

SUPERINTENDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR CAREERS:

A CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS OF TWO LONG-TERM

SMALL-SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

AND THEIR SCHOOL SYSTEMS

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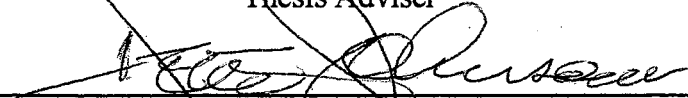
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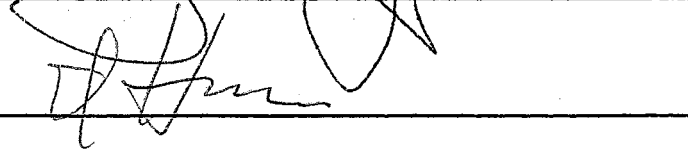
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Research Problem

Public education in the United States is currently serving over forty million students through approximately 16,000 school districts ranging in size from as few as twenty students to more than 600,000 students, and in locations from isolated rural communities to large diverse metropolitan areas. Those school districts, regardless of size and location, have several things in common. Specifically, to name a few, those are students, teachers, administrators, and governing boards. In many instances, the most highly visible position is that of superintendent. Many groups of individuals have expectations of the performance of the superintendent, and it is not unusual for those expectations to be incongruent in any of the various groups. The position is one that spans boundaries resulting in serving the internal needs of the organization while communicating its accomplishments and failure to the external community. The incumbent administratively serves typically at the pleasure of an elected board and more generally to the community at large.

The public school district or systems in the United States is required to accept all students, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, economic status, and

disabilities, within certain age limitations. At the same time, fewer households in most communities have children in the public schools than in previous decades. Additionally, schools and educators are being held to higher standards of accountability relative to student performance on test scores than previously was the case.

Historical Background

Various studies have produced different results concerning the average tenure of a superintendent. The Texas Association of School Administrators reports the national average tenure of school superintendents is 2.9 years at one site (Amarillo, 1997). Chance (1992) states the national average tenure of school superintendents is at five years. According to the American Association of School Administrators, the school superintendents' average stay in a school district is 6.5 years, and 2.5 years in urban districts (Morris, 2000). It is an anomaly for a superintendent to have a life long career at one site.

The position of superintendent has changed from being a fatherly, authoritative person to a negotiator who mostly takes care of conflicts within the district. He or she no longer rules the district, but takes care of existing fires that may have a tendency to spread and engulf the district (Chance, 1992). Yock (1990) derived that the critical time for a superintendent is the first four years and if he or she made it through the sixth year, the position was most likely to be theirs indefinitely. It would seem to be important to know about superintendents that have been able to stay in a district for a relatively lengthy tenure (Chance, 1992).

In one Midwestern state, there is one county with two superintendents who have spent the majority of their lives as school leaders at their respective site. Both are superintendents of small school districts. One has been in charge of his school district since 1975 and the other since 1962. These superintendents have survived long past the average stay of a superintendent.

These two small-school superintendents' districts were two of over five thousand school districts that blanketed this state fifty years ago. All were within walking distance of each household. Now, they are part of less than five hundred rural schools surviving depletion by annexation or consolidation.

Theoretical Frame

Field theory in social sciences, founded and developed by Kurt Lewin, was used as lenses to view the phenomenon of longevity of superintendent position and the uniqueness of small school environment. Kurt Lewin, universally known as the founder of modern social psychology, pioneered the use of theory, using experimentation to test hypothesis (Greathouse, 11/17/98). Lewin came to the United States in 1933 and became known for his term "life space" and work on group dynamics.

Gordon Allport described in the "Foreword to the 1948 Edition" of Kurt Lewin's Resolving Social Conflicts, that Lewin had basically three types explanatory concepts. One was the adaptation of geometry or topology, a branch of geometry that treated special relationships without regards to quantitative measurements. The second set of concepts was focused on the psychology of the individual such as needs and aspiration

level. It dealt with the tension that is within the person himself. The third concept was based on field forces, barriers, and locomotion. Field forces are dependent on group pressures. Barriers are obstacles to one's action in regards to group restraints. And locomotion is the changing of one's position with reference to the group (Lewin, 1948).

Lewin states that "field theory" is probably best characterized as a method of analyzing causal relations and of building scientific constructs. Lewin's fundamental construct is the "field." This field consists of behavior (action, thinking, wishing, striving, valuing, achieving, etc.) that is born of change of some state in that field in given time. When dealing with an individual, this field is considered the life space of the individual. This life space consists of the individual and the psychological environment as it exists for him (Lewin, 1951).

Lewin describes that the behavior (B) of an individual is a function (F) of the person (P) and his environment (E) or $B = F(P, E)$. He says this is correct for emotional outbreaks as well as for "purposive" directed activities such as dreaming, wishing, thinking, as well as talking and acting. Lewin emphasizes that the person (P) and his environment (E) are not independent of each other. To understand or predict behavior, the person and his environment must be considered as one constellation of interdependent factors. Lewin describes this totality of factors as the "life space" of the individual. He describes that the work of explaining behavior becomes identical to finding a scientific representation of the life space and determining the function or law that links the behavior to the life space (Lewin, 1951).

Kurt Lewin's field theory is defined as the examination of the life space of an organization, including its mission, vision, goals, methods, and personnel. It is all of those elements that make up the whole, and manipulating change, rearranging the parts and how it positively or negatively affects the whole (_____,10/4/98).

Lewin's practice of field theory is said to be complex, integrating aspects of systems management, human resource development, and process design. He described organizations as being in a state of "quasi-stationary equilibrium." Organizations tend to be stable and resist change. Lewin believed that those who specialize in field theory should (1) unfreeze the organization, (2) change it, and (3) refreeze it in this new state (_____,10/3/98). He believed that for this change to take place, the total situation has to be taken into account (Greathouse, 11/17/98).

For field theory to be successfully used, people must be seen as important and not just human resources to be used and thrown away. By bringing out the best in people, organizations can reach optimal effectiveness. Lewin's field theory targets the culture of the organization, giving focus on the system, processes, and rewards. It utilizes field and experimental research to create positive, lasting change at minimal cost (_____,10/17/98).

In this context, the researcher looked into the uniqueness of the environment of small schools and variations of smallness. The researcher explored the issue of school consolidation or annexation and the effects it may have upon the culture of the school systems and the communities and individuals involved. The researcher used Lewin's concept as a lenses to view the behavior (B) of the superintendent to be a function (F) of the superintendent (Person-P) and his school setting (Environment-E) or $B=F(P,E)$.

Problem Statement

The literature is devoid of studies about small school superintendents' perspectives on their lengthy tenures. Many research articles state that the superintendents' tenures are short on average, but these same studies do not look at those who have long tenures and why they have those tenures, particularly in small school districts.

Superintendents' perspectives on the topics of school size, school consolidation, curriculum, community-school relationships, school-community identity, student learning, class size, intra-school relationships, student drop out rates, and student participation were pursued in relation to the longevity in the superintendent's position. A cross-case analysis looked at these perspectives, consistent with the purpose of this study and the development of the research question: What are the perspectives of two long-term small-school superintendents concerning their own characteristics (P) and their school environment (E), and the effect these two components F (P, E) have on these superintendent's longevity (B) at their small rural schools? Evolving from this research question, various themes may arise due to the qualitative nature of this study. Subtopic questions were: What are the perspectives of the county superintendent towards the tenure of these two long-term superintendents and the small school environment? What are the perspectives of two additional rural small school superintendents concerning the tenure of these two long-term superintendents and their small school environment?

Significance of the Study

This study was undertaken in an attempt to gain an understanding of the “life space” of two long-term small-school superintendents. This case study has added to the available literature concerning the longevity of a superintendent, and particularly in a small school setting by providing insight into the “lived world” of two long-term superintendents through exploring the intricacies of each superintendent’s thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward this top school administrative position. The researcher believes that the information derived from this study will make a useful contribution toward the understanding of longevity in the superintendency. This work also supports the theoretical framework of Kurt Lewin (1951), by using his field theory to help provide a deeper understanding of the relationships between the person (P) and his environment (E) and its connections to school administration.

This study was motivated by the current literature concerning school administration and the researcher's current position as a superintendent. The success of keeping a top level administrative position for an extended length of time and learning to interact with others such as parents, community, teachers, staff, and students should be invaluable to any current or prospective school administrators.

Definition of Terms

County Superintendent – Abolished by state law on July 1, 1993, the elected county position served as the executive officer of the dependent (K-8) elementary schools

operating in that county. Dependent school principals were supervised by the county superintendent (70 O.S. 4-104).

Cross-Case Analysis – Subjects of the qualitative study are first viewed and analyzed independently of each other as a single case study, then they are compared and analyzed dependent of each other.

Dependent School Principal – A principal at an elementary district (K-8) during the era of the county superintendent.

District Report Card – A report issued to each school district by the State Office of Accountability that lists the demographic information of the school district and student test scores in the district.

Elementary School District – A school districts that offers classes from Kindergarten through eighth grade. Elementary school districts do not offer any grades above eighth grade (70 O.S. 5-103).

Elementary School District Superintendent: A superintendent who presides over a Kindergarten through eighth grade school created by legislation in 1993 (70 O.S. 6-101.4).

Life Space – Defined by Lewin (1951) as the totality of the person and his/her environment.

Lived World – The totality of the past and present environment including internal and external stimuli the superintendent has resided in.

Principal – Shall be any person other than a district superintendent of schools having supervisory or administrative authority over any school or school building having two or more teachers (70 O.S. 1-116).

Public School – Consists of all free schools supported by public taxation and shall include Kindergarten through twelfth grade schools (70 O.S. 1-106).

Regional Accreditation Officer – A state department employee who is in charge of a region of the state and who monitors school districts to assure the school's compliance with all state laws and state department regulations.

School District – Any area or territory comprising a legal entity, whose primary purpose is that of providing free school education, whose boundary lines are matter of public record, and the area of which constitutes a complete tax unit (70 O.S. 1-108).

Small School District – For the purpose of this case study, it is defined as a school district with an enrollment of 500 students or less.

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

Limitations of the Study

The lack of data and resources concerning longevity of the superintendency was a limitation to this study. Due to time constraints and developing a manageable thesis, the size sample was two superintendents, which these two superintendents may not be

representative of the phenomenon that occurs with other superintendents. Given a longer duration of time, this qualitative study may have allowed for additional participants and thereby extending breadth to the given information. Another limitation is that this study is based partially on the opinions and responses of the two superintendents. Qualitative data may not provide the researcher with a continuity of events and the reports may be only positive events, which provide a nonrepresentative sample (Merriam, 1998). Due to the limitations of qualitative research, the respondents' opinions would be correct for their own "life space," but may not be generalizable to other superintendents' "life space." Further, the subjectivity of the researcher may be a limitation based on his current biases towards the superintendency and small school environment.

The Researcher

The researcher is in his seventh year as a superintendent at a small rural school that is similar in size and location as the school sites that were studied (see Table I). During his tenure, he has seen several superintendents' positions change like a revolving door. For various reasons, superintendents move on to other schools or other occupations. The dynamics of a school district are intriguing to the researcher. A twenty-year tenure for a superintendent in the same school district is extraordinary.

The researcher was asked "why" he wanted to study such a dissertation topic. One reason was to add to the available literature on superintendent longevity. His answer was partially professional and partially personal. He believes the information gained from these veteran administrators would help aspiring professionals who want a

TABLE I
 YORK COUNTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT
 ENROLLMENT 1998-1999

Elementary School Districts	Student Population
Bethel	604.0
Clear Creek	457.4
Gideon	337.0
Elementary School District	326.1
Ticky Ridge	280.0
Terrisida	234.0
Lucky	183.6
Shilo	172.0
New Home	171.0
Oakhill	136.0

superintendent's position. Also, this information would help the researcher become more knowledgeable and wiser as a superintendent. Thus on a personal and practical level, he can take the perceptions and ideas gained from this study and apply them to his district and his style of leadership. The researcher notes that the superintendency is changing over time and that information such as this gained from these long-term superintendents will help guide practicing superintendents through the ever-changing educational systems and communities.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The literature primarily relating to the longevity of a school superintendent and secondarily the intricacies of small school size was reviewed. The focus was on stability and tenure in position, and implications of small school size and associated factors concerning community-school relationships and identity, student learning, class size, intra-school relationships, drop out rates, student participation, curriculum, and school consolidation issues were examined to determine previous research conducted.

With the average tenure of school superintendents being 6.5 years or less (Amarillo, 1996; Chance, 1992; Morris, 2000), it is extraordinary to have a long tenure at any one site. A special emphasis will be placed on literature concerning small-school superintendents and their communities.

What does the researcher say about the qualities one must possess to retain the superintendent's position, and the pros and cons of small school districts concepts. Also, what appropriate application of the theoretical framework being applied has been reviewed in the literature. A review of literature of Kurt Lewin's field theory in social

sciences was necessary to provide a framework towards the anomaly of superintendent longevity in a small school environment.

Longevity in the Superintendency

The availability of current research concerning longevity for a school superintendent was limited. An exhaustive review of literature was conducted to find any information that may be relevant to this topic. Areas of research reviewed concerning superintendent longevity were primarily retrieved from resources that concentrated on reasons for early termination or possible exiting of the superintendents' positions. Following is a literature review listing possible reasons for a superintendent's stability or success in a school district, possible reasons for leaving the superintendent's position, areas of critical stress for a school superintendent, communication and public relations, and possible reasons for a shortage of the school superintendents' pool.

A study conducted in the early nineties concerning long-term rural superintendents suggested various reasons for their stability and success in one district. The reasons were a stable school board, open communication, hiring good employees, and working closely with the local community (Chance, 1992). Failure to communicate and poor people skills were the two areas identified by Townley (4/3/2001) as most likely to get a superintendent in trouble. Relationship problems with the board of education was the major cause of turmoil in their districts (Townley, 4/3/2001). To become superintendent was the easy part, to keep the positions and be effective was the real challenge (Shepard, 1986).

The superintendency has historically been vulnerable to high turnover (Sharp, 1995). It has often been described as an “unpleasant, even impossible job” (Carter, 1997). Sharp (1995) found that in his Illinois study, the top reasons for leaving a superintendent’s position were retirement and problems with the board of education. A California report says literature consistently finds four reasons for leaving the superintendency: (1) become superintendent of a larger district, (2) go to another district for higher pay, (3) get away from a disharmonious board/superintendent relationship, and (4) retirement. This same report showed the major reason for superintendents changing jobs was a disharmonious board of education (Giles, 1990). A Connecticut study of 149 superintendents listed the following areas as critical stress for staying as a superintendent. They were board relations, politics, personnel issues, workload, time, crisis management, complying with mandates, high visibility, dealing with angry parents, lack of recognition and feedback, and public/community demands and criticism (Richardson, 1998).

A superintendent must have effective communication to avoid confusion among the community, board of education, and staff. The superintendent must be a good manager that provides leadership, direction, vision, and purpose while establishing an environment conducive to learning. Superintendents who are change agents are considered risk takers that view their job as one that educates the school community about “what is needed and what they should want” (Behrens, 1992).

Paul Houston (2000) writes that superintendents “are held responsible when things go wrong and they are being asked to lead at a time when a lack of consensus prevails over where people want to go.” Those who want to take this lead position rarely

find clear expectations of what the community or board of education want or what they should do (Johnson, 1996).

The American Association of School Administrators concluded that there will soon be a shortage of school superintendents. It is suggested that this shortage will be due to abusive actions towards superintendents, excessive blame of all the districts ills, and confusion of what really is the mission of the school district. Superintendents are often criticized in very public venues (Houston, 2000). Criticism by the board of education and their tendency to micromanage the school district adds a certain stress to the job and adversely effects both the superintendent and the their family lives (Sharp, 1995). Conversely, a study of Oklahoma superintendents concluded that their longevity in their school districts was partially due to the low level of internal conflict between the school board and superintendent. This stability derived from the same people being on the school board for an extended amount of time and open communication with the community and school staff (Chance, 1992). Open communication develops trust. Leadership depends on trust, and trust is about shared understanding of what is working and what is not. This credibility must be earned by the superintendent (Johnson, 1998).

Credibility may be accomplished by achieving goal congruence with the school board and staff. Lewin discussed the concept of goal congruence (____, 10/5/2000). To illustrate this concept, the researcher separated the goals of the superintendent from the goals of the school board and the goals of the school district. The ideal environment of a school district would be for all three to have the same goals as shown in Figure 1.

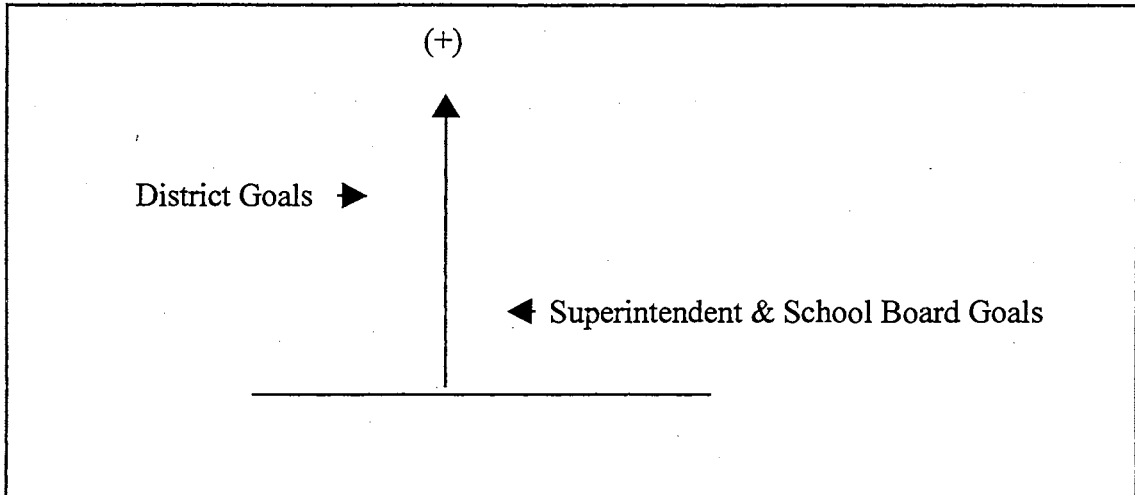


Figure 1. Maximum Goal Congruence of a School District.

Figure 2 illustrates a school district where the superintendent and school board have fairly compatible goals and their goals are somewhat aligned with the school district goals.

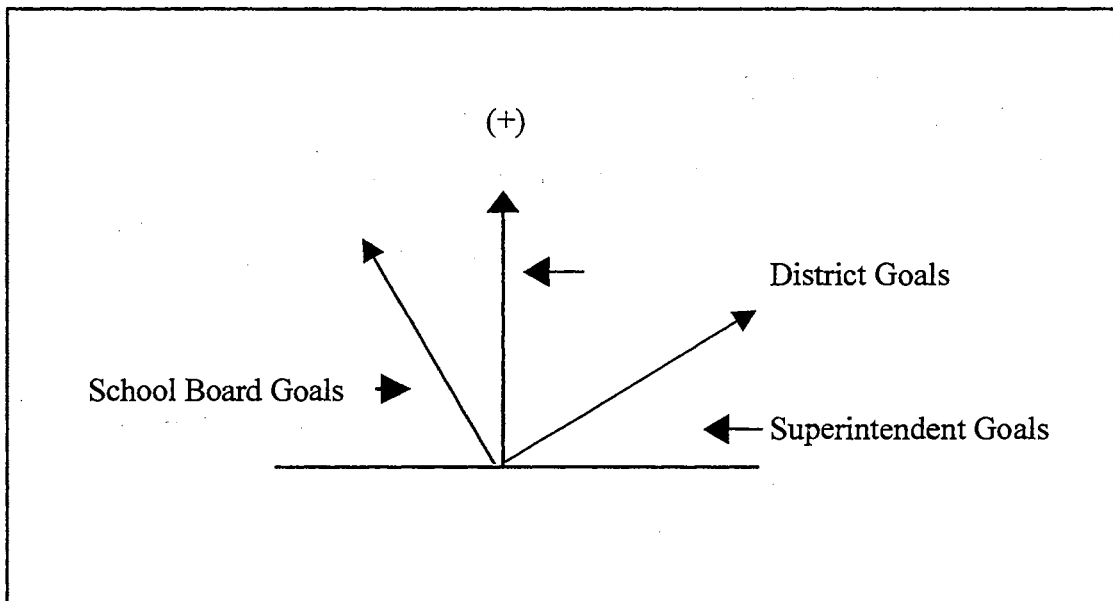


Figure 2. Medium Goal Congruence of a School District.

Full potential of the school may not be realized due to the difference of goals of the superintendent, school board, and school district. When goals of the superintendent and school board are not the same or congruent (Figure 3), substantial losses to the district or even the superintendent's position may be in jeopardy. In some instances, the school district goals may be so opposed to the superintendent and school board goals that no positive progress is attained (Figure 4).

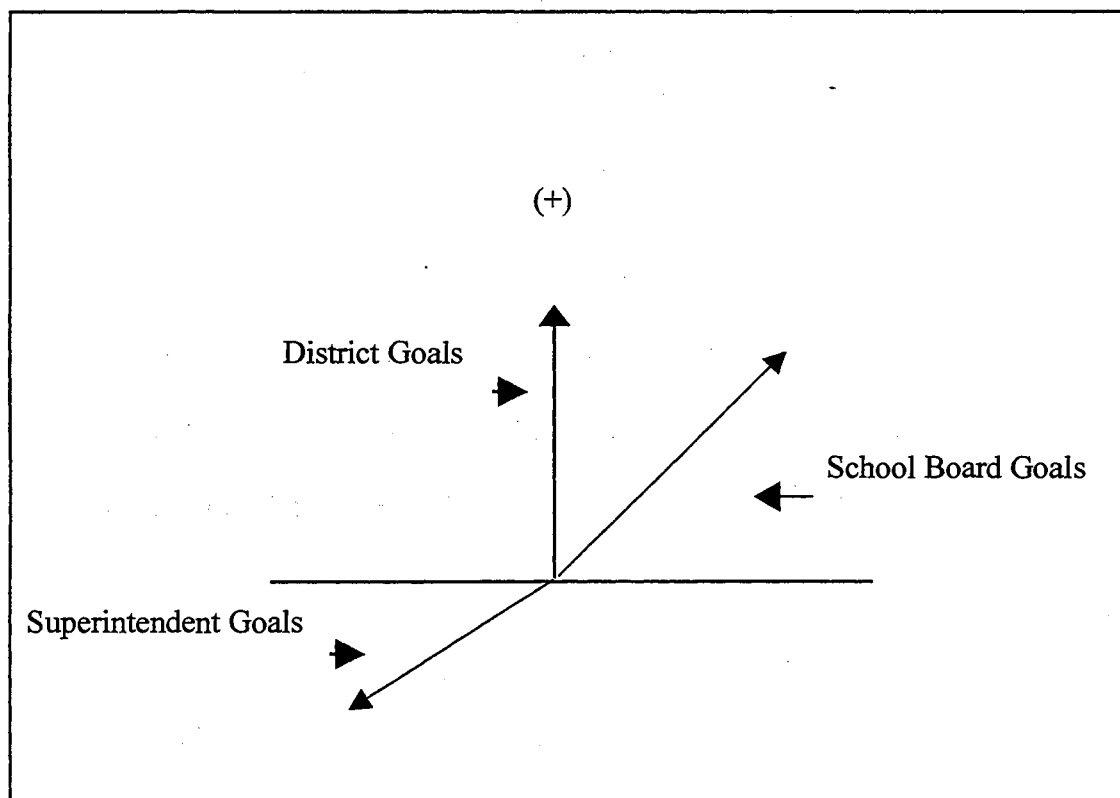


Figure 3. Partial Goal Incongruence of a School District.

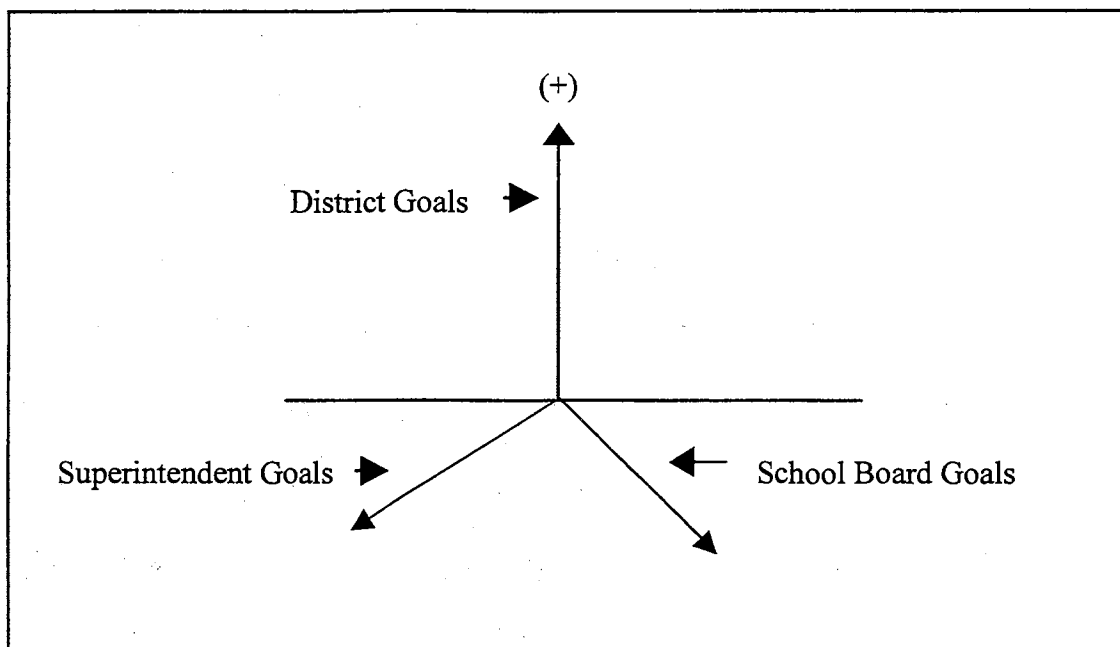


Figure 4. Complete Goal Incongruence of a School District.

A superintendent may view his/her position and his/her stability as a superintendent through the lenses of Lewin's field theory. Finding goal congruence and setting individual goals towards the school district goals will greater enhance the performance of the superintendent and school district (_____, 10/5/2000).

Field Theory

Kurt Lewin's field theory in the field of management was used as a lenses to view the perspectives of the superintendents. Field theory is defined as the examination of an organization, including its mission, vision, goals, methods and personnel. All of these elements make up the whole and manipulating change through rearranging the parts,

affects the whole positively or negatively (_____, 10/4/2000). Lewin's theory is based on the formula that behavior (B) is the function (F) of how the person (P) interacts with his/her environment (E), or $B = F(P, E)$.

Lewin's practice of field theory is said to be complex, integrating aspects of systems management, human resource development, and process design. He described organizations as being in a state of "quasi-stationary equilibrium." Organizations tend to be stable and resist change. Lewin believed that those who specialized in field theory should (1) unfreeze the organization, (2) change it, and (3) refreeze it in this new state (_____, 10/3/98). Lewin believed that for this change to take place, the total situation has to be taken into account (Greathouse, 11/17/98).

For field theory to be successful, people must be seen as important and not just human resources to be used and thrown away. By bringing out the best in people, organizations can reach optimal effectiveness. Field theory targets the culture of the organization, giving focus on the system, processes, and rewards. It utilizes field and experimental research to create positive, lasting change at minimal cost (_____, 10/17/98).

The goal of Lewin's field theory is to increase the long-term health or performance of the organization, and for this case, school system. Field theory is used in social science to address situations where people may not be reaching their peak performance due to social or mechanical systems, communication, or work processes. Lewin's field theory views the social system in which individuals are strongly influenced by their organization culture. Cultural change is the most potent tool for improving the organization or school.

For field theory to be effective, the superintendents must believe that people are important, and not just resources to be thrown away or discarded. By bringing out the best in people, schools can reach optimal effectiveness. Field theory empowers both the leaders and individual employees by creating a culture of continuous progressive improvement. It aligns around shared goals and visions rather than personal motives. Field theory is used to put the minds of all staff to work for the school, which enhances the quality and speed of decisions.

The outcomes of Lewin's field theory are possible increased teaching effectiveness, innovation, parent satisfaction, personal feelings of effectiveness, and job, work and life satisfaction. The objective of field theory is that people/employees have the same goals, and communication is open across the board. Conflict is treated and resolved constructively, and schools are based on present needs so they are efficient and help those within the school system. Innovation is high in field theory (_____, 10/30/2000).

Lewin states that we cannot understand an organization without trying to change it (_____, 10/12/2000). He also believed that human behavior is the function of both the person and the environment. He discussed that one's behavior is related both to one's own characteristics and to the social setting in which one finds himself (Jones, 10/30/2000).

His group dynamics has been utilized in areas of industrial settings, communities and educational settings such as classroom management (Greathouse, 11/17/98). The researcher has not found any studies where Lewin's approach has been applied

specifically to school superintendents and their organizations. Lewin emphasized three essential ideas: (1) significance of the members of the setting playing an active role in discovering knowledge for themselves; (2) the cohesive approach that includes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor activities to support permanent changes in attitudes, ideas, and behaviors; and (3) the powerful impact social environment of the setting has in supporting change (Stahl, 3/1999).

These three ideas are driving forces of an organization. Driving forces and restraining forces are two opposite components viewed for diagnosing situations in an organization or school. Lewin believed that for any situation, that both the driving forces and restraining forces influence any change that may occur (_____, 10/4/2000).

Driving forces tend to initiate change and keep it going. Concepts such as incentive earning, administrative pressure, or competition are examples of driving forces. Differences of opinion by employees, apathy, or hostility towards work or the administration or even poor maintenance of facilities and equipment are considered restraining forces.

The level of productivity of the school can be raised or lowered by how the two forces work together. The superintendent can raise the equilibrium of these forces by viewing the whole picture, the product or output, and all the intervening variables that take place in an organization (_____, 10/4/2000).

Small School Size

Literature review was conducted in the area of small school size. This review was initiated to give the researcher a more thorough understanding of the environment that the two superintendents involved in this case study resided. To provide insight into the environment of a small school, issues of curriculum, student learning, small class size, community/school relationships, large school decentralization, and school consolidation were discussed.

By viewing the whole picture, administrators and teachers in small schools often can and do give attention to student's educational, emotional, social, and environmental needs. According to research conducted in New Jersey and Chicago, the study found that when excluding socioeconomic status, students who attend small schools may have greater chances of attaining higher grades on achievement test scores, fewer behavior problems such as suspension or dropping out of school, and having higher employment rate after graduation (Howley, 1996; Dewees, 1999).

This research supports the notion that students and teachers of small schools have a substantial sense of belonging to each other and the school system. These teachers in small school environments are in an atmosphere that makes it possible to know the strengths and weaknesses of each child in their classrooms and meet the individual needs of their students. Studies also show that minorities and children from low socioeconomic status perform better in small schools than in larger systems (Irmsher, 1997). At the very least, these two environments are equal in this task.

Curriculum

An assumption held that lends support for consolidation or annexation is that ‘the larger the school, the more variety of courses would be offered students. A recent study conducted at the Northwest Regional Laboratory in Portland, Oregon found that “a one hundred percent increase in enrollment generated only a seventeen percent increase in courses offered” (Houston, 1996). The study also revealed that most of the new courses were introductory level and in non-core academics. Additionally, it was found that only “five to twelve percent of students in large schools” enroll in extra courses offered (Houston, 1996). With this data in mind, small schools could compete with the wide array of core specific classes that larger schools tout as being one of their advantages. With today’s Internet and satellite technology, the availability of distance learning programs have allowed smaller schools to acquire the tools necessary to keep pace and have the possibility to exceed the larger schools in expanded curriculum offerings.

Administrators of small schools encourage teachers to try new educational approaches that fit their students and work hand-in-hand with other teachers to establish and promulgate continuity in the children’s educational process (Irmsher, 1997). These teachers are also encouraged to play a significant role in the student’s life affecting all aspects of the student educational and personal growth. Whether it is social maturation, educational difficulties, or home environment, a small-school teacher is in an environment where it is possible to know his/her student in order to make a positive impact in the student’s life (Cotton, 1998).

Home life and parental contact are two issues that may affect the success or failure of the students. Again, teachers should know their student and the situation/environment he/she lives in before an effective educational process can exist. Cotton (1998) and Walberg (1992) explain that parental contact and support is a significant key to effective learning, and in small school settings, higher rates of parent involvement is frequently cited as a major positive influence on student achievement and attitudes.

Although the assumption is made that large schools are more economical, efficient and provide a much broader curriculum for its students than small schools, an increasing amount of research is being gathered that contradicts this assumption. A great deal of research shows that small schools have a positive impact on their students (Deweese, 1999). Large school proponents often mention duplication of services within small schools as an argument in favor of consolidation, although there is evidence that school size has little effect concerning economic efficiency (Miskel, 1995).

Student Learning

If we examine the child's need first and foremost, and develop the most least-restrictive environment possible for educational learning, then small school environments should be analyzed and synthesized to understand the phenomenon of smallness. Data from all areas that influence the child should be researched. Home life, parental attitudes toward school, class size, learning abilities and disabilities, teacher specialization, and

aptitudes are just a cross section of available information an administrator, teacher and school can explore to get to know the child.

Christian and Sieger (1999) explain that small schools allow students and teachers to know one another better. It is hard for a child to be overlooked in this environment. Small schools initiate student participation in activities, and this participation creates a sense of belonging to the school. It is hard for a child to become lost in the small school setting. Parents and students are more involved in the school, which also should stimulate a sense of caring for education (Raywid, 1998).

Whether the child is Native American, non-white, poor, female, or a part of a minority, he/she is embraced by the school, and the school is embraced by the family. Research shows that students who are of a minority race have a greater achievement level at a small school. The minority student is at greatest harm of failing going to large schools (Annie, 1998; Irmsher, 1997).

Small Class Size

A major benefit to keeping small schools is preserving small classes. As minority students achieve higher in a small school setting, they also achieve higher in small classroom settings. These students gain substantial benefits from beginning their educational process in small classes than do other children in large classes. When compared to students from large school/large classroom settings, students from small school/small classroom settings obtained higher scores on tests, participated more in school, showed good behavior, and effectively retained previous learning (Annie, 1998).

Individual instruction, or as close as one can get, is pursued by most of those involved in that private school education or home schooling. In other areas of public school such as Special Education, Gifted and Talented, Title I, tutoring and reading groups, small group participation is encouraged and sometimes required.

Here, in the specialized activities and grant-funded programs, lies the best opportunity for initiating reform. A case for systematic reform could take place at the grass roots level of small class size early in elementary school. This Midwestern state currently mandates the ratio of one teacher to ten children in early childhood (four-year-old program), one teacher to 20 in kindergarten through third grade, and one teacher to 35 students in fourth grade through sixth grade (Oklahoma, 1998). Recent research has shown that a one to fifteen ratio in the early elementary grades is needed to provide effective educational teaching and learning for the children (Achilles, 1997).

The theory of “span-of-control” states a leader (teacher) can efficiently and effectively handle seven to eight subordinates (students) (Achilles, 1997). Based on this theory, effectiveness and efficiency is increasingly reduced as participants (students) are added to the group. Achilles (1997) explain that children, who begin their early years of education with 15 or fewer students in his/her class, have less a chance of needing remediation at a later date. The notion of reducing costs in education is helped by the fact that if a student’s weakness is identified early on in elementary (Special Education, academic deficiencies), then this may reduce the cost of having to provide a costly program for the child in his/her later years of education.

The smaller the class, the greater the possibility for individual instruction, and in turn, the easier it may be for a teacher to assess a student's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers with a small class can spend more time on task with the student, identify student-learning problems earlier, and create a bond with the students. The greater the frequency of the bond between teacher and student, the less behavioral problems will be encountered, and the more pride and self-esteem towards him/herself will be developed. Small school environment should help promote student achievement (Raywid, 1998). Howley (1996) states, "More and more it seems that small schools hold particular promise for helping impoverished students maximize their potential to achieve academically."

Community/School Relationships

In rural communities that still have a school, the small school is recognized as central to local activities and serves as a major resource to the community (Fanning, 1998). The bond that was previously mentioned between teacher and students of a small school is also evident in the case of the relationship between school and community. Discussion concerning consolidation basically emphasizes economics or costs, leaving out cultural and community issues. When not considering community in connection with school consolidation, various social problems and concerns may arise concerning parents and educators. The smallest schools may look like or be families (Howley, 1996). Small schools function more like communities, and large schools more like bureaucracies (Irmsher, 1997).

Strong parental and community support of the local school system is directly linked to the successful achievement and development of the student. The consolidation of school districts maintains the possibility to destroy this link and in some cases phase out the community (Fanning, 1998).

Large School Decentralization

There has been a recent push for larger schools to emulate small school settings. This demassifying or decentralization of larger school represents one form or avenue of large school reform (Candoli, 1995; Houston, 1996). Typically, a large school is broken or split up into sub-units, where teachers and students can stay in the same group for several years. This initiative would allow small school benefits to creep into the large school sub-units. Other plans or initiatives that are similar include mini-schools, houses, learning communities, and charter schools (Annie, 1998).

These clusters support personal learning environments for its students. If consolidation of schools is chosen, some systems are electing to leave the schools as such and reorganizing administration, technology and funding structures, thus leaving the identity of the original school in place.

School Consolidation

Sometimes intervening variables come to the school district from external sources. The issue of school consolidation continually looms over small schools. School consolidation is explained as the unification of two or more school districts by dissolution

of existing ones and creation of a single new district (Merriam, 1998). Throughout the 20th Century, consolidation among school districts has been considered a part of all major national and state educational reform. Since 1940s, nearly 70% of all school districts have been consolidated into larger school districts (Miskel, 1995). Cotton (1998) states that in 1940, 117,108 school districts existed and has decreased by 87% to 15,367. The perception of “bigger is better” concerning school districts has grown into a national institutionalism. The train of thought among many educational and business leaders is that by enlarging school districts, the district would be able to offer more resources for teachers and students, offer a variety or wider curriculum to the students, and save needed district funds by eliminating administrative positions (Sarason, 1996).

Researchers describe these notions as economics of scale (Fanning, 1998). In this concept, the new district formed would save money across the board on administrative costs, operation, and maintenance simply by the consolidation of school districts.

School philosophy emulating late 19th Century industrial business practices play a significant role in spurring this phenomenon (Fanning, 1998). Social order in management practices has affected the organizational structure of our school systems. Under this view, the one best system of operating a business has translated into the one best system for operating our schools. Economics and production (students) have been the view of school as a business.

Research on consolidation of schools has numerous findings that are contrary to each other. On the surface, consolidating or enlarging school districts seems to be the historic answer to the problem of providing adequate learning centers (Houston, 1996).

However, underlying issues challenge the economical and effective education process reasons given for integrating school districts (Fanning, 1998). Other reports (Irmshir, 1997) have shown just the opposite in that there is no correlation to school districts saving earmarked administration money by consolidating districts. Irmshir (1997) also reports that larger school districts are more impersonal and students are left out of activities. Many teachers state they have little or no input in the educational process, while parents say they are not in touch with their child's education or school. Conversely, small schools are able to contribute to student achievement, attainment, and a sense of well-being (Deweese, 1999).

Summary

Through literature review, there is a body of evidence that points to small schools being effective and efficient towards student learning and school management. Studies show that small schools are more personal, promote parent involvement, create a sense of belonging for students and teachers, and initiate higher test scores and grades. Characteristics of small schools were reviewed to gain insight into the environment of the two superintendents in this case study.

According to the literature review, to have possible success and extended tenure in their position, superintendents must possess the characteristics of openness and good communication while motivating the staff to be innovative and risk takers. Lewin's field theory has been used as a framework to look at why superintendents thrive at their school district site. This theory supports that superintendents should: (1) allow staff to be

innovative and play an active role of discovering knowledge; (2) allow for a cohesive approach that includes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor activities to support permanent changes in attitudes, ideas, and behaviors; and (3) know that the social environment of the school setting has significance in supporting change. By understanding that a person's (P) own characteristics are not independent of his/her environment, and that behavior is a function of these two components, superintendents may have greater insights of their position and wiser responses to conflicts or situations that may arise.

There is a movement for change for larger school systems emulating these smaller counterparts by creating sub-units. The development and implementation of houses, mini-schools, and clusters are an integral part of this movement. These large school initiatives are implemented to promote the values and benefits of the small school as mentioned earlier.

When consolidation issues arise, opponents of this initiative should display research on school-community identity and the importance of smallness to meeting the educational needs of students. Proponents of consolidation should utilize the amassed information to organize a system where schools keep their identity and finding proof that administration, technology, and other resources are streamlined and non-duplicated.

An emphasis in the findings show that no matter what the size of the school district, there needs to be a plan to attain the benefits that most small school environments portray. Having small classes, knowing the child, knowing home life, and knowing the community is integral to having a productive educational system.

Lewin's field theory in social sciences can be used as a process to promote movement to this type of educational system. By allowing the unfreezing, changing, refreezing method, systems can move to the acceptance of this smallness phenomenon. With persistence, further research, and further literature review, and action, the educational process can move closer to the ultimate goal of education--optimum student learning.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Initiation of the Study

The notion of conducting a case study of two superintendents' longevity and their small school environment arose from a curiosity. This curiosity originated from watching the revolving door of superintendents' positions in some districts and the superintendents' stability in other districts.

The superintendent's position is one that spans boundaries resulting in serving the internal needs of the school district while attempting public relations with the external community. Since the superintendent works at the pleasure of the local school board that is elected by the community, it is extraordinary that one person accomplishes a long tenure at one school district site.

The process of conducting the research envisioned collecting data from several individuals. Because the school districts—now referred to as elementary school districts but prior to 1990 called dependent districts—operate as independent districts, their governance is no longer tied to the county superintendency. The county superintendency was abolished a decade ago; however, the superintendents in this study served under the county superintendent and then independent of that person.

To gain a broader perspective, the county superintendent to whom the subjects in this study reported was interviewed. Also interviewed were two other elementary superintendents in this same county who have held their positions for over the past fifteen years. Their observations/perspectives of the local districts and county superintendent relationship was explored in an effort at triangulation to gain insight into how that system worked.

Documents such as student registers, employee document sheets, state aid allocation sheets, school accreditation reports, and state driven district report cards were examined to detect data and information to help verify and validate information provided by the superintendents.

The researcher met with each superintendent in August 2000 to discuss the possibility of doing a case study. The researcher explained in detail what the process would entail and then guaranteed the subjects that their responses would be treated confidentially and anonymously. Both Mr. Mark Bowers, superintendent of Clear Creek School, and Tim Ragsdale, Superintendent of Lucky School were enthused about the proposed case study and committed themselves to the effort by completing the consent form (Appendix A). After Oklahoma State University (OSU) Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval was obtained, the project began. A copy of the approved IRB form (Appendix B) was given to each Superintendent at the first interview.

Institutional Setting

The two sites selected for this cross case study were rural elementary schools consisting of early childhood classes through eighth grade. Out of 544 school districts in the state, 113 school districts are considered elementary districts (Table II). The elementary school districts represent less than four percent of the total student population. There are presently 44 counties that have at least one elementary school district (Tables III & IV). The average population of an elementary school district is 198 students (Oklahoma, 1999).

TABLE II
STATE SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THEIR
ENROLLMENTS 1999-2000

Kinds of Districts	No. of Districts	Percent of Total	Average Enrollment	Total Student Enrollment	Percent of Total
Elementary School Districts (K-8)	113	21	198	22,345	3.7
Independent School Districts (K-12)	431	79	1,403	604,659	96.3
Total	544	100	1,152	627,004	100

TABLE III
KINDS OF DISTRICTS BY COUNTY
1999-2000

Kinds of Districts	Number of Counties
Independent Districts Only	33
Independent and Elementary Districts	44
Total	77

TABLE IV
NUMBER OF ELEMENTARY DISTRICTS BY COUNTY
2000-2001

Number of Counties (77)	Number of Elementary Districts (113)
1	9
1	8
1	7
1	6
2	5
5	4
6	3
8	2
19	1
33	0

Harmon (1997) explains that 44% of the nation's schools and 50% of the local school districts are located in rural areas or small towns. Raywid (1999) states that the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform sets the optimal size for elementary districts at 350 students. As a comparison, and according to State Department data, for the 1999-2000 school year, Clear Creek School's student enrollment is 491 and Lucky School's is 188 (Oklahoma, 2001).

Lucky School District and Clear Creek School District are both located in York County, which comprises a total of nine elementary districts (K-8) and three independent districts (K-12). Lucky School District ranks sixth and Clear Creek School District ranks second in student population in York County's nine elementary districts (Table I).

From the beginning of this state's territorial period in 1890 to 1992, school organization and governance included county superintendents and local school administrators. Eventually, two systems evolved: independent school districts and dependent school districts. In the latter districts, the county superintendent provided administrative oversight. For 100 years, the county superintendency was an elected position with a four-year term. In recent years, York County has one of the highest number of elementary districts in the state. The York County Superintendent's main responsibility was to take care of the paperwork for all elementary districts in his county. This paperwork included student enrollment data for state aid purposes, textbook acquisitions, student transfers, federal programs, and checking and approving of certification for all elementary school staff positions. The county superintendent also

acted as a mediator between the school districts when conflicts arose. The county superintendent would also appoint board members to fill vacant seats.

The local school board of each dependent school district was comprised of three elected members. These board members hired a principal to manage the school system along with teachers and staff. The county superintendent signed off on the certification and transcript requirements of all personnel. Until the early 1980s, all state aid came to the county clerk's office, and then was dispensed by the county treasurer. The dependent districts proceeded to hire an independent treasurer to allow funds to come directly to each school district.

When state law dissolved the county superintendent position, it created the Elementary Superintendent position and grandfathered in those who previously had been principals at the elementary school sites. The responsibilities of the county superintendent were then placed on the local elementary superintendent. Presently, to be in charge of an elementary district, one either has to have elementary superintendent certification or superintendent certification. Both the Clear Creek School Superintendent and Lucky School Superintendent have elementary superintendent certification.

In York County, six of the nine superintendents have elementary superintendent certification. Six of the superintendents have been at their school district for over 11 years, one has been at his school site from five to ten years, and two have been at their school sites less than five years. Five of the nine superintendents are eligible for retirement (Table V).

TABLE V
 YORK COUNTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT
 INFORMATION 2000-2001

School Districts	Elementary Superintendent Certification	K-12 Superintendent Certification	0-5 Years On-site	6-10 Years On-site	11+ Years On-site
Bethel	X				X
Gideon	X				X
Oakhill		X	X		
New Home		X	X		X
<u>Lucky</u>	<u>X</u>				<u>X</u>
Terrisida		X		X	
Shilo	X				
Ticky Ridge	X				X
<u>Clear Creek</u>	<u>X</u>				<u>X</u>

Note: Underline indicates districts used in this study.

Clear Creek School District

Clear Creek School has steadily increased in enrollment the last ten years. In 1990, the student population was 253 and in 1995 it was 339 (Oklahoma, 2001). It is one of the smallest districts in the county encompassing approximately 23 square miles, yet it is the second largest of the elementary school districts in the county by student

population. More than two-thirds of the students are transferred into Clear Creek. Only five students are transferred out of the district.

Clear Creek is a modern school built around the original Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.) schoolhouse. It consists of an amphitheater, gymnasium, newly expanded cafeteria, library/office building, three-classroom building with freshly bricked exterior, a new playground, and a rubberized track with baseball facility enclosed.

The district has 57% Native American students and 96% of students that are considered below poverty level. It provides free breakfast and lunch to all of its students.

There are 25 teachers at Clear Creek School. Thirty-three percent of these teachers have advanced degrees. The average years of experience of Clear Creek teachers is 9.7 years. Teachers at this site earn about \$2000 more than the state average (Table VI). Teachers have earned their degrees from two state regional universities, one state

TABLE VI
CLASSROOM TEACHERS (1998-1999)

	Number of Teachers	% of Advanced Degrees	Average Years Experience	Average Salary
Clear Creek School	25	33	9.7	\$32,569
Lucky School	13	61	11.8	\$29,686
State Average	18	30	12.3	\$30,621

religiously affiliated university, and one Ivy league school, Brown University. There have been only three teachers at Clear Creek School that have been asked to resign in the last 20 years.

Clear Creek School is similar to the other York County elementary schools concerning state testing of core curriculum (Table VII). On the 5th Grade State Core Curriculum Test, Clear Creek School students scored above the state average in Math,

TABLE VII
YORK COUNTY STATE CORE CURRICULUM
REPORT 5TH AND 8TH GRADE CRITERION
REFERENCE TEST SCORES

		Math	Science	Reading	Writing	History	Geography	Arts
State	5 th	85	81	80	92	75	68	58
Average	8 th	75	79	81	97	65	49	50
<u>Clear</u>	5 th	<u>93</u>	<u>78</u>	<u>78</u>	<u>93</u>	<u>78</u>	<u>78</u>	<u>44</u>
<u>Creek</u>	8 th	<u>79</u>	<u>76</u>	<u>79</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>55</u>
<u>Lucky</u>	5 th	<u>100</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>44</u>	<u>44</u>	<u>11</u>
	8 th	<u>87</u>	<u>87</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>47</u>
Bethel	5 th	77	66	57	63	49	46	34
	8 th	63	77	74	97	51	37	26
Oak	5 th	73	73	67	80	47	27	7
Hill	8 th	86	93	71	92	86	50	21
Terrisida	5 th	92	58	75	100	83	67	33
	8 th	84	84	92	100	84	64	52
Ticky	5 th	100	90	86	96	83	66	41
Ridge	8 th	64	86	86	93	86	71	57
Gideon	5 th	82	79	67	77	70	64	52
	8 th	66	72	76	96	48	24	28
New	5 th	88	88	94	100	88	63	38
Home	8 th	80	80	80	100	67	53	13
Shilo	5 th	65	59	53	100	35	41	47
	8 th	71	86	71	100	64	71	57

Note: Reported by percentages.

Writing, History, and Geography. Students scored just below the state average in Science, Reading, and the Arts. On the 8th Grade State Core Curriculum Test, Clear Creek scored above the state average in Math, Writing, and the Arts.

Clear Creek expends \$5,243 per student. The average household income is \$17,292, which is approximately \$7,000 less than the state average. The average property valuation per student is \$4,251 compared to the state average \$21,239 (Table VIII). The total valuation of Clear Creek School District is \$2,303,181, allowing the school to bond for approximately \$230,000. Clear Creek School has never tried to pass a bond in its district. The district used a combination of building fund and general fund monies to complete building projects.

TABLE VIII
FINANCIAL INFORMATION

	Expenditures per Student (1999)	Average Household Income (1990)	Average Property Valuation per Student (1999)
Clear Creek School	\$5,243	\$17,292	\$4,251
Lucky School	\$6,086	\$19,716	\$10,806
State Average	\$5,091	\$24,088	\$21,239

Lucky School District

This school site is a very rural district. Lucky School would only be found if you were lost or if you had a purpose for finding the school. It has one class per grade level

with the average class having eighteen students. In 1990, this school district had 168 students, and in 1995 it had 175 students. The student population has been basically stable for the last ten years.

Lucky School District consists of approximately twenty-nine square miles. It has three bus routes to cover this area. Twenty-five percent of its students are considered transfers. Thirty students transfer out of this district. Its facility consists of a modern gym with classrooms, library and a computer lab outlying the gym. It also has an old block building that serves as a cafeteria, an old W.P.A. building that house the office and two classrooms and an old gymnasium. This district has 36% Native American students, eleven percent African American students and remaining are Caucasian students. Ninety-six percent of the students are from families whose income is below the poverty lines. Lucky School also provides free breakfast and lunch to all of its students.

Lucky School has a staff of 13 teachers with the average years of experience at 11.8 years. Sixty-one percent of these teachers have advanced degrees. All of Lucky School teachers graduated from the nearby state regional university. Lucky School expends approximately \$6,086 per student, which is about \$1000 more than the state average. The average household income for Lucky School District residents is about \$4000 less than the state average at \$19,716. The average property valuation per student is \$10,806 (Table VIII). Lucky School District's total valuation is \$2,238,632, with the possible bonding capacity of approximately \$233,000.

Lucky School District students scored one hundred percent in the academic areas of Math and Writing on the 5th Grade State Core Curriculum Test. The students scored below state average in Reading, History, Geography, and the Arts. On the 8th Grade State Core Curriculum Test, Lucky School students scored above the state average in Math, Science, Writing, and Geography (Table VII).

Sample

“Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned.” (Merriam, 1998) Two superintendents were chosen due to two factors: (1) primarily, the longevity of the superintendency at one site, and (2) secondarily, superintendent of a small school. To keep this case study manageable, only two superintendents were chosen to explore their “life space.” Two additional superintendents that have similar longevity and school environments and a past county superintendent that presided in York County were interviewed to provide triangulation to this study.

Clear Creek School

Mr. Mark Bowers has been at the lead of his school district since 1962. He came to Clear Creek as a Principal/Teacher after 11 years at a neighboring rural school district. In the early 1990s, he was designated as a Superintendent by the State Department of Education. Mr. Bowers is currently the Superintendent of this same district.

Lucky School

Mr. Tim Ragsdale has been employed at Lucky School since 1975 as Principal/Teacher. He began this position after one year at another public school. He, too, was designated a Superintendent of his district by the State Department of Education in the early nineties. Mr. Ragsdale is currently the Superintendent of Lucky School.

Data-Collection Methods

Two primary data-collection methods were used: individual audiotape recorded long interviews, and review of Lucky and Clear Creek School District documents and archival records. Throughout the process of developing interview protocol, interviewing and conducting this case study, the researcher was guided by Kurt Lewin's field theory and its application to the exploring of the environment of each superintendent. Data collection techniques are detailed below:

Long Interviews

Creswell (1998) discusses that the important point of interviewing for a phenomenological study is to describe the meaning of a small number of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. The in-depth interview was used as the major data source for this case study because of the advantages such an approach offers for the exploration of perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs. Miles and Huberman (1984) discuss that "words," especially when they are organized into incidents or stories, have a vivid, concrete, meaningful flavor that often proves to be far more convincing to the reader.

The interviews allowed the researcher to obtain the superintendents' perspectives and perceptions. Interviews allow the researcher to ask questions appropriate to the superintendents' role and knowledge, to analyze and interpret what the superintendents say, and to ask for additional information as needed (Merriam, 1988).

The long interview is a specific type of research methodology. McCracken (1988) emphasizes that the long interview is sharply focused, rapid, highly intensive process that seeks to diminish redundancy. The long interview calls for special kinds of preparation and structure, including the use of an open-ended questionnaire protocol, so that the researcher can maximize the value of time spent analyzing the information. The long interview is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative methods (McCracken, 1988).

McCracken (1988) says,

The (long interview) method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the life world of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience. The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves.

Interviews were conducted with the two superintendents to obtain meanings to lived experiences and explore the structures of consciousness in their experiences. (Cresswell, 1998). The interviews were open-ended and informal throughout the course of the interaction. The superintendents were questioned from a semi-structured list of open-ended questions regarding their perception of their careers, school, approaches and beliefs concerning a small school superintendent. The superintendents were allowed to discuss any aspect of their life that they believe brings meaning to their position.

Continual probing and clarification of the superintendent's responses was utilized throughout the interviews. The entire interviews were audio taped.

Quality Criteria for an Interview. Kvale (1996) lists six quality criteria than may serve as guidelines to the interview process: (1) the extent of spontaneous, rich, specific, and relevant answers from the interviewee; (2) the shorter the interviewer's questions and the longer the subjects' answers, the better; (3) the degree to which the interviewer follows up and clarifies the meanings of the relevant aspects of the answers; (4) the ideal interview is to a large extent interpreted throughout the interview; (5) the interviewer attempts to verify his interpretations of the subject's answers in the course of the interview; and (6) the interview is self-communicating, it is a story contained in itself that hardly requires much extra descriptions and explanations. He suggests the latter three refer to an ideal interview, where the meaning of what is said is interpreted, verified, and communicated before the tape recorder is turned off.

Grand Tour Questions. To gain insight on the individual (P) and the school environment (E), the researcher's initial interview was used to get background information on the superintendent and the school. The interview session allowed for any aspect of school management or superintendent's personal or professional life.

Interview Questions from Superintendent's First Interview Session:

- What year did you start working at this school?
- How has it been possible for you to stay at this school for such a long time?

- Where do you see yourself fitting into this school system?
- What makes your school unique?
- Tell me how personal life affects professional life?
- Is there anything else you can or want to add to this conversation?

Interview Questions from Superintendent's Second Interview Session. The follow-up interview session was used to clarify or expand on themes presented in the initial interview.

- In your opinion, what values must a superintendent possess to have a successful career at one school site?
- Explain your school/community relationship and what impact the school has on the identity of the community.
- What is your view concerning "student learning" at your school?
- Is the curriculum adequate at your school site and how has it developed over the past years?
- What are your views about "class size" and "school size" and the effect it has on student learning, student participation, and student dropouts?
- Discuss the relationships between the different groups within your school?
- What effects do you believe the concept of consolidation or annexation would have upon your school?
- Explain any involvement you have had concerning any consolidation effort during your tenure.

- What innovative programs do you currently offer that are not necessarily required?
- Have you had any teacher terminations within the last 20 years? (may include “asked to resign,” “understand that they need to resign or leave,” or going through the process to terminate)
- Explain any legal action against your school that has happened in the last 20 years.
- Explain your school’s financial situation.
- Describe a typical board member.
- Do you live or attend church in your district and would either have significance in your role as superintendent?
- Has there been any life changes that you think has affected your job as superintendent? Explain.
- What changes were there, if any, when the system went from the county superintendent era to the elementary superintendent era?
- What did you see was the role of the county superintendent?

A third interview was scheduled with each superintendent to discuss themes that have emerged from the interview and the researcher’s perceptions of what each superintendent had said. This interview was used to clarify these themes to make sure the researcher accurately heard what each one believes and had said.

Additional Interviews. Interviews were also pursued with a past county superintendent and two additional superintendents to provide triangulation for this case

study. The county superintendent that held the position in York County during the 1980s was interviewed to gain his perspective of the purpose of his position and the relationships that he held with the dependent elementary schools within the county. It was also garnered to gain insight into the environment of the two superintendents when they were dependent principals and the transition each had, as they became elementary superintendents in the early nineties. Interview protocol concerning the county superintendent was based from the interviews of the two long-term small-school superintendents. Although questions are directed and specific, they allow the flexibility for the county superintendent to engage in conversation and speak towards what he sees as relevant. Each question may lead to sub-themes and further probes of the researcher.

Interview Questions for the past County Superintendent

- What was it like to be county superintendent?
- What roles and responsibilities did you have as the county superintendent?
- What was your relationship with the principals of the dependent districts?
- Do you believe your relationship with some dependent school principals was stronger than that with others? Please give some examples.
- What kind of contact did you have with the dependent districts?
- Do you believe some schools gained by having a county superintendent? If so, please give me some examples of schools that may have gained by having you as county superintendent?
- What was the importance of the county superintendent's position? Please explain.

- Do you believe your relationships with some dependent school principals were stronger than others? Please give me some examples.
- Explain how your relationship with the dependent principals affected the schools in a positive or negative way. Please give examples of specific schools and events.
- Was your relationship with schools that had dependent principals who had been at that site for a long time different from schools that recently hired their dependent principal? Explain.
- Explain the York County political system including the relationships between the County Commissioners, County Clerk, County Treasurer, the dependent principals and schools, and yourself.
- What do you believe helped a dependent principal stay at a school for such a long tenure?
- How did a person gain a position at a dependent school?
- Explain what you believe was the transition, if any, for a dependent principal becoming an elementary superintendent.
- Why do you believe that the position of county superintendent was eliminated by the State Legislature?
- Please tell me anything else you would like about being county superintendent and your relationships with any of the dependent principals.

Interviews were conducted with two superintendents that were dependent principals in York County during the county superintendent era and were also present during the transition of dependent principals becoming elementary superintendents and the elimination of the county superintendent's position. These interviews were pursued to conduct triangulation with the case study superintendents. Questions formulated were a result of the interviews with the long-term small-school superintendents in this case study.

Interview Questions for Dependent Principal/Elementary Superintendent.

- What was it like to be a dependent principal during the time of the county superintendent?
- How long were you a dependent principal before County Superintendent Wesley Lee was elected into his position?
- Did you notice any difference of treatment between school districts based on the longevity of the dependent principal? Explain.
- What was your relationship with the county superintendent?
- What did you believe the role or responsibility was for a county superintendent?
- Did County Superintendent Wesley Lee fulfill these responsibilities? Explain.
- How did you perceive the relationships between the County Commissioners, County Superintendents, County Treasurer, County

Clerk, and your school district? Other dependent school districts? Please explain.

- Were some elementary principals treated more favorably by the county superintendent than others? Please give examples of the preferential treatment.
- How did the county superintendent treat schools where the principal and/or the board disagreed with the county superintendent?
- How did you perceive your transition from dependent principal to elementary superintendent after the elimination of the county superintendent position?
- What do you believe helped you keep your position at your school during the era of the county superintendent and the transition to an elementary superintendent?

Interview Procedures. Kvale (1996) explains the purpose of interviewing is to obtain descriptions of the lived world of the interviewees with respect to interpretations of the meaning of the described phenomena. To attain an understanding of each superintendent's position and his small school environment, the theoretical framework of Kurt Lewin's field theory and a qualitative case study research method was used including tape recorded interviews with each superintendent, review of the district's student population records, school accreditation reports, and school report cards issued by the state, review of teacher credentials/certification, and previous experience and colleges attended, and innovative programs and progress made with those programs. These

procedures were utilized to gain some insight into the daily lives of a small-school superintendent that has a tenured career at one site. The resulting data were examined and interpreted using Kvale (1996) three areas of analysis. They are (1) structuring the interview material using transcription; (2) clarification of the material by eliminating repetitious and non-essential material; and (3) analysis proper in finding meanings of the interviews and bringing the superintendent's own understanding into light.

Individual Interviews

Prior to the initial interview, the researcher phoned each Superintendent and explained that he had received authorization to begin his research project and would like to find a time convenient for them to visit with him. He scheduled an appointment with each superintendent on his own school site for the interview.

Interview #1. Prior to beginning the interview, the researcher visited with the superintendent for a moment until he was ready to begin. He discussed the Institutional Review Board Consent Form to make sure the superintendent understood it and then they both signed the form. He reemphasized the focus and purpose of his study and assured the superintendent that he was here to learn from him. In the interview, the researcher portrayed what Kvale (1996) describes as deliberate naivete. He showed an openness to new and unexpected phenomena, rather than have pre-conceived ideas and ready-made categories or topics. The initial interview was used to get background information on the superintendent and his school district. It allowed for any aspect of school management,

longevity in the superintendent's position, community, student learning or any topic he wished to discuss.

The researcher and superintendent scheduled a block of time for the interview of 60 to 90 minutes. The initial interview of each superintendent averaged at 45 minutes. Immediately following the interview, Mr. Ragsdale, Lucky School, took the researcher on a tour of his rural school district and bus route, pointing out to him where some of his students and staff live. Mr. Bowers, Clear Creek School, brought out a box of old school pictures from the 60s and 70s and proudly named most of the students and teachers in the pictures.

Interview # 2. The second interview was patterned from the initial interview. The researcher still portrayed an openness for new information. After typing and coding the initial interview, he was able to ask each superintendent clarifying questions and probe deeper into their responses.

Interview # 3. A third interview was set up with both superintendents to discuss themes that have emerged from the interviews and the researcher's perceptions of what each superintendent had said. This interview was used as a clarifying session to make sure the researcher accurately heard what each one believes and had said.

Documents

Biklen and Bogdan (1998) explain that such things as memos, newsletters, policy documents, proposals, student records, minutes from meetings, statements of philosophy,

brochures, pamphlets, and the like are viewed by many researchers as extremely subjective, representing the biases of the promoter, presenting an unrealistic glowing picture of how the organization function. They say that it is for this reason that qualitative researchers look upon them favorably.

Student handbooks, accreditation reports, lunch applications/reports, State Department of Education statistical and state aid reports, and student registers were examined to provide breadth to this study. Student handbooks were examined to look at procedures, rules, and an over all mission statement for each school. Accreditation reports provided information about minority populations and class size population. Lunch applications/reports included economic information of the student body. The State Department of Education statistical and state aid reports provided school attendance records and monies generated from student population. Student attendance registers were reviewed to check for student enrollment numbers and attendance.

Data Analysis Techniques

Merriam (1998) describes data analysis as the process of making sense out of the data. "The central task of interview analysis rest with the researcher, with the thematic questions he or she has asked from the start of the investigation and followed up through designing, interviewing, and transcribing" (Kvale, 1996).

In this cross case analysis, the superintendents are first viewed and analyzed independent of each other as a single case study. After the independent case study analysis is completed, then a cross case analysis of each superintendent and school site is

performed. Merriam (1998) explains that in a multiple case study, there are two stages of analysis, the with-in case analysis treats each superintendent as its own comprehensive case. Once this process has been completed, cross case analysis begins.

In the analysis process of the interviews, the researcher utilized Kvale's (1996) six steps of analysis. The first step is when the superintendent describes his lived world, his experiences, and feelings about the superintendency and his school. In the next step, the superintendents may become enlightened about their own situation and make possible discoveries about themselves. In the third step, the researcher provides numerous reflections to the superintendent's comments. This allows for feedback from the superintendent, to clarify or let the researcher know that he heard the superintendent correctly. Kvale (1996) describes this as "on-the-line interpretation" with the possibility of "on-the-spot" confirmation or disconfirmation of the researcher's interpretations.

The fourth step involved transcription of the interviews. There are three parts of this step: (1) structuring the vast amount of data for analysis, (2) clarification of material by separating essential from non-essential material, and (3) analysis proper which involves developing meanings of the interviews. This part deals with the superintendent's own understanding of his position as well as providing new perspectives to the researcher on the phenomena.

The fifth step is a vital component of this project. It is the re-interviewing process of this project. This step is where the researcher can take analyzed data from the initial interview and have the superintendents confirm or disconfirm the researcher's interpretation and discuss further the superintendent's original statements.

The last step is where possible self-actualization of the superintendent or the researcher may take place. It is where what they have learned may lead to some type of action in their lives. This step is where one may begin to act on the insights that one may have gained from the interviewing process.

Kvale (1996) and Merriam (1998) describe tactics that generate meaning in qualitative data. The following lists of data analysis techniques were used: (1) noting themes and patterns, (2) seeing plausibility, (3) clustering, help see “what goes with what,” (4) counting also let’s you see “what’s there,” and (5) contrasts/comparisons sharpens understanding. The tactics are also supported by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Trustworthiness Criteria

Merriam (1998) points out that all research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. People want to be able to trust research results if they intend to apply the knowledge to their practice. Kvale (1996) explains, “The understanding of verification starts in the lived world and daily language where issues of reliable observation, of generalization from one case to another, of valid arguments, are part of everyday social interaction.” With respect to trustworthiness, the issues of internal validity, reliability and external validity are discussed.

Internal validity questions how research information matches reality. Can the given research be applied across different school sites? The design of a qualitative study dictates that what may be “reality” for one school site, may not necessarily be the “reality” of another school site. According to Merriam (1998), there are six strategies to

enhance internal validity and deal with the perception of reality. One is triangulation, or using multiple sources of data to confirm emerging findings. Mathison (1988) points out that shifting the notion of triangulation away from ensuring validity and instead relying on a “holistic understanding” of the situation to construct “plausible explanation about the phenomenon being studied” (Merriam, 1998). Another is member checks where the researcher would go back to the interviewee to see if the results are plausible to him or her. The third is allowing for a long-term observation to increase validity of the findings. Peer examination is allowing your colleagues to give input on your findings. The fifth is participatory research allowing participants to help in all phases of research. And the last is clarifying the researcher’s biases at the beginning of the study. This case study uses five of the six strategies. The third strategy of allowing for long-term observation is not utilized for this study.

Reliability is based on the question of would a researcher get the same results if he or she were to complete the case study again. It is based on the concept that studying a reality repeatedly will create the same results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest concentrating on the dependability or consistency of the results obtained from the data.

To enhance the opportunity for generalizability, the researcher has employed the following strategies: (1) providing a rich, thick description of the superintendents and their environment; (2) description of how typical the school environment is; and (3) using multiple sites to contrast findings.

Ethics

The researcher understands that he was a guest in the case study school sites and that these superintendents allowed him in their environment. Both superintendents signed an Informed Consent form and were aware of the purpose of this case study. The Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board approved this research as a part of the attainment for an Educational Doctorate. Names of the superintendents and school sites were changed to protect the identity and anonymity of the superintendents.

CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION
OF THE DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this cross-case analysis was to describe and possibly gain insight into the lived world of two long-term small-school superintendents: Mark Bowers, Superintendent of Schools at Clear Creek, and Tim Ragsdale, Superintendent at Lucky School District. Data were gathered using long interviews from each superintendent. The resulting data will be discussed as they are relevant to the Superintendent's characteristics (P) and their environment (E). The interview sessions allowed the superintendent to discuss any aspect of school management or the superintendent's personal or professional life. The long interview method allowed the researcher to view the mental world of the superintendent (McCracken, 1988). The researcher allowed ninety minutes for the first session. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions, which allowed for a semi-structured interview. A second interview was conducted to follow-up on information gained in the initial interview. It was used to clarify or expand on themes presented in the first interview. The final interview was

pursued to discuss themes that emerged from the first two interviews and the researcher's perceptions of what each superintendent had said.

Interviews were also conducted with two additional superintendents, Robert Yuan at Ticky Ridge School and Larry Daniels at Bethel School, and a past county superintendent Wesley Lee, to provide triangulation for this study. The past county superintendent was interviewed to gain his perspective of the purpose of his position and the relationships he held with the dependent principals in the county. The interview was also sought to gain insight into the environment of the two superintendents when they were dependent principals and the transition each made in becoming elementary superintendents. Interviews were conducted with Superintendent Yuan and Superintendent Daniels due to each holding the position of elementary principals in the same county and making the transition to elementary superintendents.

A review of the material gathered revealed that responses fell into two broad areas or themes: (1) the characteristics of a superintendent and his longevity at one site in relation to his environment, and (2) the implications of the environment of his small school in relation to parents, students, and administration and the transition from elementary principal to superintendent. Sub-topics of the environment of a small school theme were arranged in the areas of small school issues such as student population, community-school identity and relationship, and the effectiveness and importance of small schools, legal issues, and school consolidation issues.

Superintendent Mark Bowers, Clear Creek School District, and Superintendent Tim Ragsdale, Lucky School District, were participants of this case study. Both

superintendents were thoroughly interviewed to gain insight into each “lived world.”

Their “life space” or the interaction of their own characteristics (P) and their small school environment (E) was explored.

Clear Creek School District

Clear Creek School now boasts of a modernized school which consists of the original native stone building and six additional classrooms. The cafeteria was recently expanded allowing for another 2000 square feet of seating room. There is a building that has three rooms that houses three- and four-year-olds in the early childhood program. Across from the cafeteria is a newly remodeled gym with an increased foyer and new wood gym floor. Clear Creek School has an amphitheater that seats 200 people. Such a facility allows the school to host several academic meets and professional development workshops throughout the school year. In front of the amphitheater is the office/library/classroom building. This building has six classrooms, a spacious 35 x 40 library, an open front office setting, and a conference meeting room. Although the school is located at the edge of the county, the local dependent school superintendents in the county use the conference meeting room once a month to discuss current issues. The meeting room is also used for monthly school board meetings, Individual Education Plan meetings, and parent meetings. The office is positioned directly in front of the front gate with about 150 feet between the two. Another classroom building sits adjacent to the office building. It comprises six classrooms and houses third, fourth, and fifth grade

students. Between this building and the front gate is a very visible modern colorful playground used by all the K-8 students.

Beyond the playground, there is a metal bridge spanning a creek and leading to a tennis court and rubberized running track. A baseball/softball field is enclosed within the track. Surrounding this sports complex is a six-foot chain link fence. The school grounds between the buildings and front gate are asphalted. There is no evidence of any trash or debris. A new parking lot was built outside the school grounds and all staff and visitors are now encouraged to walk through the front gate to enter the school grounds. Mr. Bowers responded to a question regarding who is responsible for all the modern facilities, He replied “Most everything’s been built while I have been here, I didn’t do it, but the board did.”

Board Characteristics

Elementary school districts are governed by three members of the district who serve three-year terms with one term expiring each year. Mr. Bowers said his board members are typically “30 to 40 years old and are outstanding members of the community. They are most often business people and have children in the school. The normal length of time for Clear Creek School board member is 20 to 25 years. Occasionally two people will file for a board post.” Clear Creek School’s current board is composed of two males and one female. Mr. Bowers said, “This holds true for past board members.”

Student Characteristics

“Today we have approximately a 500-student membership; at the end of the school year we had 486 students,” explained Mr. Bowers, “I’d say that 70 to 80% of them have a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) and show some degree of Indian blood. An overwhelming majority of Clear Creek students transfer into the district. Probably 30% of them, 25 to 30% are actual residents.” Mr. Bowers attributed several explanations for the district attracting so many out-of-district children. He said,

I think that a lot of them that live close to where I live, and due to the fact that I know a lot of people in that area, plus we have started an after school program where the child can be taken care of until the parent gets off work. And plus the fact that a lot of people want their children to come to Clear Creek because they graduated from Clear Creek.

He adds, “I believe I get along well with those parents and grandparents.”

Superintendent Characteristics-Mark Bowers

Mr. Bowers has been an active educator for over 51 years. “I started here in 1963 and I was at another school district for 13 years before here,” proudly states Mr. Bowers.

I started here at Clear Creek as principal. We just had the main building and a 24x30 lunchroom and had the outside bathroom or toilets like all of ‘em did. Where you see the native stones out here, there’s two buildings. Between the two rooms, there was a folding door across it and there was on building that went off kinda in an “L” shape. So we really had three classrooms.

Mr. Bowers does not live or attend church in Clear Creek School district.

I live approximately 12 miles from the school building itself. I am close enough to the school that if the security alarm goes off or that I am needed at the school, I can be there in 15 minutes. This helps for deliveries, problems with equipment, and etcetera.

As far as his attending church in the district, Mr. Bowers explained, "I do not feel the church or churches in the district exert any political power in the school."

Concerning any life changes that may have affected his job, Mr. Bowers replies,

There has (sic) not been any events in my life such as divorce, arrests, or lawsuits that have affected my job as superintendent. I do not know how the community would perceive these changes. I would guess that any one of these events would create a lot of talk and be very distracting to my job and school.

"A superintendent must have the foresight to look ahead and make plans that will be rewarding for the school and community," he added. The qualities Mr. Bowers would like to see in a person taking his place would be experience dealing with people and keeping one's word. "Do for the people what you tell them you're gonna (sic) do, that's the key to a lot of it," he explains. He adds, "If you tell me you're gonna do something, don't go over and tell them this and do something entirely different. I think that works real well wherever you go."

Mr. Bowers states,

It's been my life here at Clear Creek and it's gonna be hard for me to quit, but that's just a part of life and, as we go on, we accept more everyday. I call it the system, it comes that time when we have to step away. No one is indispensable. Certainly I feel they can get someone to step right on in and carry it and go right on with the load. I often think about the idea that when you build a woodpile, build it just a little more than the person before you. So leave it just a little bit bigger than it was when you found it. I kinda like to think along those lines. Certainly I do want the district to keep going and I will do everything in my power to keep it going when I do leave here. I will keep talking to the people, advertise the district, what it can offer the children and offer the people.

Lucky School District

Mr. Ragsdale went on to say

it (Lucky School) had gone out basically, the people had transferred out. I went around knocking on doors seeing if they would send their kids back and some of 'em cussed me and some sent them back. There was (sic) forty-six kids in the entire school and they had decided to leave, so there was none at all. We had about sixty-three kids for the first two, three years. We got a van and ran that for about ten years to pick up kids, did a lot of building and a lot of other things with mid term enrollment, and then about seven or eight years ago, we sold the van and have been legit since. We drive into our district and still pick up our kids in regular busses. The last three years we've ran about one hundred eighty to one hundred ninety students.

He discussed Lucky School District's facilities. He explained that when he started, there was only four classrooms. "This building is all that was operable," Mr.

Ragsdale said,

We built three classrooms in that older gym we have out there and we built fifteen classrooms and the gym together with no bond money. This is money we have kind of saved until the legislature stopped us from using general funds to build with, which killed most dependent schools. Which is the ideal to start with.

Board Characteristics

A typical board member is like a typical teacher, "there ain't no such thing," states

Mr. Ragsdale.

The board members I have at the present and in the past have been hard-working family men doing a job no one else wanted to do and letting me run the school. The three members that hired me remained on the board about six or seven years. Then, as their children graduated, they would not refile for election. One member has remained on the board for the twenty years I have been employed here.

Student Characteristics

“I have got pictures on the wall of kids that graduated here,” explains Mr. Ragsdale,

I have got kids that are making a real effort. I have got parents that are driving from other towns so they can send their kids here. I have a lady from another town that moved in with some other people for a little while so she could send her kids here. And then that wasn't financially feasible for her to do it, but she still wants to move back so her kids can go to school here. We have an awful lot of second-generation kids here now.

Lucky School District's student population comprises about sixty percent Caucasian students, 35% Native American, and less than 5% Spanish and African American children. Mr. Ragsdale comments,

I think a lot of our minority students, especially our black kids, they go here eight or nine years, they don't realize they are black and they go to another school and they're told real quick they're black. I know it happens to our Spanish kids and I think it happens a lot to our Indian kids. That they are here and nobody cares what makeup they are, and they go to their schools in the ninth grade and they are stereotyped. They can't handle it.

Superintendent Characteristics-Tim Ragsdale

“I started here in 1975 or 74, I can't remember which, either 25 or 26 years ago,” claims Mr. Tim Ragsdale, Superintendent of Lucky School District. He adds,

I worked one year at another district. Lucky School called me and asked me to come over for an interview for the job. I did and they hired me. We started here with a budget of \$36,000. That was the entire budget. I had \$3600 above teachers' salaries to operate the year with. That's all maintenance, all utilities, food, everything. I went and talked to the State Superintendent and he told me that if I could make it till Christmas, he wouldn't take my certificate. We worked here until Christmas and got a couple of grants and got some commodities from different schools, and now, we started out this year with our budget at \$1.2 million.

Mr. Ragsdale spends a lot of time at Lucky School. "I've spent a lot more hours here than I have at home," he said. "I spent a lot more hours here in the last twenty-five years than I have at home," He added,

I get here at 6:00 A.M. every morning and I stay till almost everybody leaves and I come back to whatever there is at night. I've put my family on hold. When my kids went to high school, the only time I got to see them participate in anything was when we didn't have anything here. Otherwise, if we had something here, this was your first obligation. I guess my family resented me some. I guess my wife kinda resented the fact that I gave so much to the school.

A small school is an extension of your home and "you must shore the problems of the people of the district to have credibility teaching their children," states Mr. Ragsdale. Mr. Ragsdale does not live in Lucky School District nor does he attend church in the district. "I live close enough to know most of the patrons of the district," he says. He states that "none of the local churches in the community have any political power, but he stresses that life changes may have a direct impact on a superintendent's job." Mr. Ragsdale says, "My life changes have been subtle, I just get older. I think a divorce, remarrying, or an arrest would be grounds to find a new superintendent." He says that "a superintendent should never sacrifice his/her moral conviction; always be honest with school board, community and staff; and know the expectations and values of the community and be willing to adjust to meet these expectations."

Mr. Ragsdale continues to explain how to adjust to these expectations.

I think I have been in touch with the same type people that I am. I think that's one of the things you've got to do in any community, you've got to come into the community with the idea you're gonna change to fit that community or you are gonna have to already be established as the type of person. I don't think that if a person can come into a system and not adjust to that system, the system will not adjust to you.

He adds,

I think I pretty much fit into the community. I think the community is laid back, lazy type of people and I fit that pretty good. But I don't think I could get into some of the other schools, even in the county. I don't think some of the people in other counties could fit in here. I really believe you have to have a solid foundation within the community and I think you have to be a part of the community. I think you have to be at the functions; you've got to want to be at the functions, people can tell if you don't want to be there pretty quick. You've got to mold your personality to that of the one which you live in.

I think you have to stay humble and when you're not willing to stay humble, I think you should move on. I don't think you need to give up your beliefs or thought or anything you believe is morally right or wrong, but I think you have to keep adjusting to the community. As more people move into the community, the community has changed, the people that hired me are not here any longer, and their families are here, but it's changed. People have moved in that don't have the same moral values and don't have the same discipline as the others did.

Mr. Ragsdale further adds, "I think you have to come into a school and realize this system is here, if you want to stay you'll adjust to it; and hopefully school boards will pick somebody that can adjust to it."

Mr. Ragsdale elaborates on fitting in.

It's hard on anybody that has any skeletons in their closet or anything other than a moral upbringing. This is the Bible belt of the world up here. You can go out and drink a beer or go to rooster fights, but you don't do it where your kids will see you. You don't do it where they can go home and say I saw him here or there. The kids have to see you as being above these things, whether you are or not. I think they have to see you as a person they would like to be or feel like is a role model.

Longevity in the Superintendency

Mr. Ragsdale states what he believes are the reasons for being able to stay at his school for such an extended time.

I believe that having a good working relationship with the community and with a school board that has been basically stable has helped me stay at Lucky School District this long. I also believe that being receptive to new ideas and accepting criticism as a positive motivation has helped me stay here too.

Mr. Bowers, Clear Creek School superintendent explains,

I believe that being fair and consistent with parents and students, letting the welfare of the school be foremost in the decisions that needs (sic) to be made, and having many of the parents and community members when I started here has helped me maintain my position at this school. I also think that you must enjoy the job and enjoy working with children and helping them cope with their problems and furnish them a shoulder to lean on. And enjoy the satisfaction of the students being successful in life.

“I was told when I first got here, that if I did a good job, I’d have everyone mad at me in five years. I think that is a pretty good analogy,” commented Mr. Ragsdale. He added,

I think I have had people mad at me in five years and you start building back what you tore up and then another five years, you have another group. So, I think when you figure five years, if you have a really thin skin, that's probably all that it would take. I think once five years is up, you probably made enough people mad that you are going to have to build some fences or move on. I really believe that's a pretty close timeline. Sometimes we get a little hardheaded about building those fences because we know we are right. Why do we care what these people think if we know we're right? I think that is the arrogance that catches all of us. I think we've gotten to the point we've been told all our lives that if you do everything right, you will be rewarded and you won't be punished for doing things wrong. Life's not fair, it don't work that way. You're gonna get kicked in the teeth. Good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people and this is the way of life. I think that's the thing that we have got to keep remembering and remember the holier than thou attitude that we all have. You don't go into administration unless you have an ego to start with, I don't care what anybody else tells you. Sometimes, it is because you want to tell people what to do and sometimes it's because you don't want to work hard. But either way, you have to have a reason for going into it and you gotta make sure it's not an arrogant one that got you there.

Transition: Principal to Elementary Superintendent

In the early 1990s, the office of county superintendent was eliminated by the state legislature. Before this change in law, the county superintendent had various statutory duties. The Oklahoma Statutes (1981) list the duties of the county superintendent, which include: (1) approve all contracts of teachers and other personnel under his supervision and keep on file in his office a copy of each contract for the entire term of the contract, (2) keep a permanent file in which he shall record all pertinent information relative to teacher's certificates, (3) visit each school under his supervision as often as necessary but no less than twice a year and shall advise with the teachers thereof relative to the classification of students, methods of instruction, and the upkeep and condition of the school building or buildings, equipment, and grounds and, the county superintendent shall be authorized to furnish and provide the teachers and clerks of boards of education of the dependent school districts of his county with sufficient teachers' registers, teachers' class registers, teachers' report forms, pupils' report cards, grade cards, diplomas, awards, clerk's registers, school warrant books, minute books, claim banks, and other stationary for the needs of the school, (4) keep a record of his official acts and the registers of all teachers and principals employed under his supervision, (5) require of all teachers and principals under his supervision the filing of complete and accurate reports at the end of each attendance period and at the end of each school year, (6) make an annual statistical and financial report, and (7) make apportionments of public funds to which the school districts of his county are entitled, (8) furnish the county clerk and county assessor a description of the boundary of each school district in the county or any

changes made thereof. After this change in law, the duties that were performed by the county superintendent were assumed by the elementary principals.

At this time, the elementary principal's title changed to elementary superintendent. The transition from elementary principal to elementary superintendent was discussed with Mr. Ragsdale and Mr. Bowers to gain insight into the effect this change may have had on their position at their schools. Interviews were also gathered from two other superintendents who experienced this transition period as well as the county superintendent who was in office at that time.

“Well, some of the titles got changed, but mine didn't get changed,” stated Mr. Ragsdale.

The state superintendent decided I needed to go back to school. I had to pick up nine hours to satisfy her, one on finance, one on housing, and I don't remember what the other one was. So I went back and got those hours to get my elementary superintendent license.

Mr. Ragsdale further described the transition from elementary principal to elementary superintendent.

The changes from to elementary superintendent presented no problem, because, when the law was enacted to close the county superintendent's office, our official was doing nothing to support the schools. When I first became an elementary principal, the county superintendent of schools made decisions for the ten county schools, for example, certification of teachers, textbook selection, and sports and academic decisions. He also settled all disputes between schools. His role was superintendent of schools. The last county superintendent wanted the individual school to settle all disputes, send their own textbook list to the state, etc. He ran a termite extermination company out of the office. The secretary checked certification of teachers and the other things he was supposed to do. When the county superintendent was eliminated, there was not much transition needed for area principals.

“Basically, the elementary superintendent did the things that were normally done by the county superintendent. I feel that the office of the county superintendent was not needed,” says Mr. Bowers. Mr. Bowers explained that the main change is that he didn't have to teach anymore. “I was a teaching principal at that time,” he says, “after I became a superintendent I did not have to teach any longer.”

“It was a smooth transition (from elementary principal to superintendent). We did the same things in running the school that we do today,” he explains.

We took several reports into the county superintendent that today we send to the state department. The county superintendent's role was to check the registrars, take care of transfers, determine the residence of students, and check the schools for accreditation. He would purchase textbooks and dispense them to the schools.

Mr. Bowers believed that the county superintendent fulfilled his responsibilities of keeping the school records, approving certificates, and taking care of transfer students.

“When I first started as dependent principal, I thought the county superintendent was to advise and help dependent schools as the need arose. Act as a real superintendent would,” said Mr. Ragsdale,

The county did not fulfill any responsibilities. He was very seldom in the office. All transfers were stamped, as were the teacher contracts, by his secretary. My transition from dependent principal to elementary superintendent was very smooth, because I was not using the county superintendent's office the last two or three years he was in office. I learned to bypass the county superintendent's office and not to depend on the office for anything.

“I was always treated fairly by the county superintendent and, if some principals were treated more favorable, (sic) I am not conscious of it,” state Mr. Bowers. He added,

“I got along with the county superintendent real well and kept my reports in on time. I took pride in keeping my records neat and in excellent shape.”

Robert Yuan, Superintendent of Ticky Ridge believed the role or responsibility for a county superintendent was to

keep dependent schools informed as to changes in school law and how we could best meet their new requirements and serve as a central location from which dependent schools could operate. The county superintendent should work closely with the Regional Accreditation Officer to improve schools in his county.

He said,

The county superintendent did serve as a source of information about upcoming changes and possible solutions to meet these changes. He did serve as a central location for meeting and discuss with others who faced the same problems and thereby coming up with a workable solution.

Mr. Yuan noted,

The county superintendent did not work with the Regional Accreditation Officer and the dependent principals to improve individual schools. The Regional Accreditation Officer and the dependent principals worked out these problems and the county superintendent was informed as to the solution.

“I believed he was my superintendent and that I should call him if I had a problem,” commented Larry Daniels, Bethel School Superintendent, “However, I was on my own, he was not a support system for me.” Mr. Daniels further elaborated “this county superintendent was always at the horse races. He had a very efficient secretary to help fulfill his responsibilities.”

“We didn’t do it all,” says county superintendent Wesley Lee,

but we did do the registers, check the registers and make sure they were all done right, yeah, we did that in the office. They (schools) did most of the grants, but I did while I was in there, wrote one grant myself. This grant

was for helping the kids that were coming into the ninth grade making that transition (to a new school). That was the purpose of those kids. But what happened, I discovered there was some money in different schools, such as Indian money and teacher training money, but it was such a small amount that they didn't want to do anything with it cause it wasn't worth doing anything with. So I got the idea of cooping all the money a little from here and there.

Mr. Lee discussed the transition of elementary principal to superintendent.

I think they (principals) were already doing about everything. I don't know who started it at the time, about doing away with the county superintendents, but they were going to save money. Well, that was what they were trying to do, it just wound up costing the school district a lot more money. You had one superintendent for all ten schools and then you had principals out there. Now most those guys are superintendents and then they got principals, so it wasn't a good deal, as far as saving money. I don't know, you might have a better school out there. I don't know, but I know at the time there were people who respected the county superintendent's office. You know, it's kinda like if you get in trouble, I'm gonna go see dad.

The superintendents discussed if there was any preferential treatment given to the dependent principal by the county superintendent. Mr. Ragsdale explained,

The most notable difference in the way the dependent principals were treated was in the textbook selection. The county superintendent would call whomever he chose to pick up books first, they may take two or three books extra for every grade. The last person to pick up textbooks may be five or six books short per class and the only one that could reorder them was the county superintendent, so you never had enough books for your students.

Mr. Bowers said, "I did not notice much difference in treatment between the principals that were new at the job and the ones that had been on the job a long time. It seemed that he treated us in the same manner."

Mr. Yuan reported,

To my knowledge, everyone was treated about the same. This was probably due to the fact the county superintendent had no day-to-day

dealings with the different schools and therefore made no decisions one way or the other which effected a particular school over another. More often than not, a problem between schools was discussed with the two schools involved and county superintendent, a decision reached, but the county superintendent would not follow up to see if the changes indeed had taken place.

“At times, contracts would be signed or not, depending on outcome of board elections,” Mr. Daniels added, “The county superintendent would write grants for some schools more favorably, for instance, he would make sure our school got funds from Indian Education grants.”

“The local school boards were not affected much by the county superintendent, just the principals. The county superintendent made unfavorable schools wait until the teachers were confirmed as having their certification. They could not be paid without his approval,” commented Mr. Ragsdale. Mr. Daniels stated, “The supplies and textbooks were never enough and meetings were held without your knowledge. I was the least experienced of all dependent principals, so I was treated like my school was completely unimportant.” Mr. Ragsdale, Mr. Daniels, and Mr. Yuan were consistent with their disdain for the county superintendent, while Mr. Bowers seemed to be on good terms and have a good working relationship with Mr. Lee.

County superintendent Mr. Lee said,

Some of them didn't want me around, you know, it works both ways. I would do just what I had to do at their school and stay out of the way and not create any ripples. This is the way I handled it. I could have went out there and sure enough made them mad, but I didn't. I've seen it all at one time or another. It's been quite an experience over years and I've got to truthfully say I really enjoyed it.

The superintendents commented on the relationships between the county officers, commissioners, treasurer and their school districts. Mr. Ragsdale said, "The relationship between the county officers and my district was one of haves and have nots. The money that our district generated was given out at their convenience. We never knew when or how much to expect."

Mr. Bowers stated,

I think the relationships (between these entities) was good, for they had to work together for the school to be successful. The superintendent approved the contracts, the county commissioners approved the budgets, and the county treasurer acted as treasurer for the schools.

"They (county officials) appeared to all be looking for the next election," says Mr. Daniels, "They wanted your support to keep their jobs. I think the greater your number of students a school has, the more support they would get." Mr. Yuan said,

The county superintendent's office was in the court house and he had day-to-day contact with these county officials. Although it was sometimes strained, your county schools had just the county treasurer to release their funds in a prompt and timely manner. The county treasurer would keep school funds for at least a month before disbursing them. This allowed the county to collect interest off the school funds.

"I didn't handle any of that (school money), I didn't have anything to do with the money," commented county superintendent Mr. Lee. He added,

School money was not intermingled with the county (money). You got so much money out there, that it comes for different reasons, like how many students you got you get so much, so much for handicapped and add all those stuff up and whatever the state gives you. Anything you can get in line of a grant or Indian money comes into play and that's what makes up your budget. County commissioners couldn't do anything with that.

Mr. Lee discussed Clear Creek's financial situation.

At the very beginning, when I first became a county superintendent, they (Clear Creek School) were fairly small. They really only had one rock schoolhouse out there. What really put them over the top was the tribe started building these Indian homes and this school district out here went from little to big. They used to get about \$1500 per student (from Impact Aid). As time went on, Clear Creek went around a lot of folks, that's what made them, Impact Aid they get, of course they get Johnson O'Malley also. There's a number of Indian students out there so they get the money. I was at the state capitol and they were saying that Clear Creek had a bunch of money and they were needing money. And they were on the verge of taking it from them (Clear Creek). I don't remember the amount, but it was a considerable amount of money and I came back and reported it to Mark Bowers and told em you better start doing something, you need to spend that money or they will take it away from you or you're gonna lose it. And he did (start spending the money). He started a building program and started a few things. You know he doesn't have any more money than the other schools get from the state. It's the Indian money that counts. You know people say boy, look at what Mark Bowers is doing. Well, you know if Joe Blow was in there and had the money, he would be doing the same thing. People don't realize that he (Mr. Bowers) is a good politician. A principal has got to be and you got shake a few babies' hands and community you have and when you kinda control the people and keep them together. But you get them to fighting, get them split out there in the community, you're not going to be there very long.

Mr. Lee discussed the superintendents keeping their jobs.

I tell you what it amounts to, it amounts to how good you are at controlling your school board. You as an administrator, if you keep your board on there and keep your people coming when someone (else) comes up for election and tries to get control of your school board, that is why they (superintendents) stay so long. If they don't do that, they would last just so long, about three years. You gotta be somebody who can figure what to do, and when to do it, and how to do it. You gotta think those things through, you can't just off your hat do something real quick. You gotta study them out, take advise from friends or somebody you can depend on that can tell you.

The topic of keeping the principal/elementary superintendent's position through the transition of the elimination of county superintendent was discussed with the superintendents. "I firmly believe that any job can be successful when we work to make

it as good as we possibly can. I have always believed that nothing is good enough if it can be made better," stated Mr. Bowers. Mr. Ragsdale commented, "My school was so poor that no one would take the job for one thing, but had a good school board that ignored the county superintendent and gave the authority to run the school for the best interest of the students and community." Mr. Yuan said that "we continued to operate as usual with little change. Only one person was eliminated from the information loop, the county superintendent, that was all." "Writing for grants for things we needed and always being on the job (fifteen hours per day) is what helped me survive during this time period," said Mr. Daniels, "I was responsible for everything. We did not have the help we have today. The county superintendent was hardly ever coming to our school."

Public Relations

"We pretty well know who our enemies are," stated Mr. Ragsdale,

And sometimes we forget who is our support out there. I think probably the one thing that people in small schools don't do is that we don't have a public relation system. We don't have people in place to let the other people know what's going on in the school. We send notes home saying we're having this or that, we call parents saying your kid is in trouble, but we don't ever let people know what we have done at these small schools. Very few people ever come to the school, so they don't know that we have the Internet, that we have every child here in school using the Internet. They don't understand that their child gets more individual attention here in a day than they would other places in a week. We don't tell them what great teachers we've got, we don't tell them the great lunch menus. We just assume that everybody knows this.

Mr. Bowers believes his school has good public relations with people in the district.

He said,

I think I get along real well (with the people in the district). Since I have taught a lot of people in the district. We have now first generation, then second generation students, we have several students in school now, so they may go home and talk to their parents and say, Mr. Bowers said this. And the parent would say, yes, I know what Mr. Bowers will say because I've been in his class. I grew up with a lot of full blood Cherokee boys and ran around with them. The district is predominately you might say Indian. I think growing up with those boys gave me a better understanding of this community. I think the ability to work with people and good public relations has a lot to do with my success here as it would anywhere else.

Mr. Ragsdale added,

I think most parents want an individual feeling. I think they want to be able to come into the office and want to be heard if they have a gripe. I think you have to listen to them, you don't have to agree with them, but you have to listen. So I think you have to be accessible to people and you have to listen to people.

Mr. Bowers concurs with Mr. Ragsdale. He said,

I think sometimes when a parent comes down to visit with you, all you need to do is sit down and listen to the parents and listen to what their problems are, if they have problems. And they do or they wouldn't be there. So I think the best thing to do is sit down and be a good listener. Listen to their problems and then after that, you can both sit down and work something out.

"I think we have a good working relationship with our parents. I know a lot of parents will come to me on different concerns," stated Mr. Bowers, "I know the principal handles a lot of discipline, but on the same token, they still come to me because they know how I would discipline the children."

Teachers/Personnel

The superintendents discussed their personnel and the effects that personnel has on longevity in the superintendence. Mr. Ragsdale said, "I am not sure everyone has the

same opinion of our relationship (superintendents and staff). But I think everyone has a job of equal importance. When one person doesn't perform their duties, it affects the whole system." Mr. Bowers stated, "Our staff as a whole, works well together and are willing to do about anything that will make the school prosper."

Mr. Ragsdale said,

I think I have been instrumental in hiring the people that's here and I think I have hired the people here that fit my personality. I think once the community begins to realize that the community is following you, instead of you fitting into the community, you begin to have some real problems. I think you start having some problems when the community begins to realize after you have been there that long, they begin to think you're bigger than the community. Or they think you think that, and once they get that idea, you've got problems.

He added,

Once you get disloyal employees, you have problems no matter where you're at. I think this is the thing school boards should understand when they start hiring people, that you need to get loyal people, people who have a sense of dignity and a sense of responsibility to who pays them. I don't think you have to try and butter up people, but I do think you have an obligation to do the job you were hired to do and support the people that pay your salary. If your not willing to do that, you should move on. Small schools work so good because of the fact that you can get rid of people. Say you have thirty people and twenty-eight of them support the school, those two don't have a place to go. Before long, they decide to go other places.

Mr. Bowers commented,

I think that now, as long as I have been here, that everyone that is here now, is that everyone is someone that's been hired since I've been here. Because the time I came here, there were only two other teachers. One of them has passed away and I don't know where the other is. But the staff, bus drivers, janitors, cooks, and everyone else are all that have been employed since I've been here.

Mr. Bowers does not concern himself with loyalty. He said,

I want them to be loyal, but at the same token, if they do their job, they don't have a problem with me. As long as they do their job, I'm one hundred percent behind 'em. I like people to do their job.

"I have people here that like to do things," said Mr. Ragsdale,

I have a lady that wanted to do our Christmas program and I didn't realize that. I hired someone else to do the program and she comes in crying asking "what did I do wrong?" That's the first time I realized I thought she was doing it as a favor. She was doing it because she loved it. You got to stop and back up and work something out, if you care about people. If they weren't doing a good job, you got to take it upon yourself to either lie to 'em or else be honest. You've got to be honest with them.

Mr. Ragsdale added,

I do a lot less than when I first started. Everything here was apart of me. I did everything here. There was nothing here that I was not a real part of. And not only supervise, I did it. As time goes by, you begin to realize there are a lot of people that can do these jobs. They might not do as good as I could, but they can do 'em. And it gives me a lot of time to do other things. Before long, you find out that when you have people doing one job, they get a lot better at it than you was to start with. So now I got a lot of people that does a lot of jobs, that do 'em better than I would have, and once you realize that, its pretty simple to sit back and let them do 'em.

Small School Environment

The environment of these two long-term small school superintendents was discussed. Themes emerging from their interviews included small school issues, legal issues, finances, consolidation issues, and community identity.

Mr. Bowers explained,

I don't know if there is a tremendous amount of difference between (our school and larger schools) because all schools should be teaching the same thing. If we go back to our PASS (Priority Academic Student Skills) objectives and curriculum, we should be teaching all the same curriculum. We may be able to do a little bit more individual help, where as some of the things other schools offer that we can't. We turn out some excellent

students; they (bigger schools) turn out some excellent students. We turn out some students we wish could be better and I know that's true for where ever you go.

He added,

Individual instruction and getting to know the children is an advantage of a smaller school like ours, where as you might not get this attention at a larger school. Back a few years ago, I could call every child by name. It's rather hard for me today. It could be my age or the extra students we have. I know who their dad, mom, probably grandpa and grandma was. I still know a lot of them, yes I do. Like I said, they'll come down to enroll their children and say, "oh, the school has grown since I was in school here." We have a tremendous number of people that way. They will come back to the school and bring their children, grand children and put them in school and I very seldom forget a face. Like Jerry Clower said, "they'll go, but they'll come back and they'll bring more."

"In a small community, you realize where the priorities are real quick and that smaller communities have a goal," commented Mr. Ragsdale,

They want their kids educated, they want 'em to be picked up and sent home, and not bothered. I believe that school size is more important than class size because of individualized attention throughout the school. The students feel like a part of the school system and they don't want to disappoint the school by being a drop out.

Legal Issues. Both superintendents talked about legal actions that were taken against each school. "We have been sued numerous times," pointed out Mr. Ragsdale,

contractors that didn't get bids, children hurt on the playground, school board members elected illegally, and corporal punishment. I even sued a parent in a due process hearing. None of the suits were successful, except one building contractor received some money because we listed the board meeting as an Emergency Meeting instead of Special Meeting at the court house.

"There has been only two suits against the district concerning accidents to two students since I have been here," said Mr. Bowers, "The insurance company settled the

suits for a minor amount of money. One parent sprained an ankle and this has been resolved with a moderate remuneration from the insurance company.”

School Consolidation. Each superintendent discussed the consolidations or annexations of school districts and the possible effect it could have on their community.

Mr. Bowers stated,

Although I keep a watchful eye out on the issue (of consolidation), I have not been involved in consolidation, but I have been involved in annexation. A district dissolved and annexed to three neighboring districts. The people in the district got together and drew out areas to be annexed to each of the their districts. They voted to annex and each carried by a large plurality. The superintendents met and divided the assets equally accorded to the area that annexed to each district. It was a very smooth transition. If our school was consolidated or annexed into another school district, I think sometimes the community would lose its identity, because here you have basketball game, here you have several parents come to the basketball games and a few events through the year. Like here we have Thanksgiving dinner and we'll probably have a thousand people show up for the Thanksgiving dinner. And we have Johnson O'Malley meetings and we'll have a cultural day and several parents attend that. And probably sometimes I think the community would have a tendency to lose its identity if it weren't for these school events.

“I believe the Lucky community would lost its identity if the school was consolidated into another district, said Mr. Ragsdale,

Our people would no longer have a common problem or goal and or source of pride. Our school is the central function of this community. A lot of our employees live in the district and this is their life. We have good community and parent participation at our sporting events, at parent-teacher conferences, and at community meetings held here at school. If our children were forced to go to another district, I thing they would be considered outsiders and I think they would feel like outsiders. I continually get feedback from our professional groups and reports that some legislature is trying to put in a consolidation bill, whether it is to get rid of K-8 schools or small K-12 schools. Some years there is more talk than others. But I do believe that HB1017 was enacted to do away with us

smaller schools. But it seems we were able to meet the mandates as good or better than our larger schools. I think we have to go on with business, but we should always stay on top of any talk to consolidate us.

Mr. Bowers added, "Clear Creek is large enough that annexation or consolidation is not needed. Our school is small enough that all children are known by the staff. And this individualism seems to really help the students."

Summary

This chapter has introduced data retrieved from the long interviews with the long-term small-school superintendents Mark Bowers and Tim Ragsdale. To provide triangulation for this study, superintendents Larry Daniels and Robert Yuan and past county superintendent Wesley Lee were interviewed and information was attained for this study.

Characteristics of each superintendent, their local school board, and student population were discussed and provided foundation for this formative case study. Next, the longevity in the superintendent's position concerning superintendent Mark Bowers and superintendent Tim Ragsdale was explored. Topics explored were the transition from elementary principal to elementary superintendent, public relations, and teacher/personnel issues. Finally, the environment of small schools was discussed. Sub-topics included small school issues, legal issues, and school consolidation.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Examination and interpretation of the data gathered was accomplished using Kvale's (1996) three steps of analysis. The first two steps were completed: (1) structuring the interview material using transcription, and (2) clarification of the material by eliminating repetitious and non-essential material. The third step is analysis proper, which Kvale (1996) explains is finding meanings of the interviews and bringing the superintendents' own understanding into light.

The analysis is presented from the perspective of Kurt Lewin's field theory. Lewin (1951) describes behavior (B) as the function of the person (P) and his environment (E) or $B=F(P,E)$. He notes that "coming up against that fundamental differentiation between the forces within the individual (P) and the influences that infringe upon the individual from the environment (E), any psychology that strives to comprehend concrete behavior has to adhere to two basic insights: (1) The individual exists within an environment in relations to which he or she displays a relative insulation. This thesis means on the one hand that actual behavior depends on the vectors of the current psychological environment; on the other hand that there exists, nevertheless, a certain dynamic separateness of the psychological organism in relation to the environment. The degree of this separateness varies substantially among different individuals and among developmental stages. (2) This environment should be defined as essentially psychological with regard to the respective individual and should be defined as fundamentally psychologically correlative with experiences, attitudes, needs, and in short, correlative with the current state of the respective individual (Lewin, 1999).

Lewin, (1951) states that

If one wishes to use the wealth of accumulated facts concerning development, personality, social relations, cognition, and motivation for the purpose of understanding, guiding, or predicting the behavior of any individual, these data will have to be linked in such a way that they become applicable to a particular person at a particular time.

He added,

An emotional state such as anger can lead to a variety of such very different symptoms such as noisiness or extreme politeness. The same personality may manifest itself in practically opposite actions. In other words, a given state of a person corresponds to a variety of behavior and can, therefore, be inferred only from a combined determination of overt behavior and the situation. This is another way of saying that behavior (B) is determined by the person and environment ($B=F(P,E)$) and not by the person or environment alone.

Analysis and interpretation of the study will be presented in specific sections.

They are: (1) the characteristics of the Clear Creek and Lucky school districts including the superintendent, school board and students of each school; (2) longevity in the superintendency including the transition from elementary principal to superintendent, public relations, and teacher/personnel issues; and (3) small school environment which discusses small school environment issues, legal issues and consolidation concerns. This section will be followed by conclusions and recommendations of this study.

School District Characteristics

Superintendent Mark Bowers, Clear Creek School, has built his school from a little rock building to the elaborate school facility it is today. The buildings are structured where they are inviting to the public, but have a sense of control. The grounds are impeccably clean with no trash or debris found. The buildings are used by the

community and surrounding schools and entities as a meeting place. Mr. Bowers gives all the credit to his board for this expansion at Clear Creek School.

He credited a school board that has been basically stable throughout his career. He described the members as being business people with kids, usually 30 to 40 years old. The normal tenure of his Clear Creek board members is 20 to 25 years. The performance of the superintendent and district may be enhanced when the superintendent's goals are set towards the school district and board goals. This leads to goal congruence as illustrated in the literature review (_____, 10/5/2000).

Clear Creek School houses approximately 500 students with about 70 to 80% being of Native American descent. Only 25 to 30% of the students are actual residents of Clear Creek School District. Mr. Bowers claims the out-of-district students are attracted to the school for three reasons: (1) he knows a lot of the parents that live close to him, (2) they have an after-school program that watches the kids for working parents, and (3) a lot of the parents graduated from Clear Creek.

Although Mr. Bowers does not live in the district, he said he lives close enough to take care of any needed business that may arise while he is at home. He does not believe that living in the district or attending church in the district would make any difference. Mr. Bowers did not have any noted life changes such as divorce, arrests, or re-marrying, but if he did, he thinks it would be a hindrance to his job. The qualities he believes a good superintendent should have are public relation skills and keeping one's word. He also thinks that a superintendent must have a vision for the school and community. Mr.

Bowers believes that Clear Creek School is his life. He also believes that a superintendent should leave the woodpile a little higher than when he found it.

Superintendent Tim Ragsdale was hired as principal in 1974 at Lucky School. He began the year with a \$36,000 budget and no students. He went knocking on doors in the community and driving a van outside the district to bring back the 46 students that left and increased the student population to about 63 kids the first two to three years. The school now boasts of 180-190 students a year for the last ten years. Mr. Ragsdale put his teaching certificate on the line to help save the school. If Lucky School District would have run out of funds, the school would have been shut down and he would have lost his teaching certificate. Mr. Ragsdale's stature correlates with Behrens' (1992) that superintendents are risk takers.

Mr. Ragsdale has also built his school facilities up from a little rock building to the modern facility it is today. He was able to accomplish this without any bond money. Mr. Ragsdale spends the majority of his time at work, mostly going from 6 a.m. until after the night events are done. He has always put his job over his family life.

He describes his board members as family men with kids in school giving up their time to do a job no one wants. He believes there is no such thing as a typical board member. He has one board member that has been with him since he started in 1974. The others have typically stayed from six to seven years.

Mr. Ragsdale is proud of his students. He has all their pictures hanging on his office wall. Most of the Lucky School students are Caucasian. About 35% of the student body is Native American and less than 5% is Spanish and African American. He said the

kids do not realize their race until they go to another school. Mr. Ragsdale believes parents want to send their children to school at Lucky because of its small size and the individual help the student receives.

Lucky School is an extension of Mr. Ragsdale's home. He does not live in the Lucky community or attend church there, but he does believe that neither plays a role in his staying employed at the school. And then, he believes the superintendent should be a person who can handle community problems and gain the community's faith.

Although he does not live in the district, Mr. Ragsdale knows most of the people in the district. He believes you have to be a genuine part of the community, be humble, and be seen as above a regular person. He does not believe his style would fit some of the other schools in the county. He fits in the Lucky community, he thinks the community will not adjust or fit to you. He stated three things as helping him to be successful at Lucky School: (1) he does not sacrifice his moral conviction, (2) he is honest with the community, and (3) he adjusts to meet the expectations and values of the community.

Longevity in the Superintendency

Mr. Ragsdale has five ideas for longevity in his position: (1) have a good working relationship with the community, (2) keep a stable school board, (3) be receptive to new ideas, (4) accept criticism, and (5) do not get caught up with arrogance. Chance (1992) also lists four components that may increase the success of longevity in the superintendent's position. They are: (1) a stable school board, (2) open communication

between administration, parents, and staff, (3) hiring good employees, and (4) working closely with the community.

Mr. Bowers details five reasons for keeping the superintendent position at his site: (1) he is fair and consistent with parents, (2) the welfare of the school must be foremost in decisions, (3) keep a stable school board, (4) enjoy the job and enjoy working with children and (5) enjoy the satisfaction of students being successful in life.

Transition: Elementary Principal to Superintendent

Mr. Ragsdale was required to pick up nine more hours of administration classes before he was allowed to have an elementary superintendent license. Mr. Bowers received his elementary superintendent license after taking one class. Originally, the county superintendent made the decision for county schools concerning certification of teachers, textbook selection, sports and academics, and disputes between schools. Mr. Ragsdale thought there was no problem making the transition from elementary principal to superintendent, because he believed the county superintendent was not doing anything to support the schools. Mr. Ragsdale said the county superintendent wanted schools to settle their own disputes. According to Mr. Ragsdale, the county superintendent did not fulfill his responsibilities because he was too busy running a business out of the office, and had his secretary stamping transfers, contracts or whatever was needed.

Mr. Bowers concurs that the elementary principals did the things that were normally done by the county superintendent, so that position was not needed. The main difference between elementary principal and elementary superintendent for Mr. Bowers is

that he did not have to teach any longer. It was a smooth transition from elementary principal to elementary superintendent at Clear Creek School because they were doing the same things in running the school as they do today. The county superintendent sent reports to the state department, after elimination of the county superintendent position, reports were sent directly from the school to the state department. Mr. Bowers believed the role of county superintendent was to check registers, transfers and residency, check school accreditation, and order textbooks. He believed the county superintendent fulfilled his responsibilities.

Superintendent Robert Yuan, Ticky Ridge School said the county superintendent was to keep the schools informed as to changes in law and how to meet these requirements. Also, his role was to provide a central location from which schools could operate. He thought the county superintendent did not work with the elementary principals to improve schools. Bethel Superintendent Larry Daniels thought he was on his own because the county superintendent was not a support system. Mr. Daniels believes the county superintendent had an efficient secretary to fulfill his responsibilities.

Mr. Wesley Lee, county superintendent, did not believe the transition from elementary principal to elementary superintendent was too difficult because the principals were already doing about everything. He said the schools took care of most of their grants. He wrote one grant to help eighth graders make the transition to ninth grade and pooled several of the schools' smaller grants. He said that people respected the county superintendent's office because it was the last stop for anyone with a complaint or need.

Preferential Treatment

Mr. Ragsdale believed that some schools received preferential treatment from the county superintendent, especially noticeable in the textbook selection process. He said that some schools were forced to wait to be paid because the schools had to have his approval before releasing payments. He thought the local school boards were not affected by the county superintendent.

Mr. Bowers did not notice any preferential treatment towards any of the schools. He said he was always treated fairly. Mr. Yuan said he was treated the same as all the other principals. He said that schools usually worked out their own conflicts. Mr. Daniels said favoritism was shown to some schools through the awarding of grants. He said that contracts would be signed or not, depending on the outcome of a board election. County superintendent Lee said that some of the principals did not want him to come around, so he just did the minimum for those schools and stayed away. Notably, he said he could have caused problems if he wanted to.

Mr. Ragsdale and Mr. Daniels concurred that some schools received preferential treatment. Mr. Bowers, Mr. Lee, and Mr. Yuan thought the schools received the same treatment. This inconsistency may be spurred by the positive working relationship Mr. Bowers and Mr. Yuan had with the county superintendent and the abrasive and virtually nonexistent working relationship that Mr. Ragsdale and Mr. Daniels had with the county superintendent.

Relationships

For Mr. Ragsdale, the money for his school was generated at the county's convenience. He never knew how much money to expect for his school. Mr. Bowers believed he had a good relationship with the county superintendent and that all functions of county government seemed to work together. He said the county superintendent approved contracts, the county commissioners approved budgeting and the county treasurers took care of the money.

Mr. Daniels noted that the county officials were looking to the next election and the bigger the school the more support would come from county agencies to get those votes. Mr. Yuan pointed out that the county treasurer held school funds at least a month before releasing them so that interest could be earned from the money and put in county offices.

County superintendent Lee says that he did not handle any money and school money was completely separate from county money. His view was that county commissioners did not have much to do with school money. Mr. Lee believed that grants and Indian money were important for these schools. He said that Clear Creek became big and prospered because of the Indian money. He commented that the bigger Clear Creek got, the more they began to do their own thing or become more independent of the county superintendent's office. Although, Mr. Bowers had a positive working relationship with Mr. Lee, he gave credit to the expansion of his school to the local school board and eventually to himself for his talent of moving the funds around to meet the needs of the school. The influx of Federal funds did help the school prosper both financially and

structurally, but Mr. Lee gives the credit for Clear Creek's prosperity by drawing in these Federal funds due to the tribe making investments in housing and land within the district.

Mr. Lee insinuated that he was the one that prompted Mr. Bowers to begin building or otherwise he would lose the school money he had saved. He thought that anybody in Mr. Bowers' spot with all the money Clear Creek School had could do the same as Mr. Bowers, Even though Mr. Bowers is getting all the credit for building up the school.

Mr. Lee believes Mr. Bowers is a good politician. He states five things that he thinks would help someone stay a superintendent: (1) have good public relations with your community, (2) keep your board stable and control them, (3) keep your community from splitting, (4) think things out and don't act so quickly and (5) ask questions of people you trust.

Mr. Bowers says people can be successful when they make their jobs as good as they possibly can. Mr. Ragsdale said that where he took a job that he said the school was so poor that nobody would take the job. He credits his success to a great school board that ignored the county superintendent and gave him (Mr. Ragsdale) the authority to run the school. Mr. Yuan claimed he operated his school as usual with little change as he went through the transition from elementary principal to elementary superintendent.

Mr. Daniels used writing grants and long hours, sometimes fifteen per day on the job to ease through the transition. He said he was already responsible for everything and that the county superintendent hardly came to his school.

Public Relations

Mr. Ragsdale mentioned that small schools like his (Lucky School) do not do a good job with a public relations system. He said the enemies are known, but the supporters are sometimes forgotten. He spoke of the need to promote the individual attention given to the students, the good technology, the great teachers and great menus. All too often it is assumed that everyone knows this.

Mr. Bowers believes his school has good public relations and that he gets along good with the people and community at Clear Creek. He says that since he has taught a lot of people in and around his district and, since he has a lot of second-generation students, the parents know what to expect. He bases a lot of his success on the fact that he grew-up with Indian children and he knows how to work with the people in his community.

Mr. Ragsdale pointed out that most parents want an individual feeling. They want the superintendent to listen and be accessible. Mr. Bowers concurred that a superintendent needs to be a patient listener. After that, something can be worked out with the parents. It is crucial to have a good working relationship with parents.

Teachers/Personnel

At Lucky School, everyone has a job of equal importance according to Mr. Ragsdale. The whole system is affected by one person not doing his/her job. Clear Creek's staff works well together and is willing to do about anything to help the school. Both Mr. Ragsdale and Mr. Bowers have been instrumental in hiring all of their staff.

Mr. Ragsdale believes he has hired people that fit his personality. He thinks you need to hire loyal people with a sense of dignity and responsibility to the one that gives them their paycheck. Mr. Bowers wants loyal employees but he does not concern himself with that. If his employees do their job, then he does not concern himself with the loyalty. He just wants them to do their job. Mr. Ragsdale believes you need to be able to delegate responsibilities to capable employees.

Small School Environment

Small School Issues. Mr. Bowers said there should not be much difference in the teaching aspect of large or small schools, because the curriculum should be the same. He acknowledged that his small school may provide more individual help than bigger schools can offer. He also believed it is easier getting to know the children and families in his small school than in a larger system. He said that you realize where priorities are real quick at schools such as Lucky. Mr. Ragsdale sees school size as being more important than class size because of the individual attention throughout the school.

Legal Issues. Mr. Ragsdale and his school have been sued numerous times, but none were successful. Clear Creek has been sued twice with both being settled by the insurance companies.

School Consolidation. Clear Creek is large enough that consolidation or annexation is not needed and still small enough that most parents and children are known by staff and administration. Mr. Bowers thinks it is important to keep an eye on the

consolidation issue. Consolidation of his school may cause a loss of identity for Clear Creek community members because the school provides events to help keep the community active and participating.

Mr. Ragsdale says that since legislation is periodically initiated to try and close smaller schools that this is an important issue for any school that has a similar amount of students that Lucky School has. He believes Lucky community would lose its identity if consolidated. The community would no longer have a common problem, goal, or central function. He thinks kids would feel like outsiders if they are forced to go to another school.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

With the national average tenure of a superintendent at one school site less than 6.5 years, it is imperative for those individuals who aspire to be, or currently is a superintendent, to have information available that may help sustain or keep his/her superintendent's position. Although this qualitative case study of two long-term superintendents may not be generalized across other school sites, it provides insight into some characteristics that may be beneficial to any school administrator. Those characteristics are: (1) adjusting to fit into the educational setting one finds him/herself, (2) working to have good relationships or public relations with the community, parents, teachers, staff, and students, (3) being honest with the community and doing what you say, (4) being instrumental in employing the best staff available, and (5) working to keep your supporters on the school board.

The purpose of this case study of two long-term small-school superintendents and their school systems was to gain insight on issues that may help a potential administrator possess and retain the superintendent's position. Kurt Lewin's field theory was utilized to view the "lived world" of each superintendent. Since his approach is explained as

behavior (B) is a function of the person (P) and his/her environment (E), Lewin's approach was beneficial in two ways: (1) it helped view the superintendent (P) in relationship to the school environment (E) and the effect this relationship (B) had on the longevity of a superintendent, and (2) it helped view the behavior (B) of the organization of the school (P) in relation to the county environment (E) and the effect this relationship had on the longevity of the superintendent. Lewin's field theory provides lenses for the researcher to explore the characteristics and environment of a person or organization (life space); and as the person or organization develops over time, the researcher can study the behavior of this interaction between person and environment as it develops or matures.

The researcher used the qualitative method of long interview for this study to learn how the superintendents interacted with their school and community, thus enabling them to have such a lengthy tenure at their school. The interview protocol evolved from an initial set of open-ended questions concerning the life space of the superintendents. Each superintendent was allowed to discuss any aspect of his personal or professional life that he thought brought meaning to his position as superintendent. Probing and clarification was continual throughout the initial interview.

A second interview was granted to allow clarification or expansion of themes that emerged from the initial interview. A more defined, extensive list of open-ended questions were developed to help probe and guide deeper into the life space of each superintendent. A third interview was scheduled with each superintendent to discuss the themes that emerged from the interview. The superintendents were allowed to clarify

these themes to make sure the researcher accurately heard what each superintendent had said.

Additional interviews were scheduled with two rural superintendents that are located at similar schools in York County and the past county superintendent from York County. These interviews were pursued to contribute to triangulation of information received from the superintendents Mark Bowers and Tim Ragsdale. Triangulation was particularly pursued concerning the relationships the superintendents, who at one time were elementary principals, had with the county superintendent and, how these elementary principals made the transition to elementary superintendents while retaining their administrative position. The interview protocol for the additional interviews was based from the themes derived from the interviews with the Mr. Bowers and Mr. Ragsdale.

The findings of the data gathered were accomplished using Kvale's (1996) three steps of analysis. They are: (1) structuring the interview material using transcription, (2) clarification of the material by eliminating repetitious and non-essential material, and (3) analysis proper, which he explains is finding meaning of the interviews and bringing the interviewee's own understanding into light.

The analysis and interpretation of the study was presented in three sections. They are: (1) the characteristics of each school district including the superintendent, school board members, and students, (2) the longevity in the superintendency including the transition from elementary principal to superintendent, public relations, and teacher/personnel issues, and (3) issues of the superintendent's small school environment.

School District Characteristics

Both Mr. Bowers and Mr. Ragsdale have built their schools from little stone block buildings to very modernized schools. They attribute this prospering to good financial management. County superintendent Lee attributes Clear Creek School's development due to the Indian money that the district receives from the tribe because of the large Indian population and Indian housing projects. Mr. Lee says that anybody could build what Mr. Bowers built if they had that kind of money. Although Mr. Bowers relationship with the county superintendent was positive, both had insinuated that as the elimination of the county superintendent's position approached, Clear Creek School began to go around the system and began the process of becoming independent from the county superintendent's office. Mr. Lee also infers that he is to credit for the facilities at Clear Creek because he had warned Mr. Bowers that he had better start spending the school's money, or the state was going to come and take it away from school.

School board members were similar for both school districts. Mr. Bowers has a longer rate of longevity for the majority of his board members, but Mr. Ragsdale has had one member on his board since he was hired. Chance (1992) lists having a stable school board as one of the reasons for a superintendent's stability or success in a district.

The student population of each school is diversified. Clear Creek has a student body of 486 students with a majority of the students of Indian race with the minority being Caucasian. Lucky School has less than 200 students with a mixed enrollment of 60% Caucasian, 35% Native American, and less than 5% Spanish and African American. Each school has a high poverty rate and feeds all students free breakfast and lunches.

Both superintendents believe that parents are attracted to their schools because of the individual attention the student receives, and the parent knows what to expect from the superintendent because he was the administrator when the parent was in school. Howley (1996) and Dewees (1999) find that students and teachers of small schools have a substantial sense of belonging to each other and the school system. Irmsher (1997) states that minorities and children from low socioeconomic status perform better in small schools than in larger systems.

Longevity in the Superintendency

Mr. Ragsdale believed his longevity is based on a good working relationship with the community, having a stable school board, and being receptive to new ideas and accepting criticism. Mr. Bowers based his longevity on being fair and consistent with parents and students, putting the school first in decision-making, and being well known in the community. Behrens (1992) agrees that a superintendent must have effective communication skills to be successful. Richardson (1998) lists public/community demands and criticism as one of the areas of critical stress for a superintendent. Failure to communicate and poor people skills were the two areas identified by Townley (2001) as mostly to give trouble to a superintendent. Chance (1992) explains that working closely with the local community, open communication, and a stable school board increases the superintendent's stability in a school district. County superintendent Lee concurred that an administrator has got to be a good politician and shake a few babies' hands. He said that you have to control the people and keep them together, because if

you get them fighting, get them split in the community, then you are not going to be there very long as a superintendent.

Both superintendents survived the transition from elementary principal to elementary superintendent. Each was essentially doing the job of superintendent as the legislature eliminated the county superintendent's position. Superintendents Ragsdale, Bowers, Yuan, and Daniels agreed that the county superintendent position was not needed. The degree of relationship between each superintendent and the county superintendent differed. Mr. Bowers, who had one of the larger school districts, seemed to have a positive relationship with the county superintendent. The smaller school districts seemed to be fighting for their own and were not paid attention by the county superintendent. This perspective seems to give credence to the notion by Mr. Daniels that the county officials were just looking for a vote and the bigger the district the more attention was given. The improvement of facilities and advancing enrollment of Clear Creek School may have been the connection concerning the positive relationship between the Mr. Bowers and Mr. Lee. Mr. Lee was proud of stating that he was the one to have Mr. Bowers begin the building projects and spend the money.

There was a discrepancy between how the individual schools and superintendents were treated by the county superintendent. Mr. Bowers and Mr. Yuan seemed to agree that everyone was treated equally. Mr. Yuan had the view that it was not so much that everyone was treated the same, as it was that everyone was on even treated. Mr. Daniels and Mr. Ragsdale explained that the county superintendent was too busy doing personal business, that is why they both began to do the various duties of the superintendent

without going through the superintendent. Mr. Lee was under the impression that some schools did not want him around, so he obliged them. But he made it clear that if he wanted to interfere with the districts' business, he could.

Both superintendents Mr. Bowers and Tim Ragsdale have recommended the hiring of all the employees at their respective schools. Mr. Ragsdale believed that you should hire personnel that fit your personality. He said you need to hire loyal workers and let them do their job. Mr. Bowers said that he is not so concerned with loyalty, as long as the employee does his/her job. He just wants them to do what they were hired for. The Connecticut study lists personnel issue as a critical stress for a superintendent. Chance (1992) also lists hiring good employees has an essential component of longevity in the superintendency.

Small School Environment

Small school environment issues were discussed to give the researcher a more concrete background of the environment of the superintendent and issues that he may have to deal with in his role as superintendent. Mr. Bowers does not see much difference in a small school and a large school. He believed that with state mandates of what has to be taught, both type schools are essentially using the same curriculum. He conceded that his small school may be able to do a little more individual attention, whereas he thinks that larger schools may not be able to give this individual attention. Mr. Bowers also mentioned that he thinks it is easier to get to know the children and families in his school district because of the size of the district. Mr. Ragsdale believed that school size is more

important than class size because of the individualized attention a child receives throughout the school. He thought the child feels like he is a part of the school system. Irmsher (1997) explains that in a small school environment, the atmosphere makes it possible for teachers to know the strengths and weaknesses of each child and meet the individual needs of the child. Cotton (1998) notes that a small-school teacher is in an environment where it is possible to know the student, and enhancing the opportunity to make a positive impact in the student's life.

Mr. Bowers keeps a watchful eye on legislative issues of consolidating school districts. Although Clear Creek district on participated in an annexation process, Mr. Bowers believed any consolidation of his district would hurt the identity of the Clear Creek community. He viewed his school as a central meeting place of community members for various types of events. Mr. Ragsdale believes Lucky community would lose its identity if the school were consolidated into another district. He said that his community would no longer have a common problem, goal, or sense of pride. He stated that his school is the central function of the community. In rural communities that still have a school, the small school is recognized as central to local activities and serves as a major resource to the community (Fanning, 1998). Fanning (1998) reports that consolidation of school districts increases the possibility of phasing out the community.

Conclusions

The case study presented a description of the "lived world" of Superintendents Mark Bowers and Tim Ragsdale. The theoretical framework developed by Kurt Lewin

was used as a lens to view the behavioral characteristics (B) of each superintendent (P) in the environment (E) of their school site ($B=F(P,E)$). In this framework it is important to note, as the environment of the schools change through the years, so do the superintendents have to make adjustments to their own environment. Lewin (1951) notes that personal (P) characteristics and environment (E) cannot be independent of each other, but cohabitant within the “life space” of an individual.

Based on the findings presented in Chapter IV, the researcher made several conclusions from the results of this study. Interview data revealed for these two superintendents that their longevity was based on (1) “fitting” into the setting (community), (2) having good public relation skills, (3) listening to patrons and do what you tell them your going to do, (4) hiring loyal, hard working employees, and (5) fighting to keep your school board stable.

The transition period for these elementary principals to become elementary superintendents was a smooth event. Both superintendents were basically doing the county superintendent’s job responsibilities as time approached the elimination of the county superintendent’s position. Both superintendents and their schools were basically independent of the county superintendent’s office. The county superintendent’s office played the role of providing documents and paperwork, and allowing the schools the freedom to manage themselves.

Small school environment issues were explored to give the researcher a better understanding of the “life space” of each superintendent. Topics discussed were

individual attention, knowing the child, student participation, legal issues, school identity, and school consolidation.

Recommendations

Further Research

A qualitative follow-up study in this area could examine the “life space” of superintendents who have been in this position less than the national average to gain insight into conflicts that inexperienced superintendents may be encountering. This study would add to available literature concerning aspects of what created an early exit from the superintendents’ position. Another area that should be examined is a case study of superintendents that have recently been relieved of their superintendent’s position. A study of this nature may provide further insight into the topics of longevity of the superintendent to explore what did not work and why it did not work. Also, a study concerning the question is a small school superintendent’s position easier to keep, or an easier job to do, than a large-school superintendency. This study may increase the information pool for prospective superintendents interested in the intricacies of the environment of a large or small school and it may also provide insight into superintendent longevity versus the superintendent as a change agent. A study of perspectives of teachers and staff concerning the longevity of a superintendent may give another view of this topic in respect to the perspectives of why a superintendent is successful and able to have a lengthy tenure. A cross-case analysis of perspectives of superintendents that have long tenures versus superintendents that have short tenures may be enlightening. It may

provide a list of characteristics that may be needed to have a lengthy tenure as a superintendent.

Further research into student learning and the effects of applying Lewin's field theory to student learning is recommended. Small classroom settings and the impact that a low student-teacher ratio has on student learning may be key to educational effectiveness. Also, due to the broad nature of Lewin's field theory, the researcher suggests that the theory falls short in describing specific behaviors resulting from specific interactions of a person and his/her environment. Further research to include the interaction of psychology and organization theory is suggested to bridge the gap of this phenomenon.

Additional study and information gathering concerning Lewin's field theory and its application to structure of public school systems and the role superintendents play could be beneficial to future development of school systems. Data gathered from this study could provide a convincing case for the effectiveness of a small school or the promotion of clusters and mini-schools and the stability of its leadership.

Researching issues of consolidation of schools and the effects consolidation of school systems has on the identity of community would be interesting. The loss or gain of identities of the involved school communities could provide a basis for future decision-making.

Another area of interest concerning this issue is the politics that is played in educational decision-making. A look at social systems through the eyes of political theories might be another avenue in creating positive change within a school community.

Research and data collections are continually being amassed concerning the issues of small school environments versus large school environments. Further study and research of this information is needed to allow school organizations to move towards the most effective environment for the children.

Practice

The data gathered for this cross-case analysis may be used to provide insight into aspects of longevity in the superintendency. Although, this study pertains to the “life space” of two long-term superintendents and may not be generalizable to others who are or will be in the superintendent’s position, it provides a perspective that may help an aspiring superintendent attain this top administrative position or help an incumbent superintendent maintain his/her tenure. It is suggested that the tenure of a superintendent may be increased by applying the following concepts: (1) adjusting to “fit” into the school system, (2) working to have good relationships and communication with the community, parents, teachers, and students, (3) being honest and doing what you say your going to do, (4) being instrumental in hiring the best staff available, and (5) working to keep a stable school board.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM FOR SUPERINTENDENTS

CONSENT FORM

General Information

You have been asked by a doctoral student in Curriculum and Educational Leadership at Oklahoma State University to be interviewed about your position as a School Superintendent.

The interview serves two purposes: (1) information collected in the interview will be used by the researcher to create a dissertation about educational administration, and (2) information collected by the researcher may be used in the scholarly publications of the researcher and/or the dissertation advisor dealing with educational leaders.

The initial interview should last from one-half to two hours and will be recorded. Initial interviews will be open ended concerning what the interviewee believes is pertinent to the superintendency, longevity, or any aspect of small school management. Follow up interviews will take place to clarify initial information attained and explore deeper into aspects of small school environment and leadership.

Pseudonyms will be assigned each superintendent interviewed. These pseudonyms will be used in all written materials dealing with interviews. Lastly, no interview will be accepted or used unless this signed consent form has been received by the researcher and filed.

Understanding

I understand that participation in this interview is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time after notifying the researcher.

I understand that the interview will be conducted according to commonly accepted research procedures and that information taken from the interview will be recorded in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

I understand that interview will not cover topics that could reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject's financial standing or employability or deal with sensitive aspects of the subject's own behavior such as illegal conduct, drug use, sexual behavior or use of alcohol.

I may contact the dissertation advisor, Dr. Kenneth Stern, Department of Curriculum and Educational Leadership, College of Education, 311 Willard Hall,

Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078; Telephone (405) 744-8929, should I wish further information about the research.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: _____ Time: _____ A.M./P.M.

Signed: _____
(signature of subject)

I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the subject before requesting the subject to sign it and provided the subject with a copy of this form.

Date: _____ Time: _____ A.M./P.M.

Signed: _____
(signature of researcher)

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

APPROVAL FORM

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 1/3/02

Date : Thursday, January 04, 2001

IRB Application No ED0163

Proposal Title: SUPERINTENDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR CAREERS: A CROSS-CASE
ANALYSIS OF TWO LONG-TERM SMALL-SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS AND THEIR
SCHOOL SYSTEMS.

Principal
Investigator(s) :

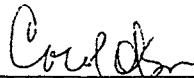
Rodney John Cox
PO Box 565
Locust Grove, OK 74352

Ken Stern
311 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) : Approved

Signature :



Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

Thursday, January 04, 2001

Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

VITA

Rodney John Cox

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: SUPERINTENDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR CAREERS: A
CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS OF TWO LONG-TERM SMALL-SCHOOL
SUPERINTENDENTS AND THEIR SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Major Field: Educational Administration

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Lancaster, California

Education: Graduated Valedictorian from Jay High School, Jay, Oklahoma, May 1981; received Associates of Arts degree from Northeastern A&M College, Miami, Oklahoma in May 1984; received Bachelor of Science in Mathematics Education from Northeastern State University in December 1985; received Masters in Science-School Counselor in May 1988; received Educational Specialist degree from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in July 1997. Completed the requirements for Doctor of Education degree with a major in Educational Administration at Oklahoma State University in May 2001.

Experience: Taught Middle School Math and coached girls varsity sports at Wyandotte, Oklahoma, August 1986 to May 1988; taught Middle School Math and coached girls varsity sports at Jay, Oklahoma, August 1988 to May 1991; taught High School Math/Computers and coached girls varsity sports at Locust Grove, Oklahoma, August 1991 to June 1994; currently Superintendent of Peggs Public School, Peggs, Oklahoma since July 1994.

Professional Membership: Cooperative Council of Oklahoma School Administrators, Oklahoma Rural Elementary School, National Association for Bilingual Education, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Council for Impacted Schools.