and only one abstention. (J. Johnson, email interview, January 4, 2021)

Representative Casada adds:

The legislative delegation first met with the Department of Education. The bill was then drafted and I and the rest of the delegation worked with other legislators to gain their vote and support. (G. Casada, email interview, December 6, 2020)

The legislative process is fueled by these actions. The resulting language of the bill provided opportunity for relief as designed; however, omitted or modified sections that allowed for continued prohibition of some aspects of local control. Chairman Anderson discusses the power

of the school district versus the power of the state Department of Education. Although some view that power versus power may yield results, those outcomes may come with adverse consequences, as noted by Chairman Anderson:

I would like to see more flexibility in how the district is allowed to operate. The unfunded mandates are a constant budget buster. Fortunately, Williamson County strongly supports its public education system so WCS is able to be successful in spite of the State's overreach in operations. (G. Anderson, email interview, January 1, 2021)

The ethical and moral intention of the original idea and bill was not lost on the stakeholders responsible for its creation. Although the field of education unites behind the common goal of serving students, paths to accomplishing this objective can and do differ greatly. There is no universal model to provide for the needs of students and that is exactly what Jason Golden described as one of the purposes behind pursuing Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), saying:

I saw it as an opportunity to increase local decision-making. I saw that it could mitigate the traditional "one size fits all" nature of legislation that is often aimed to solve problems in limited areas of the state. (J. Golden, email interview, January 22, 2021)

High performing school districts like WCS were in need of relief from state mandates. To protect the educational community, an ethical action was required.

As the bill progressed through both houses of the state legislature, the WCS Board of Education was apprised of its progress by Dr. Looney and his staff. Little debate was brought forth in committee or on either house floor before voting. Senator Johnson states that, "Ultimately the bills passed with overwhelming majorities in both houses, so in general most everyone was supportive or at the very least not working against the bill" (J. Johnson, email

interview, January 4, 2021). In the House of Representatives, over a three-week period, House Bill (HB) 210 entered and exited the House Education Administration Subcommittee; the House Education Committee; the House Finance, Ways, and Means Subcommittee; the House Finance, Ways, and Means Committee; and the House Calendar and Rules Committee, passing all with a prevailing voice vote of aye. Upon reaching the House floor, the vote on the bill was 92 ayes, two noes, and one present and not voting (Tennessee High Performing School Districts Flexibility, 2013). In the Senate, similar expedited movement was recorded. With eight ayes and zero noes, the bills passed out of the Senate Education Committee and onto the Senate floor where it received 28 ayes, zero noes, and one present and not voting. The efficient nature of the bill's passing demonstrated both the perceived need for such legislation and also attested to the political influence relationships that existed among key stakeholders.

Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act was passed by the 106<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Bill Haslam in 2013. As a requirement of the new law, the school district had to meet the final step to be recognized as high performing. Once a school district has met a majority of the law's five academic criteria, the school district's board of education is obligated to pass a resolution declaring itself as a high performing school district. Senator Jack Johnson describes the importance of this symbolic act, which officially designates a school system as high performing:

The law requires that each LEA must take an "action of its local board of education" to "declare itself to be a high performing school district" if they meet a majority of the requirements of law. So, without taking that action no school district can be a "high performing school district" even if they meet the definition requirements. (J. Johnson, email interview, January 4, 2021)

The WCS Board of Education passed a resolution, declaring it as being a high performing school district in May of 2013 (Appendix B). The stated purpose of this law allows school districts recognized as high performing to request relief from a state law, mandate, or initiative that the school district believes to be prohibitive to the district achieving its educational mission and vision. The law created, promoted, and enacted through the efforts of key Williamson County stakeholders was now at the disposal of WCS. Mayor Rogers Anderson describes doing what he felt was the right thing to do for Williamson County by supporting Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013):

Though I cannot speak as to how I thought it would address other counties throughout the state and I was most concerned with how it would affect our local public education system, I felt that the provisions as laid out in the law would have benefits for our county immediately. (R. Anderson, email interview, November 25, 2020)

The notion that political and educational leaders attend to the needs of the constituency groups is commonplace. This was the case when local and state education bodies of government fluctuated on the alignment of goals beginning in 2009. For Williamson County, Denise Goodwin explains the community's altruistic support for Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013):

The district's central office leadership, along with a very engaged and supportive Board made the movement of this initiative very easy. The collective understanding was basic to allowing the highest performing districts to continue on their own pathways (which is community unique) to success for their stakeholders, once proved/affirmed criteria were met. (D. Goodwin, email interview, December 2, 2020)

WCS immediately began using the relief waiver of the new law. In the first application for relief, Dr. Looney requested the authority to alter the evaluation method for teachers and to grant tenure with or without the consideration of TVAAS data (Appendix A). As noted earlier, “The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) measures student growth year over year, regardless of whether the student is proficient on the state assessment. In calculating a TVAAS score, a student’s performance is compared relative to the performance of his or her peers who have performed similarly on past assessments” (Tennessee Department of Education, 2020b). This was the genesis of the issue that created the need for Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). Although the Tennessee Commissioner of Education denied WCS’ initial request for relief, Commissioner Huffman responded to Superintendent Looney, saying:

To the contrary—while the former tenure law forced any eligible teacher not receiving tenure to be dismissed, today’s law permits a local school district to employ a non-tenured teacher indefinitely. In other words, while the law does prohibit a school district from granting tenure to teachers not meeting the requisite evaluation scores, it does not prevent you, as a director of schools, from continuing to make your own decisions about how to utilize the evaluation to inform your decisions. (Appendix A)

This action did, however, grant WCS the ability to make decisions on how to utilize the evaluation form as the district deemed appropriate. Dr. Charles Farmer, former Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Schools, discusses what the flexibility of the legislation meant to the employees of Williamson County Schools:

Administrators and Faculty appreciated the flexibility related to the TEAM Evaluation model. Each school had to choose one of three options to follow. Most schools in WCS



chose the coaching model which allowed for formal observations and walk throughs throughout the semester with only one post conference at the end of each semester. (C. Farmer, email interview, November 30, 2020)

Although this pronouncement staved off the immediate threat to the employment of exceptional teachers and principals, the absence of opportunity for tenure in the field of education did not appear to bolster confidence and trust among teachers for their leaders and may have created roadmaps for future decisions. Jason Golden, now the Superintendent of Williamson County Schools, reflects on Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) as an architect of the initiative and a practitioner of the legislation:

The ultimate impact over the years has been much less significant than anticipated due to the language modification that left most ultimate decisions with the Commissioner of Education. It is good to have this tool available, and it is often discussed in our decision-making processes as a possibility to get things done. (J. Golden, email interview, January 22, 2021)

Persistence in solving a problem through political action created a unique and timely piece of legislation. Chairman Anderson provides historical experience in the political realm:

WCS has always advocated for more and more local control of the public school districts. The State has always been hesitant to allow variables in the education processes giving more control over to the local school systems. One important fact that comes into play here is that the majority of State Legislators is that they previously served as county commissioners. Voting to give more control over to local school systems, would not sit well with many commissioners around the state. (G. Anderson, email interview, January 1, 2021)

Regarding education reform in Tennessee, Chairman Anderson adds:

The Act is only a small step to get the State to recognize that some public school districts are achieving at a very high level and that all public school districts are hampered by how the State focuses on the scoreboard at the end of the game. They currently focus on test scores but do not give districts enough flexibility and funding to operate what they know works with kids. Every district is different, yet all the rules are singularly focused on how the State says the district need to educate the children. WCS with a less than 10% Free and Reduced population and other districts with over 80% Free and Reduced population obviously have different needs in how to educate their community. There needs to be more flexibility for all high performing school districts. Funding formulas need to be reevaluated to best serve the needs of each district. (G. Anderson, email interview, January 1, 2021)

Mr. Huffman's served as the Tennessee Commissioner of Education for almost four years. During his tenure, contention and ultimately denunciation grew. Commission Huffman resigned from his office in the wake of a letter signed by 56 superintendents expressing no confidence in his leadership. Additionally, several teachers' unions and a group of 15 Republican lawmakers requested his removal by Governor Haslam (Boucher & Garrison, 2014). Democratic State Representative Craig Fitzhugh remarked regarding Mr. Huffman's departure, saying:

Tennessee will never see real, lasting change until we stop blaming teachers and start addressing root problems. Our schools are underfunded, our teachers are underpaid, and we aren't talking about poverty and parental involvement—two key factors in student improvement" (Boucher & Garrison, 2014, n. p.).

Dr. Looney and Mr. Huffman reached an impasse on several issues leading up to the high performing initiative. The two leaders traded political barbs which escalated into larger conflicts.

From the abovementioned letter from superintendents, Dr. Looney states:

Our state secured and has spent \$500,000,000 in Race to the Top grant funds in the last three years. At the same time, Tennessee has realized small incremental improvements in student results. One might argue that the dizzying rate of education reforms in Tennessee is the result of the huge influx of federal dollars rather than a careful, measured understanding of the needs of students. Others believe these pockets of improvement are a result of implementing The Tennessee Diploma project, which preceded Race to the Top initiatives. In reality, as most any researcher would concede, it is difficult to know which reforms have been beneficial because we have manipulated too many variables. Perhaps most discouraging is the fact that 50% of the \$500,000,000 was kept by the Tennessee Department of Education. I wonder for what purpose and to whose benefit? The district I serve received less than \$400,000 which did not come close to covering the cost and burden of implementing these reforms. (Spears, 2013)

It should be noted that \$500 million in federal grants had been secured by Tennessee for a successful application process and first phase win in the Race to the Top program (2009). Many new initiatives were funded from the grants including the new Common Core standards, revamping the state's teacher evaluation system, and rapidly increasing the implementation of charter schools (Tatter, 2014).

Commissioner Huffman's initiatives for the state of Tennessee were disparate in education ideology from Dr. Looney's mission and goals for WCS. Mr. Huffman's unwillingness to compromise for mitigation to provide relief placed the future employment of

high performing educators in jeopardy. Dr. Looney’s attempts for conflict resolution through Thomas’s (1977) five distinctive approaches including—competition, collaboration, compromise, avoidance, and accommodation—failed with the exception of accommodation, which developed through the legislative journey. The consensus of support included the WCS leadership team, the Board of Education, and county and state elected officials. This conflict built a political coalition among stakeholders that resulted in Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

For Dr. Looney and his leadership team, as Senator Johnson described it, the chosen path was to transform a political barrier into an ethical opportunity to better serve not only WCS, but any other high performing school district that sought relief as well. Denise Goodwin broadened that point with her closing statement, “I appreciate legislative acts that benefit public education. I believe that well designed and well funded public education are the key components, in our society, for perpetuating democracy” (D. Goodwin, email interview, December 2, 2020). The participants of this study ultimately believed that the promulgation, passage, and implementation of Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) was the right thing to do. Protecting and advocating for other similarly situated high performing school districts became an integrated component of the WCS objective. Although support from other high performing districts enabled the legislation to pass, Williamson County Schools remains the only school district to be designated as high performing by the state of Tennessee and utilize the relief waiver provided by the law.

### **Emergent Themes**

This exploratory case study examined a single education reform initiative championed by one Tennessee public school district and the local and state leaders of that community. The

journey from attempts to resolve a pressing issue, to developing a concept, to enacting a legislative bill into law that became Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) was profoundly shaped by influence relationships among key stakeholders.

Understanding leadership, ethical and moral behaviors, and the political dimensions of these events will be addressed by an analysis of themes and include roles, politics, influence, ethics, and organizational frameworks.

Themes and subthemes as well as those classified as co-occurrence, or co-occurrence as it is defined in the Atlas.ti platform, is not uncommon and were beneficial to the analysis. Five themes and 21 subthemes were identified and coopted as coding criteria. Interviews were parsed by individual quotations and notably, all statements coded received multiple codes as the perceptions intersected across the major themes of the analysis (Table 4.1). The table's top x-axis displays the names of theme, including roles, politics, influence, ethics, and organizational frameworks. Beneath each theme, the number of quotations (Q) associated with that theme are noted as well as the number of subthemes, or codes (C), within each theme. The theme of roles contains the five subthemes of teacher scholar, manager, democratic leader, applied social scientist, and communicator. The theme of politics includes three subthemes: political influencer, power leader, and conflict leader. Influence is a theme with only one subtheme, influence leader. Ethics is the theme with the most quotations attributed and also has the most subthemes, covering ethical leader, moral leader, utilitarianist, altruist, leader-member exchange (LMX) leader, and reflective leader. Organizational frameworks is the final theme, with four subthemes, including structural leader, human resources leader, political leader, and symbolic leader. The y-axis of the table presents the names of the study participants and the number of quotations attributed to each of them. All quotations from study participants were attributed to at least two

Table 4.1

*Code-Document Table*

	Roles Q: 183 C: 5	Politics Q: 136 C: 3	Influence Q: 148 C: 1	Ethics Q: 190 C: 6	Frameworks Q: 131 C: 4	Totals
Looney 35 Quotations	18	12	18	23	10	81
Golden 37 Quotations	24	16	23	21	11	95
Goodwin 37 Quotations	34	27	23	33	22	139
Farmer 39 Quotations	22	13	16	26	11	88
GAnderson 34 Quotations	30	23	23	31	26	133
RAnderson 35 Quotations	14	12	13	15	12	66
Casada 37 Quotations	20	14	13	20	18	85
Johnson 33 Quotations	21	19	19	21	21	101
Totals	183	136	148	190	131	788

*Note.* Q = Quotations. C = Codes.

subthemes or codes. The cross-functional utilization of quotations provided a deeper perspective into the findings.

Ethics and its majority of six subthemes emerged as the dominant theme of this exploratory case study. Interview responses recorded efforts of Williamson County stakeholders taking actions they believed to be ethically and morally beneficial to the WCS education community. These actions influenced the decisions of others in an attempt to do the right thing for those they serve. The theme of roles also emerged from responses where participants and those with whom they interacted were defined not only by their statutory title, but by their

conflicts, achievements, and perspectives. The idea of leadership through various roles created opportunities for understanding the purpose and nature of engagement at both the state and local levels of government. These roles are inherently bound to the theme of influence, which was another major theme identified in this study. The concept of influence relationships was a key component that enabled the legislative process to succeed, moving an idea to bill and then into law. Leaders and stakeholders from Williamson County worked together with leaders across the state to create a path to passage for Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), which encountered little to no opposition in the state legislature. As evidenced by the interviews of study participants, these relationships fostered trust and commitment concerning endeavors directed towards correcting an inadvertent, negative impact of the Race to the Top Act (2009) and oversight of this problem in state level companion legislation, Tennessee's First to the Top Act (2010). This error in policy and subsequent corrective legislative action supported the theme of politics. The federal political requirement for a companion, state level education reform act created the need for corrective action by the Williamson County leaders and stakeholders that became Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act. Organizational frameworks arose as the fifth and final theme of this exploratory case study. Actions, relationships, and reflections of participants supported the theme of organizational frameworks that contributed to understanding the process of moving the proposed bill into law.

### **Summary**

Findings that emerged from this exploratory case study were presented in this chapter. Interviews with participants, along with document and archival records analysis, enabled the researcher to recreate events and present a chronological descriptive narrative from their perspective. The purpose behind the creation, enactment, and implementation of Tennessee's

High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), the influence relationships of leadership, and the political and ethical behaviors that affected both barriers and opportunities to the legislation were identified.

Realizing that a newly ratified state law could endanger the careers of professional educators in Tennessee's highest performing school districts, the Superintendent of Williamson County Schools and other leaders from Williamson County pursued legislative action as an ethical, political recourse. Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) provided an opportunity for WCS to seek relief from mandates the school district believed would hinder the pursuit of the WCS mission and vision. Through this leadership journey, Williamson County Schools became the first and only school district to utilize Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act, protecting the future of the professional educators in the district, with no perceived detriment to any other public school district in Tennessee. Five emergent major themes including roles, politics, influence, ethics, and organizational frameworks, are discussed in depth with their subthemes in Chapter 5. These themes are used to answer the research questions posed by this study. An analysis of study findings, discussions, conclusions, and recommendations for future research and study will be presented in Chapter 5.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

This exploratory case study sought to better understand the role of one school district superintendent who contributed and collaborated with local and state legislators and other key stakeholders in the development and promulgation of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). This Act was intended to protect high performing school districts from the inadvertent negative effects of previous education reform legislation. The case of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) is unique in time and place and is an event that is not typically observed or reported in the education reform literature (Yin, 2009). Simons (2009) states that case study methodology is an appropriate approach to examine a unique phenomenon.

Three questions guided the study including:

1. Why was Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) developed, promoted, and enacted?
2. How were influence relationships of leadership developed by the Williamson County Schools (WCS) district superintendent with other stakeholders?
3. What political and ethical behaviors created barriers and opportunities for the development and passage of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013)?

This chapter will analyze findings presented in Chapter 4. First, relevant literature will be presented and then used to analyze five major themes that emerged from the study including roles, politics, influence, ethics, and organizational frameworks. In addition, several subthemes will be discussed that are relevant to several of the main themes. Then, each question posed in

the study will be answered. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research and recommendations for future practice.

### **Theme 1: Roles**

The theme of superintendent roles emerged from an analysis of data. Kowalski's (2013) role characterizations provided a framework for analysis and included Teacher Scholar, Manager, Democratic Leader, Applied Social Scientist, and Communicator. It was evident, however, that these role characterizations were not only applicable to the superintendent, but could also be more broadly applied to understanding the dispositions of other participants who supported and enabled the superintendent of Williamson County Schools to lead this education reform initiative. It should be noted that several statements of participants that were coded within the theme of roles may also be relevant to other themes in this study as well. These incidences are examples of co-incidence or co-occurrence.

#### **Teacher Scholar**

Callahan (1966) observed that the foundation of superintendents' work is teaching. When asked about student achievements and progress during her tenure, Denise Goodwin, former Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools, reflected on her goals for Williamson County Schools, saying:

Our academic successes had and continues to outperform all other districts. During my tenure, WCS added at least five National Blue Ribbon Elementary Schools and at least twenty Reward Schools each year. (D. Goodwin, email interview, December 12, 2020)

It should be noted that the United States Department of Education recognizes an elementary, middle, or high school as a National Blue Ribbon School by considering the academic excellence or the school's progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups (United States,

2021). Immediately upon his hiring as superintendent in 2009, Dr. Looney challenged the professional educators of the Williamson County Schools district to close the existing achievement gaps while continuing to increase the growth of student academic achievement. In 2009, the Common Core State Standards initiative was launched and became an integral part of the federal Race to the Top Act (2009) (Common Core, 2021). These standards posed great challenges to teachers and principals yet, Dr. Looney's laser-focused approach to academic excellence was unyielding and the Williamson County Schools district was considered a high performing school district. Their efforts at nurturing and sustaining academic excellence for all students reflects their teacher scholar role characterization.

### **Manager**

Superintendents' managerial role emerged concurrently with the growth and complexity of school districts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The scope of managerial work paralleled the increase in the size of schools and had a profound and lasting impact on the nature and direction of superintendents' work. As Kowalski (2013) notes, resource management was reflected in the day-to-day business of the district including budgets, personnel, facilities management, and other operational areas. For Williamson County Schools, Dr. Looney's cabinet (district-level leadership team) assisted with many of these duties under his oversight. For example, personnel issues were handled at the school level first, then brought before the appropriate Assistant Superintendent before being brought to Dr. Looney for resolution. Applying the notion of managerial responsibility may extend beyond the role of superintendent and be used to holistically understand the managerial imperative of other district leaders. For example, Gary Anderson describes his manager's role as the Chairman of the Williamson County Schools Board of Education, saying:

Probably one of my biggest achievements while on the school board was totally restructuring how the board functioned. The first time I was elected as chairperson of the board, I changed the board's functions from multiple committees in addition to two board meetings per month, to a work session and one board meeting per month. Also added the board's policy committee since that is one of the major functions of the board. That process is still being used today over 25 years later. (G. Anderson, email interview, January 1, 2021)

Although superintendents' management role may have been eclipsed by concern for academic achievement during the past several decades, Hoyle, Björk, Collier, and Glass (2005) note that effective management remains central to a district's success. In fact, Kowalski (2013) states, "Highly effective superintendents do not have disdain for nor are they indifferent toward their management duties" (p. 250). These highly effective superintendents understand that the manager's role is at times one of the most important responsibilities they hold. For example, the Williamson County education budget is approved and funded by the County Commission and equates to roughly one third of the entire county's budget. Dr. Looney's ability as a manager enabled him to work productively with the Williamson County Commission and the Mayor.

### **Democratic Leader**

Kowalski (2013) equated the superintendent's role as democratic leader with that of a statesmanship or politician (Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2018). This role describes the delicate balance and tradeoffs required to respond to the needs of constituency groups and involved using political influence. This role characterization underscores the unyielding reality of trying to meet the goals of a wide array of stakeholders that may not always be in congruence.

When asked to describe his relationships with students, parents, county commissioners, and other elected officials, Dr. Mike Looney said:

I believe the students and parents in the district respected the work we accomplished and appreciated my accessibility. I had courteous and professional relationships with county commissioners, but at times our interests did not align. (M. Looney, email interview, January 11, 2021)

The aforementioned annual budget negotiations in Williamson County are an example of Dr. Looney's use of the role of democratic, political leader. Dr. Looney was successful in acquiring resources from the Williamson County Commission that Williamson County Schools required. Explaining the importance of democratic leadership, Woods and Gronn (2009) emphasize that the knowledge of democratic strategies coupled to leadership methods are necessary for superintendents and other educational leaders to be successful. Fusarelli, Kowalski, and Petersen (2011) strengthen this perspective noting that using civic engagement through deliberative democracy and discourse is a characteristic of a highly effective superintendent. Dr. Looney's ability to negotiate and mitigate objections and find solutions to issues with Williamson County's elected bodies demonstrated his efficacy as a democratic, political leader.

### **Applied Social Scientist**

Systems theory emerged during the 1950s to 1970s and was incorporated into the notion of educational administration. It emphasized the need to anticipate and effectively respond to changing social, economic, and political conditions affecting the nation's school districts (Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, & Potterton, 2020). Systems theory helped to explain the dynamic and challenging role of school and district administrators and facilitated superintendents recognizing the multifaceted nature of their work and using a wide array of data to guide decision-making

processes (Chance and Björk, 2003; Getzels, 1977). Superintendent Looney recognized the implication and provisions of the First to the Top Act (2010), particularly with regard to teacher employees and student learning. Superintendent Looney's role as an applied social scientist is evidenced by his understanding of how the external environment jeopardized the employment of professional educators in the Williamson County Schools. In enacting his role of applied social scientist (Kowalski, 2013), he was adept at identifying and solving complex policy problems using data on student performance and teacher evaluation systems. In this regard, Dr. Looney understood the situational complexity and implication of legislative actions that jeopardized the careers of WCS educators.

### **Communicator**

Kowalski (2013) notes that “in an information-based society, administrators are expected to engage in relational communication consistently” (p. 24). Communication is essential in the efforts to set organizational agendas and build coalitions to accomplish work. Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, and Potterton (2020) note that superintendents who communicate effectively do so in a reciprocal manner rather than through hierarchal directives. Efforts at creating and passing legislation suggests that healthy reciprocal communication among stakeholders is essential. Dr. Looney created an open line of communication between his senior staff, the board of education, and the state legislative delegation for Williamson County. In addition, Representative Glen Casada comments on importance of communication within the legislative process, saying:

The legislative delegation first met with the Department of Education. The bill was then drafted and I and the rest of the delegation worked with other legislators to gain their vote and support. (G. Casada, email interview, December 6, 2020)

In a broader concept of communication, Yep (2016) identifies three elements of transformative communication, including awareness, insight, and action. Awareness is the ability to observe the intricacies of interactions of people and their environments. Insight is the understanding of these situationally complex constructs. Action is the behavioral activity of the individual or collective utilized as a change agent for a purposeful outcome. Consequently, “Awareness, insight, and action mutually influence each other in an ongoing and unending cycle (e.g., insight can produce more awareness which can lead to action and further insight)” (Yep, 2016, p. 237).

Superintendent Looney’s awareness of the problem created by the First to the Top Act (2010) enabled him to have considerable insight to the complexity of the situation and empowered him to take appropriate action to protect his school district by proposing Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

### **Theme 2: Politics**

Politics may be viewed as an influence process that is related to the exercise of power and conflict resolution. Lasswell (1979) considered politics as leverage, stating, “The politician, in the here-selected “best” sense of the word, uses persuasion on behalf of his conception of public right” (p. 47). Leaders in service of the public good often use this perspective in politics to accomplish their goals understanding that the process may be contentious and involve spirited debate among those affected by positive outcomes or negative consequences. The political process is characterized by Lasswell (1936/1951) as “who gets what, when, and how” (p. 13). The subthemes of political influencer, power leader, and conflict leader are incorporated within the theme of politics. They are discussed separately and may prove useful in analyzing case study findings.

## **Political Influencer**

Political influence is a type of power that is used by leaders to accomplish desired outcomes. Exerting political influence is evident at the national, state, and local levels of government and other types of organizations in which individuals and groups exercise formal and informal power to accomplish their objectives (Blase & Björk, 2010). Historically, Williamson County has ranked as one of the wealthiest counties in Tennessee. With wealth, tax revenue inherently follows and Williamson County, along with its six major municipalities, contribute to the Williamson County Schools system to compensate for the deficit in return funding from the state government based on tax revenue paid into the Basic Education Program (BEP) funding mechanism for Tennessee. These contributions to the Williamson County Schools system provide opportunities which other counties with a lower tax base may not benefit from. One such benefit is a General Counsel on staff within the school district. Other school districts throughout the state, all of which are members of the Tennessee School Board Association (TSBA), have the accessibility to TSBA's legal team, or attorneys on retainer. However, the advantage of having a General Counsel in house is evident in the events of this case study. Coupled to Williamson County's state legislative team's leadership roles in state government, the political influence wielded by Williamson County's key stakeholders is unique and apparent. This leadership is transformative and the political influence to bring about change in working on Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) is noted by Senator Jack Johnson:

In order to pass the bill, my staff and I worked with the Department of Education, the State Board, and the Chairman and Members of the Senate Education Committee to refine the language to something that everyone could support. The bill passed the Senate



Education Committee unanimously and passed the Senate Floor with no one voting against and only one abstention. (J. Johnson, email interview, January 4, 2021)

In addition, Superintendent Looney contacted the superintendents of similarly situated high performing school districts to garner their support. In building a coalition of high performing school districts and their state legislative delegations, Dr. Looney as a political influencer helped shape the legislative process. Governor Bill Haslam was elected in 2010 and with his inauguration came a power shift in the state legislature as well, from a Democratic to Republican majority. Cavana, et al, (2019) notes that politicization occurs when such a shift in power and influence occurs. Politicization is comprised of three dimensions including issue salience, actor expansion, and polarization. The notion of issue salience denotes the extent of exposure an issue receives while actor expansion identifies participants engaging in a public debate. Polarization is the expanse of division in perspective and opinion held by a partitioned populace. Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) had little issue salience or actor expansion and polarization emerged when legislative power shifted in favor of high performing school districts and away from the Commissioner of Education.

### **Power Leader**

Lasswell (1936/1951) refers to political influencers as elites who use this form of power to acquire a majority of available resources, i.e., “who gets what, when, and how” (p. 13). In addition, French and Raven (1959) recognized six bases of power, including positional, rewards, coercive, information or expertise, reputation, and personal. Leaders may exercise one or more types of power in accomplishing work. How a leader elects to use these forms of power may increase degrees of flexibility and options. For example, the Williamson County Schools General Counsel's Office demonstrated expert power and political influence in authoring the concept

which became the bill that was enacted as Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). This allowed Superintendent Looney to use positional, expertise, and personal power to enable the WCS district to both enjoy widespread public support and overcome constraints imposed by the First to the Top Act (2010). In addition, Gary Anderson discusses how using power enabled the superintendent and the WCS district to overcome its adverse consequences:

I would like to see more flexibility in how the district is allowed to operate. The unfunded mandates are a constant budget buster. Fortunately, Williamson County strongly supports its public education system so WCS is able to be successful in spite of the State's overreach in operations. (G. Anderson, email interview, January 1, 2021)

Bolman and Deal (2017) note that multiple sources of power enable a leader like Superintendent Looney to maintain public support while pursuing innovative solutions to seemingly intractable problems. It was evident that Superintendent Looney was a political influencer (Lasswell, 1936/1951) and used positional, personal, and expertise power (French & Raven, 1959) to accomplish work associated with the First to the Top Act (2010).

### **Conflict Leader**

Kowalski (2013) described the foundations of conflict as territorial, value, tangible, and personal. These aspects may describe circumstances that may emerge during disputes, including that of WCS and the Tennessee State Department of Education between the years 2012 and 2013. In addition, Thomas's (1977) approaches to conflict management including competition, collaboration, compromise, avoidance, and accommodation, may help understand these events. For example, tactics of collaboration and compromise were employed by WCS Superintendent, Dr. Looney, prior to pursuing legislative action that resulted in Tennessee's High Performing

School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). Dr. Looney discussed his conflict with Tennessee's Commissioner of Education, saying:

The Tennessee Department of Education's leadership failed to recognize the uniqueness of individual school district's and had adopted policies and practices impeding local decision making and control. I believe select elected officials and State Department of Education officials resented the district's high performance. (M. Looney, email interview, January 11, 2021)

Pfeffer (1981) notes that, "Behavior is not accidental, random, or rationalized after the fact; rather, purpose is presumed to pre-exist and behavior is guided by that purpose" (p. 282). Conflicts among entities can arise from actions driven by the beliefs of individuals. Although Superintendent Looney attempted to collaborate and compromise with the Commissioner of Education, his belief that WCS would not qualify for relief was evident and may suggest a territorial disposition (Kowalski, 2013) or a competitive stance (Thomas, 1977). Dr. Looney attempted to resolve the conflict through collaboration and compromise (Thomas, 1977) before deciding that a more radical legislative solution was required.

### **Theme 3: Influence**

Influence emerged as an important theme in this case. Rost (1991) observes that "Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 102). Rost underscores the importance of influence and posits the notion of mutual purposes between leaders and followers and seeking real change are keys to effective leadership.

Conflict between the Tennessee State Department of Education and the WCS district was deftly handled by Superintendent Looney. He used the conflict as an opportunity to find a

solution to a problem, rather than view it as a detriment (Heifetz, 1994). In this regard, Superintendent Looney's efforts may be understood using Rost's (1991) notion of leadership as identifying mutual purpose and striving to create real change. Case events suggest that he and other leaders of Williamson County worked in concert to realize real change: Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). The efforts of the WCS superintendent, coalition leaders, and the county's state legislative delegation was described by Senator Jack Johnson:

I think the catalyst was Williamson County's desire to make changes that they felt were in the best interests of the children in their district, but the Department or Board by law wasn't able to provide them with the flexibility. I think they definitely felt this was an impediment to their district's achievement and growth. Ultimately the bills passed with overwhelming majorities in both houses, so in general most everyone was supportive or at the very least not working against the bill. (J. Johnson, email interview, January 4, 2021)

The network of influence captured in the Senator's perspective provides only a brief glimpse into the relationships which made the enactment of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act a reality. It was evident that a wide array of influence relationships were created among community, the WCS superintendent and his staff, the board of education, the county's state legislative delegation, and the state legislature itself.

#### **Theme 4: Ethics**

Kowalski (2013) describes the normative dispositions of superintendents as being democratic, moral and ethical, transformational, and servant leadership. Further, Hoyle, Björk, Collier, and Glass (2005) state, "A strong stand based on ethical principles demonstrates to

students, staff, community, and the Board of Education that the superintendent is a person of character and purpose” (p. 193). Ethics emerged as a prominent theme and moreover co-occurrence coding focuses on the efforts of morality, purpose, actions, and the lasting effects of these elements. The theme of ethics embodies six subthemes, largest collection within any theme. These subthemes include ethical leader, moral leader, utilitarianist, altruist, LMX leader, and reflective leader. Each will be briefly discussed using relevant literature.

### **Ethical Leader**

Northouse (2019) attributes ethics to values and morals that are appropriate or desired by an individual or society. Holding ethics to a single standard is difficult because of differing community belief systems and those of larger society. Although the field of education may unite behind the common goal of serving students, opinions about how to accomplish this objective may differ widely. In other words, there is no universal model as to how to provide for the needs of students. Jason Golden, former WCS Deputy Superintendent and current Superintendent, described one of the purposes behind pursuing Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013):

I saw it as an opportunity to increase local decision-making. I saw that it could mitigate the traditional “one size fits all” nature of legislation that is often aimed to solve problems in limited areas of the state. (J. Golden, email interview, January 22, 2021)

The superintendent of the WCS district and the political coalition concurred with the need to protect the educational community from the imposition of provisions included in the First to the Top Act (2010) and establish a shared ethical base for their activities.

## **Moral Leader**

Kohlberg (1984) observed that value-based judgment underpins the process of decision-making and that serves as a waypoint for values. Kohlberg (1984) also notes that the levels of morality mature across time and development. From the infancy of obedience and punishment to the experience of universal principles, morality evolves into the idea of doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do. These decisions have consequences and the polarity of results rests upon the values of those engaged. For example, Mayor Rogers Anderson describes doing what he felt was the right thing to do for Williamson County by supporting Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), saying:

Though I cannot speak as to how I thought it would address other counties throughout the state and I was most concerned with how it would affect our local public education system, I felt that the provisions as laid out in the law would have benefits for our county immediately. (R. Anderson, email interview, November 25, 2020)

Spector (2019) concurs with Kohlberg and provides insight into Mayor Anderson's perspective, saying, "The particular responsibilities of leaders in shaping the moral judgment of followers on what is, in fact, good and bad, right and wrong lies at the core of any notion of moral leadership" (p. 124).

## **Utilitarianist**

A desire to achieve for the greatest common good is the embodiment of utilitarianism. Häyry (2020) notes three axioms of utilitarianism, including: "the maximization of happiness; the definition of happiness as pleasure and absence of pain; and impartiality between individuals in the calculation of happiness" (p. 346). These axioms coupled to the idea of the greatest common good however becomes fraught with struggles of differing beliefs and opinions. The

notion of greatest common good is a qualifying term and to some is synonymous with the term, majority. The majority is most certainly not the whole of the entity. This suggests that a decision made for the greatest common good may also create discontent for some. In discussions of funding, education to serve a common good is prominent in Williamson County. For example, Mayor Rogers Anderson describes the responsibility of managing the needs of the entire county, rather than a single coterie of residents:

I always listen to those who want to discuss concerns relative to the school system in our county. Often times, community members who no longer have children in the public education system have a different perspective on the importance of public education in our community. Their thoughts and concerns must be considered, as well, when I weigh the decisions regarding funding the annual budget for our schools. (R. Anderson, email interview, November 25, 2020)

Northouse (2019) describes utilitarianism as the decision which “maximizes social benefits while minimizing social costs” (p. 339). This is the fulcrum on which Mayor Anderson balances the funding decisions for Williamson County. Mayor Anderson is also acutely aware that any decision he makes will not be accepted by all residents of the county.

### **Altruist**

Ethical altruism places efforts for others to benefit above those for self. Kowalski (2013) furthers this notion of servant leaders, noting, “they are ethical and moral administrators committed to serving student, employee, community, and district interests concurrently” (p. 211–212). Servant leadership is altruistic by nature and is an inherent characteristic of most who serve in public education. Leaders will strive to provide for those nearest to their educational influence. This was the case when local and state education bodies of government fluctuated on the

alignment of goals. For Williamson County, Denise Goodwin, former Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools, explains the community's altruistic support for Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013):

The district's central office leadership, along with a very engaged and supportive Board made the movement of this initiative very easy. The collective understanding was basic to allowing the highest performing districts to continue on their own pathways (which is community unique) to success for their stakeholders, once proved/affirmed criteria were met. (D. Goodwin, email interview, December 2, 2020)

Greenleaf (1970) observed that the most effective leaders were servants first and foremost. Skillsets of listening, persuasion, foresight, use of language, and pragmatism were all core elements of a servant leader and the participants of this study used these skills effectively.

### **LMX Leader**

Marion and Gonzales' (2014) note that leader-member exchange (LMX) theory "is not just about the overall social appeal of the leader, it is about two-way, differentiated relationships- leaders who build interactive relationships and who have different types of relationships with different followers (some positive, some negative)" (p. 143). LMX leaders are focused on relationship building in varying capacities based solely on the individual characteristics of the follower. These unique relationships inspire and motivate followers and are foundational to transformational leadership. Dr. Mike Looney underscores his abilities as an LMX leader when asked to describe his relationships with various stakeholders:

I continue to enjoy professional friendships with Board members in districts where I have served. I had courteous and professional relationships with county commissioners but at times our interests did not align. I had a positive relationship predicated on mutual



accountability and support with the district's faculty and staff. I believe the students and parents in the district respected the work we accomplished and appreciated my accessibility. (M. Looney, email interview, January 11, 2021)

Dr. Looney's differentiated relationships, a foundational characterization of an LMX leader, provided him with connections to stakeholders that were both homophily and heterophily in nature (Marion and Gonzales, 2014). These shared and dissimilar interests provided both individuals with unique connections. For example, Dr. Looney is a professional skydiver and could share his experience anecdotally with a teacher who is afraid of heights. Although their interests diverge on that subject, their love of education is an interest of common ground. Dr. Looney shared countless inimitable relationships with stakeholders rooted in the leader-member exchange theory.

### **Reflective Leader**

Hoyle, Björk, Collier, & Glass (2005) note that a reflective leader can assess through an objective lens not only the outcome, but also the quality of their decisions. Learning from these reflections increases the depth of leadership through trust and influence. Reflections also create roadmaps for future decisions as well. Jason Golden, now the Superintendent of WCS, reflects on Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) as an architect of the initiative and a practitioner of the legislation:

The ultimate impact over the years has been much less significant than anticipated due to the language modification that left most ultimate decisions with the Commissioner of Education. It is good to have this tool available, and it is often discussed in our decision-making processes as a possibility to get things done. (J. Golden, email interview, January 22, 2021)

Castelli (2016) identifies three internally focused practices of reflective leadership, including self-awareness, mindfulness, and personal wisdom. These traits encourage utilization of time and opportunity to reflect, analyze, and adapt based upon the conclusion of the reflective process. The notion of reflective leadership emerged from findings most clearly in Mr. Golden's reflections on Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

### **Theme 5: Organizational Frameworks**

Bolman and Deal's (2017) organizational frameworks provide the platform of the fifth and final theme. These organizational frameworks include structural, human resources, political, and symbolic dimensions of leadership in organizations. These constructs enable participants and analysts to frame and reframe the experience to ascertain more effective ways of viewing and solving problems. In the coding process, all statements were evaluated for organizational frameworks. Structural and human resources frameworks were identified sparingly in the interviews, while the political and symbolic frames appeared more prominently in participant interviews.

#### **Structural Leader**

The Structural frame focuses on how an organization conducts work hierarchically that is both efficient and rational (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Effectiveness is achieved through identifying and solving problems and occasionally through restructuring when needed. Dr. Charles Farmer, former Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Schools, describes an important dimension of the structural framework of WCS as the leadership team that worked on the high performing schools initiative:

Dr. Looney's cabinet was a team-based decision-making model. All high school and middle school principals reported to me so I was close with them. Dr. Looney and Mr.

Golden informed the Cabinet of the opportunity as we worked to make decisions that were in the best interest of our students. (C. Farmer, email interview, November 30, 2020)

Bolman and Deal (2017) note, “Two issues are central to structural design: how to allocate work (differentiation) and how to coordinate diverse efforts after parceling out responsibilities (integration)” (p. 53). Dr. Looney was able to maintain a hierarchal reporting and responsibility structure but operate within a team-based matrix. Consequently, his senior staff excelled at these two measures under his leadership. Dr. Looney provided latitude to allow his leaders to lead.

### **Human Resources Leader**

The Human Resources Leader subtheme appeared in fewer instances than any other code in the analysis. This framework focuses on the organization meeting the individual needs of employees and makes four assumptions. The first of these assumptions recognizes organizations as entities that exist to serve the needs of people and not the opposite. The second assumption stipulates that organizations and individuals need one another for what they contribute to each other. Organizations contribute jobs and income, as well as opportunities for movement. Individuals bring their talent, vitality, and visions to their organization. As a negative postulation, the third assumption warns of a poor fit between the organization and the person, where both will struggle. Conversely, the fourth assumption finds that a good fit benefits both the organization and the individual. This meaningful relationship fosters growth and stability (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The human resources frame assumes a mutual need between the organization and its people, that both flourish or suffer based on their fit for one another, and that the organization exists to serve its people. In the case of Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), schools developed a new evaluation system that met both the

needs of the organization and its employees. In this regard, the Human Resource Frame may help to explain events. For example, Dr. Charles Farmer discusses what the flexibility of the legislation meant to the employees of WCS, saying:

Administrators and Faculty appreciated the flexibility related to the TEAM Evaluation model. Each school had to choose one of three options to follow. Most schools in WCS chose the coaching model which allowed for formal observations and walk throughs throughout the semester with only one post conference at the end of each semester. (C. Farmer, email interview, November 30, 2020)

The First to the Top Act (2010) became law, providing the mechanism that was necessary for the newly appointed Commissioner of Education to launch his novel teacher evaluation system. Coupled with the sixth provision of the First to the Top Act requiring fifty percent of a teacher or principal's evaluation to be based upon student achievement data with no mitigation for the growth score component for high academically performing school districts, the new evaluation system placed professional educators' employment in jeopardy. Once passed, Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) provide the waver of relief, which WCS utilized immediately to create the teacher evaluation process described by Dr. Farmer. This structural resolution enhanced the ability of the school district to meet the needs of its employees.

### **Political Leader**

Bolman and Deal (2017) discuss the Political Frame in terms of individuals and interest groups existing in coalitions expressing differences in beliefs and values, information, and interest, coupled with perceptions of reality. The control of scarce resources depends on who has power. Goals in the Political Frame are fraught with conflict, as the struggle for superiority

seems unending. Political perspectives are not easily or often swayed. The Political Frame treats conflict as being both normative but also creates opportunities for finding solutions. Chairman Gary Anderson provides an historical political perspective, saying:

WCS has always advocated for more and more local control of the public school districts. The State has always been hesitant to allow variables in the education processes giving more control over to the local school systems. One important fact that comes into play here is that the majority of State Legislators is that they previously served as county commissioners. Voting to give more control over to local school systems, would not sit well with many commissioners around the state. (G. Anderson, email interview, January 1, 2021)

School districts, by state law, were required to submit funding requests before their elected funding bodies. These requests, no matter the size of the request being made, required the expenditure of considerable time and effort for school districts. In the original draft of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), language was included to provide school districts greater leniency in how funding efforts could be handled. Although this provision was struck from the final legislation, self-funded measures remained in the bill.

Bolman and Deal (2017) discuss organizations as coalitions and the power and decision-making processes implemented. The political power demonstrated in this case affirmed state control over local control. As Chairman Anderson stated, state legislators did not agree to give control of funding decisions solely to school districts without the oversight of their funding bodies, the county commissions. In this regard, the acquisition and distribution of resources was clearly a political act.

## **Symbolic Leader**

The Symbolic Frame establishes the importance of the meaning of events rather than the events themselves. Bolman and Deal (2017) note that meaning helps “humans make sense of the chaotic, ambiguous world in which they live” (p. 236). The significance of the meaning can be cultural, where beliefs and values become definitive characteristic systems. These belief systems empower the pursuit of goals while strengthening desired influence relationships. Bolman and Deal (2017) describe a ceremony as having four roles, including socializing, stabilizing, reassuring, and conveying messages to outside entities. Senator Jack Johnson describes the ceremonial symbolic act which officially designates a school system as high performing:

The law requires that each LEA must take an “action of its local board of education” to “declare itself to be a high performing school district” if they meet a majority of the requirements of law. So, without taking that action no school district can be a “high performing school district” even if they meet the definition requirements. (J. Johnson, email interview, January 4, 2021)

The act of self-recognition of a school district as being high performing occurs once every three years and may be viewed as being ceremonial. In addition, the ceremony itself solidifies the high performing designation for a district’s stakeholders as well as conveys the message to the Tennessee Department of Education signifying the ability to utilize the dedicated waiver request for relief provided by Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

## **Research Questions**

As a means for the researcher to capture the primary objectives of the study, Agee (2009) suggests beginning the development process of research questions with a single overarching question. The overarching question forged from this study’s statement of the problem guided the

design of the study as well as the collection of data. Frankel and Devers (2000) state, “Many qualitative researchers pursue research in certain areas because the existing theoretical and substantive literature does not adequately capture or reflect their personal experience or those with whom they are close” (p. 254). This is a relevant application to this exploratory case study. This uniquely situated opportunity to examine federal, state, and local education reform policy seeks to fill a knowledge gap that might otherwise remain exposed.

Three research questions emerged that guided this study. An overarching initial question of “why” drove further inquiry. Patton (2002) notes that “why questions presume cause-effect relationships, an ordered world, and rationality” (p. 363). Where legislation needed to be enacted to correct an existing education reform measure, this question must be addressed before others can be considered. Through descriptive narratives, each of these three questions will be addressed applying the findings from the data collection and analysis. Answers to the second and third questions will also include a discussion of emerging themes.

**Question 1:** Why was Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) developed, promoted, and enacted?

Race to the Top Act (2009) was an education reform initiative that created a state-level competition for funding. States that were selected were required to enact companion legislation that facilitated reforms. First to the Top Act (2010) was Tennessee’s companion legislation that was required by the federal government to complete the application process. First to the Top Act (2010) consisted of six main provisions:

- (1) Established an Achievement School District allowing the commissioner of the state Department of Education to intervene in consistently failing schools;
- (2) required annual

evaluations of teachers and principals; (3) created a 15-member advisory committee charged with the task of recommending guidelines for these evaluations; (4) removed restrictions against using teacher effect data until data from 3 complete years are obtained; (5) required personnel decisions (promotion, retention, tenure, compensation) be based, in part, on evaluations; and (6) mandated that 50% of teacher and principal evaluations be based on student achievement data. (Finch, 2017, p. 489)

The first five provisions are generally accepted by professional educators and did not cause a great deal of controversy. The sixth provision, however, became a source of concern for high performing school districts. Under the First to the Top Act (2010), student academic growth scores would be calculated into achievement data and used as fifty percent of annual performance evaluations of teachers and principals. High performing school districts would experience a ceiling for student academic growth and under this law would receive failing evaluations. For non-tenured employees, this could ultimately be the cause of their dismissal from the school system.

In 2012, Superintendent of WCS, Dr. Mike Looney, worked with Tennessee Commissioner of Education, Kevin Huffman, to find common ground where high performing school districts and their employees would not be penalized for their success as an inadvertent impact of the First to the Top Act (2010). Attempts to secure a waiver of this provision proved unsuccessful and Superintendent Looney, with his district-level Cabinet leadership team, the WCS Board of Education, and state delegation collaborated to devise a solution to this problem. Denise Goodwin, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools describes the spark for Tennessee's High Performing School District's Flexibility Act (2013):



The basic catalyst was to have those implementing State of Tennessee’s Education Department mandates to recognize the success and autonomy of high performing districts, granting them relief from mandates, which these districts were either already practicing, or in educational non-alignment. WCS’s belief in our researched based educational practices were strong and evidence data. The Act granted WCS (and others) true flexibility in many areas, the first and most important (in my opinion) was in how we evaluated teachers. The conversations of how to handle unneeded mandates were always on the table, which included options like asking for waivers directly from the TDOE Commissioner and working in direct understanding of disagreement with the State with district autonomy using effective data to rebuff the mandates. (D. Goodwin, email interview, December 2, 2020)

Following the passage of Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act in 2013, WCS utilized the relief waiver request process (Appendix A) to initially request five areas of relief. These five specific requests for relief included: (1) permission to develop independent rigorous local standards, (2) permission to make adjustments to the local school calendar, (3) request for streamlined approval of school and district improvement plans, (4) permission to manage the district’s lone focus school improvement without oversight, and (5) request for authority to grant tenure to teachers at the completion of their fifth year of teaching without consideration of TVAAS (Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System) data. “The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) measures student growth year over year, regardless of whether the student is proficient on the state assessment. In calculating a TVAAS score, a student’s performance is compared relative to the performance of his or her peers who have performed similarly on past assessments” (Tennessee Department of Education, 2020b).

Three of the five requests submitted by the WCS district for relief were granted by the Tennessee Department of Education. One request concerning teacher tenure (5) required additional information from the district. The request was subsequently denied. Although WCS had achieved the goal of protecting teachers and principals in the evaluation process, the issue of granting tenure was seen as a non-issue by Commissioner Huffman. In his response to Superintendent Looney, the Commissioner stated:

To the contrary – while the former tenure law forced any eligible teacher not receiving tenure to be dismissed, today’s law permits a local school district to employ a non-tenured teacher indefinitely. In other words, while the law does prohibit a school district from granting tenure to teachers not meeting the requisite evaluation scores, it does not prevent you, as a director of schools, from continuing to make your own decisions about how to utilize the evaluation to inform your decisions. (Appendix A)

However, there was a remedy. WCS became the sole public school district to self-identify as a high performing school district, declaring it through a Board of Education resolution (Appendix B) and file waiver requests based on this distinction. During the 2014–2015 school year, the district filed two such requests including the aforementioned waiver and a request for relief in class size requirements due to capacity issues and budget constraints. Other school districts in the state had filed requests for relief for similar concerns under the general powers of the Commissioner of Education provision of the law. These requests as well as those of WCS, which were submitted under Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), were granted equally. From inception of the legislation in 2013, and through the 2014–2015 school year, WCS remains the only public school system in Tennessee with documented waiver requests referencing the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

**Question 2:** How were influence relationships of leadership developed by the Williamson County Schools (WCS) district superintendent with other stakeholders?

Analysis of data collected coalesced into five major themes using coding criteria including roles, politics, influence, ethics, and organizational frameworks. The internal content of codes proved applicable to analyzing participant's interview data using these five major themes. These interview data provided a rich context that facilitated analysis and answering this question in greater depth and broader perspective. Among the first questions of the interview (Appendix N), participants were asked to describe their relationships with various stakeholders. Rost (1991) notes that, "Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 102). The notion of leaders having an influence relationship with stakeholders to accomplish work was an important enabling characteristic of Superintendent Dr. Mike Looney. It enabled him to identify and solve problems in the WCS district. Although Dr. Looney is no longer superintendent of WCS, he commented on his influence relationships that were important in the promulgation and enactment of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), when he said:

I continue to enjoy professional friendships with Board members in districts where I have served. I had courteous and professional relationships with county commissioners, but at times our interests did not align. I had positive relationships predicated on mutual accountability and support with the district's faculty and staff. I believe the students and parents in the district respected the work we accomplished and appreciated my accessibility. (M. Looney, email interview, January 11, 2021)

Superintendent Looney created and maintained a wide array of influence relationships. The emerging theme of roles, as well as superintendent attributes of the communicator and manager suggest that Dr. Looney effectively used these influence relationships to lead the district. Kowalski (2013) states “in an information-based society, administrators are expected to engage in relational communication consistently” (p. 24). Dr. Looney was extraordinarily proficient in his capacity to communicate with stakeholders through several mediums such as social media, email, phone calls, face to face interactions, and meetings. His accessibility to them was equally important. Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, and Kowalski (2018) note that corporate governance models were implemented by school district boards of education and that superintendents enacted a managerial role in their the day-to-day operations of the district. Dr. Looney’s role of manager dealt with personnel, the school district’s budget, public relations, facilities management, and the effective operation of the school district. These responsibilities could not be completed without the influence relationships Dr. Looney created and maintained with his central office staff. During the period of promulgation and enactment of Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), managerial influence relationships were more important than ever to maintain the high performing quality that WCS stakeholders had come to expect. As Dr. Charles Farmer stated when asked about their relationship, “Very close. Dr. Looney’s cabinet was a team-based decision-making model” (C. Farmer, email interview, November 30, 2020). In addition, Denise Goodwin said, “I served under multiple Superintendents and while I sometimes, professionally, disagreed on methods and procedures, the heart of public education agreement was always found” (D. Goodwin, email interview, December 12, 2020). As an influence leader, Dr. Looney’s focus was squarely set on decision-making. Kowalski (2013) noted that this focus was a function of leadership. As WCS

consistently strove to create real change (Rost, 1991) through improvement measures, Dr. Looney's leadership guided the district and its stakeholders.

Elected officials including Board Chairman, Gary Anderson, Mayor Rogers Anderson, Representative Glen Casada, and Senator Jack Johnson all shared unique relationships with Dr. Looney. As Board Chairman and an elected member of the Board of Education for thirty years in Williamson County, Gary Anderson described his relationships with several superintendents and may provide a sense of a political culture in which influence is shared through open communication and trust, saying:

Different Superintendents all have different personalities and how they work with board members. For the most part, my relationship was very good with all of them since I always let them know before a vote where I stood to open up conversations about the different aspects involved. Administrators, Faculty, and Staff all seemed to respect my service to the community and knew that if they talked with me about something that I would not throw them under the bus. (G. Anderson, email interview, January 1, 2021)

Mayor Anderson, Representative Casada, and Senator Johnson all felt a strong working relationship, with mutual, honest connections to the Superintendent and his district-level leadership team. Senator Johnson summated the relationship:

Overall, I believe that we have a great working relationship with each other. We may not always agree on everything, but at the end of the day, our goal is the same – and that is to make the best decisions possible to ensure the best outcomes for the students, parents, and teachers of Williamson County. (J. Johnson, email interview, January 4, 2021)

The themes of roles, politics, and organizational frameworks emerged and were intertwined in discussions with elected officials involving relationships and the influences of leadership. The

fulcrum on which they are balanced is decidedly political. Superintendent characteristics of the democratic leader, political influencer, and political leader all contribute to coalition building and the acquisition and protection of scarce resources. Values and belief systems of stakeholders as well as their mutual relationships illustrate a broad-based commitment among stakeholders for ensuring the well-being of WCS. These influence relationships of the superintendent and his leadership coalition developed over time. They were nurtured with great care and effort, and established a foundation of support for the proposal that would become Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

**Question 3:** What political and ethical behaviors created barriers and opportunities for the development and passage of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013)?

Political and ethical behaviors of the superintendent and members of his coalition emerged from the study and are closely intertwined. Dr. Looney's response regarding the catalyst for the high performing initiative provides insight into its political nature. He said:

The Tennessee Department of Education's leadership failed to recognize the uniqueness of individual school district's and had adopted policies and practices impeding local decision making and control. (M. Looney, email interview, January 11, 2021)

When Dr. Looney joined WCS as superintendent in 2009, conversations around charter schools and vouchers had just emerged in Tennessee. Governor Bill Haslam was elected in 2010 and appointed Kevin Huffman as Tennessee's Commissioner of Education. Over Mr. Huffman's nearly four-year tenure, he was no stranger to criticism and controversy. His appointment ended in resignation following a letter signed by 56 superintendents, expressions of no confidence from

several teachers unions, and a group of 15 Republican lawmakers all calling for change from the Governor's office (Boucher & Garrison, 2014). Commenting on Mr. Huffman's departure, Democratic House Representative Craig Fitzhugh said:

Tennessee will never see real, lasting change until we stop blaming teachers and start addressing root problems. Our schools are underfunded, our teachers are underpaid, and we aren't talking about poverty and parental involvement — two key factors in student improvement. (Boucher & Garrison, 2014, n. p.)

Reflecting on the events leading up to his resignation, it was evident that Dr. Looney and Mr. Huffman had not seen eye to eye on various issues leading up to Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). The political volleys between the two leaders may also be construed as ethical battles as well. In the aforementioned letter from 56 superintendents, Dr. Looney states:

Our state secured and has spent \$500,000,000 in Race to the Top grant funds in the last three years. At the same time, Tennessee has realized small incremental improvements in student results. One might argue that the dizzying rate of education reforms in Tennessee is the result of the huge influx of federal dollars rather than a careful, measured understanding of the needs of students. Others believe these pockets of improvement are a result of implementing The Tennessee Diploma project, which preceded Race to the Top initiatives. In reality, as most any researcher would concede, it is difficult to know which reforms have been beneficial because we have manipulated too many variables. Perhaps most discouraging is the fact that 50% of the \$500,000,000 was kept by the Tennessee Department of Education. I wonder for what purpose and to whose benefit?

The district I serve received less than \$400,000 which did not come close to covering the cost and burden of implementing these reforms. (Spears, 2013, n. p.)

Lasswell's (1936/1951) notion of "who gets what, when, and how" (p. 13) is wholly applicable throughout their ongoing dialogue. When the scarcity of resources is in play, no resource is scarcer in education than funding. Board Chairman Gary Anderson reflected on this, saying:

The Act is only a small step to get the State to recognize that some public school districts are achieving at a very high level and that all public school districts are hampered by how the State focuses on the scoreboard at the end of the game. They currently focus on test scores but do not give districts enough flexibility and funding to operate what they know works with kids. Every district is different, yet all the rules are singularly focused on how the State says the district need to educate the children. WCS with a less than 10% Free and Reduced population and other districts with over 80% Free and Reduced population obviously have different needs in how to educate their community. There needs to be more flexibility for all high performing school districts. Funding formulas need to be reevaluated to best serve the needs of each district. (G. Anderson, email interview, January 1, 2021)

Tennessee had successfully applied and won the Race to the Top (2009) as one of the first states to receive a \$500 million federal grant. This became a springboard to many of the initiatives implied in Dr. Looney's letter, including implementing the new Common Core standards, overhauling the state's teacher evaluation system, and rapidly expanding the implementation of charter schools (Tatter, 2014). A major point of political contention between Dr. Looney and Mr. Huffman developed in his first year as Commissioner of Education. Mr. Huffman launched the newly designed teacher evaluation system predicated on the sixth criteria of the First to the Top



Act of 2010, which “mandated that 50% of teacher and principal evaluations be based on student achievement data” (Finch, 2017, p. 489). Dr. Looney knew that this achievement data included the growth score component and that teachers and principals in his district had little or no room for growth due to the high performance of their students.

The ideological differences in education between Mr. Huffman’s initiatives for the state of Tennessee and Dr. Looney’s mission and goals for WCS were simply incongruent. This political conflict created the opportunity for Dr. Looney to advance the idea of Tennessee’s High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) as a solution to the problem. With Mr. Huffman and the Tennessee Department of Education unwilling to compromise, placing the future of employment of high performing educators in jeopardy, Dr. Looney began conversations for advancing a legislative solution to the problem. Broad-based consensus and support among the WCS leadership team, the Board of Education, and county and state elected officials was evident. Using Thomas’s (1977) five distinctive approaches to conflict resolution—competition, collaboration, compromise, avoidance, and accommodation—as a framework, all of Dr. Looney’s efforts failed except accommodation and that was accomplished only after passing legislation to reach relief.

Although notions of politics and ethics are viewed by scholars as distinct concepts, they are intertwined in this case study. From the political perspective, the ethical values and beliefs of the community are inherently imbued in the politicians whom the electorate chose to serve and represent them. Northouse (2019) notes that ethical leadership displays the beliefs and actions of morality through the theoretical frameworks of character and conduct. When discussing his support for the high performing initiative, Senator Jack Johnson states:

I think the catalyst was Williamson County's desire to make changes that they felt were in the best interests of the children in their district, but the Department or Board by law wasn't able to provide them with the flexibility. I think they definitely felt this was an impediment to their district's achievement and growth. (J. Johnson, email interview, January 4, 2021)

For Dr. Looney and his leadership team, the ethical altruist and utilitarianist path, as Senator Johnson described it, enabled Dr. Looney to transform a political barrier into an ethical opportunity to better serve not only WCS, but also other high performing school districts that seek relief as well. Denise Goodwin, former Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools, underscored this point, saying:

I appreciate legislative acts that benefit public education. I believe that well designed and well funded public education are the key components, in our society, for perpetuating democracy. (D. Goodwin, email interview, December 2, 2020)

Study participants ultimately believed that the promulgation, passage, and implementation of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) was the right thing to do. Protecting and advocating for other similarly situated high performing school districts became an integral part of the WCS rationale for pursuing relief. Although support from these high performing districts added to the momentum that helped pass the legislation, Williamson County Schools remains the only school district to use the provisions of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) and be designated as high performing by the state of Tennessee and moreover to utilize the relief waiver provided by the law. Reflecting on these events, the current Superintendent of WCS, Jason Golden, comments on the lasting impact and utilization of the law:

The ultimate impact over the years has been much less significant than anticipated due to the language modification that left most ultimate decisions with the Commissioner of Education. It is good to have this tool available, and it is often discussed in our decision-making processes as a possibility to get things done. (J. Golden, email interview, January 22, 2021)

It is evident that the notions of politics and ethical behavior were closely intertwined in this case study and were important dimensions that framed efforts to successfully pass Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This exploratory case study was unique in time and place focusing on a single education reform initiative, including the genesis, enactment, and implementation of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). Through notes and recorded thoughts, coupled with my own experience as a member of the WCS Board of Education and County Commissioner, several opportunities for future research emerged. These recommendations for future research are informed by my experience and perceptions garnered from study participants, as well as gaps in literature. First, recommendations for future study may include investigation into inadvertent, negative impacts of federal and state education reform initiatives upon uniquely situated school districts both within a state and more broadly across the nation. This study revealed one instance in which a federal education reform act required state companion legislation that unintentionally jeopardized the employment of teachers and principals in high performing school districts in Tennessee. Other promising areas for future research may focus on legislative acts regarding funding, economically disadvantaged communities, and education standards, that may inadvertently have negative impacts on uniquely situated school districts.

Second, future research may examine the relationships of State Commissioners of Education and superintendents within their state. This unique case study revealed a politically contentious relationship between one superintendent and Tennessee's Commissioner of Education and its lasting effects on a school district. Third, other possible studies might examine the symbiotic relationships necessary for local school districts and the state's education capability in aggregate to achieve and maintain academic success, with aspects of communication, mutual respect, and collegiality are potential study foci. Lastly, future studies may center on the political shifts of state and federal education reform based on the political party in power. This exploratory case study hinged on two landmark pieces of legislation, one federal and one state, both of which were enacted in a time of transitional executive power from one political party to another. Education reform is often utilized to place an executive level leader in a perceived ethical position of doing what is viewed as best. Future research might analyze major education reform initiatives at the federal and state levels of government to explore patterns of promulgation and enactment, evaluate efficacy, and ascertain opposition efforts.

### **Implications for Practice**

Participants of this study provided candid assessments regarding their involvement in the series of events surrounding the promulgation and enactment of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). Each offered perspectives of Williamson County and the WCS district, influence relationships of stakeholders, and the inevitable political and ethical opportunities and constraints of the legislative education reform journey. Several implications for practice emerged from this unique research study. First, leadership strategies utilizing various roles and organizational frameworks are important in scaffolding an approach to education reform. As evidenced by this study, Taylor's (1909) "one best way" is not a sufficient singular

approach to education reform. The field of education is vast and although the intent of education reform is the betterment of all, it is important to be aware of the detriments to some. Second, leaders must recognize, build, and maintain influence relationships within and outside the political realm to be successful in legislative pursuits. Third, ethically and morally influenced behaviors should be foundational to education reform efforts. Lastly, determination to lead through serving, accepting the challenges of the position, and being responsible for ensuring desired outcomes, are all qualities a board of education should look for in their superintendent.

### **Conclusion**

This unique exploratory case study examined the need and pursuit of state-level legislative intervention by a single Tennessee school district. Due in part to failures in communication, collegial relationships, and political and ethical influence, the Williamson County Schools (WCS) superintendent and a coalition of his support sought legislative relief. With funding stability, political influence and power, and stalwart ethical leadership, Williamson County was uniquely positioned to pursue this objective, not only for self-relief, but for other high performing school districts across the state as well. In hindsight, the stance of the Commissioner of Education was incongruent with the goals and mission of the WCS district. The Commissioner's refusal to grant relief jeopardized the employees of Williamson County Schools and other similarly situated high performing school districts. Although it may be conjecture, had the Commissioner worked with the WCS superintendent to find common ground for relief, there would not have been a need for Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) to relieve the threat to WCS. However, failed conflict resolution and the realization that a remedy was necessary to protect the school district led the WCS superintendent and other leaders and key stakeholders to utilize influence relationships and create an ethical,

political solution: the promulgation, passage, and practice of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act.

APPENDIX A

WILLIAMSON COUNTY SCHOOLS INITIAL WAIVER REQUEST UTILIZING  
TENNESSEE'S HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL DISTRICTS FLEXIBILITY ACT (2013)

Mike Looney, Ed.D., Superintendent  
1320 West Main Street, Suite 202  
Franklin, Tennessee 37064-3700  
Phone (615) 472-4000  
Fax (615) 595-4943



September 12, 2014

Commissioner Kevin Huffman  
State of Tennessee  
Department of Education  
710 James Robertson Parkway  
Andrew Johnson Tower, 9th Floor  
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Commissioner Huffman:

Pursuant to our conversation, please consider this letter as an official request of relief in accordance with your statutory authority to waive rules, regulations, and laws impeding Williamson County Schools' service delivery as a High Performing School District.

1. We request permission to develop independent rigorous local standards meeting or exceeding Tennessee curriculum expectations and aligned to state assessments.
2. We request permission to make local adjustments to the school calendar. This would include daily, monthly, and annual school schedules and calendars based on local needs relating to parent conferences, seat time requirements, activity requirements and length of school day, professional development, and inclement weather day management.
3. We request streamlined approval of school/district improvement plans and Federal Program plans to include any related amendments.
4. We request permission to manage the improvement process of the district's single "Focus School" (Fairview Middle School) without external oversight and support.
5. We request the authority to grant teachers tenure at the end of their fifth year of employment with or without consideration of TVAAS data.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mike Looney', is written over a horizontal line.

Mike Looney, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Williamson County Schools



STATE OF TENNESSEE  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
9<sup>th</sup> FLOOR, ANDREW JOHNSON TOWER  
710 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY  
NASHVILLE, TN 37243-0375

**BILL HASLAM**  
GOVERNOR

**KEVIN HUFFMAN**  
COMMISSIONER

October 1, 2014

Dr. Mike Looney  
Director of Schools  
Williamson County Schools  
1320 West Main Street, Suite 202  
Franklin, TN 37064-3700

Dear Dr. Looney,

Thank you for your letter dated September 12, 2014. Williamson County Schools (WCS) has a strong record of achievement in this state and I commend you and your staff for the tremendous work to improve student outcomes in your community. Your success serves as a model for the rest of the state in proving both high achievement and strong growth can take place in each of Tennessee's school districts.

Your letter asked me to consider a number of requests to assist WCS with the delivery of its services to students. Below, I have addressed each request individually:

1. *We request permission to develop independent rigorous local standards meeting or exceeding Tennessee curriculum expectations and aligned to state assessments.*

The state's academic standards, adopted by the State Board of Education in multiple subject areas, establish a set of expectations for learning and represent a baseline or minimum requirement from which local school districts operate. Districts, of course, then have the authority and responsibility to develop their own curriculum, shape instruction, and select textbooks and other instructional materials. Although WCS must ensure the state's minimum standards are met, you have the flexibility to determine how to structure your work and certainly are welcome to operate in a manner that exceeds the minimum requirements set by the state.

2. *We request permission to make local adjustments to the school calendar. This would include daily, monthly, and annual school schedules and calendars based on local needs relating to parent conferences, seat time requirements, activity requirements and length of school day, professional development, and inclement weather day management.*

We are certainly open to further discussions on this request; however, additional information is needed. As you know, Tennessee law requires a minimum of 180 student instructional days with a minimum of six and one-half (6 ½) hours of instruction per day. It is assumed your request would maintain the minimum instructional times; however, this is not clear. In addition, more information is needed to determine what specific relief you are requesting relative to parent conferences, activity requirements, professional development and inclement weather day management.



3. *We request streamlined approval of school/district improvement plans and Federal Program plans to include any related amendments.*

This request is approved.

4. *We request permission to manage the improvement process of the district's single "Focus School" (Fairview Middle School) without external oversight and support.*

Based on WCS' strong record of achievement and achievement growth, this request is approved for the 2014-15 school year.

5. *We request the authority to grant teachers tenure at the end of their fifth year of employment with or without consideration of TVAAS data.*

The reform of Tennessee's teacher tenure law in 2011 helped solidify Tennessee at the forefront of education reform in the country and was the end product of the work of many education stakeholders in Tennessee, including boards of education and directors of schools. The key component of this reform was to associate tenure with performance that exceeds expectations and to include, for the first time, student achievement as part of the equation.

It's important to note, at most, TVAAS data accounts for 35 percent of a teacher's overall evaluation and it's the overall evaluation score that factors into tenure decisions. Furthermore, nothing in the teacher tenure law or the teacher evaluation law mandates any particular personnel decision to local school districts. To the contrary – while the former tenure law forced any eligible teacher not receiving tenure to be dismissed, today's law permits a local school district to employ a non-tenured teacher indefinitely. In other words, while the law does prohibit a school district from granting tenure to teachers not meeting the requisite evaluation scores, it does not prevent you, as a director of schools, from continuing to make your own decisions about how to utilize the evaluation to inform your decisions.

For these reasons, this request is denied.

I commend you for your continued efforts to seek relief from state requirements you believe are impeding your ability to serve your students in the most efficient and high quality manner. The department looks forward to partnering with WCS to provide flexibility where possible and hopes to learn from your related work to assist other districts throughout the state.

Sincerely,



Kevin Huffman

APPENDIX B

WILLIAMSON COUNTY SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES:

MAY 20, 2013

MINUTES

WILLIAMSON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

REGULAR MEETING

May 20, 2013

A. Call to Order

The Williamson County Board of Education met in regular session on Monday, May 20, 2013 in the Williamson County Administrative Complex Auditorium.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Pat Anderson called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

The pledge of allegiance was led by Tim McLaughlin after which the Board observed a moment of silence.

Members Present .....11

Kenneth Peterson	1 <sup>st</sup> District	Robert Hullett	7 <sup>th</sup> District
Janice Mills	2 <sup>nd</sup> District	Pat Anderson	8 <sup>th</sup> District
P. J. Mezera	3 <sup>rd</sup> District	- - -	9 <sup>th</sup> District
Tim McLaughlin	4 <sup>th</sup> District	Eric Welch	10 <sup>th</sup> District
Gary Anderson	5 <sup>th</sup> District	Mark Gregory	11 <sup>th</sup> District
Cherie Hammond	6 <sup>th</sup> District	Vicki Vogt	12 <sup>th</sup> District

Members Absent .....1

Rick Wimberly 9<sup>th</sup> District

Chairman Anderson recognized Allison Cowan, Orchestra Director, and the strings students from Centennial and Ravenwood high schools who performed prior to the Board meeting.

B. Approval of Agenda

Chairman Anderson noted before approving the agenda, including the Consent Agenda, that everyone should have a replacement page for School Fees (High) and a replacement page for Superintendent Goals/Evaluation Instrument 2013-2014.

There being no further additions or corrections Robert Hullett moved to approve the agenda, including the Consent Agenda, as presented and Eric Welch seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a voice vote on the motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Motion Carried.

Chairman Anderson read the approved Consent Agenda to the audience.

C. Consent Agenda (as approved above)

1. Approval of School Board Meeting Minutes
  - April 15, 2013
2. Approval of Board Policy Revisions, *2<sup>nd</sup> Reading*
  - a. 4.200 - Curriculum Development (Editorial Change)
  - b. 4.605 - Graduation Requirements
  - c. 5.117 - Non-Tenure and Tenure
3. Approval of Recommendations for Field Trip Fee Requests
4. Approval of School Federal Projects, Grants and Budgets: ESEA as Amended by No Child Left Behind Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, Part B and IDEA Pre-School), Carl D. Perkins C&T Education Act of 2006; Carl D. Perkins IV Reserve Grant Application and Budget; Superintendent Authorizations
5. Approval of High School Course List for 2013-2014
6. Approval of Special High School Course List for 2013-2014
7. Approval of School Fees
8. Approval of Church of the City, Inc. at Hunters Bend Elementary School

D. Items of Particular Public Interest

1. Public Comment

Chairman Anderson noted no one had requested to address the Board.

E. Communications to the Board

1. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Mike Looney shared the topics covered at the Work Session. The district's first charter school application was rejected based on failure to meet the minimum statutory requirements of the Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002. The Pride Survey data for the 2012-2013 school year was reviewed. Dr. Looney also noted results of our external review from AdvancEd and shared that the district was continually answering questions on Common Core on the district website. Finally, he recognized Walnut Grove Elementary school nurse Kristen

Whittemore for saving the life of a parent volunteer by her swift action and by using the school's AED machine.

- Student Spotlight

Students from across the district were honored with Student Spotlights during the meeting. From Brentwood Middle, eighth grader Harry Westbrook placed first in Algebra II at the Tennessee Math Teachers Association Competition. His teacher is Vivia Smith. Brentwood High's Joyce Kang also placed first in Calculus. Her teacher is Jerry Stelmaszak. From Ravenwood, Stanley Xiang placed first in Pre-Calculus, and Frances Ding placed first with a perfect score in Statistics at the Tennessee Math Teachers Association Competition. Their teacher is Stacey Herrin.

Also from Ravenwood, Frances Ding and Eric Yang won first place in the Chemistry Lab at the Tennessee State Science Olympiad. Their teachers are Avril Buerstetta and Amy Maffei.

Two groups from Brentwood High won first place in the Tests in Engineering Aptitude, Mathematics and Science Competition. Will Cuthbertson, Jake Henry, Philip Ooi, Iain Woodburn, Dennis Sun, Deven Bhuvu, Lisa Qu and Hadley Hilgenhurst won in the ninth and tenth grade group, and Akash Oza, Luke Donahue, Brandon Green, Austin Southard-Smith, Kimberly Eddleman, Nisha Bhuvu, Taylor Streaty and Joyce Kang won in the eleventh and twelfth grade group. Their teacher is Ashley Seth.

Brentwood High students won several first place awards at the state DECA competition including Corey Fawcett and Web Massengale in the Financial Services Team Decision Making category; JoJo Liddell in Restaurant Services Marketing; Hannah Overmyer in Hotel and Lodging Marketing; Shawdi Rabiei in Human Resources Management; and Mark Randolph in Sports and Entertainment Marketing. Their teacher is Lisa Nease.

Several high school students won first place at the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences competition. From Brentwood, Ben Sherrill, Thomas Tatum, Thomas Wolf for Best Animation; Josh Jirjis, Zach Madell, Grayson Propst, Danielle Wilson for Best Music Video; Stephen Hart and Cameron Pedley for Best News Package; and Grayson Propst and Danielle Wilson for Best Short Film. Their teacher is Ronnie Adcock. From Centennial, Caleb Simons and Tarrik Walker won for their Public Service Announcement. Dawn Marek is their teacher. At Independence, Jackie Jones won for Best Sound. Her teacher is Matt Balzer. From Ravenwood, Aaron Mirtes won for Best Director and Best Editor; Chaz Olivier for Best Photographer; and Aaron Mirtes and Brad Belemjian for Best Talent. Laura Faber is their teacher.

Centennial's Patrick Mills, Toby Renfrow and Noah Shirley won the SKILLS USA award for their Capstone Student Project Showcase Arts, Audiovisual Technology

and Communications. Dawn Marek is their teacher. From Independence, Courtney Smith won in Advertising Design. Her teacher is Stephanie Prewitt.

Brentwood High's Natalie Bennett won the Congressional Debate House 1, and Rebekah Ninan won the Congressional Debate House 2 at the state National Forensic League Competition. Harriet Medlin is their teacher.

In the Tennessee High School Speech and Drama League Competition, Brentwood High's Sarath Pavuluri won in Congress. Harriet Medlin is his teacher. Ravenwood's Josh Mucci won first place in After Dinner Speaking; Andy Gordon and Alyssa Miller won in Duo Interpretation; and Ross Hildabrand won in Extemporaneous Speaking. Kelly Duyn is their teacher.

Several schools placed first at the state Destination Imagination tournament. The Clovercroft Elementary team members are Kylie Enriquez, Molly Keffer, Claudia Farnell, Sierra Scott, Jaya Cluff, Zoe Miles in Life of DI. Coaches are Craig Miles and Christina Scott, and the DI Coordinator is Crystal James. In the category of In Disguise, Crockett Elementary's Eli Bullock-Papa, Ella Bullock-Papa, Eliana Gallagher, Andrei Gaylord, Greta LI, Savitha Samudrala and Rohan Tyagi won. Their coaches are Nancy Gallgher and Kairali Samudrala.

Two schools won in the category of Twist A Rama including Heritage Elementary's Logan Bock, Dylan Fichter, Zach Smith, Madison Staffen, Madison Kalb, Estella Pennell and Sarah Ward with coach Debbie Smith, and Kenrose Elementary's Jack Berexa, Kelsey Blood, Clark Danelz, Weston Geuther, Zara Malik, Emily Mastroleo and Lily Wilson with team managers Cindy Danelz, Christy Geuther and Kristin Berexa.

Brentwood Middle won two first place awards in the categories of Change in RealiTee and Wind Visible. The team members are Sara Dillender, Sydney Smith, Matthew Donahue, Brady Cauthen, Harry Westbrook, Sophie Khomtchenko and Julia Lifferth. The team coach is Melanie Dillender and DI School Sponsor is Meredith Tuinstra.

From Grassland Middle Siena Rozzelle, Katie Thornton, Amelia Mitchell, Zach Helton, Austin Sparks and Gibbs Bedenbaugh won in the A List category. The coaches are Robert Bedenbaugh and Rachel Bedenbaugh, and the school sponsor is Jennifer Keith.

In the category of IN The Zone, the Woodland Middle team of Benjamin Callahan, Megha Chitturi, Emily Lu, Keenan Jensen, Zoe Rozine and Lauren Shepard placed first. Lora Westlund is the teacher sponsor, and Kabrina Rozine is the coach.

From Franklin High, team members McKenzie Bottoms, Marjory Day, Ashley DePeri, Ella Dermon, Andie Fisher and Sarah Southern won in the category of In Disguise. Their coach is Leigh Justus.

In athletics, Fairview Middle’s Joshua Ortiz- Derrick won the 2013 AAU Middle School Wrestling Tennessee State Champion and the 2013 Nationals Duals All American. His coaches are James Derrick, Tom Herring and Don Barnett.

- Teacher/Staff Spotlight

In Staff Spotlights, Hunters Bend Elementary’s Lisa Arnold was recognized for receiving a Williamson County Impact Award, and Franklin High Band Instructor David Aydelott was honored for being elected President Elect for the Tennessee Music Educators Association. He will be president in 2015.

2. Board Chairman’s Report

Chairman Anderson recognized several students. Ravenwood High students Chaz Olivier and Aaron Mirtes placed third in the C-SPAN Documentary Competition. Grassland Middle student Nicholas Ma was chosen to represent the state of Tennessee in the Doodle4Google Competition. Franklin High students, Matthew Rutledge and Andrew White; Independence High student, Allison Borsage; Page High student, Lucas Mendl; and Ravenwood High student, Daniel O’Reilly received scholarships from the ACE Mentor Program of Greater Nashville. She also thanked the students and staff for a great school year, and she congratulated all of the graduates.

F. Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business before the Board.

G. New Business

1. Board Policy Revision, 1<sup>st</sup> Reading

a. 4.208 - Adult Education Program

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of deleting Policy 4.208 as outlined on the first reading by the Board Policy Committee.

Janice Mills moved to approve the recommendation and Kenneth Peterson seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes

Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried

b. 4.400 - Instructional Resources and Materials

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of Policy 4.400 as outlined on the first reading by the Board Policy Committee.

Mr. McLaughlin moved to approve the recommendation and Mr. Welch seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried.

c. 4.406 - Student Access to Electronic Media

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of Policy 4.406 as outlined on the first reading by the Board Policy Committee.

Vicki Vogt moved to approve the recommendation and Cherie Hammond seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried.

d. 4.603 - Promotion and Retention

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of Policy 4.603 as outlined on the first reading by the Board Policy Committee.

Mr. Hullett moved to approve the recommendation and Mr. McLaughlin seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried.

e. 4.6051 - Credit Requirements for Graduation (Includes Deletion of 4.6051b)

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of Policy 4.6051 as outlined on the first reading by the Board Policy Committee.

Ms. Hammond moved to approve the recommendation and Mr. Welch seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried.

f. 4.7002 - Middle School Examinations

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of Policy 4.7002 as outlined on the first reading by the Board Policy Committee.

Ms. Mills moved to approve the recommendation and P. J. Mezera seconded the motion.



Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried.

g. 6.203 - Resident Students

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of Policy 6.203 as outlined on the first reading by the Board Policy Committee.

Mr. Hullett moved to approve the recommendation and Ms. Mills seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried.

2. Board Approval of 2013-2014 Acceptable Use Guidelines

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of the Acceptable Use Guidelines for 2013-2014.

Mr. Welch moved to approve the recommendation and Mr. Hullett seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried

3. 2012-2013 Budget Amendments

a. General Purpose School Fund

i. Bus Destroyed

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of a resolution appropriating \$93,000 to replace a destroyed bus.

Mr. McLaughlin moved to approve the recommendation and Mr. Peterson seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried

ii. Community Service

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval a resolution for \$35,000 to cover use and supervision fees for facility usage with building rental fees covering the cost.

Mr. Hullett moved to approve the recommendation and Ms. Hammond seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried

iii. United Way

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of a resolution for \$2,220 for a United Way grant.

Ms. Mills moved to approve the recommendation and Mr. McLaughlin seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried

iv. Coordinated School Health Program

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of a resolution for \$1,520 for a transfer of accounts for the Coordinated School Health Program.

Mr. Peterson moved to approve the recommendation and Ms. Vogt seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried

b. Central Cafeteria Fund

i. Commodities

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of a resolution appropriating \$488,220 for USDA commodities.

Mr. Hullett moved to approve the recommendation and Ms. Hammond seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried

ii. Cafeteria Needs

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of a resolution for \$676,655 to balance line items for the year.

Mr. Peterson moved to approve the recommendation and Mr. Welch seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried

c. Extended School Program Budget

i. Contracted Services

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of a resolution appropriating \$35,000 for additional summer expenses for the Extended School Program Budget.

Mr. Peterson moved to approve the recommendation and Mr. Welch seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes

Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried

4. High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of the Board vote to declare itself a high performing school district pursuant to the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act.

Ms. Mills moved to approve the recommendation and Mr. Mezera seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried

5. Contract Over \$10,000 - Quantum Learning Education

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval for a contract over \$10,000 with Quantum Learning Education which will provide professional development for teachers during the summer.

Ms. Vogt moved to approve the recommendation and Mr. McLaughlin seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	Yes	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 11; No, 0; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried

6. Superintendent Goals/Evaluation Instrument 2013-2014

Chairman Anderson called on Superintendent Looney who recommended approval of the Superintendent Goals/Evaluation Instrument for 2013-2014.

Mr. Hullett moved to approve the recommendation and Ms. Mills seconded the motion.

Chairman Anderson called for a roll call vote on the main motion.

Kenneth Peterson	Yes	Robert Hullett	Yes
Janice Mills	Yes	Pat Anderson	Yes
P. J. Mezera	Yes	---	---
Tim McLaughlin	No	Eric Welch	Yes
Gary Anderson	Yes	Mark Gregory	Yes
Cherie Hammond	Yes	Vicki Vogt	Yes

Action: Yes, 10; No, 1; Abstain, 0; Motion Carried

H. Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Board, Chairman Anderson adjourned the meeting at 7:16 p.m.

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Patricia B. Anderson, Chairman

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Dr. Mike Looney, Superintendent of Schools

APPENDIX C

PROFILE DATA FOR THE STATE OF TENNESSEE IN AGGREGATE  
AND WILLIAMSON COUNTY SCHOOLS

Profile Data	State of Tennessee, Aggregate	Williamson County Schools
District Grades Served	PK-12	PK-12
Safe School	All Schools Safe	All Schools Safe
Districts	146	1
Schools	1811	41
Teachers	63,170	2,183
Administrators	4,873	130
Students	995,892	35,578
English Learner Students	45,739	605
English Learner Student Percent	4.6%	1.7%
Economically Disadvantaged Student Percent	57.9%	9.6%
Students with Disabilities	139,232	3,640
Students with Disabilities Percent	14.0%	10.2%
Per-Pupil Expenditure	\$9,374.90	\$8,739.70

2014-2015 Profile data of the state of Tennessee, in aggregate, and Williamson County Schools.

From the Tennessee Report Card Archive, 2014-2015.

APPENDIX D

STUDENT ETHNICITY DEMOGRAPHICS FOR THE STATE OF TENNESSEE IN  
 AGGREGATE AND WILLIAMSON COUNTY SCHOOLS

Ethnicity Demographics	State of Tennessee, Aggregate		Williamson County Schools	
Total Number of Students	995,892	100%	35,578	100%
Male	511,241	51.3%	18,147	51%
Female	484,639	48.7%	17,431	49%
White/Caucasian	645,857	64.9%	29,499	82.9%
African American	240,346	24.1%	1,777	5.0%
Hispanic	84,248	8.5%	1,901	5.3%
Asian	20,470	2.1%	2,068	5.8%
Native American	3,183	0.3%	240	0.7%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1,551	0.2%	93	0.3%
* Statistical anomalies in the state's aggregate data exist but are not rationalized in the Department of Education's data records.				

2014-2015 Student ethnicity demographics of the state of Tennessee, in aggregate, and Williamson County Schools. From the Tennessee Report Card Archive, 2014-2015.



APPENDIX E

ATTENDANCE AND PROMOTION RATES FOR THE STATE OF TENNESSEE IN  
AGGREGATE AND WILLIAMSON COUNTY SCHOOLS

Attendance and Promotion	State of Tennessee, Aggregate	Williamson County Schools
K-8 Average Daily Attendance Rate	95.7%	96.7%
K-8 Promotion Rate	98.4%	99.9%
HS Average Daily Attendance Rate	94.1%	94.9%
Graduation Rate	87.8%	95.5%
Cohort Dropout Rate	6.0%	1.7%
Event Dropout Rate	2.6%	0.8%

2014-2015 Attendance and promotion rates of the state of Tennessee, in aggregate, and

Williamson County Schools. From the Tennessee Report Card Archive, 2014-2015.

APPENDIX F

DISCIPLINARY STATISTICS FOR THE STATE OF TENNESSEE IN AGGREGATE

AND WILLIAMSON COUNTY SCHOOLS

Disciplinary Actions		
State of Tennessee, Aggregate	Suspension	
	Discipline Count	Discipline Rate
All Students	61,646	6.2%
Asian	258	1.3%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	44	2.8%
Hispanic	3,337	4.0%
African American	38,233	15.9%
Native American/Alaskan	152	4.8%
White	19,622	3.0%
Female	19,546	4.0%
Male	42,100	8.2%
Williamson County Schools		
All Students	83	0.2%
White	68	0.2%
Female	15	0.1%
Male	68	0.4%
State of Tennessee, Aggregate		
	Expulsion	
	Discipline Count	Discipline Rate
All Students	2,021	0.2%
Asian	11	0.1%
Hispanic	83	0.1%
African American	1,388	0.6%
White	528	0.1%
Female	527	0.1%
Male	1,494	0.3%
Williamson County Schools	None reported	

2014-2015 Discipline statistics of the state of Tennessee, in aggregate, and Williamson County Schools. From the Tennessee Report Card Archive, 2014-2015.

APPENDIX G

FUNDING MECHANISMS FOR THE STATE OF TENNESSEE IN AGGREGATE  
AND WILLIAMSON COUNTY SCHOOLS

Funding Mechanisms	State of Tennessee, Aggregate	Williamson County Schools
Per Pupil Expenditure	\$9,374.90	\$8,739.70
Local Funding	40.34%	55.50%
Federal Funding	12.28%	4.11%
State Funding	47.38%	40.38%
Per Pupil Expenditure – Total current operating expenditures on a per pupil basis including federal, state, and local funds. Some examples of use are for instructional materials, maintenance, and transportation.		

2014-2015 Funding mechanisms of the state of Tennessee, in aggregate, and Williamson County Schools. From the Tennessee Report Card Archive, 2014-2015.

APPENDIX H

GRADUATION RATES FOR THE STATE OF TENNESSEE IN AGGREGATE  
AND WILLIAMSON COUNTY SCHOOLS

Graduation Rates	State of Tennessee, Aggregate	Williamson County Schools
All Students	87.8%	95.5%
Asian	92.8%	96.5%
Native American/Pacific Islander	93.7%	89.4%
Hispanic	83.5%	89.4%
African American	80.6%	89.9%
Native American/Alaskan	85.0%	92.9%
White	90.9%	96.4%
Economically Disadvantaged Students	83.5%	86.2%
Students with Disabilities	70.0%	75.0%
English Language Learner Students	74.8%	69.0%

2014-2015 Graduation rates of the state of Tennessee, in aggregate, and Williamson County Schools. From the Tennessee Report Card Archive, 2014-2015.

APPENDIX I

ACT SCORES FOR THE STATE OF TENNESSEE IN AGGREGATE  
AND WILLIAMSON COUNTY SCHOOLS

ACT Scores		
State of Tennessee, Aggregate	Current	3 Year Average
Composite	19.4	19.4
English	18.9	18.9
Math	18.9	18.8
Reading	19.6	19.5
Science	19.5	19.2
Williamson County Schools		
	Current	3 Year Average
Composite	23.8	23.6
English	24.0	23.8
Math	23.1	22.9
Reading	24.1	23.9
Science	23.4	23.1

2014-2015 ACT scores of the state of Tennessee, in aggregate, and Williamson County Schools.

From the Tennessee Report Card Archive, 2014-2015.

APPENDIX J

TCAP 3 YEAR AVERAGE SCORES FOR THE STATE OF TENNESSEE IN AGGREGATE  
AND WILLIAMSON COUNTY SCHOOLS

TCAP 3 Year Average Scores							
State of Tennessee, Aggregate							
	2013		2014		2015		
	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Trend
3-8 Math	A	55	A	57	A	58	NC
3-8 Reading	B	51	B	52	B	58	NC
3-8 Science	B	52	B	54	B	58	NC
3-8 Social Studies	A	56	A	57			
Williamson County Schools							
	2013		2014		2015		
	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Trend
3-8 Math	A	68	A	71	A	72	NC
3-8 Reading	A	69	A	70	A	70	NC
3-8 Science	A	69	A	72	A	73	NC
3-8 Social Studies	A	74	A	76			
NC = No Change							

2014-2015 Three year average TCAP scores of the state of Tennessee, in aggregate, and Williamson County Schools. From the Tennessee Report Card Archive, 2014-2015.

APPENDIX K

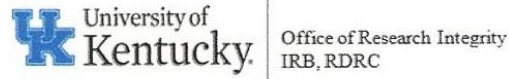
TVAAS 3 YEAR COMPOSITE SCORES FOR THE STATE OF TENNESSEE IN  
AGGREGATE AND WILLIAMSON COUNTY SCHOOLS

TVAAS 3 Year Composite Scores			
Williamson County Schools			
	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Overall	5	5	2
Literacy	5	3	3
Numeracy	5	5	1
Literacy and Numeracy	5	5	2

2014-2015 Three year composite TVAAS scores of Williamson County Schools. From the Tennessee Report Card Archive, 2014-2015.

## APPENDIX L

### IRB APPROVAL LETTER



#### EXEMPTION CERTIFICATION

IRB Number: 61766

TO: Robert Hullett, Jr.,  
Educational Leadership Studies  
PI phone #: 6154004123  
  
PI email: r.hullett@uky.edu

FROM: Chairperson/Vice Chairperson  
Nonmedical Institutional Review Board (IRB)

SUBJECT: Approval for Exemption Certification

DATE: 10/26/2020

On 10/23/2020, it was determined that your project entitled "*STRATEGIC EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE POLICY-MAKING ARENA: THE PROMULGATION, PASSAGE, AND PRACTICE OF TENNESSEE'S HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL DISTRICTS FLEXIBILITY ACT OF 2013*" meets federal criteria to qualify as an exempt study.

Because the study has been certified as exempt, you will not be required to complete continuation or final review reports. However, it is your responsibility to notify the IRB prior to making any changes to the study. Please note that changes made to an exempt protocol may disqualify it from exempt status and may require an expedited or full review.

The Office of Research Integrity will hold your exemption application for six years. Before the end of the sixth year, you will be notified that your file will be closed and the application destroyed. If your project is still ongoing, you will need to contact the Office of Research Integrity upon receipt of that letter and follow the instructions for completing a new exemption application. It is, therefore, important that you keep your address current with the Office of Research Integrity.

For information describing investigator responsibilities after obtaining IRB approval, download and read the document "[PI Guidance to Responsibilities, Qualifications, Records and Documentation of Human Subjects Research](#)" available in the online Office of Research Integrity's [IRB Survival Handbook](#). Additional information regarding IRB review, federal regulations, and institutional policies may be found through [ORI's web site](#). If you have questions, need additional information, or would like a paper copy of the above mentioned document, contact the Office of Research Integrity at 859-257-9428.



## APPENDIX M

### Combined Consent and Authorization to Participate in a Research Study

#### **KEY INFORMATION FOR**

#### **STRATEGIC EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE POLICY-MAKING ARENA: THE PROMULGATION, PASSAGE, AND PRACTICE OF TENNESSEE'S HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL DISTRICTS FLEXIBILITY ACT OF 2013**

We are asking you to choose whether or not to volunteer for a research study about the origins of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act of 2013, followed by the implementation and maintenance of recognition by the William County Schools District in the State of Tennessee. We are asking you because of your involvement as a key stakeholder in Williamson County's high performing school district or legislative community. This page is to give you key information to help you decide whether to participate. We have included detailed information after this page. Ask the research team questions. If you have questions later, the contact information for the principal investigator in charge of the study is below.

#### **WHAT IS THE STUDY ABOUT AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?**

By performing this study, we hope to learn why the Williamson County Schools district and community became involved in Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act of 2013, as well as more about the genesis, implementation, and maintenance of rigor required. This research will include an examination of relationships between stakeholders of Williamson County's school district, community, and state government. Your participation in this research will consist of roughly an hour to two hours of your time.

#### **WHAT ARE KEY REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS STUDY?**

The study could assist other school districts in Tennessee in the pursuit of being qualified under the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act. Additionally the research could provide guidance and options for similarly situated school districts in their response to adverse conditions of state mandates and legislative actions.

#### **WHAT ARE KEY REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE NOT TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS STUDY?**

You will/may be identified in reports and publications by name. You will have the opportunity to review transcripts and have all or part of your interview removed from the research data. Should you wish not to be identified, you should not volunteer for this study.

#### **DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?**

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer.

## **WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS OR CONCERNS?**

The person in charge of this study is Robert Hullett, Ph.D. Candidate and Principal Investigator of the University of Kentucky, Department of Educational Leadership Studies. If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns regarding this study or you want to withdraw from the study his contact information is: [r.hullett@uky.edu](mailto:r.hullett@uky.edu), 615-400-4123.

If you have any questions, suggestions or concerns about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact staff in the University of Kentucky (UK) Office of Research Integrity (ORI) between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Monday-Friday at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428

## **DETAILED CONSENT:**

STRATEGIC EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE POLICY-MAKING ARENA:  
THE PROMULGATION, PASSAGE, AND PRACTICE OF TENNESSEE'S  
HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL DISTRICTS FLEXIBILITY ACT OF 2013

## **WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS:**

Principal Investigator (P.I.): Robert Hullett, Ph.D. Candidate  
UK Department: Educational Leadership Studies (EDL)  
Address: 103 Dickey Hall  
Lexington, Kentucky 40506  
Phone Number: 859-257-6076  
Website: <https://education.uky.edu/>

## **WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND WHAT IS THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF TIME INVOLVED?**

The research procedures will be conducted through interviews by email or zoom, or other electronic meeting application. There will be an initial interview taking less than one hour. Should follow-up questions emerge, email or zoom, or other electronic meeting application, will be utilized to collect responses. This will also take less than one hour. The total possible time you will be asked to volunteer is less than two hours. At the conclusion of the interview process, a transcript of your interview will be provided to you for your review with the opportunity to amend or remove any of your responses. Verbal interviews will be transcribed utilizing the online application, temi.com, which does not retain data upon exiting the website. Both transcriptions and responses by email will be input into Atlas.ti, a qualitative data collection and analysis application. This information will be password protected and deleted upon completion and publication of the study.

## **WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?**

Research will be conducted via interviews which will be conducted between one participant and one interviewer in a manner convenient to the participant, either email or zoom, or other electronic meeting application. The interview will relate to your experience with Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act of 2013 and Williamson County. You are free to skip any questions that you do not wish to discuss. The interview should take no more than one hour. Following a review of your responses by the interviewer, via transcription and/or email, a secondary interview with follow up questions may be

requested. This interview will hold to the same provisions of the first and should also last no more than one hour. At the conclusion of the interview process, a transcript of your interview will be provided to you for your review with the opportunity to amend or remove any of your responses.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?**

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk or harm than you would experience in everyday life.

**WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. Your willingness to take part, however, may, in the future, help society as a whole, better understand this research topic. Also, your responses may help the education systems in Tennessee better understand the rigor, uses, and effects of the High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act, and may contribute to the fields of educational leadership, policy, and politics.

**IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?**

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

**WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?**

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE? WILL MY INFORMATION BE PRIVATE?**

Being that you are a public figure who potentially has statewide notoriety in Tennessee, your name, positions, and district, Williamson County, will likely be identified. We will take precautions to ensure that you agree with your statements by providing you with a copy of the transcripts along with a copy of any pre-submission articles that we may write. If, at any time prior to publication, you disagree with the quotes or prefer them to be stricken from the record, we will do so immediately. We will make every effort to safeguard your data, but as with anything online, we cannot guarantee the security of data obtained via the Internet. Third-party applications used in this study may have Terms of Service and Privacy policies outside of the control of the University of Kentucky.

**CAN YOU CHOOSE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY EARLY?**

You can choose to leave the study at any time. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. Further, you have the right to request that your interview be pulled from the study at any point. The individuals conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to answer the questions, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you, or if the technology malfunctions and your interview is lost.

**WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

## **WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?**

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind, now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the principal investigator, Robert Hullett at 615-400-4123 or [r.hullett@uky.edu](mailto:r.hullett@uky.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky at 859-257-9428 or [rs\\_ORI@uky.edu](mailto:rs_ORI@uky.edu). Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

## **COLLECTION OF INFORMED CONSENT**

If you have arranged to conduct the interview via Zoom, or other electronic meeting application, your informed consent to participate in this study will be obtained verbally at the beginning of your meeting with the investigator, following the providing of answers to any questions you might have. If you have arranged to conduct the interview by email, the investigator will send you an email asking you if you have read this consent letter, if you any questions about the study, and after your questions have been answered, if you consent to participate. This will be completed in separate emails. The first email will include this consent letter. The second email will ask you for any questions you might have and if none, for your consent. If any questions are asked, subsequent emails will be sent until all questions are satisfied and culminate with the request for your consent. Upon receipt of your informed consent to participate in the study, the interview document will be emailed to you.

## APPENDIX N

### KEY INFORMATION FOR INTERVIEW

#### (PROCESS AND INSTRUMENT)

#### **INTRODUCTION**

My interviews will engage Williamson County Schools (WCS) stakeholders, both current and former, and the state legislative delegation from Williamson County, as they were instrumental in the development, promulgation, and passage of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). Additionally, preliminary data reveals WCS as the first and only school system to achieve recognition, as well as request relief from the state, under the act. Interviews will be scheduled for 60 minutes in length, with respect given to the participants' time and other obligations. Due to the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, these interviews will be conducted electronically via video conferencing (Zoom or other electronic meeting application) or by email.

With my history and relationships as a Board of Education Member in Williamson County, cooperation for the goal of interviewing will not be difficult to achieve. For the interview with Superintendent, Dr. Mike Looney, I would like to know what the watershed moment was for him that put WCS on the path to forge Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). I would like to know more about how he rallied district personnel to achieve the requirements for recognition. Dr. Looney has since taken another superintendent position and former Deputy Superintendent, Jason Golden is now the Superintendent for WCS. I will ask of him, the same questions for Dr. Looney. For now-retired Board Chairs, Pat Anderson and Gary Anderson, I will ask them what their initial thoughts were when Dr. Looney first brought the idea to them. I would like to better understand these events from their perspectives. Knowing that the Board would need to lead other School Boards across the state, I would like to know if Mrs. Anderson and Mr. Anderson

reached out to any other Board Chairs for conversation regarding the initiative. Further, I would like to know if there were any detractors in Williamson County to the resolution of support that inevitably came to the Board and if so, how he mitigated that influence. Finally, for Mrs. Anderson, Mr. Anderson, Dr. Looney, and Dr. Golden, I would like to know their thoughts on the experience of working directly with our State Legislative Delegation to bring Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) to fruition with it being signed into law by the Governor, Bill Haslam. For County Mayor, Rogers Anderson, I would like to discuss the fiscal impacts, either perceived or real, to Williamson County. The Williamson County Board of Education is funded by the Williamson County Commission, with which the Mayor works hand in hand. Additionally, I will interview other WCS Assistant Superintendents, district stakeholders, and two of our remaining legislative delegation, Senator Jack Johnson and Representative Glen Casada, who were instrumental in stewarding the bill through the 106<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of Tennessee.

The data I hope to collect may contribute to preparing a rich and informative case study. Interviews will enable the researcher to understand personal perspectives of those directly involved in this unique piece of legislation, as well as facilitate collection of additional descriptive data such as timelines, planning agendas, change management scopes, and any evaluations that might have been conducted with personnel. These interviews will ultimately enable the researcher to recreate events surrounding the development and passage of this piece of legislation. The following study questions include:

1. Why was Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) developed, promoted, and enacted?
2. How were influence relationships of leadership developed by the Williamson County Schools (WCS) district superintendent with other stakeholders?

3. What political and ethical behaviors created barriers and opportunities for the development and passage of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013)?

The unique moment in time and place for this study presents an exceptional opportunity to contribute to the fields of educational leadership, policy, and politics.

### **INTRODUCTORY SCRIPT**

Good afternoon. First and foremost, thank you for taking the time to participate in this research endeavor for the dissertation work of my Ph.D. pursuit. In 2013, Tennessee's High Performing School District Flexibility Act (2013) was signed into law by Governor Bill Haslam. This law allows school districts that meet a majority of specific academic criteria to request waivers from state directives/initiatives, which the school district deems contrary to their academic growth and achievement goals. My research will examine the origins of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), followed by the implementation and maintenance of recognition by Williamson County Schools (WCS). I will examine the process of becoming a recognized high performing school district, while considering the relationships of stakeholders. WCS has demonstrated this academic excellence with recognition by the state under Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013). The questions within the interview are non-disparaging, exploratory in nature, and intended to understand events from your personal perspective as well as help me collect supporting data that would be pertinent to the case study including agendas, timelines, and change management plans as examples. Information from the interview will be included in the body of the dissertation and may be reported anonymously if you wish. No FERPA sensitive data will be asked or discussed in the interview. Again, your time, experience, and perspectives are most appreciated in this research effort.

## **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **OPENING**

[Interviewee Name]

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today. Your insight, experience, and overall contributions to this research will be quite valuable. We have several main questions to discuss today, and as the conversation develops, follow up questions might emerge as well. At any point, if you would like to skip a question without answering or would like to end the interview, please let me know. I have scheduled our conversation for 60 minutes, and it is possible that our discussion could be shorter than that, but the goal is no more than an hour of your time.

1. As we begin, will you verbally confirm that you have received and read the consent letter that was sent to you? (pause for the answer) Will you also verbally acknowledge that this interview is being recorded? (pause for the answer) Thank you.

### **MAIN INTERVIEW**

2. You are currently the (title) of (community/area of service) and you served in that role for how many \_\_\_\_\_ years?
  - a. Would you share with me the reasons that brought you to Williamson County?
  - b. How long have you been in (education/government) and what roles have you served in?
  - c. Can you provide a brief history of achievements/progress in your (community/area of service) since your hiring/election as the (current role)?
3. How would you describe your relationship with the WCS Board of Education?
  - a. Current Board?
  - b. Previous Boards?



4. How would you describe your relationship with other stakeholders in the district?
  - a. County Commission and other Elected Officials?
  - b. Superintendent, Administrators, Faculty, and Staff?
  - c. Students and Parents?
  - d. Non-(school district) Parent Community Members at-large?
5. Regarding Tennessee's High Performing School District Flexibility Act (2013), how did you first become aware of the initiative?
  - a. What were your initial thoughts?
  - b. Did you foresee potential benefits and/or detriments to Williamson County and the state in aggregate?
  - c. How did you approach decision makers in your realm of influence?
6. What were the catalyst issues that motivated you to pursue Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013)?
  - a. Could these issues have been an impediment to WCS's achievement and growth?
  - b. Could these issues have been an impediment to other school districts in Tennessee, to the best of your knowledge?
  - c. Would any aspects of WCS or other similarly situated school districts improve regarding these issues if Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) had not passed?
  - d. Were any solutions other than the possibility of Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) considered?

7. Regarding the rigor of the requirements for Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013), how was the initiative received: (role specific responses)
  - a. By the senior staff?
  - b. By the Board of Education?
  - c. By the Administrators, Faculty, and Staff?
  - d. Students and Parents?
  - e. Other Stakeholders we have discussed?
8. What did WCS have to accomplish to qualify for Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) designation?
  - a. Board of Education resolutions?
  - b. Academic requirements?
  - c. Did you have a change management plan and if so, can you tell me about it?
  - d. Rally support of stakeholders, internal in the schools and external in the community?
  - e. Any outlier circumstances? (unknown unknowns you encountered)
9. Have there been any negative impacts to the district?
  - a. Funding issues?
  - b. Relationships with stakeholders, elected officials, the State Department of Education?
  - c. Instances where Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) was believed to be beneficial regarding an issue, but materialized as a detriment?
10. Have there been any positive impacts to the district?
  - a. What flexibility did the district gain on specific measures?

11. Do you feel that any modifications should be made to Tennessee's current High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013)?
- a. Academic thresholds loosened or tightened?
  - b. Any new markers included? (growth of arts and/or athletics programs, etc...)
  - c. Should funding be part of the discussion?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add to the conversation regarding Tennessee's High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act (2013) that our questions did not discuss?

### **WRAP-UP**

That's all of the questions I have for you today. Again, I really want to thank you for your time, experience, and perspectives regarding this research. After reviewing our discussion, if I have further questions, may I contact you? (pause for the answer) If you have any questions for me, please feel free to contact me at any time. Have a great rest of your day.

APPENDIX O

FISCAL MEMORANDUM: HB 210–SB 592

TENNESSEE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
FISCAL REVIEW COMMITTEE



**FISCAL MEMORANDUM**

**HB 210 – SB 592**

March 13, 2013

**SUMMARY OF ORIGINAL BILL:** Enacts the “High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act”. Defines a “high performing district” as any local education agency (LEA) that satisfies a majority of the following criteria, according to the state report card: has a 90 percent or higher graduation rate; has an average student ACT score of 21 or greater; has a Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) three-year average composite curve equivalent (NCE) score of 55 or greater; has a Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) three-year composite curve equivalent (NCE) gain of 1.75 or higher; or meets or exceeds annual achievement and gap closure measurable objectives; and receives an “exemplary” or similar status from the Department of Education. Requires only criteria specified above reported on the state report card to be used when considering whether an LEA is eligible to be declared a high performing district. Criteria that do not apply to a specific LEA shall be removed and the majority of the criteria remaining must be met.

Authorizes any LEA that meets the majority of applicable criteria to declare itself a high performing school district by action of the local board of education. The designation shall begin the July 1 following the declaration and shall last for three years. Authorizes the LEA, at the end of three years, to again declare itself a high performing district if the majority of the criteria continue to be met. Without approval from any state or local government entity, a high performing school district may: utilize a teacher evaluation system different from the one adopted by the state; add educational days to the district’s school calendar, provided the minimum number of statutorily school days are met; may apply to the Commissioner of Education for a waiver of any State Board of Education rule, provided that the waiver does not waive regulatory or statutory requirements related to civil rights, health and safety, public records, immunizations, possession of weapons on school grounds, background checks of personnel, special education services, student due process, parental rights, student assessments and accountability, open meetings, and equivalent instruction time.

FISCAL IMPACT OF ORIGINAL BILL:

NOT SIGNIFICANT

**HB 210 – SB 592**

**SUMMARY OF AMENDMENT (003765):** Deletes and rewrites the bill such that the only substantive changes are to authorize LEAs that declare as high performing school districts to appropriate additional funds from local self-sustaining or self-sufficient funds, including the central cafeteria fund and the extended school program fund, and to re-appropriate funds between major budget categories for expenditures that are deemed immediate educational needs, upon the action and approval of the local board of education and the county or city mayor as appropriate. If the LEA receives funding from its local legislative body, the body shall establish a maximum amount for any re-appropriations, provided the maximum amount shall not be less than \$75,000. When re-appropriation occurs, the local board of education shall notify the local legislative body of this action within seven days.

**FISCAL IMPACT OF BILL WITH PROPOSED AMENDMENT:**

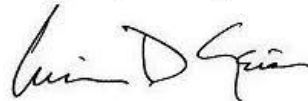
**Other Fiscal Impact – Local education agencies may appropriate or re-appropriate funds as needed. Any statewide appropriations or re-appropriations of local funding occurring as a result of the bill as amended will be permissive and is reasonably estimated to exceed \$100,000 per year.**

Assumptions for the bill as amended:

- Any increase in state expenditures to grant waivers or approve alternative teacher evaluation systems is estimated to be not significant.
- No change in the Basic Education Program (BEP) funding formula.
- Any permissive increase in local expenditures as a result of using an alternative teacher evaluation system, adding additional days to the school calendar, or receiving a waiver for certain rules and regulations is estimated to be not significant.
- Any re-appropriation made by a local legislative body may not be less than \$75,000. However, appropriations made from self-sufficient funds are not limited to any minimum amount.
- It is reasonably estimated that permissive appropriations or re-appropriations of local funding will exceed \$100,000 per year statewide.

**CERTIFICATION:**

The information contained herein is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.



Lucian D. Geise, Executive Director

/m sg

**HB 210 – SB 592**

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