

FACTORS THAT INHIBIT THE LEADERSHIP OF
FIRST-TIME SUPERINTENDENTS
IN OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS

By

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

This chapter presents an introduction to the topic to be addressed in the study. Initially, background information on school superintendents, their roles, and the challenges they face is presented. The specific problem to be addressed in the study is stated, and the purpose of this study is presented. The research questions and hypotheses to be tested in this study are described in the next section. The significance of the study, plus the assumptions and limitations of this study, is discussed. Then the key terms are defined. The chapter ends with a summary.

Demands and Challenges for Superintendents

The increasingly complex environment in which public schools are embedded is radically changing the work and leadership roles of rural school superintendents. Changing characteristics of the student population, reform initiatives, the demand for increased accountability and new program requirements are changing the landscape of school leadership and influencing how leadership roles are defined (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005). Many superintendents operate public schools that face unfunded federal and state mandates, financial constraints, legal issues and the accountability movement (Brimley & Garfield, 2005). Educational reform intensifies the demand for

superintendent accountability for improved student learning as well as the knowledge for fiscal matters (Cohn, 2005). Society continues to demand accountability so superintendents must involve all shareholders in the educational process to facilitate ownership of education (Kowalski, 2000).

Inadequate or deteriorating facilities and transportation issues can become challenges, and according to Morris (2004), many rural school superintendents find themselves working to create an educational environment that can compete with private and charter schools. Morris (2004) stated that superintendents in rural schools face unique issues that can either inhibit or enhance success. Morris utilized survey research to gather data concerning the challenges faced by 120 superintendents of rural public schools in the state of Texas. Morris's work also defined how often superintendents faced each challenge, and how difficult the superintendents found the challenges to be.

As a result of these changes and challenges, today's public school superintendents must wear many hats and fill many roles. Experienced superintendents have the ability to handle a variety of changes and challenges and remain effective in their positions. In contrast, first-time superintendents may find themselves unprepared for the multitude of changes and challenges they face. This lack of preparation often inhibits the leadership of a first-time superintendent (Hoyle et al., 2005).

Every person enters a new position with a learning curve. It is important to remember that the relative isolation of rural superintendents and the fact that many first-time superintendents are not only new to their role, but also to the school district exacerbates the learning curve of a first-time superintendent (Chapman, 1997). First-time

superintendents must overcome this learning curve quickly because the reputation that evolves during the first twelve months of a superintendency is difficult to alter, and the difference between success and failure is often determined by challenges that are impractical or impossible for which to prepare. It is necessary for first-time superintendents to avoid factors that inhibit their leadership as leaders (Leithwood & Reihl, 2003).

What is effective or successful leadership as a first-time superintendent?

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) identified four conclusions about effective leadership. One conclusion states, “A core set of leadership practices form the basics of successful leadership in almost all educational contexts” (p. 3). This set of practices includes setting directions, developing people and developing the organization. Setting directions involves setting a collective vision for the future. The idea that the district is only as good as the staff reinforces the practice of developing people through intellectual stimulation, promotion and support. Developing the school as an organization is grounded in the view that the school is a professional learning community embedded in a local community context.

Longevity may also be considered a part of successful leadership. However, Czaja and Harman (1999) found that over a three-year period, from 1994 to 1997, 48% of the 1,059 superintendents studied in Texas left their position. Many researchers believe that these exiting superintendents are most evident in rural areas (Czaja & Harman, 2004; Morris, 2004).

Butera (2006) defined success in terms of longevity and interviewed superintendents who were highly regarded by a panel of consultants to boards of

education in the Long Island, New York area. Butera identified factors to which these superintendents attributed their longevity.

Longevity also leads to the creation and substantiation of change. Successful superintendents may be seen as agents of change (Walker & Pacheco, 1995). Carter and Cunningham (2001) posited that it takes a minimum of five years for superintendents to make substantive reforms a reality. However, the tenure of superintendents remains approximately six years within any particular district. Reform is just starting when many superintendents are replaced either voluntarily or involuntarily (Butera, 2006).

What factors inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents? Beverage (2003) posited many factors can potentially affect a new superintendent's leadership. Factors such as clarity in roles, expectations, and the scope of the superintendent's authority can lead to disagreements between the superintendent and school board. This relationship, the relationship between the superintendent and the school board, makes the superintendency unique among leadership positions and can also inhibit a first-time superintendent's leadership.

Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, and Sybouts (1996) identified the overlap in the relationship between the superintendent and school board. Policymaking, staff and administrator evaluation, and fiscal management are identified as areas superintendents and school board often clash. Sharing of these roles is generally acceptable. However, problems arise when the superintendent, a trained educational professional, and members of the board, who may or may not be professionally trained as educators or board members, share differences of opinions and beliefs concerning school issues (Thomas, 2001). These differences in opinion often lead to a situation that fosters inhibiting factors

for a superintendent. The school board may disagree with the superintendent's recommendations. Thus, overriding decisions and implementing strategies of their own (Thomas, 1989; Trotter & Downey, 1989). Such situations often lead to power struggles between the superintendent and the school board, and eventually to early departure or termination of the superintendent by the board (Norton et al., 1996).

Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) identified factors that inhibit superintendent leadership. This research data, from the 2000 American Association of School Administrators' (AASA) study of superintendents, suggest there are areas of concern among superintendents about the factors identified as inhibitors by the survey. Although superintendents felt they were effective in their positions, the majority of superintendents viewed school finance, too many insignificant demands placed on them by the board, the staff and the community and compliance with state mandated reforms as the most important issues and challenges facing them.

The Situation in Oklahoma

According to the Oklahoma State Department of Education Directory (2008/09), there are 540 public school districts in Oklahoma. Each year, a number of these schools are led by first-time superintendents. During school years 2003/04 through 2007/08, 258 individuals began work as first-time superintendents in an Oklahoma public school. This is an average of over 51 first-time superintendents per year and means that almost 10% of the districts in Oklahoma were led by first-time superintendents.

First-time superintendents may hold a standard or provisional certificate (Oklahoma State Department of Education-OSDE, n.d.). Provisional certificates may be

earned by candidates who hold a Master's degree and pass a national test for certification as a superintendent. Standard certificates are awarded to candidates passing the same test, but holding a Master's degree in Public School Administration (OSDE, n.d.).

These first-time superintendents are not without training and advice when accepting their first position. First-time superintendents are required by the State Department of Education to attend training sessions coordinated by the Department. During this training, first-time superintendents are assigned a mentor to assist them during their first year (OSDE, n.a.). Workshops and seminars are available to Oklahoma's first-time superintendents through the Oklahoma State School Boards Association (Oklahoma State School Boards Association-OSSBA, 2009) and the Oklahoma Center for School Business Management (Oklahoma State University-COE, 2009).

Technology based professional development, often referred to as the virtual model, allows school leaders to participate in professional develop programs at their convenience and pace (McBride, 2004). The American Association of School Administrators (2009) provides two on-line professional development programs for first-time superintendents.

Fore (1999) gave advice concerning actions first-time superintendents could take during their first year. Fore's advice includes committing to the board to communicate honestly and openly with each member; assess the board's interaction patterns; prepare a questionnaire for each board member, as well as a questionnaire for contacting local authorities in the community; and spend time with the administrative team to decide what the superintendent's relationship with them will be.

Theoretical Perspective

Leadership theory provides an appropriate framework for a study of first-time superintendents. Leadership theory research can be organized into six models: trait theory, behavioral theory, contingency theory, situational theory, transformational and transactional theory. Early research into leadership examined the traits of leaders. These traits were believed to be inherited so leaders were born and not made (Carter, 1993; Northouse, 2000).

Leadership studies generated lists of personal characteristics and factors that seemed to characterize a leader. As more and more leadership traits were added to the list, researchers shifted their focus to leadership behavior. The pervasive opinion became that effective leadership consisted of learning and displaying a prescribed set of behaviors. This belief led to a search for a style considered to be “the best” leadership style. A result of these studies was the theory that no style of leadership was effective in all situations. Thus, researchers established that it was the situation that determined the most affective style (Mazzarella & Smith, 1989; Northouse, 2000; Stogdill, 1974; Wong-Chin, 1996).

Although the trait approach has been replaced by the situational approach, the trait approach has demonstrated that leaders engage in a myriad of activities. In the 1950s, the Ohio State University Leadership Studies sought to define leadership behavior in terms of situational variables. These studies considered a leader’s interaction with their group and organization in terms of a task and relationship leadership style. As a result of these studies, the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) was developed. This questionnaire measured the behavior of leaders and was used to isolate

two fundamental dimensions of leader behavior: initiating structure and consideration for others (Halpin, 1966).

Halpin (1966), using these fundamental dimensions of leader behavior, studied 50 Ohio superintendents. Halpin found that school staff members and school board members viewed effective superintendents as having higher scores on both initiating structure and consideration for others. Ineffective superintendents were viewed as having low scores in both behaviors, especially consideration of others.

Blake and Mouton (1985) argued that a balance between the needs of the organization, as measured by the task orientation of leaders, and the needs of the individuals within the organization, as measured by the people orientation of the leaders, must be maintained. Blake and Mouton posited that the most effective leader is a leader who is high in both task orientation and people orientation. Subsequently, a nine by nine grid commonly referred to as a “Managerial Grid” was formulated.

By design, the vertical axis of the grid refers to Concern for People, while the horizontal axis corresponds to Concern for Production or task orientation. Blake and Mouton (1985) placed each dimension on a continuum from one to nine, with one being low and nine being high. The grid produced 81 potential styles. Blake and Mouton identified and described five key leadership styles according to their relative X,Y position:

1. 1,1 – Impoverished Management – exertion of minimum effort to get required work done is appropriate to sustain membership.
2. 1,9 – Country Club Management – thoughtful attention to the needs of people for satisfying relationships leads to a comfortable, friendly organization atmosphere and work tempo.

3. 5,5 – Organization Man Management – adequate organization performance is possible through balancing the necessity to get work out with maintaining a row of people at a satisfactory level.
4. 9,1 – Authority-Obedience – efficiency is a operations results from arranging conditions of work in such a way that human elements interfere to a minimum degree.
5. 9,9 – Team Management – work accomplishment from committed people: interdependence through a “common stake” in organization purpose leads to relationship of trust and respect. Of these five key positions, the Managerial Grid prescribed this 9,9 – team a management position of leadership as “the one best style” (Northouse, 2000; Blake & Mouton, 1985).

Many factors inhibiting a first-time superintendent’s success depends on the situation within the school district in which they are employed. The situation within a school can be daunting for first-time superintendents if they are unfamiliar with the potential inhibiting factors that exist. Situational leadership theory and factors related to “Concern for People” and “Concern for Production” are identifiable in this current study and are an appropriate theoretical framework for the study.

Formal Statement of the Problem

In recent years, school leadership development initiatives have been the focus of political agendas, professional conferences, and school administration programs. School leaders have more pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities than ever before in American education’s history (Cotton, 2003; DuFour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005; Easton, 2004; Harris, 2005; Pinkham, 1999). The traditional model of professional development consists of workshops and speakers (Heller, 2004; Richardson, 1998). A second model connected to school reform includes collaboration, coaching and professional learning communities (Easton, 2004).

Although many pre- and in-service growth opportunities exist for all levels of school leadership, first-time school superintendents experience varying degrees of success. In some cases, first-time school superintendents are successful and thrive, and in other cases, superintendents do not experience a great deal of success and move on.

Analyses of first-time superintendents in Oklahoma schools reveal that 61 superintendents began their first superintendency in school year 2000/2001. Five years later, when school year 2005/2006 arrived, only 37 of the 61 superintendents remained in their original position. At the beginning of school year 2001/2002, 60 superintendents began their first superintendency position. Five years later, at the beginning of school year 2006/2007, only 39 of the 60 superintendents were still in place. Similar data can be found for the superintendents who began their first superintendency in 2002/2003.

Although a smaller group of 47 superintendents, only 24 of the 47 first-time superintendents remained at the beginning of the 2007/2008 school year.

Thus, an anomaly exists. While numerous professional opportunities are available for educational leaders, first-time superintendents still face varying degrees of success in their initial leadership appointments. Several possibilities could address this anomaly. One possible explanation is the changing role of the superintendent (Cuban, 1998). Fullan (1993) identified the conflicting nature of the superintendent as leader and manager as a possible cause. A lack of clarity in roles and expectations can lead to conflict between the first-time superintendent and the school board (Beverage, 2003). Many researchers believe the rural school environment is a possible explanation (Morris, 2004). Houston (2001) believed that current training programs for superintendents are designed by looking backward instead of forward. White (1998) suggested that staff development for

first-time superintendents be implemented in order to lengthen their stay during their first superintendency.

One way to address this anomaly, the focus of this study, is to examine the factors that inhibit leadership success in rural environments.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine which factors are most problematic in inhibiting the leadership of first-time school district superintendents in Oklahoma. Building upon Morris's (2004) research, this study examines factors that inhibit the job performance of first-time superintendents in Oklahoma schools, whether these factors vary as a function of demographics, the advice that the first-time superintendents would give to others in a similar situation, and the advice first-time superintendents would give to designers of superintendent preparation programs.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

There are four research questions in the study. The first research question is:

1. What factors inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma, and do these factors correspond to the factors identified among superintendents in Texas by Morris (2004)?
2. Do demographic and employment characteristics affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first time superintendents in Oklahoma school districts?

There are 8 hypotheses associated with this research question.

Ho1: Superintendent gender does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

The corresponding research hypothesis is:

H1: Superintendent gender affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Ho2: The age of the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

The corresponding research hypothesis is:

H2: The age of the superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Ho3: The number of years the superintendent has been in their current position does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

The corresponding research hypothesis is:

H3: The number of years the superintendent has been in their current position affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Ho4: The position held before becoming a superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

The corresponding research hypothesis is:

H4: The position held before becoming a superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Ho5: The racial and ethnic background of the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

The corresponding research hypothesis is:

H5: The racial and ethnic background of the superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Ho6: The degree held by the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

The corresponding research hypothesis is:

H6: The degree held by the superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Ho7: The certification held by the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

The corresponding research hypothesis is:

H7: The certification held by the superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Ho8: The size of the district does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

The corresponding research hypothesis is:

H8: The size of the district affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

3. What advice could be given to a prospective first-time rural school district superintendent?
4. What advice could be given to designers of superintendent preparation programs?

The third and fourth research questions are descriptive in nature; therefore, no hypotheses are stated.

Procedures

The study employed survey methodology. First-time school district superintendents in Oklahoma's rural areas were invited to complete a short survey (contained in Appendix A) that requests demographic and background information as well as information on the challenges encountered as first-time superintendents and the level of difficulty encountered in meeting these challenges. The survey contained two open-ended questions designed to solicit advice the participants would give to other first-time rural school district superintendents and to designers of superintendent preparation programs. Inferential statistical analyses were performed to answer the first and second research questions, which address the challenges, faced most often and are the most difficult with which to deal. Descriptive statistical analyses, categorizing the participant's statements, were then performed to address the third and fourth research question.

Significance of the Study

The study seeks to validate the findings of previous research concerning first-time superintendents and add to the common core knowledge in the area of identifying inhibiting factors facing first-time superintendents. Such research can benefit all stakeholders served by public school systems and help continue improvements in the delicate art of leading a school community. The study provides advice to prevent first-time superintendents from making the same mistakes as their predecessors, therefore beginning their new role more confidently. As a result, first-time superintendents may experience a shorter learning curve and be able to identify and isolate inhibitors that impact their leadership. Superintendent preparation programs may benefit from the information gathered and use it in future curricula to better prepare aspiring superintendents.

Assumptions

Neuman (2000) defined assumptions as statements about the nature of things that are unable to test or observe. For the purposes of this study, the following assumptions are made:

1. All participants will answer the survey openly, honestly and objectively.
2. The experiences of rural school superintendents are unique.
3. Challenges of rural school superintendents can be identified and measured.

Limitations

Limitations are aspects of this study that may negatively affect the study, but over which the researcher has no control (Neuman, 2000). Limitations in this study include:

1. Participant responses are limited to the survey.
2. Factors that may impact the challenges faced by superintendents, such as the socio-economic characteristics of the school district and the racial breakdown of the student population, were not assessed or examined in this study.
3. The beliefs, attitudes and experiences are limited to first-time superintendents in Oklahoma.
4. Sample size is a limitation when working with a relatively small population. One hundred twenty-six first-time superintendents in Oklahoma schools for the years 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09 made up the population for this study. Responses were obtained from 68 of these first-time superintendents. The small sample size (68) accordingly limits generalizability. At the 95% confidence level, the confidence interval (or margin of error) is + or – 8.1.
5. The final limitation is the current study was cross-sectional in nature, despite the fact that the challenges faced by new superintendents may change quickly in the first years of their superintendency as they gain experience.

Definition of Terms

Superintendent. The chief executive officer of the school district. For the purpose of this study, the term is used to identify school district superintendents in the state of Oklahoma.

First-time school superintendent. Superintendents who are in their first ever position as a school district superintendent.

Rural school districts. School districts that have a growth rate of less than 20% in the number of students in membership, student membership is between 300 and the state median, or the number of students membership is less than 300 (OSDE, 2009).

Longevity. Permanence in one superintendent position.

Challenges: Situations, incidents, relationships with people or job responsibilities that confront first-time school superintendents.

Inhibit/Inhibitors: Challenges that hinder the leadership of a first-time school superintendent.

Tenure: Number of years at a single position.

Standard Certificate: Certificates awarded to candidates passing a national test for certification as a superintendent and holding a Master's degree in Public School Administration.

Provisional Certificate: Certificates earned by candidates who hold a Master's degree in any subject area and pass a national test for certification as a superintendent.

Mentor: For the purpose of this study, the term is used to identify an experienced superintendent designated as an advisor or counselor to a first-time superintendent.

Summary and Organization of the Study

This chapter presented an introduction to the study. The problem to be addressed was introduced and a brief discussion of the demands and challenges faced by superintendents, factors that could inhibit leadership for superintendents, and the specific situation in the State of Oklahoma were also included. The purpose of the study and the research questions were presented as (a) understanding the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in school districts in Oklahoma, (b) determining if demographics would influence these factors, (c) determining the advice that first-time school district superintendents would give to others in their position and (d) determining the advice that first-time school district superintendents would give to designers of superintendent preparation programs. The assumptions and limitations of this study were presented and key terms were defined. The next chapter contains a thorough review of the literature relevant to the study, and Chapter III contains the methodology to be employed to address the three research questions of this study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the literature relevant to the study. Initially, a brief history of the superintendent position is provided. The characteristics and behaviors of effective superintendents are addressed in the next section. Barriers and inhibitors of effective leaders are outlined next. Then the challenges faced by superintendents are addressed. Training programs (including pre-service and in-service programs) are discussed in the next section, and the role of tacit knowledge is presented. The chapter ends with a summary of the key findings from the literature.

History of the Superintendency

In the early years of the superintendency, school boards acted as legislative entities; therefore, superintendents were seen as assistants to the school board. Over time, the role of the superintendent changed, and school boards began to delegate more power to superintendents as superintendents gained knowledge and expertise. The position of superintendent was viewed as that of the scholarly leader until the 1900s. From the early 1900s, until just after World War I, the superintendent was viewed primarily as a business manager (Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, and Sybouts, 1996).

It was not until the Great Depression that superintendents were first viewed as educational leaders. Cuban (1998) noted that prior to the 1950s school superintendents were described as instructional supervisors, administrative chiefs, and negotiator-statesmen. This view extended until the mid 1950s when the superintendent began to be perceived as an applied social scientist. Cuban described the role of school superintendents from the 1950s to the mid-1970s as more ambiguous, including instructional, managerial, and political responsibilities. While performing the instructional role, the superintendent sets goals for the organization, establishes standards of performance for students and teachers, supervises the staff and insures curriculum and teaching approaches are consistent. As a manager, the superintendent is concerned with school board policies, such as planning, collecting and distributing information, budgeting, hiring and firing, and managing conflict. The political role refers to the superintendent's ability to transform personal and public expectation into formal policies. In this role, superintendents use their influence and authority in an effort to govern school districts.

The position has continued to evolve, and since the 1970s has included all of the above descriptors plus the position of facilitator and innovator (Kowalski, 1999). According to Wright (2002), the delegation of power to the superintendent has identified the superintendent as the executive branch and the school board as the legislative branch of school governance. In summary, the role of the superintendent has taken on more instructional components as time has passed. The role of the superintendent has also changed in the area of curriculum policy and decision making (Andero, 2000).

Furthermore, contemporary superintendents are distinguished from their predecessors by the impact of the school reform movement (Sharp & Walter, 1997; Wyks, 2004).

The historical role of the superintendent gave way to a complex and demanding position that evolved into the contemporary superintendency. This evolution is in response to increasing complexity and the changing nature of the work. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983) created concern for principals and superintendents as well as for their qualifications to manage and lead schools (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005). The importance of the role of the contemporary superintendent cannot be overestimated in supervising the educational process of the school district.

Superintendents determine the leadership of the district's staff and recommend staff members for continued employment. Superintendents are charged by law with approving all staff development initiatives supported by the district. Superintendents strive to be physically responsible to community members and accountable to both local and state officials for the educational achievement of their students (Wyks, 2004).

In an effort to provide assurance of quality, states have established policies requiring administrators to complete professional studies in order to obtain a license as a superintendent of schools (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005). Two conflicting views on professional preparation emerged as a result of this concern. The first view supports reforms to make superintendent preparation and licensing more practice based and rigorous (Cooper, Fusarelli, Jackson, & Poster, 2002; Murphy, 1994). The second view, de-regulating preparation and licensing, would enhance a local school board's opportunity for employing executives from the business world (Hess, 2003). Kowalski

(1999) posited that this position is a result of the intense criticism of public education made by political and business elites.

According to Bjork (2005), this criticism has had some effect. Nine states no longer require superintendents to possess a license. Among the 41 remaining states, 21 have provisions allowing waivers or emergency certification. Fifteen states, including Oklahoma, allow for alternative routes to licensure for superintendents (Feistritzer, 2003).

Bjork (2005) posits that analysis of the knowledge and skills required of superintendents is essential for evaluating the merits of regulating requirements for the position. Such an analysis will also guide the work of those committed to improving university-based superintendent preparation programs. Bjork employed three steps to analyze the knowledge and skills needed by superintendents. A historical analysis of the development of the superintendency was the first step. The historical analysis clarified five primary roles. These roles were 1) teacher-scholar, 2) manager, 3) democratic leader, 4) applied social scientist, and 5) communicator. The first four of these conceptualizations had been previously identified by Callahan (1966) and the fifth was identified by Kowalski (2001, 2003).

The American Superintendency 2000: A Look at the Superintendent of Education in the New Millennium (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000) produced data concerning the role conceptions associated with school superintendents. The above mentioned primary roles were tested for validity against data from The American Superintendency 2000 study. The knowledge base of these five role conceptualizations was then compared with two primary superintendent licensure standards documents developed under the auspice

of the AASA and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium: (ISLLC) Standards For School Leaders (Hoyle, 1993).

Bjork (2005) added a sixth “Multi-Role” category that includes knowledge and skills pertinent to all or nearly all of the five roles. The knowledge and skill conceptualization and the "Multi-Role” category associated with the roles of superintendents include:

1. Teacher-scholar: Pedagogy; educational psychology; curriculum; instructional supervision; staff development; educational philosophy.
2. Manager: Laws; personnel administration; finance and budget; facility development and maintenance; collective bargaining and contract maintenance; public relations.
3. Democratic Leader: Community relations; collaborative decision-making; politics.
4. Applied Social Scientist: Quantitative and qualitative research; behavioral sciences.
5. Communicator: Verbal communication; written communication; listening; public speaking; media relations.
6. Multi-role: Motivation; organizational theory; organizational change and development; leadership theory; ethical and moral administration; technology and its applications; diversity and multiple multiculturalism; human relations.

These six knowledge and role conceptualizations provide a framework not only for evaluating the merits of de-regulating requirements for entering the superintendency and

improving university-based superintendent preparation programs, but also for studying first-time superintendents and the inhibitors they face.

In summary, the role of the superintendent began as an administrative assistant and over time has become more complex, and now includes many responsibilities. In particular, the level of responsibility of the superintendent for instructional leadership has steadily increased over time. The role of the superintendent has always been important, but the contemporary superintendent is highly profiled and readily criticized.

Characteristics of Effective Leaders and Superintendents

What constitutes an effective leader and successful contemporary superintendent? Many definitions of what it means to be an effective leader can be found, and this section reviews some of these. Initially, the personality and dispositional characteristics are described, followed by an analysis of the particular skills required of superintendents.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) stated “A core set of leadership practices form the basics of successful leadership in almost all educational contexts” (p. 3). This set of practices includes setting directions, developing people and developing the organization. Setting directions involves setting a collective vision for the future. The idea that the district is only as good as the staff reinforces the practice of developing people through intellectual stimulation, promotion and support. Developing the school as an organization is grounded in the view that the school is a professional learning community embedded in a local community context.

Johnson (1996) described three core roles of superintendent leadership: (a) educational, (b) political, and (c) managerial. Johnson identified the superintendent's teaching mission as a common thread through all three of the roles. Effective superintendents utilized their teaching skills to teach others as they operate in these three core roles.

Andrews and Sonder (1987) explained that the effective instructional leader is competent in four areas. They must be a resource provider, but they must also be an instructional resource, a communicator and a visible presence. Slater (1995) noted that effective educational leaders must be able to “articulate a vision of instructional goals, follow clear standards for teacher behavior, and are out and about” (p. 45). Good leaders are passionate about the work they do. Cash (1997) suggested they are passionate about their vision, their desire for learning and the successes of their students and staff members. Cash posited that effective leaders are able to ignite a passion for learning, instill self reliance and create an investment in community and the organization.

Trigg (1997) attempted to define effective leadership in today's climate of change through a set of traits. Trigg found that no single personality type dominated within the ranks of school leaders, but that most effective educational leaders possessed the following traits: (a) honesty and integrity, (b) a clear and simple vision, (c) high expectations, and (c) courage. Trigg also posited that it is the leader's job to find solutions. The bulk of the leader's time should be spent solving problems; therefore, effective leaders are delegators and effectively distribute the responsibility to others in the organization.

Moral leadership for successful leaders was advocated by Sergiovanni (2000). Sergiovanni emphasized bringing together diverse people for a common cause by making the organization a covenant community. Covenant communities share the same ideas, principles and purpose, thereby providing a powerful source of authority for leadership. In these communities, the purpose of leadership is to create a shared followership. Therefore, effective leaders, according to Sergiovanni, function as community leaders.

Another way to view the characteristics of effective superintendents is to describe the skills that they are required to have. Sclafani (1987) identified three sets of skills: technical, conceptual and human. Technical skills utilize a specific process, procedure or technique to accomplish tasks. When a superintendent envisions the whole of the organization and the relationships of its parts, he/she is using conceptual skills. Human skills are used to shape the behavior of members of the organization.

Strategies for use of such skills were outlined by Neuman and Simmons (2000). Neuman and Simmons identified six leadership strategies used by effective superintendents:

1. Develop a shared vision
2. Determine clear priorities
3. Promote continuous professional learning
4. Link schools to community assets
5. Provide a strong accountability system
6. Re-organize the school district structure.

The work of Kouzes and Posner (1995) emphasized the importance of the connection between leaders and followers. Their research described personal best leadership cases from which they identified following five practices:

1. Challenging the process
2. Inspiring a shared vision
3. Enabling others to act
4. Modeling the way
5. Encouraging the heart.

Butera (2006) conducted a qualitative study of successful superintendents in the Long Island, New York school district. Butera defined success in terms of longevity and interviewed superintendents having many years experience. Superintendents interviewed were highly regarded by a panel of consultants to boards of education in the Long Island, New York area. He identified nine factors to which these superintendents attributed their longevity:

1. Effective communication with the board
2. Establishing oneself as trustworthy
3. Recognizing and avoiding the political pitfalls of the position
4. Adapting to board instability
5. Assuming the role of educator to the board
6. Attaining clear feedback from the board
7. A match between the superintendent and the Board of Education
8. Identifying and resolving issues facing the district
9. Establishing positive relationships with school and community groups.

Inhibitors to Leadership

The increasingly complex environment in which public schools are embedded is radically changing the work and leadership of school superintendents. Changing characteristics of the student population, reform initiatives, the demand for increased accountability and new program requirements are changing the landscape of school leadership and influencing how leadership roles are defined (Hoyle et al., 2005). Superintendents operate public schools systems that face unfunded federal and state mandates, continuing financial and legal issues and the accountability movement. Inadequate or deteriorating facilities and transportation issues also continue to be problematic. Today's superintendents are faced with a multitude of challenges that may be organizational, political, or instructional in nature (Kowalski, 2000).

Glass et al. (2000) identified 28 factors that inhibit the success of superintendents as leaders. School superintendents, especially first-time superintendents who are endeavoring to set direction for their district, develop the district employees and positively develop the school as an organization, are inhibited by these factors. Analysis of data from the 2000 American Association of School Administrators' (AASA) study of superintendents suggests that superintendents are concerned about the factors identified by the survey as inhibitors.

Although superintendents in this study felt they were effective in their positions, the majority of superintendents viewed school finance, too many insignificant demands placed on them by the board, the staff and the community, and compliance with state mandated reforms as the most important issues and challenges facing them (Glass et al., 2000).

Beverage (2003) replicated the quantitative survey research done by the AASA in 2000. Beverage studied the factors that inhibit new superintendents in Virginia during the 2001 / 2002 school year. The study identified factors that compare favorably with the responses given by the participants in the AASA study. These findings illustrate the uniqueness of the superintendency and that superintendents use a variety of methodologies and strategies to facilitate success during their first year as superintendent. Beverage identified the most important of these as keys to success including, (a) effective communication and working with the school board, (b) accessibility to all constituents, (c) establishing trust within the organization and (d) having a broad base of experience.

Superintendent Challenges

Research identified the primary roles and responsibilities of superintendents (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; English, 2005; McAdams, 1995; Spillane & Regnier, 1998). Other authors, such as Konnert and Augenstein, (1995) and Glass et al. (2000) identified the position by the challenges superintendents confront. McAdams (1995) delineated the challenges of the superintendent into five broad areas: (a) school finance and business operations; (b) school board relations; (c) instructional leadership; (d) community relations; and (e) human resource management. These roles have become the basis for examining the superintendency. Contemporary superintendents function as teachers, interpreters of policy, managers, catalysts for good educational reform, and directors and builders (Norton, et al., 1996). Often referred to as a three ring circus, the superintendency has grown into an extremely complex but paramount position. Norton

(1996) stated, “The superintendent is the lightning rod for the school district; lightning rods were designed to be placed where they could attract attention” (p. 19).

Morris (2004) identified three primary components associated with the challenges facing superintendents: internal, external and educational challenges.

Internal Challenges

Components such as finances, facilities, transportation, personnel, policy, development of the school’s organizational culture and the relationship between superintendent and school board are all part of the internal challenges faced by superintendents. Wright (2002) contended that due to the blurring of the boundaries of job responsibilities, the relationship between superintendents and school board members has historically been a point of contention.

Finance is the biggest problem facing superintendents (Brimley & Garfield, 2005; Glass et al., 2000). Furthermore, rural schools do not have the tax base of larger schools. Therefore, some people are led to believe that small schools are cost prohibitive (Lawrence, Binger, Hill, Hoffman, Howley, Mitchell, Rudolph, and Washor, 2002). Dewees and Earthman (2000) reported that problems associated with building structures, environmental conditions and accesses to technology elements were seen as issues by a large number of rural school districts. All schools have the same responsibility to educate students, and often rural schools are asked to educate students for the 21st century despite dilapidated facilities.

Schools have a distinct culture, and today’s superintendents are expected to lead the way in creating that culture. The superintendent’s role has become one of multi-

faceted leadership. This leadership role includes three concepts: political leader, educational leader, and manager leader. For a superintendent to successfully navigate the responsibility of these three leadership roles, he/she must be knowledgeable of many areas of school leadership (Owen & Ovando, 2000).

In regard to facilities, the school is often the center of the community and school superintendents must be able to address facility issues. Schools and churches are usually the only places in the community with an auditorium for meetings or a gymnasium for indoor activities (Morris & Potter, 1999). But deciding to repair, reconstruct or replace outdated facilities can often turn community members against each other (Deweese & Earthman, 2000).

External Challenges

Federal and state mandates, poverty, governance, legal issues and the superintendent's responsibility as a community builder are all components of the external challenges faced by superintendents (Morris, 2004). Lawrence et al. (2002) discussed the issues related to transportation in schools, especially rural schools. Increased fuel prices, increased bus prices, the need for certified bus drivers and the maintenance of buses are just some of the challenges faced by superintendents.

Educational Challenges

The third component identified by Morris (2004) concerns the educational challenges faced by superintendents. Topics such as the standards and accountability movement, teacher recruitment and retention, the superintendent as a change agent and

superintendent turnover are all portions of this third component. Morris and Potter (1999) found that rural school districts are less bureaucratic than urban districts. Urban schools tend to have an assistant superintendent to oversee matters of personnel. It is usual in rural schools for there to be only one level of administration. That one level is the superintendent. Superintendents are responsible for increased number of activities generally associated with the personnel office. These activities may include strategic planning for the district, recruitment and selection of employees, orientation of new employees in working with compensation issues, and collective bargaining in legal issues.

Summary

Although every person enters a new position with a learning curve, the relative isolation of the superintendency and the fact that many first-time superintendents are new not only to their role, but also to the school district, exacerbates the learning curve of a first-time superintendent. First-time superintendents must quickly overcome this learning curve. The reputation that evolves during the first 12 months of a superintendency is difficult to alter, and the difference between success and failure for first-time superintendents is often determined by challenges for which preparation is impractical or impossible. (Chapman, 1997).

In some cases, departure from the position of superintendents is traumatic, both professionally and personally. Polka and Litchka (2008) described this condition as the "Professional Victim's Syndrome." They used a mixed method approach to ascertain the issues that have caused great emotional and economic suffering to former school

superintendents in New York and Georgia as well as the behaviors that contributed to the superintendent's ability to overcome the trauma associated with the loss of a superintendent's position. Polka and Litchka found that of the 845 superintendents completing an initial survey, 50 stated they were suffering from "Professional Victim's Syndrome." Polka and Litchka conducted face to face in-depth interviews with 30 of the 50 superintendents, and found that many had never recovered from the trauma of their previous tenure as a superintendent.

Pre-Service and In-Service Programs for Superintendents

There is little literature focusing only on preparation programs for superintendents. Most of the works published combine the work of the superintendents, principal and other types of administration. Glass et al. (2000) posited that the superintendency of the 21st century is changing in skills required and the arena in which those skills are practiced. New superintendents will spend more time working with community groups, responding to state mandated assessment programs, and acting as champions of public education in the face of school choice, school vouchers, privatization of schools and home schooling.

According to Glass et al. (2000), preparing superintendents for the future should be a much higher priority for states, higher education institutions and for the education profession itself. The study also found that superintendents perceive their preparation programs as adequate. However, this response was in regard to only past and present preparation programs, not for the program needs of the future.

In a study of the challenges faced by New Jersey superintendents, Wyks (2004) found that modification of preparation programs might indeed better prepare individuals for some of the identified challenges in the role of superintendent, but it is unreasonable to expect that preparation programs can serve as a panacea for training. Wyks' findings recommended practical application of theory, skills specific training, professional relationships, capitalizing on the experiences of colleagues and brainstorming solutions to common problems as ways in which to improve leadership.

The Role of Tacit Knowledge

Current pre-service and in-service programs for first-time superintendents are based on explicit knowledge theory. Explicit knowledge theory seeks to teach and train future and first-time superintendents through higher education curriculum provided to all aspiring or first-time superintendents. Explicit knowledge can easily be transmitted to others and assumes the useful knowledge of individuals can be articulated and made explicit through formal language. It can also be processed and stored. It includes such things as mathematical expressions, specifications and materials in operating manuals and believes knowledge can be explained by individuals, though effort and some forms of assistance may be required to help individuals articulate what they know (Sanchez, 2004).

Accompanying the view that knowledge can be explicit and managed in a similar way is the belief that new knowledge can be created through a structured and scientific learning process. Experiments and other forms of structured learning processes can be designed to fill important knowledge deficiencies (Clark, 2004; Sanchez, 1997).

On the other hand, tacit knowledge theory is defined as knowledge that is uniquely personal and attained through experience. The study of tacit knowledge has been applied to a number of disciplines in the social sciences and is utilized in the military, sales and business. Tacit knowledge differs greatly from "explicit knowledge." Tacit knowledge is the belief that knowledge is personal in nature and is, therefore, difficult to extract from the heads of individuals. It is embedded in individual experience, and many times involves intangible factors such as personal beliefs, perspective and an individual's value system. It may also contain subjective insights, intuitions and hunches. Tacit knowledge is, therefore, more difficult to articulate than explicit knowledge (Sanchez, 2004).

Tacit knowledge is divided into two dimensions, (1) the procedural and technical and (2) the cognitive dimension. The procedural or technical dimension encompasses the kind of informal "know-how" a craftsman develops over years of experience. However, many craftsmen have difficulty articulating the technical or scientific principles of his or her craft. Personal insights, intuition, hunches and inspiration derived from bodily experience fall into this dimension. The cognitive dimension consists of beliefs, values, emotions and mental models so ingrained in individuals that they are taken for granted. Although they cannot be articulated very easily, this dimension of tacit knowledge shapes the way people perceive the world around them (Clark, 2004).

Tacit knowledge provides a promising line of study in recent leadership literature (Sanchez, 2004). Lane (2002) studied the challenges and tacit knowledge acquisition of beginning superintendents in the small rural school districts in the state of Washington. Lane's exploratory case study drew three conclusions:

1. Tacit knowledge is developed by beginning superintendents and becomes part of the problem-solving strategy when faced with challenges.
2. Tacit knowledge items regarding the relationship with the school board members are of high importance to beginning superintendents
3. Beginning superintendents face common challenges in their work. Lane discovered that central themes of challenges in the district studied were very similar.

All superintendents deal with school board members, address personnel issues, communicate with the community, and assume ultimate responsibility for instructional programs. Lane posited that program development for superintendents should include real-life simulations or field based work to enhance the development of procedural knowledge. An awareness of how to problem solve challenging situations increases the level of useful tacit knowledge utilized by the superintendent (Lane, 2002).

Gensch (2006) examined the ways first-time and experienced superintendents worked through their first year in a new superintendency and found differences in the way first-time superintendents and experienced superintendents worked through their first year in a new district. Experienced superintendents in the study designed and publicly shared entry plans that described their activities for the first few months they were on the job. First-time superintendents did not implement entry or transition plans.

First-time superintendents seemed to focus on learning the tasks required for the job, while the experienced superintendents interviewed spent more time “getting the big picture.” Heifetz and Linsky (2002) contrasted these two positions as “being on the dance floor” and “being in the balcony.” The experienced superintendents also spent more time

than first-time superintendents in collaborative goal setting, focused more on student achievement and reportedly had school boards who expected higher student achievement. Experienced superintendents shifted resources from the ineffective programs to support achievement and instructional goals (Gensch, 2006).

Finally, experienced superintendents perceived no differences between how they worked through their first superintendency and subsequent superintendencies. This lack of perceived differences contradicted remarks made about what these superintendents had learned from prior experiences (Gensch, 2006).

The AASA sponsored a study of the superintendency in 1992 and again in 2000 (Glass et al, 2000). These studies explored the criteria used by school boards to evaluate superintendents. These criteria included board/superintendent relations, management functions, community relations, budget development and leadership/knowledge. Boards of Education possess policies for the evaluation of the superintendent; however, the AASA studies suggested that the evaluation criteria seem to be based on the tacit knowledge of both the board and the superintendent (Nestor-Baker & Hoy, 2001). Receiving successful evaluations as a superintendent appears to be connected to how well the superintendent understands and acts upon the tacit knowledge of the board and the community.

These findings suggest that superintendent success may be linked to acquiring and using tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge assumes that the knowledge needed by first-time superintendents to overcome inhibitors to their leadership remains in the heads of superintendents who have overcome those inhibitors. Knowledge management theory

indicates that first-time superintendents will share similar beliefs concerning those factors that have inhibited their leadership.

Chapter Summary

The role of the superintendent changed substantially over time from mere administrative assistant to the school board to the individual with ultimate accountability for education in a school district. Various authors have addressed the personality and dispositional characteristics of effective superintendents (Andrews & Sonder, 1987; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). In terms of the specific skills that superintendents must possess, technical skills, conceptual skills, people skills, communication skills, and conflict resolution skills are identified for their importance (Butera, 2006; Scalfani, 1987).

Even when a superintendent possesses these characteristics and skills, there are factors that can inhibit and challenge effective leadership. Changing characteristics of the student population, unfunded initiatives for reform, increased accountability, and legislative changes all make the superintendent's task more difficult (Hoyle et al., 2005). In relevance to this study, research into the challenges inhibiting the effectiveness of superintendents by Glass et al. (2000) and Morris (2004) provide the most important research on the superintendency.

For a first-time superintendent, especially one in a rural school district, these challenges may be particularly daunting. Morris (2004) grouped the challenges faced by superintendents into internal, external and educational challenges, and prior research supports each of these categories.

Although training programs are available for superintendents, they are inadequate for providing first-time superintendents with the skills they need to address these challenges. The next chapter presents the methodology to be employed to address the research questions of the current study relating to (a) the specific challenges for first-time superintendents, (b) the level of difficulty first-time superintendents experience, and (c) recommendations for first-time school district superintendents with no prior experience as a superintendent.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine which factors are most inhibiting the leadership of first-time school district superintendents in Oklahoma, and whether these factors vary as a function of demographics. The advice first-time superintendents could give to others in a similar situation and what advice could be given to designers of superintendent preparation programs will also be addressed.

This chapter presents the methodology to be employed to address the four research questions of this study. After the restatement of the research questions, the research design for this study will be described. The participants in the study and the survey instrument will be discussed. The specific procedures to be followed, including the data collection and data analysis plan are presented next, and the chapter ends with a summary.

Research Questions

As noted in Chapter 1, there are four specific research questions in this study. The first research question is:

1. What factors inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma, and do these factors correspond to the factors identified among superintendents in Texas by Morris (2004)?

The second research question is:

2. Do demographic and employment characteristics affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first time superintendents in Oklahoma school districts?

There are 8 null hypotheses and 8 alternative research hypotheses associated with this research question.

Ho1: Superintendent gender does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

H1: Superintendent gender affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

Ho2: The age of the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

H2: The age of the superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

Ho3: The number of years the superintendent has been in their current position does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

H3: The number of years the superintendent has been in their current position affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

Ho4: The position held before becoming a superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

H4: The position held before becoming a superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

Ho5: The racial and ethnic background of the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

H5: The racial and ethnic background of the superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

Ho6: The degree held by the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

H6: The degree held by the superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

Ho7: The certification held by the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

H7: The certification held by the superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

Ho8: The size of the district does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

H8: The size of the district affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma?

The third research question examines the superintendents' opinions regarding how other first-time rural school district superintendents may be able to overcome some of the factors that inhibit leadership:

3. What advice could be given to a prospective first-time rural school district superintendent?

The fourth and final research question solicits the superintendents' thoughts about possible improvements to superintendent preparation programs:

4. What advice could be given to designers of superintendent preparation programs?

The third and fourth research questions are descriptive in nature; therefore, no hypotheses are stated.

Research Design

The study employed survey methodology. Survey research involves asking questions of a sample of individuals who are representative of the population being studied. Survey research may be used to describe, compare and/or correlate data (Creswell, 2003). Although survey research methods are some of the oldest techniques known, many authors and researchers emphasize that survey research is valuable because it can be used to quantify statistics and interpret variables in the study (Neuman, 2000).

First-time school district superintendents in Oklahoma were invited to complete a short survey (see Appendix A) that requests demographic and background information as well as information on the challenges encountered by first-time superintendents and the level of difficulty encountered in meeting these challenges. The survey contains two open-ended questions designed to solicit advice that the participants would give to other

first-time rural school district superintendents and to designers of superintendent preparation programs.

Instrument Design

A modified version of the survey instrument used by Morris in his study of first-time rural superintendents in Texas was used to gather the information for this study (see Appendix A). The Morris instrument was tested for reliability and validity by a panel of 10 experts. The experts chosen were both current and former superintendents, whose first superintendency was in a rural school district. The panel completed the survey and made suggestions to improve the survey instrument's reliability. The panel provided information as to the clarity, understandability and readability of the survey instrument. This information was used to revise the survey so it became a useful tool in educational research. A Cronbach's alpha was calculated to measure internal consistency and to assure that survey items were measuring the same construct. The Cronbach's alpha determined the reliability coefficient to be .89.

The first part of the survey consisted of an assessment of the demographic and background characteristics of the participants including gender, age, years in the present position, position held prior to the current position, years as a superintendent, racial/ethnic category, educational attainment, certification level, school size, and overall rating of superintendent leadership. The second part of the survey consisted of an assessment of the frequency with which each participant has faced each of the 14 potential challenges and an assessment of the extent of the challenge caused by each factor. In addition, the survey contained two open-ended questions designed to solicit

advice that the participants would give to other first-time rural school district superintendents and to designers of superintendent preparation programs.

Sampling Procedures

A stratified random sampling process was used in the research. A stratified sample is the process of selecting the sample so that subgroups in the population are represented in the sample in the same proportion they exist in the population (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Gay and Airasian explained the following steps used in the stratification sampling process:

1. Identify and define the population.
2. Determine the desired sample size.
3. Identify the variable and subgroups for which to guarantee an appropriate and equal representation.
4. Classify all members of the population as members of one of the identified subgroups.
5. Randomly select an appropriate number of individuals from each of the subgroups, appropriate in this case meaning an equal number of individuals (p.127).

Superintendents chosen for this study met the following criterion: Participants were selected from the population of first-time superintendents in a rural Oklahoma public school during school years of 2006/2007, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009.

Data Collection

Surveys were made available to superintendents through the mail and on-line. To maintain confidentiality, superintendents surveyed were assigned a random number known only to the researcher. Surveys returned were numbered so the researcher could account for the return rate. Follow-up letters were sent by email to participants who did not return the survey within a three-week period. Phone calls were made to participants who did not respond after one month. The cover letter (see Appendix B) sent to all potential respondents explained this procedure.

Data Analysis

A combination of descriptive, inferential statistics and quantitative data analysis techniques were used in the study. All inferential analyses were performed using two-tailed tests and an alpha level of .05. Initially, descriptive statistics were computed and presented for the demographic and background variables of gender, age, years in the present position, position held prior to the current position, years as a superintendent, racial/ethnic category, educational attainment, certification level, school size, and overall rating of superintendent leadership.

The first research question of this study was: What factors inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma, and do these factors correspond to the factors identified among superintendents in Texas by Morris (2004)? Inferential statistical analyses (i.e. means and standard deviations) were computed to determine which challenges were faced most often and which were most difficult. These

values were then compared to the results from the Morris study to determine the level of correspondence between the two studies.

The second research question was: Do demographic and employment characteristics affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first time superintendents in Oklahoma school districts? There are 8 null hypotheses and 8 hypotheses associated with this research question.

Ho1: Superintendent gender does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

H1: Superintendent gender affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

In order to address this hypothesis, Mann-Whitney tests were performed comparing males and females in terms of the frequency with which each of the 14 challenges were faced. Mann-Whitney tests were performed comparing males and females in terms of the level of challenge presented by each of the 14 potential challenges. Mann-Whitney tests are appropriate for assessing whether two independent samples of observations have equally large values.

Ho2: The age of the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

H2: The age of the superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Spearman correlation coefficients, a non-parametric measure of statistical dependence between two variables, were computed between the ages of the respondents and the frequency with which each challenge was faced. Spearman correlation coefficients were

computed between the ages of the respondents and the level of challenge posed by each potentially inhibiting factor for this hypothesis.

Ho3: The number of years the superintendent has been in their current position does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

H3: The number of years the superintendent has been in their current position affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Spearman correlation coefficients were computed between the number of years the superintendent has been in their current position and the frequency with which each challenge was faced. Spearman correlation coefficients were then computed between the number of years the superintendent has been in their current position and the level of challenge posed by each potentially inhibiting factor for this hypothesis.

Ho4: The position held before becoming a superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

H4: The position held before becoming a superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Kruskal Wallis tests were computed comparing superintendents who held various positions before becoming a superintendents in terms of the frequency with which each challenge was faced. Kruskal Wallis tests were then computed between the positions held by the respondents before becoming a superintendents and the level of challenge posed

by each potentially inhibiting factor for this hypothesis. Kruskal-Wallis tests are appropriate because it is a method for testing equality of population medians among groups.

Ho5: The racial and ethnic background of the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

H5: The racial and ethnic background of the superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Kruskal Wallis tests were performed comparing the participants in the various racial and ethnic groups in terms of the frequency with which each challenge was faced. Kruskal Wallis tests were then computed between the racial and ethnic background of the respondents and the level of challenge posed by each potentially inhibiting factor for this hypothesis.

Ho6: The degree held by the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

H6: The degree held by the superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Spearman correlation coefficients were computed between the degrees held by the respondents and the frequency with which each challenge was faced. Spearman correlation coefficients were computed between the degrees held by the respondents and the level of challenge posed by each potentially inhibiting factor for this hypothesis.

Ho7: The certification held by the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

H7: The certification held by the superintendent affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Mann-Whitney tests were performed comparing those participants with a standard certification to those with an alternative certification in terms of the frequency with which each challenge was faced. Mann Whitney tests were then be computed between the certifications of the respondents and the level of challenge posed by each potentially inhibiting factor for this hypothesis.

Ho8: The size of the district does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

H8: The size of the district affects the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Spearman correlation coefficients were computed between the size of the school and the frequency with which each challenge was faced. Spearman correlation coefficients were then computed between the size of the school and the level of challenge posed by each potentially inhibiting factor for the last hypothesis.

The third research question of this study is: What advice could be given to a first-time rural school district superintendent with no prior experience as a superintendent?

The fourth research question is: What advice could be given to designers of superintendent preparation programs? These research questions were addressed by descriptively categorizing the participants' statements using the following techniques.

Participant responses were placed into one Microsoft Word document. Responses were identified by the number assigned to them by the researcher. Numbers assigned were known only to the researcher. Each response was read and analyzed in an effort to identify main ideas in the respondents own words. Main ideas were then analyzed for their similarity to the main ideas of other respondents. This technique included searching for words which were synonymous and searching for main ideas which relate to other main ideas: such as “estimate of needs”, “working budget” and “financial management skills” all relating to finance.

A word search using Microsoft Word was then performed to identify each time a main idea or an idea related to a main idea could be located. The words of the respondents were then use to identify a theme that best illustrated the main ideas mentioned most.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the methodology to be employed to address the four research questions of this study. The research design was presented and the participants and survey were discussed. The specific procedures to be followed, including the data collection and data analysis plans, were reviewed. The next chapter presents the results of the analyses performed to address the research questions of this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine which factors are most problematic in inhibiting the leadership of first-time rural school district superintendents in Oklahoma and whether these factors vary as a function of demographics. The advice first-time superintendents would give to others in a similar situation and what advice could be given to designers of superintendent preparation programs were also addressed. To achieve this purpose four research questions were posted in Chapter I:

1. What factors inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma, and do these factors correspond to the factors identified among superintendents in Texas by Morris (2004)?
2. Do demographic and employment characteristics affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first time superintendents in Oklahoma school districts?
3. What advice could be given to a prospective first-time rural school district superintendent?
4. What advice could be given to designers of superintendent preparation programs?

The current chapter presents the results of the analyses performed to answer these four research questions. Initially, descriptive statistics are presented for the demographic and

background characteristics of the participants. The results related to each research question are discussed, and the chapter ends with a summary of findings.

Sample Description

During 2009/2010 an attempt was made to contact the 126 first-time Oklahoma school superintendents from school years 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09.

In 2006/07 there were 32 first-time superintendents. Three of the 32 had moved to another school to become superintendent. They were located at their new school and asked to respond to the survey. Two superintendents, who had left their position, could not be located and have apparently left school administration. Responses were received from 16 superintendents. Fourteen superintendents were contacted but chose not to respond.

In 2007/08 there were 31 first-time superintendents. Five superintendents had already moved to other schools. They were located at their new school and asked to respond to the survey. Three superintendents had left their jobs and apparently school administration. Responses were received from 14 superintendents and 14 superintendents chose not to respond.

In 2008/09 there were 63 first-time superintendents. One had already moved to a different school but was located at the new school and asked to respond to the survey. Four superintendents had left their job and apparently school administration. Responses were received from 38 superintendents; 21 superintendents did not respond. Thus, the final sample size for the current study was 68. This is a response rate of 54%.

Descriptive statistics for the demographic and background variables are shown in Table 1 for the categorical variables and Table 2 for the continuous variables. The majority of the participants were male (77.9%) and Caucasian (91.2%). Most of the participants had received a master's degree (88.2%), with 11.8% having received a doctorate. Nearly all of the participants (94.1%) had undergone standard certification processes. In terms of the participants' self-ratings of their first tenure as superintendent, nearly half (47.1%) rated it as very successful, with 48.5% rating it as somewhat successful and 2.9% rating it as somewhat unsuccessful. None of the participants rated their first tenure as unsuccessful. The average age of the superintendents was 48.40 ($SD = 7.49$ years). The participants had been in the present position for an average of 2.37 years ($SD = 1.02$ years), and had an average of 944.51 students ($SD = 1,345.70$) in their first tenure.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Categorical Superintendent Demographic and Background Characteristics

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 15 | 22.1 |
| Male | 53 | 77.9 |
| Ethnicity | | |
| Native American | 5 | 7.4 |
| African American | 1 | 1.5 |
| Caucasian | 62 | 91.2 |
| Highest Degree Attained | | |
| Master's | 60 | 88.2 |
| Doctorate | 8 | 11.8 |
| Certification Type | | |
| Standard | 64 | 94.1 |
| Alternative | 3 | 4.4 |
| Other | 1 | 1.5 |
| Self-rating of first tenure | | |
| Very successful | 32 | 47.1 |
| Somewhat successful | 33 | 48.5 |
| Somewhat unsuccessful | 2 | 2.9 |
| Missing | 1 | 1.5 |

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Superintendent Demographic and Background Characteristics

| Variable | Mean | SD |
|------------------------------------|--------|---------|
| Age | 48.40 | 7.49 |
| Years in the present position | 2.37 | 1.02 |
| Number of students at first tenure | 944.51 | 1345.70 |

Research Question One

The first research question of this study was: What factors inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma, and do these factors correspond to the factors identified among superintendents in Texas by Morris (2004)? In the current study and in the Morris study, both the level of challenge (from least challenging to most challenging) and the frequency of challenge (from never to frequently) were examined. In addressing the second part of the research question, first the results from the current study are provided, followed by a comparison to the results from the Morris study.

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics for the level of challenge presented by each of the 15 challenges included in the current study, ranked by level of challenge with the most challenging factors listed first. The most challenging factor faced by the

superintendents in this sample was personnel issues ($M = 3.49$, $SD = .61$), followed by superintendent/board relations ($M = 3.34$, $SD = .73$), facility issues ($M = 3.32$, $SD = .74$), curricular concerns ($M = 3.25$, $SD = .74$), and state and federal mandates ($M = 3.25$, $SD = .70$).

In the Morris (2003) study, among the factors shared between the two studies, those that posed the greatest challenges to superintendents were: personnel issues, state and federal mandates, standardization and accountability, and facilities. Several of these factors were common to both the current study and the Morris study: personnel issues, state and federal mandates, and facilities. Personnel issues were the factor that posed the greatest challenge in both studies. State and federal mandates was the second most challenging factor in the Morris study but the fifth most challenging factor in the current study. In the current study, superintendent/board relations were the second most challenging factor, while in the Morris study superintendent/board relations were the tenth most challenging factor. Challenges faced by facilities were the third most challenging factor in the current study and fourth most challenging in the Morris study.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Rating of Superintendent Challenges Ranked by Level of Challenge

| Challenge | Mean | SD |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|
| Personnel Issues | 3.49 | .61 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | 3.34 | .73 |
| Facility Issues | 3.32 | .74 |
| Curricular Concerns | 3.25 | .74 |
| State/Federal Mandates | 3.25 | .70 |
| Standardization/Accountability | 3.10 | .74 |
| Legal Issues | 3.10 | .87 |
| Policy | 2.96 | .87 |
| Other | 2.87 | 1.30 |
| Community Development | 2.82 | .76 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | 2.66 | .66 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | 2.63 | .90 |
| Culture Development | 2.49 | .94 |
| Government Issues | 2.19 | .88 |
| Gender Issues | 1.68 | .76 |

Note. Challenges were rated on a scale from 1 = *least challenging* to 4 = *most challenging*.

The factor that posed the lowest level of challenge to the superintendents in the current study, by a substantial margin, was gender issues ($M = 1.68$, $SD = .76$). Other factors that posed a relatively low level of challenge were government issues ($M = 2.19$, $SD = .88$), culture development ($M = 2.49$, $SD = .94$), teacher retention and recruitment ($M = 2.63$, $SD = .90$), and extracurricular and athletic concerns ($M = 2.66$, $SD = .66$). In terms of the factors that were least challenging, both the current study and the Morris study found that gender issues were the least challenging, with teacher retention and recruitment and cultural development also rated as relatively unchallenging in both studies.

Table 4 shows descriptive statistics for the items rated in terms of the frequency of the challenge (as opposed to the level of the challenge). The most frequently encountered challenges in the current study were facility issues ($M = 2.96$, $SD = .84$), state and federal mandates ($M = 2.81$, $SD = .93$), “other” challenges ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.39$), and personnel issues ($M = 2.77$, $SD = .89$). In the Morris (2003) study, standardization and accountability, personnel, state and federal mandates, and facilities factors were the challenges faced most frequently. Thus, the results from the current study and the Morris study concurred that facilities issues, state and federal mandates, and personnel issues presented frequent challenges.

In the current study, the least commonly experienced challenges were related to gender issues ($M = 1.14$, $SD = .46$), teacher retention and recruitment ($M = 1.48$, $SD = .64$), government issues ($M = 2.13$, $SD = .92$), and culture development. Similarly, the

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Rating of Superintendent Challenges Ranked by Frequency of Challenge

| Challenge | Mean | SD |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|
| Facility Issues | 2.96 | .84 |
| State/Federal Mandates | 2.81 | .93 |
| Other | 2.78 | 1.39 |
| Personnel Issues | 2.77 | .89 |
| Curricular Concerns | 2.58 | .92 |
| Standardization/Accountability | 2.55 | .89 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | 2.55 | .73 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | 2.42 | .93 |
| Community Development | 2.37 | 1.04 |
| Legal Issues | 2.31 | .91 |
| Policy | 2.23 | .86 |
| Culture Development | 2.15 | 1.15 |
| Government Issues | 2.13 | .92 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | 1.48 | .64 |
| Gender Issues | 1.14 | .46 |

Note. Challenges were rated on a scale with the following points: 1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *often*, 4 = *regularly*.

least frequently encountered challenges for the sample from the Morris (2003) study were gender issues, culture development, teacher recruitment and retention, and government. Therefore, the four factors that presented the least common challenges were shared between the two studies.

In summary, the comparison between the current study and the Morris (2003) study indicated that:

1. Personnel issues were the factor that posed the greatest challenge in both studies.
2. State and federal mandates and facilities challenges were rated as presenting a high level of challenge in both studies.
3. Superintendent/board relations were rated as substantially more challenging in the current study than the Morris study.
4. The results from both studies indicated that gender issues were the least challenging, with teacher retention and recruitment and cultural development also rated as unchallenging.
5. The current study and the Morris study were in agreement that facilities issues, state and federal mandates, and personnel issues presented frequent challenges.
6. In terms of the challenges faced least frequently, both studies were in agreement that gender issues, culture development, teacher recruitment and retention, and government were not commonly encountered.

Research Question Two

The second research question was: Do demographic and employment characteristics affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first time superintendents in

Oklahoma school districts? There are 8 null hypotheses associated with this research question. The first null hypothesis was:

Ho1: Superintendent gender does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Mann-Whitney tests were performed comparing males and females in terms of the level of challenge and frequency with which each of the 14 challenges was faced.

The mean level of challenge as a function of gender and the results of the Mann-Whitney tests are shown in Table 5. The only difference between males and females in terms of the level of challenge was for the “other” factor, $z = -2.23$, $p = .026$. The means indicated that males ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.29$) felt that “other” factors posed a greater challenge than females ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.29$).

Table 6 shows the mean frequency of challenge as a function of gender and the results of the Mann-Whitney tests. There was one statistically significant difference between males and females: males rated factors related to facilities as occurring more frequently ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .84$) than did females ($M = 2.53$, $SD = .74$), $z = -2.40$, $p = .016$.

The second null hypothesis was:

Ho2: The age of the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Table 5

Rating of Level of Superintendent Challenges as a Function of Gender

| Challenge | <u>Females</u> (<i>n</i> = 15) | | <u>Males</u> (<i>n</i> = 53) | | <i>z</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | | |
| Policy | 3.27 | .80 | 2.87 | .88 | -1.54 | .124 |
| Personnel Issues | 3.47 | .64 | 3.49 | .61 | -.12 | .906 |
| Facility Issues | 3.33 | .72 | 3.32 | .75 | -.01 | .994 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | 2.73 | .80 | 2.64 | .62 | -.12 | .908 |
| Curricular Concerns | 3.20 | .77 | 3.26 | .74 | -.29 | .773 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | 2.47 | .99 | 2.68 | .87 | -.87 | .382 |
| State/Federal Mandates | 3.27 | .70 | 3.25 | .70 | -.09 | .929 |
| Standardization/Accountability | 3.13 | .64 | 3.09 | .77 | -.06 | .949 |
| Culture Development | 2.67 | .98 | 2.43 | .93 | -.95 | .341 |
| Community Development | 2.87 | .83 | 2.80 | .75 | -.06 | .953 |
| Gender Issues | 1.60 | .83 | 1.70 | .75 | -.67 | .506 |
| Government Issues | 2.33 | .72 | 2.15 | .92 | -.85 | .397 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | 3.07 | .80 | 3.42 | .69 | -1.58 | .114 |
| Legal Issues | 3.20 | .77 | 3.08 | .90 | -.34 | .737 |
| Other | 4.00 | .00 | 2.45 | 1.29 | -2.23 | .026 |

Notes. Challenges were rated on a scale from 1 = *least challenging* to 4 = *most challenging*. *z* values are the result of Mann-Whitney tests.

Table 6

Rating of Frequency of Superintendent Challenges as a Function of Gender

| Challenge | <u>Females</u> (<i>n</i> = 15) | | <u>Males</u> (<i>n</i> = 53) | | <i>z</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | | |
| Policy | 2.07 | .70 | 2.27 | .90 | -.64 | .519 |
| Personnel Issues | 3.00 | .88 | 2.71 | .89 | -1.17 | .244 |
| Facility Issues | 2.53 | .74 | 3.08 | .84 | -2.40 | .016 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | 2.40 | .83 | 2.43 | .96 | -.04 | .968 |
| Curricular Concerns | 2.73 | 1.03 | 2.54 | .90 | -.56 | .579 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | 1.73 | .88 | 1.41 | .54 | -1.24 | .214 |
| State/Federal Mandates | 2.67 | .90 | 2.85 | .94 | -.56 | .573 |
| Standardization/Accountability | 2.47 | .99 | 2.58 | .87 | -.48 | .631 |
| Culture Development | 2.07 | 1.10 | 2.17 | 1.17 | -.27 | .788 |
| Community Development | 2.00 | .93 | 2.48 | 1.06 | -1.56 | .119 |
| Gender Issues | 1.07 | .26 | 1.16 | .50 | -.57 | .566 |
| Government Issues | 1.93 | .96 | 2.19 | .91 | -1.02 | .309 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | 2.60 | .63 | 2.53 | .76 | -.44 | .662 |
| Legal Issues | 2.20 | .94 | 2.35 | .90 | -.45 | .655 |
| Other | 2.00 | 1.41 | 3.00 | 1.41 | -1.10 | .273 |

Notes. Challenges were rated on a scale with the following points: 1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *often*, 4 = *regularly*. *z* values are the result of Mann-Whitney tests.

The Spearman correlation coefficients are shown in Table 7 for the relationships between age and (a) level of challenge and (b) frequency of challenge. For level of challenge, there was one statistically significant correlation: the correlation between age and level of challenge for personnel issues was positive, $r_s = .35$, $p = .004$. This indicated that superintendents who were older tended to view personnel issues as more of a challenge than superintendents who were younger.

For the frequency of challenges, there were four statistically significant correlations. First, older superintendents tended to experience facility challenges less frequently than younger superintendents, $r_s = -.26$, $p = .031$. Second, older superintendents tended to experience challenges related to state and federal mandates less frequently than younger superintendents, $r_s = -.27$, $p = .025$. Third, older participants tended to experience challenges related to standardization and accountability less frequently than younger superintendents, $r_s = -.37$, $p = .002$. Fourth, older superintendents tended to experience challenges related to government issues less frequently than younger superintendents, $r_s = -.26$, $p = .031$.

The third null hypothesis was:

Ho3: The number of years the superintendent has been in their current position does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Table 8 contains Spearman correlation coefficients between the number of years as a superintendent and (a) the level of challenge and (b) the frequency of challenge. None of

Table 7

Spearman's Rho Correlations Between Age and Level and Frequency of Challenges

| Challenge | Level of Challenge | Frequency of Challenge |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Policy | .18 | -.09 |
| Personnel Issues | .35** | .06 |
| Facility Issues | -.24 | -.26* |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | .23 | -.01 |
| Curricular Concerns | .29* | -.05 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | -.14 | .03 |
| State/Federal Mandates | -.04 | -.27* |
| Standardization/Accountability | .07 | -.37** |
| Culture Development | .06 | .03 |
| Community Development | -.11 | -.14 |
| Gender Issues | -.03 | .03 |
| Government Issues | .15 | -.26* |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | -.07 | -.18 |
| Legal Issues | .16 | -.16 |
| Other | -.15 | -.49 |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Table 8

Spearman's Rho Correlations between Years as a Superintendent and Level and Frequency of Challenges

| Challenge | Level of Challenge | Frequency of Challenge |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Policy | -.11 | .09 |
| Personnel Issues | -.07 | -.12 |
| Facility Issues | -.16 | -.23 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | -.03 | -.15 |
| Curricular Concerns | -.14 | -.15 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | -.16 | -.11 |
| State/Federal Mandates | -.10 | .09 |
| Standardization/Accountability | -.16 | -.08 |
| Culture Development | -.21 | -.20 |
| Community Development | .08 | -.10 |
| Gender Issues | .01 | .07 |
| Government Issues | -.09 | .09 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | -.13 | -.07 |
| Legal Issues | -.11 | -.04 |
| Other | -.13 | -.33 |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

the correlations in this table are statistically significant. This indicated that the number of years as a superintendent was not related to any of the challenge factors, either in terms of level or frequency.

The fourth null hypothesis was:

Ho4: The position held before becoming a superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

The participants were asked an open-ended question regarding their prior position, and 67 of the 68 provided a response. These responses were categorized based on position and produced the following results. The most common prior position was school principal (52.2%), followed by assistant superintendent or director of another school program (32.8%). Relatively small percentages of participants reported that their prior position was in a government organization or other directorship (9.0%) or teaching (6.0%).

These four groups were compared via a set of Kruskal-Wallis tests, one for each item related to the level of challenge and frequency of challenge. Table 9 shows the results of the tests performed on the items for level of superintendent challenge. None of these tests were statistically significant, indicating that the four groups did not differ in terms of the level of challenge introduced by each factor. Table 10 shows the results of the tests performed on frequency of challenge, and there was one statistically significant difference. Specifically, the four groups were not equivalent in terms of the frequency of challenge produced by federal and state mandates, $\chi^2(3) = 8.77, p = .033$. Follow up

Table 9

Rating of Level of Superintendent Challenges as a Function of Prior Position

| Challenge | <u>School Principal</u> (n = 35) | | <u>Assistant Super./ Director</u> (n = 22) | | <u>Government/ Directorship</u> (n = 6) | | <u>Teacher</u> (n = 4) | | χ^2 | Df | p |
|--------------------------------------|---|------|---|------|--|------|---------------------------|-----|----------|----|------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | | |
| Policy | 2.97 | .79 | 2.91 | 1.11 | 3.17 | .41 | 3.00 | .82 | .20 | 3 | .978 |
| Personnel Issues | 3.54 | .56 | 3.32 | .72 | 3.83 | .41 | 3.50 | .58 | 3.43 | 3 | .330 |
| Facility Issues | 3.31 | .80 | 3.41 | .73 | 3.00 | .63 | 3.25 | .50 | 2.00 | 3 | .572 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | 2.69 | .76 | 2.64 | .58 | 2.67 | .52 | 2.75 | .50 | .24 | 3 | .970 |
| Curricular Concerns | 3.26 | .78 | 3.18 | .66 | 3.50 | .84 | 3.25 | .96 | 1.20 | 3 | .752 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | 2.54 | .85 | 2.86 | 1.04 | 2.33 | .82 | 2.50 | .58 | 2.62 | 3 | .454 |
| State/Federal Mandates | 3.20 | .76 | 3.32 | .57 | 3.00 | .89 | 3.50 | .58 | 1.22 | 3 | .748 |
| Standardization/ Accountability | 3.06 | .84 | 3.18 | .59 | 3.00 | .89 | 3.25 | .50 | .39 | 3 | .943 |
| Culture Development | 2.46 | .98 | 2.59 | .85 | 2.67 | 1.03 | 2.25 | .96 | .47 | 3 | .925 |
| Community Development | 2.71 | .68 | 3.14 | .79 | 2.67 | .82 | 2.75 | .50 | 4.66 | 3 | .198 |
| Gender Issues | 1.54 | .70 | 1.82 | .85 | 1.83 | .75 | 2.00 | .82 | 3.31 | 3 | .346 |
| Government Issues | 2.12 | 1.01 | 2.23 | .61 | 2.00 | .89 | 3.00 | .82 | 4.10 | 3 | .251 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | 3.54 | .61 | 3.05 | .84 | 3.17 | .75 | 3.50 | .58 | 5.90 | 3 | .117 |
| Legal Issues | 3.03 | .89 | 3.14 | .91 | 3.67 | .52 | 3.00 | .82 | 3.06 | 3 | .382 |
| Other | 3.00 | 1.41 | 3.00 | 1.41 | 2.67 | 1.53 | | | .27 | 2 | .875 |

Notes. Challenges were rated on a scale from 1 = *least challenging* to 4 = *most challenging*. χ^2 values are the result of Kruskal-Wallis tests.

Table 10

Rating of Frequency of Superintendent Challenges as a Function of Prior Position

| Challenge | <u>School Principal</u> (n = 35) | | <u>Assistant Super./ Director</u> (n = 22) | | <u>Government/ Directorship</u> (n = 6) | | <u>Teacher</u> (n = 4) | | χ^2 | Df | p |
|--------------------------------------|---|------|---|------|--|------|---------------------------|------|----------|----|------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | | |
| Policy | 2.09 | .78 | 2.43 | .87 | 2.50 | 1.22 | 1.67 | .58 | 3.30 | 3 | .348 |
| Personnel Issues | 2.74 | .90 | 2.82 | .85 | 2.83 | 1.33 | 2.67 | .58 | .33 | 3 | .954 |
| Facility Issues | 3.00 | .87 | 2.91 | .92 | 3.17 | .41 | 2.33 | .58 | 2.68 | 3 | .443 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | 2.56 | .96 | 2.23 | .81 | 2.50 | 1.38 | 2.33 | .58 | 2.21 | 3 | .530 |
| Curricular Concerns | 2.43 | .92 | 2.77 | .92 | 2.83 | .75 | 2.00 | 1.00 | 3.31 | 3 | .347 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | 1.51 | .70 | 1.50 | .60 | 1.20 | .45 | 1.33 | .58 | 1.26 | 3 | .738 |
| State/Federal Mandates | 3.09 | .89 | 2.50 | .91 | 2.33 | .82 | 2.33 | .58 | 8.77 | 3 | .033 |
| Standardization/ Accountability | 2.69 | .93 | 2.36 | .85 | 2.33 | .82 | 2.67 | 1.15 | 2.16 | 3 | .541 |
| Culture Development | 2.06 | 1.14 | 2.05 | 1.00 | 3.17 | 1.33 | 1.33 | .58 | 5.50 | 3 | .139 |
| Community Development | 2.14 | 1.09 | 2.50 | .86 | 3.33 | 1.03 | 2.00 | 1.00 | 6.95 | 3 | .073 |
| Gender Issues | 1.11 | .32 | 1.05 | .21 | 1.60 | 1.34 | 1.33 | .58 | 3.02 | 3 | .389 |
| Government Issues | 2.17 | .98 | 2.18 | .91 | 2.00 | .63 | 1.33 | .58 | 2.65 | 3 | .449 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | 2.47 | .75 | 2.68 | .65 | 2.67 | .82 | 2.00 | 1.00 | 2.87 | 3 | .411 |
| Legal Issues | 2.31 | .93 | 2.23 | .92 | 2.50 | .84 | 2.33 | 1.15 | .56 | 3 | .906 |
| Other | 3.00 | 1.41 | 2.25 | 1.50 | 4.00 | . | | | 1.65 | 2 | .439 |

Notes. Challenges were rated on a scale from 1 = *least challenging* to 4 = *most challenging*. χ^2 values are the result of Kruskal-Wallis tests.

Mann-Whitney comparisons indicated that former school principals ($M = 3.09$, $SD = .89$) faced this challenge more frequently than former assistant superintendents/directors ($M = 2.50$, $SD = .91$, $z = -2.38$, $p = .017$).

The fifth null hypothesis was:

Ho5: The racial and ethnic background of the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

To test this null hypothesis, all non-Caucasians were combined in one group due to the high frequency of Caucasians. The small sample size and the high frequency of Caucasians limited the discussion of racial and ethnic background. Mann-Whitney tests were performed, and Tables 11 and 12 show the comparison based on ethnicity for the level of challenge and frequency of challenge, respectively. For the level of challenge, there was one statistically significant difference: Caucasians ($M = 2.71$, $SD = .88$) perceived that factors related to teacher retention and recruitment were more challenging than non-Caucasians ($M = 1.83$, $SD = .75$), $z = -2.22$, $p = .026$. For the frequency of challenges, the same result was found: Caucasians ($M = 1.53$, $SD = .65$) experienced challenges related to teacher retention and recruitment more frequently than non-Caucasians ($M = 1.00$, $SD = .00$), $z = -2.16$, $p = .031$.

The sixth null hypothesis was:

Ho6: The degree held by the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Table 11

Rating of Level of Superintendent Challenges as a Function of Ethnicity

| Challenge | <u>Caucasian</u> (<i>n</i> = 62) | | <u>All Others</u> (<i>n</i> = 6) | | <i>z</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | | |
| Policy | 2.94 | .85 | 3.17 | 1.17 | -.90 | .370 |
| Personnel Issues | 3.48 | .62 | 3.50 | .55 | -.07 | .941 |
| Facility Issues | 3.32 | .74 | 3.33 | .82 | -.05 | .962 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | 2.63 | .68 | 3.00 | .00 | -1.53 | .127 |
| Curricular Concerns | 3.26 | .75 | 3.17 | .75 | -.34 | .734 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | 2.71 | .88 | 1.83 | .75 | -2.22 | .026 |
| State/Federal Mandates | 3.26 | .68 | 3.17 | .98 | -.12 | .906 |
| Standardization/Accountability | 3.10 | .74 | 3.17 | .75 | -.19 | .850 |
| Culture Development | 2.52 | .97 | 2.17 | .41 | -.90 | .367 |
| Community Development | 2.83 | .78 | 2.67 | .52 | -.61 | .540 |
| Gender Issues | 1.68 | .76 | 1.67 | .82 | -.02 | .981 |
| Government Issues | 2.21 | .86 | 2.00 | 1.10 | -.46 | .646 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | 3.37 | .71 | 3.00 | .89 | -1.09 | .276 |
| Legal Issues | 3.11 | .86 | 3.00 | 1.10 | -.14 | .888 |
| Other | 3.17 | 1.19 | 1.67 | 1.15 | -1.85 | .064 |

Notes. Challenges were rated on a scale with the following points: 1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *often*, 4 = *regularly*. *z* values are the result of Mann-Whitney tests.

Table 12

Rating of Frequency of Superintendent Challenges as a Function of Ethnicity

| Challenge | <u>Caucasian</u> (<i>n</i> = 62) | | <u>All Others</u> (<i>n</i> = 6) | | <i>z</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | | |
| Policy | 2.20 | .84 | 2.50 | 1.05 | -.80 | .426 |
| Personnel Issues | 2.73 | .88 | 3.17 | .98 | -1.07 | .284 |
| Facility Issues | 2.98 | .87 | 2.67 | .52 | -1.13 | .257 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | 2.40 | .91 | 2.67 | 1.21 | -.56 | .574 |
| Curricular Concerns | 2.56 | .92 | 2.83 | .98 | -.59 | .555 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | 1.53 | .65 | 1.00 | .00 | -2.16 | .031 |
| State/Federal Mandates | 2.85 | .93 | 2.33 | .82 | -1.40 | .161 |
| Standardization/Accountability | 2.56 | .89 | 2.50 | 1.05 | -.09 | .925 |
| Culture Development | 2.15 | 1.15 | 2.17 | 1.17 | -.10 | .917 |
| Community Development | 2.30 | 1.02 | 3.17 | .98 | -1.88 | .060 |
| Gender Issues | 1.15 | .48 | 1.00 | .00 | -.79 | .427 |
| Government Issues | 2.15 | .95 | 2.00 | .63 | -.24 | .808 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | 2.52 | .72 | 2.83 | .75 | -1.04 | .297 |
| Legal Issues | 2.31 | .94 | 2.33 | .52 | -.19 | .852 |
| Other | 2.78 | 1.39 | | | | |

Notes. Challenges were rated on a scale with the following points: 1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *often*, 4 = *regularly*. *z* values are the result of Mann-Whitney tests.

Due to the small sample size and the fact that only two educational levels were represented in this study (master's and doctorates), the discussion of the level of degree held was limited. Mann-Whitney tests were performed rather than the planned Spearman correlations. Tables 13 and 14 show the results of the Mann-Whitney tests for level of challenge and frequency of challenge, respectively.

For level of challenge, there were two statistically significant differences. First, participants with a master's degree felt that teacher retention and recruitment presented less of a challenge ($M = 2.55, SD = .89$) than participants with a doctorate ($M = 3.25, SD = .71$), $z = -2.12, p = .034$. Second, participants with a master's degree felt that culture development was not as challenging ($M = 2.37, SD = .90$) than participants with a doctorate ($M = 3.38, SD = .74$), $z = -2.82, p = .005$. For the frequency of each challenge, there were no statistically significant differences between superintendents with a master's degree and superintendents with a doctorate.

The seventh null hypothesis was:

Ho7: The certification held by the superintendent does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

Tables 15 and 16 show the results of the Mann-Whitney tests used to compare participants based on certification (standard and all others). Table 15 shows that there were no differences between individuals with a standard certification and individuals with some other certification in terms of the level of challenge posed by each factor. However, there was one difference between the two groups in terms of frequency of challenge: participants with an alternative certification tended to experience challenges

Table 13

Rating of Level of Superintendent Challenges as a Function of Education

| Challenge | <u>Master's</u> (<i>n</i> = 60) | | <u>Doctorate</u> (<i>n</i> = 8) | | <i>z</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | | |
| Policy | 2.97 | .86 | 2.88 | .99 | -.17 | .864 |
| Personnel Issues | 3.45 | .62 | 3.75 | .46 | -1.30 | .195 |
| Facility Issues | 3.33 | .75 | 3.25 | .71 | -.42 | .677 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | 2.67 | .63 | 2.63 | .92 | -.01 | .991 |
| Curricular Concerns | 3.27 | .73 | 3.13 | .83 | -.47 | .636 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | 2.55 | .89 | 3.25 | .71 | -2.12 | .034 |
| State/Federal Mandates | 3.30 | .72 | 2.88 | .35 | -1.84 | .066 |
| Standardization/Accountability | 3.08 | .77 | 3.25 | .46 | -.48 | .633 |
| Culture Development | 2.37 | .90 | 3.38 | .74 | -2.82 | .005 |
| Community Development | 2.78 | .75 | 3.13 | .83 | -1.14 | .253 |
| Gender Issues | 1.60 | .67 | 2.25 | 1.16 | -1.65 | .099 |
| Government Issues | 2.22 | .91 | 2.00 | .53 | -.57 | .569 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | 3.32 | .72 | 3.50 | .76 | -.74 | .459 |
| Legal Issues | 3.14 | .90 | 2.88 | .64 | -1.08 | .280 |
| Other | 2.79 | 1.31 | 4.00 | . | -.99 | .322 |

Notes. Challenges were rated on a scale from 1 = *least challenging* to 4 = *most challenging*. *z* values are the result of Mann-Whitney tests.

Table 14

Rating of Frequency of Superintendent Challenges as a Function of Education

| Challenge | <u>Master's</u> (<i>n</i> = 60) | | <u>Doctorate</u> (<i>n</i> = 8) | | <i>z</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | | |
| Policy | 2.19 | .80 | 2.50 | 1.20 | -.76 | .445 |
| Personnel Issues | 2.75 | .88 | 3.00 | 1.00 | -.89 | .374 |
| Facility Issues | 2.98 | .84 | 2.75 | .89 | -.92 | .360 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | 2.45 | .96 | 2.25 | .71 | -.52 | .606 |
| Curricular Concerns | 2.56 | .93 | 2.75 | .89 | -.47 | .639 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | 1.47 | .63 | 1.63 | .74 | -.62 | .534 |
| State/Federal Mandates | 2.80 | .92 | 2.88 | .99 | -.18 | .860 |
| Standardization/Accountability | 2.59 | .89 | 2.25 | .89 | -1.10 | .270 |
| Culture Development | 2.24 | 1.16 | 1.50 | .76 | -1.73 | .084 |
| Community Development | 2.44 | 1.04 | 1.88 | .99 | -1.50 | .132 |
| Gender Issues | 1.16 | .49 | 1.00 | .00 | -1.03 | .303 |
| Government Issues | 2.17 | .93 | 1.88 | .83 | -.78 | .438 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | 2.59 | .73 | 2.25 | .71 | -1.04 | .299 |
| Legal Issues | 2.29 | .87 | 2.50 | 1.20 | -.51 | .608 |
| Other | 2.78 | 1.39 | | | | |

Notes. Challenges were rated on a scale from 1 = *least challenging* to 4 = *most challenging*. *z* values are the result of Mann-Whitney tests.

Table 15

Rating of Level of Superintendent Challenges as a Function of Certification

| Challenge | <u>Standard</u> (<i>n</i> = 64) | | <u>Alternative</u> (<i>n</i> = 4) | | <i>z</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | | |
| Policy | 2.92 | .88 | 3.50 | .58 | -1.30 | .193 |
| Personnel Issues | 3.47 | .62 | 3.75 | .50 | -.89 | .375 |
| Facility Issues | 3.31 | .73 | 3.50 | 1.00 | -.68 | .494 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | 2.64 | .65 | 3.00 | .82 | -.95 | .342 |
| Curricular Concerns | 3.27 | .74 | 3.00 | .82 | -.72 | .472 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | 2.64 | .90 | 2.50 | 1.00 | -.48 | .630 |
| State/Federal Mandates | 3.25 | .69 | 3.25 | .96 | -.10 | .921 |
| Standardization/Accountability | 3.09 | .75 | 3.25 | .50 | -.33 | .744 |
| Culture Development | 2.53 | .94 | 1.75 | .50 | -1.68 | .093 |
| Community Development | 2.79 | .77 | 3.25 | .50 | -1.21 | .226 |
| Gender Issues | 1.67 | .78 | 1.75 | .50 | -.55 | .582 |
| Government Issues | 2.21 | .90 | 2.00 | .00 | -.40 | .691 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | 3.31 | .73 | 3.75 | .50 | -1.17 | .242 |
| Legal Issues | 3.10 | .87 | 3.25 | .96 | -.34 | .735 |
| Other | 2.69 | 1.32 | 4.00 | .00 | -1.45 | .146 |

Notes. Challenges were rated on a scale from 1 = *least challenging* to 4 = *most challenging*. *z* values are the result of Mann-Whitney tests.

Table 16

Rating of Frequency of Superintendent Challenges as a Function of Certification

| Challenge | <u>Standard</u> (<i>n</i> = 64) | | <u>Alternative</u> (<i>n</i> = 4) | | <i>z</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | | |
| Policy | 2.23 | .84 | 2.25 | 1.26 | -.17 | .862 |
| Personnel Issues | 2.77 | .91 | 2.75 | .50 | -.09 | .932 |
| Facility Issues | 2.89 | .83 | 4.00 | .00 | -2.79 | .005 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | 2.42 | .95 | 2.50 | .58 | -.23 | .821 |
| Curricular Concerns | 2.56 | .91 | 3.00 | 1.15 | -.78 | .435 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | 1.50 | .65 | 1.25 | .50 | -.76 | .449 |
| State/Federal Mandates | 2.81 | .93 | 2.75 | .96 | -.13 | .898 |
| Standardization/Accountability | 2.57 | .91 | 2.25 | .50 | -.72 | .472 |
| Culture Development | 2.19 | 1.16 | 1.50 | .58 | -1.06 | .291 |
| Community Development | 2.41 | 1.04 | 1.75 | .96 | -1.22 | .222 |
| Gender Issues | 1.15 | .47 | 1.00 | .00 | -.70 | .481 |
| Government Issues | 2.11 | .94 | 2.50 | .58 | -1.03 | .301 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | 2.56 | .74 | 2.25 | .50 | -.87 | .383 |
| Legal Issues | 2.32 | .89 | 2.25 | 1.26 | -.31 | .757 |
| Other | 2.63 | 1.41 | 4.00 | . | -1.04 | .301 |

Notes. Challenges were rated on a scale from 1 = *least challenging* to 4 = *most challenging*. *z* values are the result of Mann-Whitney tests.

related to facility issues more frequently ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .00$) than participants with a standard certification ($M = 2.89$, $SD = .83$). However, this result should be interpreted with caution given that there were only four participants with a non-standard certification.

The eighth and final null hypothesis was:

Ho8: The size of the district does not affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma.

The Spearman correlation coefficients between the size of the school and the level and frequency of each challenge are shown in Table 17. There was only one statistically significant correlation in this table: size of the school was positively related to the level of facility challenges, $r_s = .37$, $p = .002$. Thus, superintendents from larger schools tended to feel that factors related to the facilities were more of a challenge than participants from smaller schools.

Research Question Three

The third research question of this study was: What advice could be given to a first-time rural school district superintendent with no prior experience as a superintendent? Qualitative data from this study was used to answer this research question. Specifically, responses to the open-ended question “What advice would you give to first-time superintendents in rural school districts to help them deal with these challenges?” were analyzed. Sixty of the first-time superintendents provided a narrative response to open-ended research question number three. A large number, 26 in all, revealed that a new superintendent should obtain a mentor. These 26 superintendents

Table 17

Spearman's Rho Correlations Between School Size and Level and Frequency of Challenges

| Challenge | Level of Challenge | Frequency of Challenge |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Policy | -.13 | .12 |
| Personnel Issues | .03 | .18 |
| Facility Issues | .37** | -.01 |
| Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | .08 | .08 |
| Curricular Concerns | .05 | -.07 |
| Teacher Retention/Recruitment | .01 | -.20 |
| State/Federal Mandates | -.16 | .00 |
| Standardization/Accountability | .14 | .00 |
| Culture Development | .08 | -.12 |
| Community Development | -.03 | -.09 |
| Gender Issues | -.01 | .10 |
| Government Issues | -.16 | -.11 |
| Superintendent/Board Relations | -.04 | .02 |
| Legal Issues | -.10 | -.01 |
| Other | -.01 | -.18 |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

cited words or phrases associated with having a mentor, experienced superintendents, accreditation officer, or someone to advise you 29 times. Although some superintendents referred to using experienced or other superintendents as a resource, and did not use the word mentor, it was apparent that a primary piece of advice was, “call other superintendents and make sure you have a support group.” Examples of this theme are included in the following statements:

“Talk with other superintendents and attend all the sessions for first year superintendent. I continue to call on my fellow first year superintendents for advice and guidance.”

“Have a mentor that you can call for help.”

“Develop relationships with other superintendents for advice.”

“Prepare yourself professionally, seek the advisement of other professionals...Ask questions of other superintendents, the state department of education and the US Department of Education.”

“Call your mentors or the state [Department of Education].”

“Use other experienced superintendent as a resource for problems and questions.”

The second theme can be summarized by the statement, “Always make your decisions based on what is best for students and their education.” Similar statements were made 13 times by first-time superintendents. These superintendents also provided advice about making these decisions, with 15 mentioning the importance of communication, especially listening, during the first year as a superintendent.

Associated with the communication/listening advice is the idea of gathering information before making decisions. A compilation of these themes, communication/listening + information gathering = decision making based on what is best for students and their education, revealed that 34 first-time superintendents gave one

or more pieces of such advice.

Examples of this theme include the following statements:

“Take your time to listen more than talking.”

“Make sure to keep an open mind and listen to everyone even if you don't agree.”

“Be prepared to listen to those people in the central office that have been there.”

“Take the time to listen to your personnel and get to know them.”

“Be a people-person and a good communicator.”

Finance and financial issues were also mentioned by first-time superintendents.

One superintendent stated, “Finance is a big challenge for all administrators.” Nine first-time superintendents mentioned finance and financial issues specifically. One superintendent’s advice was to, “[Be aware of] budget concerns and cuts in funding and job trends that may affect the tax base in your district, work hard on understanding Federal Programs and reimbursables and on the affects of cuts in state aid and what it does to a school budget.”

The participants also highlighted the importance of establishing good relationships with board members, stating “superintendent/board relations are very important” and “create a good working relationship with your BOE [Board of Education].” Eight participants made similar comments. Advice such as “Learn all you can about board meeting rules and regulations,” and “[learn] how to conduct your board meetings, development of board agenda, and appropriate use of executive session” rounded out a superintendent/school board relationship advice.

Six first-time superintendents provided advice concerning the community. One superintendent’s advice was to, “Understand the community concerns and values.” A

more direct statement came from another superintendent; “Make yourself a part of the community.”

Although mentioned a relatively small number of times, several other ideas emerged. Advice pertaining to developing the vision or focus of the school and the policies of the school were mentioned six times. Creating trust and change were each mentioned two times as was staying ahead of the problems associated with the position of superintendent. Two superintendents also mentioned the importance of time management and the importance of developing the ability to deal with the media.

Lastly, two superintendents alluded to tacit knowledge. One superintendent stated, “Be prepared for what you are not prepared to experience. The unexpected and things beyond your imagination is what the job is about.” Another superintendent summarized the position by saying,

“Twenty-nine years in the classroom and seven years as a high school principal did not prepare me for being a superintendent. Master's degree in administration did not prepare me to be a superintendent. The state mandated 11 days in Oklahoma City for all first time superintendents did not prepare me. You must roll up your sleeves and just tackle the daily grind and experience on the job training.”

Research Question Four

The fourth research question of this study was: What advice could be given to designers of superintendent preparation programs? The participants were directly asked this question in an open-ended format, and the qualitative data was used to address this research question.

The responses can be summarized by the statement “Make it real!!” A total of 59 responses were received. Respondents referenced the university degree program they had

completed and the first-year superintendents training program provided by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Of the responses received, 23 referred to designing a practical curriculum for superintendent preparation programs as compared to a theoretical one. One respondent's advice was to, "Useless theory and more practical teaching practices." Another superintendent encouraged designers to, "Provide more relevant hands-on programs."

Nineteen superintendents suggested a practical curriculum in the area of school finance. The response from two superintendents was simply, "finance, finance, finance." One superintendent stated, "I never saw a school finance paper until my first day on the job." These respondents also mentioned specific areas of finance. Those areas included the school estimate of needs, the state funding formula and how to maximize it in a district, developing a budget, Federal Programs, estimating year end fund balance and understanding how the funding formula works in respect to a district that has a declining enrollment.

Respondents not only asked for reality in the subjects covered in the curriculum, they also asked for reality in the presenters and suggested some of the training be outside of the classroom. Six of the respondents stated that presenters should be current or former superintendents. One respondent stated, "They (current superintendents) know what they are talking about and know what subjects are relevant and current." It was further recommended that designers of superintendent preparation programs talk to a "myriad of other superintendents not just from big districts." The same first-time superintendent discussed their experience of being in a large district and now being superintendent in a

small district. They stated, “I am still reeling from what I have found in a (smaller) district.”

Receiving comments from several respondents was the need for more training in superintendent/board relations, construction of school policy, understanding school reporting and deadlines, and school law, especially Oklahoma school law. Respondents asked for more training concerning board meeting do’s and don’ts and executive session protocol. One response stated, “School law should be more Oklahoma school law and policies instead of generic talk about “separation of church and state” and other vague topics.” Regarding the construction of school policies, one respondent stated, “We probably needed more information on how to develop and update policies. They [policies] are really a big deal anymore and can make or break you.” And, in regard to reports and deadlines, one respondent stated, “Programs need to get a hold of the state reporting schedule and explain accreditation, highly qualified, gifted and talented, CLEP, etc. Most of my job is reporting not theory.”

Several respondents advised that a mentorship or a shadowing program be established. This advice seemed to complement statements suggesting that the job of being a superintendent is a tacit knowledge experience. Several respondents provided similar advice such as, “It (being a superintendent) is a hands-on experience” and “there is just so much to learn that the day to day experience is often the only way you can learn some things.” One respondent suggested a semester internship be a required part of a superintendent preparation program.

Some first time superintendents feel that mistakes are being made because so much learning can be considered on the job training. One respondent wrote, “Too many

mistakes are made and too much time is lost due to on-the-job training of administrators.” The same respondent criticized superintendent training programs for the amount of theory and research training requirements and for their, “Failure to incorporate a skills-based curriculum.” Concerning theory and research, this respondent stated, “Even if one has a firm grasp of theory and is skillful at research, very little time is available to the hard working administrator to practice theory and research. To train administrators without recognizing this reality is a disservice to the profession, our schools, and most importantly, the students who attend our schools.”

Some respondents spoke positively about the superintendent training programs they had completed. Others thought the programs were too long, contained too much theory and not enough practical training, and were taught by instructor’s who failed to understand the day-to-day responsibilities of a superintendent. Some of the advice provided by respondents appeared to be related to their individual experiences as a first-time superintendent. One superintendent mentioned the need for training in how to deal with the press. Another superintendent desired more training concerning Title IX lawsuits. However, the overwhelming theme can be summarized by the response, “Make it real!!! Don’t have the program be a lot of theoretical useless garbage!”

Summary of Findings

The first research question of this study was: What factors inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma, and do these factors correspond to the factors identified among superintendents in Texas by Morris (2004)? The participants indicated that the most substantial, frequent challenges were: personnel

issues, facility issues, and state and federal mandates, with superintendent/board relations representing an important challenge as well. These results were generally consistent with the results from the Morris study, with personnel issues being the biggest challenge in both studies, and state and federal mandates and facility challenges also rated as very challenging in both studies. One difference between the two studies was that superintendent/board relations were rated as substantially more challenging in the current study than in the Morris study.

The second research question was: Do demographic and employment characteristics affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first time superintendents in Oklahoma school districts? Nonparametric group differences and correlational analyses indicated that:

1. Males felt that “other” factors (not listed specifically on the survey) posed a greater challenge than females.
2. Males rated factors related to facilities as occurring more frequently than females. Superintendents who were older tended to view personnel issues as more of a challenge than superintendents who were younger.
3. Older superintendents tended to experience facility challenges, state and federal mandate challenges, standardization and accountability challenges, and challenges related to government issues less frequently than younger superintendents.
4. There were no relationships between years as a superintendent and perceptions of challenges.
5. Caucasians perceived that factors related to teacher retention and recruitment were more challenging and a more common challenge than non-Caucasians.

6. Participants with a master's degree felt that teacher retention and recruitment and culture development presented less of a challenge than participants with a doctorate.
7. Participants with an alternative certification tended to experience challenges related to facility issues more frequently than participants with a standard certification
8. Superintendents from larger schools tended to feel that factors related to the facilities were more of a challenge than participants from smaller schools.

The third research question of this study was: What advice could be given to a first-time rural school district superintendent with no prior experience as a superintendent? The most common theme to emerge from the qualitative analyses for this research question was that accessing a mentor would help new superintendents. Additional themes were (a) to keep what is best for students in the forefront of decision making; (b) to focus on communication and listening to stakeholders; (c) to carefully gather information before making decisions; (d) to be aware of budgeting issues; and (e) to work toward establishing good relationships with school board members.

The fourth research question of this study was: What advice could be given to designers of superintendent preparation programs? The overarching theme to emerge from the analysis for this research question was to stay rooted in the real world rather than taking a theoretical perspective. Participants wanted this focus on the real world in terms of (a) developing a practical curriculum for superintendent preparation programs; (b) developing courses in the area of school finance; (c) increasing the amount of training outside the classroom; and (d) increasing training related to superintendent/board

relations, construction of school policy, understanding school reporting, and deadlines and school law. In addition, the participants encouraged the development of formal mentoring and internships superintendent education programs.

This chapter presented the results of the analyses performed to address the four research questions of this study, including quantitative analysis for the first two research questions and qualitative analysis for the third and fourth questions. The key findings related to each research question were then summarized. The next chapter presents a discussion of these findings including the implications of the findings and recommendations for educational practice and future research.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to present a discussion of the findings from this study. Initially, the first four chapters of this study are summarized. The key conclusions related to each of the four research questions are presented. The implications of the results from this study for educational policy and superintendent training are presented in the next section, along with recommendations for future research in this area. The chapter ends with concluding remarks.

Summary of the Study

Chapter I of this dissertation introduced the topic of the research study. Although many pre- and in-service growth opportunities exist for all levels of school leadership, first-time school superintendents experience varying degrees of success. In some cases, first-time school superintendents are successful and thrive, and in other cases, superintendents do not experience a great deal of success and move on.

The purposes of this study were to (a) understand the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma, (b) determine if demographics influence these factors, (c) determine the advice that first-time rural school district superintendents would give to others in their position, and

(d) determine the advice that first-time rural school district superintendents would give to designers of superintendent preparation programs.

The theoretical basis of this study comes from the work of the Ohio State University Leadership Studies of the 1950's, Halpin (1966) and Blake and Mouton (1985) and the subsequent Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ). The study is significant because it seeks to validate the findings of first-time superintendents and add to the common core knowledge in the area of identifying inhibiting factors facing first-time superintendents. The research questions posed in this study were:

1. What factors inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in rural school districts in Oklahoma, and do these factors correspond to the factors identified among superintendents in Texas by Morris (2004)?
2. Do demographic and employment characteristics affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in Oklahoma school districts?
3. What advice could be given to a prospective first-time rural school district superintendent?
4. What advice could be given to designers of superintendent preparation programs?

Several assumptions, limitations and delimitations were discussed in Chapter I. It was assumed participants would answer the survey questions openly, honestly, and accurately. It was also assumed the unique experiences of each school superintendent could be adequately understood by looking at their common experiences. It was also assumed the challenges of school superintendents can be identified and measured adequately.

One limitation of the study was that participant beliefs, opinions, and perceptions were only assessed through the survey. Although qualitative data was collected and examined, there was no direct observation or contact with the participants. The second limitation was that factors that may impact the challenges faced by superintendents, such as the socio-economic characteristics of the school district and the racial breakdown of the student population, were not assessed or examined. The fact that the beliefs attitudes and experiences are limited to first-time superintendents in Oklahoma is the third limitation.

The fourth limitation concerns sample size. Sample size is a limitation when working with a relatively small population. One hundred twenty-six first-time superintendents in Oklahoma schools for the years 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09 made up the population for this study. Responses were obtained from 68 of these first-time superintendents. The small sample size (68) accordingly limits generalizability. At the 95% confidence level, the confidence interval (or margin of error) is + or – 8.1. The final limitation is the current study was cross-sectional in nature, despite the fact that the challenges faced by new superintendents may change quickly in the first years of their superintendency as they gain experience.

The first delimitation from this study was the beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of superintendents in Oklahoma which may differ from those of superintendents in other states. In addition, the results from this study are delimited to only new superintendents—the challenges faced by more experienced superintendents may be different.

The second chapter presented a review of the literature relevant to superintendent training and challenges. Key findings from the literature review were:

1. The role of the superintendent had changed substantially over time from mere administrative assistant to the school board to the individual with ultimate accountability for education with a school district.
2. In terms of the specific skills that superintendents must possess, technical skills, conceptual skills, people skills, communication skills, and conflict resolution skills are identified for their importance
3. Even when a superintendent possesses these characteristics and skills, there are factors that can inhibit and challenge effective leadership.
4. While training programs are available for superintendents, they are inadequate in providing first-time superintendents with the skills they need to address these challenges.

The third chapter of this dissertation presented the research methodology used to achieve the purpose of this study. First-time school district superintendents in Oklahoma were invited to complete a short survey that requested demographic and background information as well as information on the challenges encountered as first-time superintendents and the level of difficulty encountered in meeting these challenges. The survey contained two open-ended questions designed to solicit advice the participants would give to other first-time rural school district superintendents and to designers of superintendent preparation programs.

A stratified random sampling process was used in the research. Superintendents chosen for the study met the following criterion: Participants were selected from the population of first-time superintendents in Oklahoma public school during school years of 2006/2007, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009. Surveys were made available to

superintendents through the mail and on-line. To maintain confidentiality, superintendents surveyed were assigned a random number, known only to the researcher. Surveys returned were numbered and coded so the researcher could account for the return rate. Follow-up letters were sent to participants not returning the survey within a three-week period. Phone calls were made to participants still not responding after one month.

A combination of descriptive, inferential statistics and quantitative data analysis techniques were used in the study. All inferential analyses were performed using two-tailed tests and an alpha level of .05. Initially, descriptive statistics were computed and presented for the demographic and background variables of gender, age, years in the present position, position held prior to the current position, years as a superintendent, racial/ethnic category, educational attainment, certification level, school size, and overall rating of superintendent leadership. The third and fourth research questions were addressed by descriptively categorizing the participants' statements.

Chapter IV presented the results from this study. The first research question of this study was: What factors inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in school districts in Oklahoma, and do these factors correspond to the factors identified among superintendents in Texas by Morris (2004)? The participants indicated that the most substantial, frequent challenges were: personnel issues, facility issues, and state and federal mandates, with superintendent/board relations representing an important challenge as well. These results were generally consistent with the results from the Morris study, with personnel issues being the biggest challenge in both studies, and state and federal mandates and facilities challenges also rated as very challenging in both

studies. One difference between the two studies was that superintendent/board relations were rated as substantially more challenging in the current study than in the Morris study.

The second research question was: Do demographic and employment characteristics affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first time superintendents in Oklahoma school districts? Findings of interest and importance related to this research question were that males rated factors related to facilities as occurring more frequently than females and superintendents who were older tended to view personnel issues as more of a challenge than superintendents who were younger. Older superintendents tended to experience facility challenges, state and federal mandate challenges, standardization and accountability challenges, and challenges related to government issues less frequently than younger superintendents. Participants with an alternative certification tended to experience challenges related to facility issues more frequently than participants with a standard certification. And, superintendents from larger schools tended to feel that factors related to facilities were more of a challenge than participants from smaller schools.

The third research question of this study was: What advice could be given to a first-time rural school district superintendent with no prior experience as a superintendent? The most common theme to emerge from the qualitative analyses for this research question was that accessing a mentor would help new superintendents. Additional themes were (a) to keep what is best for students in the forefront of decision making; (b) to focus on communication and listening to stakeholders; (c) to carefully gather information before making decisions; (d) to be aware of budgeting issues; and (e) to work toward establishing good relationships with school board members.

The fourth research question of this study was: What advice could be given to designers of superintendent preparation programs? The overarching theme to emerge from the analysis for this research question was to stay rooted in the real world rather than taking a theoretical perspective. Participants wanted this focus on the real world in terms of (a) developing a practical curriculum for superintendent preparation programs; (b) developing courses in the area of school finance; (c) increasing the amount of training outside the classroom; and (d) increasing training related to superintendent/board relations, construction of school policy, understanding school reporting, deadlines and school law. In addition, the participants encouraged the development of formal mentoring and internships within superintendent education programs.

Conclusions

Research Question One

What factors inhibit the leadership of first-time superintendents in school districts in Oklahoma, and do these factors correspond to the factors identified among superintendents in Texas by Morris (2004)?

Conclusion 1: Personnel issues were the factor that posed the greatest challenge.

Conclusion 2: State and federal mandates and facilities challenges were rated as presenting a high level of challenge.

Conclusion 3: Superintendent/board relations were rated as substantially more challenging in the current study than in the Morris study.

Conclusion 4: The current study and the Morris study were in agreement that facilities issues, state and federal mandates, and personnel issues present frequent challenges.

Conclusion 5: The results from both studies indicated that gender issues were the least challenging, with teacher retention and recruitment and cultural development also rated as unchallenging.

Research Question Two

Do demographic and employment characteristics affect the factors that inhibit the leadership of first time superintendents in Oklahoma school districts?

Conclusion 1: Superintendents who were older tended to view personnel issues as more of a challenge than superintendents who were younger.

Conclusion 2: The number of years as a superintendent was not related to any of the challenge factors, either in terms of level or frequency.

Conclusion 3: Caucasians perceived that factors related to teacher retention and recruitment was more challenging than non-Caucasians.

Conclusion 4: Participants with a master's degree felt that teacher retention and recruitment presented less of a challenge than participants with a doctorate.

Conclusion 5: Superintendents from larger schools tended to feel that factors related to the facilities were more of a challenge than participants from smaller schools.

Research Question Three

What advice could be given to a prospective first-time rural school district superintendent?

Conclusion 1: Participants recommended that first-time school superintendents obtain a mentor.

Conclusion 2: Participants advised first-time school superintendents to gather as much information, from as many sources as possible, before making a decision.

Conclusion 3: Participants advised that decisions should always be based on what is best for students.

Conclusion 4: Participants advised first-time superintendents to have an understanding of finance and financial issues and to be aware of cuts in funding and trends that have a negative effect on your school budget.

Conclusion 5: Participants advised first-time superintendents to establish a good relationship with their board and to learn all they can about board meeting laws and regulations.

Conclusion 6: Butera (2006) identified factors to which successful superintendents in the Long Island, New York area attributed their longevity. Responses from superintendents concerning advice they would give to potential first-time superintendents support these factors.

Research Question Four

What advice could be given to designers of superintendent preparation programs?

Conclusion 1: Participants advised the subjects studied be real life situations and presenters be current or former superintendents.

Conclusion 2: Participants advised more time be spent on understanding school finance and completion of specific financial reports superintendents are required to complete.

Conclusion 3: Participants advised that more time be spent on superintendent/board relations and laws related to school board meeting agendas and executive sessions.

Conclusion 4: Participants advised that a mentoring or shadowing program be established.

Conclusion 5: States have established policies requiring administrators to complete professional studies in order to obtain a license as a superintendent of schools and two conflicting views on professional preparation have emerged (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005). The first view supports reforms to make superintendent preparation and licensing more practice based and rigorous (Cooper, Fusarelli, Jackson, & Poster, 2002; Murphy, 1994). The second view, de-regulating preparation and licensing, would enhance a local school board's opportunity for employing executives from the business world (Hess, 2003). Respondents in this study support making superintendent preparation and licensing more practice based and rigorous.

Implications

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher poses several implications. These implications are divided into the categories of theory, research and practice. Because of their nature, several of the findings are discussed in multiple categories.

Implications for Theory

As mentioned in Chapter I, leadership theory can be divided into six models: trait theory, behavioral theory, contingency theory, situational theory, transformational and transactional theory. Responses from first-time superintendents in this study reveal that the role of the superintendent in the 21st century is highly “situational”. Many factors inhibiting a first-time superintendent’s success depends on the situation within the school district in which they are employed. The situation within a school can be daunting for first-time superintendents if they are unfamiliar with the potential inhibiting factors that exist.

By examining the concern for people and concern for task orientation of first-time superintendents, this study adds to the existing theory base knowledge of first-time superintendents in the area of situational leadership. Two of the four inhibitors posing the greatest challenge to first-time superintendents were related to “concern for people”. The other two were related to “concern for production”. Therefore, as has been referenced in Blake and Mouton (1985), first-time superintendents must be balanced in both “concern for people” and “concern for production” to remain effective in their position.

Inhibitors related to “concern for production”, such as State and Federal mandates and facilities, presented a high level of challenge in both studies. However, superintendent/board relations, one of the inhibitors related to “concern for people”, was rated as substantially more challenging in the current study than in the Morris study. This finding presents implications for both theory and practice. This could imply that a positive relationship between the superintendent and board is becoming more difficult to

maintain or that school boards are expecting more from the first-time superintendents they hire.

The tacit knowledge of first-time superintendents is implicated in this study. Tacit knowledge theory is defined as knowledge that is uniquely personal and attained through experience. The experiences of the first-time superintendents surveyed are similar and yet unique. The responses received to the open-ended questions allow one to see that being a first-time superintendent can present unanticipated “inhibitors”. The statements, “[You must] be prepared for what you are not prepared to experience. The unexpected and things beyond your imagination is what the job is about,” and “You must roll up your sleeves and just tackle the daily grind and experience on the job training” are insights into the unpredictability of the job. They also lead one to believe that a person can learn to be a superintendent but they cannot be taught to be a superintendent.

Implications for Research

Findings from this study add to the existing research regarding first-time superintendents. As mentioned earlier, one finding is that the roles and responsibilities of first-time superintendents are varied and unpredictable. There are several implications to this finding. First, given the idiosyncrasies of a given superintendent’s experiences, school district board members must be flexible in terms of both hiring decisions and the support they provide to new superintendents. Hiring decisions must be made based on the specific characteristics of the district—a potential superintendent that may succeed in one district may not succeed in another. In terms of supporting new superintendents, school

board members again must be flexible in understanding what kinds of support are required.

Superintendents wear many hats. As a primary job function, superintendents are first and foremost the financial officer of the school. However, they also function as the human resource manager and facilities manager. Future superintendent research needs to focus on one specific area of responsibility. A deeper understanding of the superintendent's role as financial officer could be gained, through quantitative or qualitative methodology, by focusing the research project only on that role. A more focused approach will allow researchers to investigate the "why" of inhibitors that are identified and gather information concerning solutions to the inhibitors.

Superintendents who were older tended to view personnel issues as more of a challenge than superintendents who were younger. This finding presents implications for research and practice. Further research may reveal that the finding is due to generational differences or differences between what an older first-time superintendent expects of a new and younger teacher. Research may also reveal a disconnection between how new teachers view the school as an institution and how it is viewed by first-time superintendents.

Superintendents from larger schools tended to feel that factors related to the facilities were more of a challenge than participants from smaller schools. This finding also presents implications for research and practice. In practice, superintendents of larger schools may see facilities as a challenge because their district is growing and new facilities must be added. Construction of new facilities present bond issue challenges and varied opinions from district constituents as to where new facilities should be located.

Additionally, challenges may arise if older facilities are to be closed.

In contrast, districts with no positive growth or declining enrollment may be concerned with maintaining old facilities. Future research into the superintendent as facilities director will reveal the specific concerns and possible solutions to maintaining old facilities and to the construction of new facilities that first-time superintendents could share.

Implications for Practice

There are implications from this study related to superintendent preparation programs. It is clear from the results of the quantitative portion of this study that new superintendents require more training and education in personnel issues, facility issues, state and federal mandates, and superintendent/board relations. Given that these were the primary challenges faced by new superintendents, additional education and training, particularly activities focused on real-world problems, would be beneficial. Results from the qualitative analyses indicate that real-world situational training in curriculum development, school finance, superintendent/board relations, school policy, school reporting, school law would benefit new superintendents.

Another key finding from the study (particularly based on the qualitative results) is new superintendents require mentoring. National organizations such as the American Association of School Administrators should develop programs in which new superintendents can be mentored by more experienced superintendents. In addition superintendent training programs should add a mentoring component to educational and professional development activities for superintendents.

However, tacit knowledge of first-time superintendents is also found in this study. Some responses lead one to believe that a person can learn to be a superintendent but they cannot be taught to be a superintendent. Superintendent preparation programs may find themselves trying to hit a moving target. Who can predict what first-time superintendents need to know when they accept their first position? While superintendent preparation programs may provide more real-world experiences, respondents to the survey give voice to the idea that you only learn to be a first-time superintendent by being one.

The knowledge gained from being a first-time superintendent is tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge assumes that the knowledge needed by first-time superintendents to overcome inhibitors to their leadership remains in the heads of superintendents who have overcome those inhibitors. Therefore, superintendents, first-time or experienced, could benefit from not just a mentor, but a personal coach or consultant who has been a successful superintendent. Compensation for such a personal coach should not be extremely expensive because such a coach could be employed by multiple superintendents. Compensation could come from several sources. School boards, superintendents and even state departments of education would benefit from this practice. Retired school superintendents create a candidate pool for personal coaches or consultants.

Implications relating to the “inhibitors” may be found in this study. In many cases, the factors identified as “inhibitors” are beyond the control of the first-time superintendents who find themselves dealing with them. First-time Superintendents in Oklahoma have little control over their fiscal resources. They do not control the vast number of demands placed on them when they accept the role of superintendent. Many

of these “inhibitors” come with the position. Therefore, first-time superintendents may focus on those “inhibitors” over which they have a reasonable amount of influence.

Therefore, prospective first-time superintendents must be careful in selecting their first superintendency. They must be knowledgeable of important questions to ask that will reveal the inhibitors that come with the position. They must be skilled in analyzing the school’s fiscal resources, facilities and personnel or obtain a mentor to assist them in doing so. Suggestions for Future Research

Some of the topics suggested for future research include:

1. A longitudinal study where new superintendents are surveyed at regular intervals to determine how their perceptions and views change over the first three years of being a superintendent.
2. A longitudinal study where superintendents are surveyed at yearly intervals to determine how their perceptions and views of superintendent/board member relations change as the membership of the school board changes.
3. A longitudinal study where new superintendents are surveyed to determine their perception, access to and use of a mentor.
4. A longitudinal study where superintendents are surveyed to determine their perception, access to and use of a paid personal coach or consultant.
5. A longitudinal study where superintendents are surveyed and focus is put on inhibitors to leadership as the schools financial manager.
6. A longitudinal study where superintendents are surveyed and focus is put on inhibitors to leadership as the schools facilities manager.
7. A longitudinal study where superintendents are surveyed and focus is put on inhibitors to leadership as the schools personnel manager.
8. A qualitative study of successful school superintendents to determine their keys to

success.

9. A qualitative study of school superintendents who left the superintendent's position and did not return.
10. A qualitative study of superintendents who left the superintendent's position with focus on whether the reasons for leaving could best be described as "concern for people" or "concern for task."
11. A mixed methods study in which the superintendents complete an LBDQ survey and a survey identifying inhibitors to their success. Results of the two surveys could then be compared and contrasted.
12. A longitudinal study where superintendents are surveyed and the inhibitors on the survey are changed or re-organized. Re-organization of the inhibitors may produce different results regarding the most influential inhibitors.
13. A longitudinal study where socio-economic characteristics of the school district and the racial breakdown of the student population, are assessed and compared to the inhibitors superintendents find to be the most challenging.
14. A longitudinal study where socio-economic characteristics of the school district and the racial breakdown of the student population, are assessed and superintendents are asked how they overcame characteristics that inhibited their leadership.
15. A longitudinal study where superintendents are surveyed to determine their chosen methods of continuing professional development and their evaluation of those methods.

Concluding Remarks

Four major research questions guided the study. The research questions were analyzed using a combination of descriptive, inferential statistics and quantitative data analysis techniques. Means and standard deviations were computed to determine which challenges were faced most often by first-time superintendents and which were most difficult. These results were then compared to the results from the Morris study. Mann-Whitney tests, Spearman correlation coefficients and Kruskal Wallis tests were used to compare demographic information related to the first-time superintendents and their responses to which challenges were faced most often and which were most difficult.

Responses to research questions three and four were gathered through open-ended questions. Answers received from the open-ended questions were analyzed by descriptively categorizing the participants' statements.

The findings from this study represent a valuable resource for both school district administrators, administrators of superintendent training programs, and for new superintendents. For school district administrators, it was recommended that they remain flexible in both hiring decisions and support for new superintendents. Administrators of superintendent training programs should make several changes based on the results of this study including (a) adding a mentoring component wherein potential superintendents will develop a mentorship relationship with more experienced superintendents; and (b) developing curricula related to personnel issues, facility issues, state and federal mandates, and superintendent/board relations. New superintendents and potential superintendents can use the results from this study to better understand the types of challenges they may face so they can prepare themselves for these challenges. It was also recommended that national organizations develop mentoring programs to ease the

transition of new superintendents.

Several suggestions for future research in this area were also made including performing longitudinal studies where new superintendents are surveyed at regular intervals to determine how their perceptions and views change, performing qualitative studies to better understand the experiences of new superintendents, attempting to understand why some new superintendents do not remain in this profession, and addressing superintendent inhibitors and the leadership types identified in the Blake and Mouton (1985) theoretical model. By following the recommendations provided above, the transition into a superintendent's role will be eased, and superintendent job effectiveness can be increased.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

SUPERINTENDENT SURVEY

1. What is your gender? female male
2. What is your current age? _____
3. How many years have you been in your present position? _____
4. What position did you hold, immediately prior to your current position? _____
5. Please select the racial/ethnic category that best describes you.

Native American Caucasian
 African American Asian or Pacific Islander
 Hispanic

6. What is the highest degree you have earned?
 Bachelors Masters Doctorate

7. What type of Certification do you possess?
 Standard Alternative

8. Approximately how many Pre-K to 12th grade students attend the school district where you are/were superintendent? _____

9. During your tenure as a first-time superintendent, how do you rate your leadership?
 Very successful Somewhat unsuccessful
 Somewhat successful Totally unsuccessful

10. Please rate the following challenges during your first tenure as a superintendent.

- | | | | |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1.) Not Important | (2) Somewhat Important | (3) Important | (4) Very Important |
| _____ Policy | | _____ Culture Development | |
| _____ Personnel Issues | | _____ Community Development | |
| _____ Facility Issues | | _____ Gender issues | |
| _____ Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | | _____ Government Issues | |
| _____ Curricular Concerns | | _____ Superintendent/Board Relations | |
| _____ Teacher Retention/Recruitment | | _____ Legal Issues | |
| _____ State/Federal Mandates | | _____ Other (Describe _____) | |
| _____ Standardization/Accountability | | | |

11. During your first tenure as a superintendent, how often did you face the following challenges?

- | | | | |
|---|-------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| (1.) Seldom to Never | (2) Monthly | (3) Weekly | (4) Daily |
| _____ Policy | | _____ Culture Development | |
| _____ Personnel Issues | | _____ Community Development | |
| _____ Facility Issues | | _____ Gender issues | |
| _____ Extracurricular/Athletic Concerns | | _____ Government Issues | |
| _____ Curricular Concerns | | _____ Superintendent/Board Relations | |
| _____ Teacher Retention/Recruitment | | _____ Legal Issues | |
| _____ State/Federal Mandates | | _____ Other (Describe _____) | |
| _____ Standardization/Accountability | | | |

1.) What advice would you give to first-time superintendents in rural school districts to help them deal with these challenges?

2.) What advice could be given to designers of superintendent preparation programs?

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER

David M. Payne
2024 North Osage
Ponca City, Oklahoma 74602

date

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at Oklahoma State University. I am requesting your assistance in completing my research study on the *Factors that Inhibit the Leadership of First-time Superintendents in Oklahoma Schools*. I hope you will take time to complete an on-line survey by going to the following website and responding online. A hardcopy of the survey will be provided upon request.

Information gathered from the study will only be used for research purposes. The results will be summarized in a dissertation. Only the researcher will have access to individual responses. Each participant will be assigned a numeric code so that the surveys return can be accounted for. Your anonymity will be maintained. The risks associated with this study are minimal. These risks are not greater than those encountered in daily life. Moreover, you may simply not answer any survey items you perceive as threatening. You are not obligated to participate in this study. However, should you choose to participate, you will make an important contribution to educational research.

This survey is comprised of two components. The first component asks questions about demographic data pertaining to age, gender, ethnicity and some questions about the district where you are superintendent. Then you will answer questions pertaining to the challenges you face as a first-time superintendent. I ask you to complete this survey so that the body of knowledge pertaining to first-time superintendents will increase and aspiring superintendents will have the benefit of your experiences. Proceeding with the web-based survey will imply your consent to participate in the study.

You may contact me by telephone at 580-716-0680 or by e-mail at david.payne@okstate.edu if you have any questions regarding this research project. The dissertation committee chair is Dr. Ed Harris. He may be reached at area code 405-744-7932 or by e-mail at ed.harris@okstate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dr. Sheila Kennison, Institutional Research Board Chair, 218 Cordell Hall, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Ok 74078, at 405-744-1676.

Let me extend my appreciation to you in advance for participating in this research project.

Sincerely,

Mr. David M. Payne
Doctoral Student-Oklahoma State University

APPENDIX C

COMPLETE QUALITATIVE RESPONSES

Responses to the open-ended question: “What Advice Would You Give First-time or Prospective Superintendents to Help Them Deal with These Challenges?”

1. Try to stay ahead of the challenges and above all, address issues as they arise don't pretend they will go away. Talk with other superintendents and attend all the sessions for 1st year superintendent. I continue to call on my fellow 1st year superintendents for advice and guidance.
2. Have a mentor that you can call to help you come up with solutions to the issue, or at least to commiserate with you.
3. Go slow, listen and learn who your leaders are and get them on your side early. Make yourself a part of the community. Be prepared for what you are not prepared to experience. The unexpected and things beyond your imagination are what this job is about.
4. Develop relationships with other supts for advice; consult attorney; take time to gather all of the info you need
5. No response
6. Make sure to keep an open mind and listen to everyone even if you don't agree.
7. Make connects with other superintendents in the area. Be prepared to listen to those people in the central office that have been there and have an understanding of things that need to be done. Don't be afraid to call your accreditation officer for help. It is better to ask for help and clarification than to have to correct.
8. No response
9. Call other superintendents and make sure you have a support group
10. Prepare yourself professionally, seek the advisement of other professionals and keep the focus of the districts priorities in all the communications and policy decisions.
11. Special education issues leading to dealing with the OCR
Special Education Coop
Teacher arrested and jailed for molestation
Body of 34-year-old former student found on campus—overdose
- 12: We used a quality attorney that truly knows special education issues and it was well worth the expense.
13. Ask questions to other Supt./SDE and Feds. Listen to others and learn from their mistakes. Listen to people in the community, make changes gradually unless

needed immediately.

14. No response
15. Learn all you can about Board meeting rules and regs., personnel issues and finance.
16. Time management as I had no assistant. The superintendent before me had me as an assistant. Budgetary constraints have prevented me from hiring an assistant during my tenure, so I am actually working the positions of two people. We do not have the staff for me to delegate the duties of the assistant (federal programs, personnel, etc.)

ALWAYS make your decisions based on what is best for the students and their education. Sometimes the adults may have to make adjustments, but that is all right...as long as you are doing what is best for the students you will be fine. Special interest groups will try to sway you, but just make your decision based on what is best for all the students.

17. I think you have to be very clear with your Board and your staff of your expectations and your vision for the district.
18. When the snow falls - no matter how early you get up or what you decide - it is wrong!
Every month you have PBS (Pre & Post Board Syndrome). When the candidate for Sherriff comes to your door and assumes that your husband is the Superintendent.
When your husband responds to your maiden name because nobody knows his last name.

The policy book had not been updated for probably 20 years. It was quite an undertaking to update and revise the manual. We even got rid of corporal punishment!

With a low carryover and slim funding it was a challenge to determine the personnel cuts necessary to run the district efficiently. Especially when you come to the district the first of July.

I have learned more about construction than I ever imagined. From wind energy to LEED certification these are all topics that were part of the learning curve for me.

Developing payment scales for support employees and discussion of similar issues for extra duty and administration.

Getting to know your school attorney and building a relationship so that you are getting the most for your district. The first day on the job I was faced with newspaper headlines of a teachers arrested for lewd acts with a minor.

How to conduct your Board meetings, development of Board agenda, and appropriate use of executive session.

Never take yourself too seriously. You are only as good as the people you surround yourself with! A board is only as good as you are, a superintendent is only as good as their administrators, a principal is only as good as their teachers, and the teachers are only as good as their students. Be the biggest and best learner in your school. Do not delegate anything that you do not know how to do yourself. If you do delegate understand you also gave the power and authority with the task. You will always sometime or another have a board member, administrator, teacher, support staff, parent, and/or student not agree with you and not like you. Treat people as you want to be treated, especially honestly. Speak openly, honestly, but guarded with the media, but never defensively. Understand the question before answering. Be direct, confident, and honest. Never ever hold a grudge, life is too short. When you choose the superintendent's position you no longer are looked at the same in your community, by your staff, or by your friends. IT IS LONELY AT THE TOP.

19. The biggest challenge was the teacher/superintendent relationship. I was shocked at what went on each day. As a teacher I managed my classroom and dealt with my daily issues, I was not aware of the demands and issues brought to the superintendent on a daily basis.
20. Call your mentors or the state dept
21. Use other experienced superintendents as resources for problems and questions.
22. In a leadership position it is vital to exhibit confidence and organization. Communicate a very clear and concise mission. Don't try to conquer the world during the first year. Survey the landscape, take copious notes, and communicate regularly with staff. Compliment often and criticize only when necessary. Build for the future by establishing relationships based on openness and communication.
23. Work closely with your faculty and form a shared school vision and semester goal.
24. Latch on to a mentor you trust and ask for guidance.
25. Be pro-active when handling difficult issues. Hiding your head in the sand will only aggravate the issue.

26. No response
27. Develop a relationship with area superintendent's that have more experience and draw from them. Continually read current issues, new laws, etc. Evaluate each situation before making important decisions.
28. Read your policy book when you need to make a decision. Follow policy. Create a good working relationship with your BOE. Be seen and be approachable to the patrons in your district.
29. Make sure you can really trust someone before you trust them with anything of significance. Take the time to listen to your personnel and get to know them. Things are often not as they seem -- rarely as good nor as bad as you think it is, usually somewhere in between, but sometimes far worse. Make sure you pick fights you can win. Otherwise, find ways to set the stage so the staff and community think they came up with the idea that you have been wanting to implement.
30. Be a "People-Person" and a good communicator.....the other should take care of itself.
31. Figure out effective "time management" strategies.
32. Find a wise and trustworthy mentor
33. Superintendent/Board Relations are very important. This was a constant challenge for me. Board was very resistant to change. Seek Board Development Workshops for the OSBA to improve Superintendent/Board challenges.
34. No response
35. My advice is that everyone should be an assistant supt or at least have a years training on the job by the former superintendent.
36. Media - know how to deal with the media. Media issues - you must know how to deal with the media. The media is a constant and you have to learn not to let it get to you if it is negative.

BE PREPARED! If you are going into a district that is a troubled district - **BE PREPARED!** You have to have a strong resolve or it will get you down.
37. Reports, facilities and plant management. Get to know experienced Supts. in your area, who can give advice.

38. Keeping up with state and federal requirements is hard. Having to worry about having enough money to operate your school.

Just don't get overwhelmed, and take your time in making decisions. Most things can wait for you to think it through.

39. Communication is vital.

40. Be as well educated as possible (preferably "experience" educated) in all aspects of district management - knowledge of all site levels, knowledge of athletics, child nutrition, transportation, special education, policies, board relations, community relations, financial management, and many others.

41. Establish a good working relationship with your Board, and with your principals. Be sure to have an Open Door policy and listen to the voices of others before making a decision. Pay close attention to financial details and rely on fellow superintendents when you have a question.

42. Finance is a big challenge for all administrators. It is very intimidating for a first year Superintendent.

I tried to develop a plan for finance to report to the BOE each month.

Have people that you trust to talk to and use as resource. Don't try and make personal relations with teachers or staff.

43. Stay current on the law and work with your Board of Education.

44. In a school this size, the superintendent wears many different hats. It is enjoyable but you have to be willing to learn many different areas in your position. Continue learning. Discuss with peers who have been through the battles. Communicate with all involved. Transparent in relations with all involved.

45. Stay in touch with staff and students get to know them if district size allows. Empower your staff more through praise than criticism. Always end staff meetings on a positive note. Let the staff see you working as hard or harder than they are. Do not lead through dictatorship or total authoritarian rule. Be approachable by your staff and students. Make the decisions you need to make but use the word team and teamwork with your staff

46. Don't make quick decisions unless it is absolutely required. Find out as much background information as possible. Look at all sides before making a decision.

47. Take your time to listen more than talking, Don't have a knee-jerk reaction to issues presented to you or as a reaction, build a consensus for change with your

stakeholders, work on community and public relations, be patient because Rome wasn't built in a day and you won't change your school climate in a day either. Use a team approach.

48. Go to professional development. Get a good mentor for finance. I got Vernon Florence and it was the best professional decision I ever made.
49. 20 years in the classroom and 7 years as a high school principal did not prepare me for being a superintendent. Master's Degree in administration did not prepare me to be a superintendent. The state mandated 11 days in OKC for all first year superintendents did not prepare me. You must roll up your sleeves and just tackle the daily grind and experience "on-the-job-training". My best advice is to get a good mentor to help and don't be afraid to ask questions.
50. No comment
51. A mentor that is a good resource and does not mind sharing
52. Be sure to pick a District that has a board that understands their limits of responsibility, and a community that has demonstrated financial support for their school.
53. Spend some time as a principal before you become a Supt.
54. Team building with staff. Trust from staff and community.

Converting the atmosphere of a school from adversarial to team driven is critical. Students vs. Teachers, Teachers vs. Administrators, Administrator vs. Board, etc. Leadership is about integrity which is about do the "right" thing when no one is looking. I also believe it is key to out work everyone at the school.

55. Call and ask a mentor what to do or ask for advice in a situation you are not comfortable with.
56. Financially, we are not adequately prepared for this position. Don't be afraid to ask. Find some points of contact you can trust and use them.
57. Budget concerns with cuts in funding and job trends that may affect the tax base in your district. Work hard on understanding federal programs and reimbursable. The affects on cuts in state aid and what it does to a school budget. Be open with payroll clerk and encumbrance clerk and look into flex-benefits and allowable expenses in different funds, general, building, child nutrition.
58. Develop a network of superintendents that you trust and can rely on. Do not be afraid to ask these individuals anything. We have all been through it before and

there is so much to learn that even small things need attention.

59. Find a mentor to help you through the process of the 1st year.
60. Understand the community concerns and values. Learn the bus stop locations, times and routes. Talk, talk, talk to community, board, teachers, parents and students.
61. Major changes need to be accomplished at the beginning of the school year. You can change other things with the help of your Principals and teachers.
62. Find an experienced superintendent who would be willing to meet with you at least twice per month to discuss issues
63. Have a veteran superintendent on your speed dial. You will need some advice from a veteran sooner or later.
64. Develop a network with experienced superintendents to assist them and be a good listener. Attend county, state and administrative organizational meetings to keep abreast of legislative actions that affect all schools.
65. Be yourself. Stand by your principles.
66. Try to find out as much about the district as possible. Their finances, community, and board members.
67. School board must be educated as to their role, if possible

Responses to the open-ended question: "What advice could you give to designers of superintendent preparation programs?"

1. More course work in school finance, i.e. estimating year end fund balance, understanding how the funding formula works in respect to a district that has declining enrollment.
2. I thought the programs were great. We probably needed more information on how to develop and update policies. They are a really "big deal" anymore and can make or break you.
3. Things I wish I had more knowledge about were: How to implement change, More budget knowledge specific to Oklahoma School Finance, Board/superintendent relationships and the role of the board. What I learned in school was not wasted. There is just so much to learn that the day to day experience is often the only way you can learn some things.
4. Use practitioners in your classrooms...the superintendency has changed a great deal
5. No response
6. They need to follow a superintendent around for a while to see what it is really like..
7. Programs need to get a hold of the state reporting schedule and explain accreditation, highly qualified, gifted and talented, clep, etc. Most of my job is reporting not theory.
8. No Response
9. Make sure you involve 2nd and 3rd year superintendents who still remember the challenges of the first year
10. No response
11. More specific information about finance from experienced superintendents. Provide access to someone from the press to educate supts. about dealing with the press.
12. No response
13. Teach them how to set up a working budget and the pitfalls that can get Supt. into financial problems. Go through Est. of Needs and the importance, some of the

reports, e-rate, board meeting dos and don'ts

14. More preparation in legal, financial, Title I, IDEA issues.
15. Include the following in Supt. training:
 - Principal Evaluation
 - Board Meeting Do's and Don'ts/Executive Session Protocol
 - Basic finance
 - Team building
16. Make it real!! Don't have the program be a lot of theoretical useless garbage! It really needs to be taught in sections by people who have been superintendents. Many times the superintendent preparation programs (much like teacher education programs) are taught by people who haven't been in a public school since they were a student in one. For example, we have entry year teachers who are unaware of the PASS standards until they begin their student teaching. They should be taught about the state standards in their teacher education courses. If superintendents were teaching the superintendent preparation program sections, the prospective superintendents could be taught current information regarding, for example (but definitely not limited to) facilities management (including bond issues--from working with architects, to selecting bonding agents, to legal issues, to construction, etc.; on what repair projects you must use an architect; what in regard to facilities management (architect fees, etc.) can be paid from the general fund and what cannot; etc.) how to maximize the funding formula; federal programs; the budget process; personnel issues; etc. The 11 days that first year superintendents have with the SDE are good for networking, but the sessions barely skim the surface of what a superintendent needs to know. The mentor is a lot of help, but the mentor has his/her school to operate, also. A well designed preparation program would be the greatest help for a prospective superintendent.
17. The first year Superintendent Course set up by SDE is beneficial, but too long. Most of the material could be completed in fewer days.
18. Include information about bond issues, construction, and financing in your preparation classes. What questions should you ask when you walk into a situation where the bond issue has been passed and it is now up to you to complete the project(s). It would also be helpful to have discussion about Superintendent's contracts and evaluation. Suggestions about how to market your school would also be useful. More programs are needed to prepare candidates for the position of superintendent in the state of Oklahoma. It is pretty much learn on the job and most of us as assistant superintendents handled a very specific portion of the whole program.

I hope this helps. Good luck on your doctorate. My dissertation was about principal training.

19. It is important to have more supervision, communication, and building positive relationships with the staff.
20. As much on finances as possible
21. Use less theory and more practical teaching practices
22. Much emphasis should be placed on the practical. Train administrators in scenarios of administration backing such up with a solid, sound foundation of school-based knowledge. Train administrators to the point that when they hit the job, they hit it running. Too many mistakes are made and too much time is lost due to on-the-job training of administrators. There are fundamentals of school administration. Define those fundamentals and drive them in future administrators. There is plenty of room in a doctoral program, for example, to incorporate a skills-based curriculum and as a base of study. Utilizing the remaining course of study for theory and research is important. But, to the practical need of administration, such is not very beneficial. Even if one has a firm grasp of theory and is skillful at research, very little time is available to the hard working administrator to practice theory and research. The ability (having the skills and self-confidence) to make quick and sound decisions is paramount to today's successful administrator. To train administrators without recognizing this reality is a disservice to the profession, our schools, and, most importantly, the students who attend our schools.
23. Finance, Finance, Finance!
24. Make it real!!!! Get away from all those trivial assignments that have nothing to do with being a Superintendent whatsoever. Hire people who have really been successful tenured superintendents to run your program instead of educational bureaucrats.
25. FINANCE, FINANCE, FINANCE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
26. No response
27. More information of basic financial matters and public school law.
28. School finance needs to be practical instruction.
29. Provide more emphasis on general leadership skills and interpersonal skills.
30. Superintendents have to be a "people-person" with good communication skills and a lot of common sense. Many of the other characteristics or knowledge can be obtained through law books, financial strategies, or other resources.....you must know how to relate to people or you won't survive as a superintendent.

31. Any additional educational law could be beneficial.
32. Time must be made for training outside of the school setting for practical problems that will be presented that are not covered in any Master's course work.
33. Cover more Superintendent/Board Development
34. No response
35. On the job training is what really counts.
36. These people need to get out more - the big districts are easy compared to the smaller districts - there are so many issues with smaller districts. Professors need to talk to a myriad of other superintendents not just from big districts. I came from a larger district to a smaller district and I am still reeling from what I have found in this district.
37. In depth curriculum in the area of school finance, where it all comes from and how it can be expended.
38. More class work in finance and federal and state mandates. Also superintendent and school board relations.
39. Board relations and decision-making
40. Focus more on the financial management skills and knowledge necessary to manage the district. Much of what the first year superintendent program covers could be done with paper handouts - much more time needs to be spent on financial management issues.
41. The two major areas to be prepared are in School Law and in School Finance.
42. Give more opportunities for building relationships with district and local superintendents. These are your most important life line.
43. Try to have people teach administration courses that have real experience as a superintendent and require an internship of at least one semester.
44. No response
45. A class on all the state and federal requirements or mandates would be nice. For instance yesterday a person from the Dept. of Labor visited me on my asbestos management plan. We just had our 3 year eval done, but I was unaware of

everything that I was supposed to be doing and documenting within the plan. It would be nice to know all the deadlines and different policies to stay compliant with. I called the superintendent prior to me about our asbestos plan and it was on a shelf and hadn't been looked at for some time.

46. Give as much real-time financial, legal, federal information and experience as possible.
47. Get out of the theory lectures and bring in Superintendents who are in the real world and can address potential school superintendents on the real-life problems and challenges they will be facing and how they work through them. Give them a practicum to work with other experienced superintendents before being thrown into situations they may not be prepared for.
48. Get superintendents out in the field and have them do internships. Teach them how to manage federal programs (I was underprepared in this area). Teach more about the legal aspects - especially in special education.
49. A lot more training on the finance side of the job. School Law should be more Oklahoma School Law and Policies instead of generic talk about "separation of church and state" and other vague topics. I hate to sound negative about all this, but you cannot learn to be a superintendent from a book; it is a hands on experience.
50. No response
51. Shadowing opportunities for first time superintendents. A collaboration Website (Wiki)
52. Increase the amount of time spent on Title IX issues, methods of enhancing community support, and things to look for in a school district before applying there.
53. Shadowing
54. There are a great number of cold hard facts such as: bond issue requirements, legal issues, asbestos abatement, State Department Requirements, etc. that could easily be taught rather than a focus on educational philosophy and theory. It doesn't matter what great leadership skills you have if your staff, board, and students think you are incompetent because you didn't know that all new building projects must be approved by the state or some other minute regulation that you were never taught.
55. Keep it relevant and for the working day to day operations
56. BRING IN CURRENT SUPERINTENDENTS TO DISCUSS THE TOPICS.

THEY KNOW WHAT THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT AND KNOW WHAT SUBJECTS ARE RELEVANT AND CURRENT.

57. Have prospective superintendents work with federal program directors to understand budget items and reimbursable in special education, title programs, etc. I am learning something new about chargeable and reimbursable daily.
58. Provide more relevant hands-on programs. I never saw a school financial paper until my first day on the job. Theory is fine but gaining the practical aspects of the job are much more important.
59. Develop program consistent to what a Superintendent experiences on a daily basis. Using "real-life" situations.
60. Have actual administrators present real life situations then have the students respond to them.
61. They need to explain the state formula on finance.
62. Get real people who are sitting superintendents to lecture as often as possible and school attorneys as often as possible
63. Have superintendents come in a talk to the students about uncommon issues they have dealt with in the past and are currently dealing with. There are so many things that happen that aren't mentioned in a textbook.
64. Finance classes should be geared to help aspiring superintendents to understanding different states funding sources for education. Most colleges look at budgeting or estimate of needs and not a breakdown of the state aide formula and what effects it will have on your budget. Show the difference between a school that relies heavily on state aide vs. a gross production school or high ad valorem based school. Each state has a different way its schools are funded.
65. Practical applications are much more important than different people's theories.
66. Hands on finance - developing a budget (district, special ed, title 1 - 7). State Aid, ad valorem, and Activity funds. Filling out state and federal reports, Dealing with a board of education, Community relations
67. Board relations advice. common sense exercises

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL FORM

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Monday, September 21, 2009
RB Application No: ED08118
Proposed Title: Factors that Inhibit the Leadership of First-time Superintendents in Oklahoma Schools
Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt
Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 9/20/2010
Principal Investigator(s): David M Payne, Edward Harris
2024 North Osage, 300 Willard
Peoria City, OK 74004, Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. In the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

* The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

- 1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research, and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with the protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board please contact Beth McCormack in 210 Concell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mccormack@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

[Handwritten signature of Sheila Kennison]
Sheila Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

DAVID M. PAYNE

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: FACTORS THAT INHIBIT THE LEADERSHIP OF FIRST-TIME
SUPERINTENDENTS IN OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS

Major Field: Educational Administration

Biographical:

Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, April, 15, 1953, the son of Mace Fortune and Mary Ann Payne.

Education: Graduated from Sperry High School, Sperry, Oklahoma in May, 1971, received the Bachelor of Science Degree from Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, in May, 1981; received the Master of Education degree from Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1992; completed requirements for the Doctor of Education Degree from Oklahoma State University in July, 2010.

Professional Experience: Teacher, Perry Public Schools, Perry, Oklahoma, 2007-Present; Superintendent, Woodland Public Schools, Fairfax, Oklahoma, 2005-2007; Training Coordinator, Pioneer Technology Center, Ponca City, Oklahoma, 2000-2005; High School Principal/Elementary Assistant Principal, Braman Public Schools, Braman, Oklahoma, 1997-2000; Classroom Instructor, Pawhuska Public Schools, Pawhuska, Oklahoma, 1996-1997; Owner/Director/Administrator, International Academy of Cosmetology, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1993-1997; Adjunct Faculty, Tulsa Community College, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1992-1993; Teacher, Stigler Public Schools, Stigler, Oklahoma, 1990-1993; Teacher, Owasso High School, Owasso, Oklahoma, 1986-1990; Teacher, Caney Valley Public Schools, Ramona, Oklahoma, 1958-1986.

Professional Organizations: National and Local Society of Human Resource Manager; American Association of School Administrators; National School Boards Association; Oklahoma State School Boards Association; Cooperative Council of School Administrators.

Name: David M. Payne

Date of Degree: July, 2010

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, OK

Title of Study: FACTORS THAT INHIBIT THE LEADERSHIP OF FIRST-TIME
SUPERINTENDENTS IN OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS

Pages in Study: 137

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major Field: Educational Leadership

Scope and Method of Study: This study examined the challenges faced by first-time superintendents in Oklahoma Schools as well as defined how often the challenges occurred and how difficult they were perceived to be by the superintendents. This study also obtained advice first-time superintendents would give to persons interested in becoming a school superintendent and advice first-time superintendents would give to designers of superintendent preparation programs. Survey research was used to gather the data. The first part of the survey consisted of an assessment of the demographic and background characteristics of the participants. The second part of the survey consisted of an assessment of the frequency with which each participant has faced each of the potential challenges and an assessment of the extent of the challenge caused by each factor. In addition, the survey contained two open-ended questions designed to solicit advice that the participants would give to other first-time rural school district superintendents and to designers of superintendent preparation programs. A combination of descriptive, inferential statistics and quantitative data analysis techniques were used in the study. All inferential analyses were performed using two-tailed tests and an alpha level of .05. The third and fourth research questions were addressed by descriptively categorizing the participants' statements.

Findings and Conclusions: For school district administrators, it was recommended that they remain flexible in both hiring decisions and support for new superintendents. Administrators of superintendent training programs should make several changes based on the results of this study including (a) adding a mentoring component wherein potential superintendents would be develop a mentorship relationship with more experienced superintendents; and (b) developing curricula related to personnel issues, facility issues, state and federal mandates, and superintendent/board relations. It was also recommended that national organizations develop mentoring programs to ease the transition of new superintendents. By following the recommendations provided above, the transition into a superintendent's role will be eased, and superintendent job effectiveness can be increased.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Ed Harris