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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS INTO THE ROLE OF A NEW SUPERINTENDENCY IN TEXAS: A MIXED METHODS TRIANGULATION CONVERGENCE INQUIRY

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The purpose of this study was to examine the factors contributing to a successful transition into the role of a new superintendency in Texas. A triangular designed mixed methodology with a convergence model was employed. The setting was urban, suburban, and rural school districts in Texas. The participants were superintendents of public school districts in Texas. Quantitative data were collected through the use of an electronic survey, while a focus group was conducted to collect the qualitative data. Participating superintendents indicated that the training and education they received had adequately prepared them for the role of a new superintendent and that school board relations were important during the entry period. Analysis of qualitative data resulted in three themes; namely, community, learning, and goals and expectations. In accordance with the convergence model, the quantitative and qualitative results were synthesized and discussed. Based on the results of the study, a need for additional professional development programs or emphasis in college and university programs on the entry period of the superintendency, negotiating the superintendent's contract, writing an entry plan, and working with stake holders was indicated.

Keywords: superintendent, entry period, leadership, mixed methods

Early in its history, the public education system in the United States was localized in cities and communities. In the 1700s, states, such as Massachusetts in 1721, passed laws requiring every town to choose men to manage the schools within the town. Most of these men had other civic duties in addition to managing the schools, such as administering the city government. As their responsibilities grew, both in education and in other civic functions, a need arose to establish committees or other separate entities to manage the business of the public schools. These became the first school boards (Sharp & Walter, 2004).

As the concept of school committees or school boards expanded beyond New England after 1800, many of the members of these committees determined that they needed someone to handle the daily administrative responsibilities of the schools. Buffalo, New York, was the first place to appoint a superintendent in 1837. Other states and communities followed their lead. The primary duty of these early superintendents was to be instructional leaders. Since then, their responsibilities have increased (Sharp & Walter, 2004).

With school districts under increasing accountability by state agencies and the federal Department of Education, the role of the superintendent is more important than ever. This is due to the increased emphasis on academic standards and accountability. With the requirements of No Child Left Behind and other laws, school districts must continue to work to close the achievement gaps between all subpopulations. Over the past 10 years, there has been more attention on teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decision making, and accountability for all professional staff in schools, especially superintendents. The school systems today are focused on high-stakes testing and accountability. The goal of superintendents and school districts, especially during transitions, is achieving and maintaining academic excellence. Superintendents who are effective keep the emphasis on improved teaching and learning and gather evidence of student achievement that demonstrates this improvement (King, 2002). Instructional leadership is a change from the former role of the superintendent as manager to the current role as leader of instruction (Barnett, 2004).



In the wake of these important changes, the superintendent's position has become more difficult to execute, more difficult to fill and the job requirements are more demanding. In addition, the average tenure for superintendents may be considered short. Based on various studies, the median length of a superintendent's tenure is between four and eight years (Alborano, Cooper, Ghosh, Natkin, & Padilla, 2002; Lashway, 2002; Sharp & Walter, 2004).

The superintendent position is like that of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in the corporate world. In terms of accountability and responsibility, the job is ever-demanding. Although there are programs, graduate courses of study, and professional development to assist people who want to become superintendents, there appear to be very few programs that provide guidance for the transition involved in the entry period to a new superintendency. There is a small amount of literature-based research on the entry period of a superintendent; however, the reviewer of literature on leadership has no difficulty finding numerous articles and studies for the business world that can appropriately be tailored to the superintendent position. This study compared a business model of the entry period into a CEO position during the first 90 days to the experiences of superintendents in their first 90 days. The researcher wanted to determine if the business model was a good model for predicting entry experienced in educational leadership.

Suggestions for transitions and change vary in the number of steps and details provided by different authors, but all are fairly consistent in their basic ideas. This suggests that there may not be one correct approach to this type of transition, but that certain key steps must be in place to be effective. Kotter (2007) stated that the change process goes through a series of phases which include eight steps to transform an organization. Sharp and Walter (2004) listed 11 suggestions for new superintendents. Other authors provided various steps to facilitate change or transformation (Collins, 2001; Watkins, 2004). This would seem to indicate that there is no one correct approach to the transition, but that knowing and implementing a type of process into a new position would be key to a successful transition.

All of these processes described above have similarities, with the main one being that a new leader or a leader experiencing change, such as transitioning to new position, must follow a type of formal plan in order to be most successful. For the purpose of this study, superintendents in Texas public school districts were surveyed regarding the transition to a new superintendency. Additionally, a focus group with sitting superintendents was held to gain further information regarding their transitions to new positions. Therefore, a mixed methods design was employed. For the purpose of the study, this transition was considered the first 90 days of a new position.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The hypothesis proposed in this study is that actions by a new leader (such as a superintendent or CEO) in the first 90 days of a new position will largely determine whether he/she succeeds or fails in the position over the long term. This is documented from research of business practices by Kotter (1996; 2007) and Watkins (2004). Their research shows that the goal should be to have a formal plan to accelerate an effective transition in a new position and that there are certain steps that most successful leaders take in the beginning of a new position, such as developing the same terminology with others in the new position; creating a collaborative vision for the new school district; creating coalitions; and negotiating or building early successful achievements (Kotter, 2007; Watkins, 2004).

Kotter (1996) discussed an eight-stage process dealing with change. These steps are 1) creating a sense of urgency, 2) establishing a guiding coalition, 3) developing a vision, 4) communicating the vision, 5) empowering employees for action, 6) producing short term successes, 7) combining the gains, and 8) generating additional change and securing the new approaches in the culture of the organization. Kotter (1996) indicated that these steps are sequential and that it is important not to skip any steps in the process.

Watkins (2004) proposed a series of 10 steps to accelerate change. These involve 1) promoting oneself, 2) accelerating one's learning, 3) matching strategies to situations, 4) securing early successes, 5) negotiating success, 6) achieving alignment, 7) building the team, 8) creating coalitions, 9) keeping one's balance, and 10) expediting everyone in the organization. Several of these steps are similar to Kotter's. These include securing early successes, building the team, creating coalitions, and expediting or empowering everyone. Additional similarities between the two processes include both authors' view that learning should be ongoing. Matching or creating strategies to fit the situation or vision is another similarity. Watkins included some ideas that Kotter did not, including advancing oneself in the new position.

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors contributing to a successful transition into the role of a new superintendency in Texas. The following research questions guided the study:

1. Did professional development programs in which superintendents participated prepare them for entry into a new superintendency?
2. What were the activities used by the superintendents to determine the district situation prior to entry into superintendency?
3. What were the activities used by the superintendents during their entry into superintendency?
4. What were the leadership efforts of the superintendents during their entry into the superintendency?
5. What were the factors inhibiting the role of the superintendents?
6. What were the superintendents' leadership areas of strength?
7. What strategies have superintendents found to be the most successful in their entry period?
8. With hindsight, what would the superintendents have done differently upon entry into the superintendency?

Questions 1 through 6 were answered using quantitative data, while questions 7 and 8 were answered using qualitative measures.

METHOD: OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH DESIGN

This was a mixed methods descriptive study. Creswell (2005) stated that the combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection in a mixed methods design provides a better understanding of a research problem than collecting only one type of data. Mixed methods research involves both qualitative and quantitative components, which complement each other and produce deeper insights than either one does by itself (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). According to Meltzoff (1998), the mixed methods design allows for collecting, analyzing, and connecting both quantitative and qualitative data. A triangular designed mixed methodology with a convergence model was employed. Triangulation design is the most common and well-known approach to mixing methods. The integration of qualitative and quantitative research strategies takes advantage of the strengths of each design, allowing them to complement each other and produce deeper insights than either one does by itself (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). In the convergence model, quantitative and qualitative data are collected separately at about the same time, and then the different results are converged or joined during the interpretation. The purpose of the triangular designed mixed methodology with a convergence model is to give both quantitative and qualitative data equal emphasis, to converge the results during the interpretation, and to draw valid and well-substantiated conclusions about the research problem (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

In this mixed methods design, the qualitative data were collected separately, and then the results were converged by comparing and contrasting the quantitative and qualitative results during the interpretation of data (Creswell & Clark, 2007). A model for this design is shown in Figure 1. The data collected and analyzed during the quantitative phase provided information from a large number of participants. This allowed the researcher to generalize the results to the participating superintendents in Texas. This quantitative data provided specific information about the importance of the entry period to a new superintendency, professional development regarding this time period, and other data that were analyzed quantitatively. The qualitative data, although limited to a small number of the superintendents, permitted a more in-depth understanding of the data (Creswell, 2005) and allowed for more comprehensive information regarding the entry periods of superintendents in urban, rural, and suburban areas.

The study explored whether new superintendents had a formal plan for the entry period and whether or not such a plan assisted in making the superintendents successful. The rationale for choosing a mixed methods design for this study was that the researcher sought to collect and analyze qualitative data to complement the quantitative data in order to better understand the nature of the topic. The collection of the quantitative data from a large number of participants enabled the researcher to generalize the results to the participating superintendents in Texas, and the qualitative data, although limited to a small number of the superintendents, permitted a more in-depth understand-

ing of the data (Creswell, 2005).

Figure 1. Triangulation Design: Convergence Model (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 63).

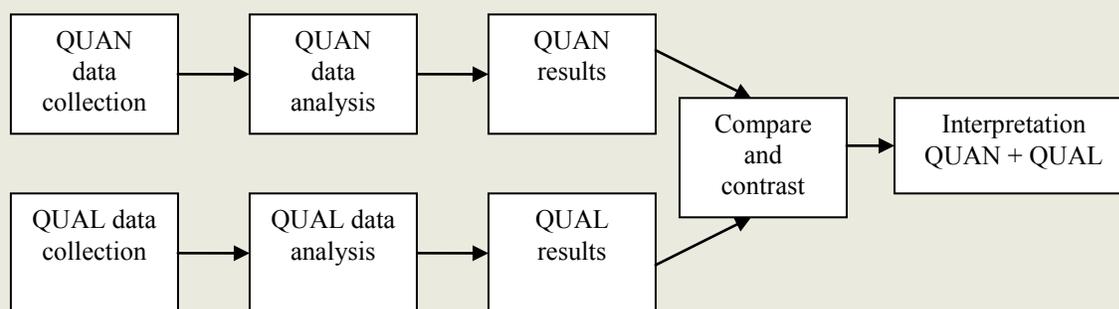


Figure 1. QUAN: Quantitative Data; QUAL: Qualitative Data.

The study used an electronic survey to collect the data for the quantitative research questions. The study employed the use of a focus group with superintendents who served in urban, suburban, and rural school districts to collect qualitative data. The focus group was chosen because focus groups tend to be more natural than one-on-one, face-to-face interviews. Individuals are sometimes reluctant to give responses in the one-on-one format than in a focus group (Lancy, 1993).

Subject Selection

The accessible population for this study consisted of superintendents in Texas public school districts ($n = 1271$) in 2008. All superintendents were invited to participate in the quantitative portion of the study. For the qualitative component of the study, a non-probability sample of superintendents in the Region 2 Education Service Center was recruited to participate in a focus group. The Region 2 Education Service Center is a non-profit service organization created to provide services to schools. There are 20 service centers in Texas, each serving schools in a specific region. In 1967, the Texas Legislature and the State Board of Education established 20 Education Service Centers throughout the state. The Region 2 Education Service Center, located in Corpus Christi, serves 42 school districts in 11 counties in the Coastal Bend area of South Texas.

Instrumentation

The quantitative data for this study were collected using the Entry to the Superintendency Survey (ESS) (Martinez-Perez, 2005). The ESS consists of six parts: 1) demographic information, 2) preparation for the superintendency, 3) current superintendency prior to entry by new superintendent, 4) current superintendency entry or transition plan, 5) current superintendency entry or transition strategies, and 6) opinions on superintendent's current leadership. The original instrument consisted of 37 questions. The instrument was revised by the researcher to meet the objectives of the study.

The ESS was examined and pilot tested by a panel of experts to evaluate its content validity. The panel consisted of experts, either current or former superintendents, knowledgeable in the field of public school superintendents (Charles, 1998). The feedback from the panel was used to revise the instrument.

A focus group was conducted to collect the qualitative data. The following areas were addressed: 1) preparation, 2) importance of entry period, 3) transition plan, and 4) strategies during transition plan. The lead question was: What are the factors contributing to a successful transition into the role of a new superintendency in Texas?

Data Collection

For the quantitative data collection, email addresses of current Texas public school superintendents were obtained

from the Texas Education Agency website. The quantitative data were collected from superintendents responding to an electronic survey over the internet from July 30 to September 1, 2008. An initial invitation email was sent to the superintendents whose names and email addresses were downloaded from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Website ($n = 1271$), followed by the email with the survey link and two (2) additional email reminders. There were 289 (24.70%) responses to the survey. Superintendents invited to participate in the study accessed the web-based survey either by clicking on the link in the email or entering the web address onto their web browser.

Qualitative data collection was conducted using a focus group. Perspectives of superintendents regarding the need for a plan during the transition period and strategies for that plan were obtained through the focus group. The researcher served as the facilitator and took notes. The session was audio-taped and later transcribed by the researcher. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The questions were open-ended, allowing for a free response and not limiting the response to a choice among stated alternatives, as in the electronic survey. Taping the responses allowed the researcher to record the subjects' responses verbatim, while allowing the researcher to participate in the dialogue during the forum (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1990).

DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data were collected online and downloaded into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for the purpose of data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and organize all data and answer the research questions. Specifically, frequency and percentage distribution tables and measures of central tendency and variability were reported. Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha (Crocker & Algina, 1986; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) was used to estimate the reliability of the aforementioned scales. It is an internal-consistency approach to the estimation of reliability, which is based on the notion that the items of the instrument measure the same phenomenon/construct.

Qualitative data from the focus group were transcribed, analyzed, and summarized, looking for patterns and information regarding the importance of the entry period of the superintendency to the participants. In addition, any formal plans and strategies for the entry period were summarized and categorized. Themes and broad categories arising from the data were analyzed and described. The qualitative nature of the group forum enabled the researcher to describe the phenomena of interest in detail and in the original language of the research participants (Charles, 1998; Thattai, n.d.). According to Thattai (n.d.), quantitative research excels at summarizing large amounts of data and reaching generalizations based on statistical projections, while qualitative research excels at "telling the story" from the participant's viewpoint, providing the rich descriptive detail that sets quantitative results into their human context. Creswell (2005) described this as a "rich, complex picture" (p. 49).

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

The quantitative results are organized as follows: (1) a description of the demographics of the superintendents who responded to the electronic survey and (2) the results of the responses to the electronic survey as they relate to each of the quantitative research questions. A profile of subjects for the quantitative data can be found in Tables 1 and 2.

Regarding the career path of responding superintendents, most had been either a teacher or a principal before becoming a superintendent. There were a variety of experiences indicated as to whether they had worked previously at a kindergarten-to-grade-six (6) school, a middle school, or a high school. In addition, there were a variety of areas of expertise, with curriculum and administration/operations as the most widely reported attributes. The most frequently selected professional development programs were 1) the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) Superintendents Academy and 2) higher education (Ed.D. or Ph.D.) programs.

The results of responses to the electronic survey as they related to the quantitative research questions are summarized below. Quantitative research question 1 asked: Did professional development programs in which superintendents participated prepare them for entry into a new superintendency? The overwhelming majority of the respondents indicated that the professional development programs had prepared them for their roles as new superintendents. Superintendents were also asked how well the professional development programs in which they had engaged prepared them for entry into the superintendency in various leadership and skill areas, such as fiscal management and



personnel management. There were 11 items in the Preparation for the Superintendency section of the ESS. The internal consistency of the items, as estimated by Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, was 0.91. The professional development programs for preparation into entry-level superintendencies selected most often were *instructional leadership* and *vision creation*.

Table 1

Quantitative Data: Profile of Subjects (n = 289)

| Variable | f | % |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 225 | 77.90 |
| Female | 60 | 20.80 |
| Missing | 4 | 1.40 |
| Ethnicity | | |
| African American | 7 | 2.40 |
| Native American | 3 | 1.00 |
| White | 258 | 89.30 |
| Hispanic | 15 | 5.20 |
| Other | 2 | .70 |
| Missing | 4 | 1.40 |
| Education | | |
| Bachelor's Degree | 2 | .70 |
| Master's / MBA | 184 | 63.70 |
| Ed.D. / Ph.D. | 98 | 33.90 |
| Missing | 5 | 1.70 |
| First Superintendency, Hired From | | |
| Inside the District / Organization | 133 | 46.00 |
| Outside the District / Organization | 146 | 50.50 |
| Missing | 10 | 3.50 |
| Current Superintendency, Hired From | | |
| Inside the District / Organization | 103 | 35.60 |
| Outside the District / Organization | 174 | 60.20 |
| Missing | 12 | 4.20 |
| Current District Type | | |
| Rural | 219 | 75.80 |
| Suburban | 41 | 14.20 |
| Urban | 19 | 6.60 |
| Missing | 10 | 3.50 |

Note. f indicates the count or number for each group; % indicates the percentage of the whole for each count.

Quantitative research question 2 asked: What were the activities used by the superintendents to determine the district situation prior to entry into a new superintendency? The Current Superintendency – Before the First Day on the Job section of the ESS included eight (8) items which had a reliability coefficient of 0.70. The respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance of each activity, using a 4-point Likert-type scaling (4 = essential, 3 = important, 2 = somewhat useful, 1 = not applicable). *Analyzing the district's budget* and *student achievement* data were the most important activities, while *using search firms to obtain information* was the least important activity.

Table 2

Quantitative Data: Profile of Subjects (n = 289)

| Characteristic | Mean | Median | Mode | SD | Skew Coef. |
|---|---------|--------|--------|---------|------------|
| Age | 50.79 | 51.00 | 50.00 | 7.52 | -.22 |
| Teaching Experience | 13.99 | 11.00 | 5.00 | 10.31 | 1.02 |
| Administrative Experience | 16.28 | 15.00 | 11.00 | 7.77 | .62 |
| Superintendent Experience | 7.40 | 6.00 | 1.00 | 5.92 | 1.22 |
| Other Educational Experience | 7.66 | 1.00 | 0.00 | 10.70 | 1.24 |
| Number of Districts Served | 1.58 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.12 | 4.02 |
| Number of Years Served in Current Superintendency | 4.59 | 3.00 | 1.00 | 4.47 | 1.82 |
| Percent of LEP Students | 10.06 | 5.00 | 1.00 | 12.37 | 2.16 |
| ADA | 1820.85 | 721.00 | 200.00 | 3609.38 | 5.11 |
| Years until Retirement | 8.78 | 8.00 | 10.00 | 5.87 | 1.09 |

Note. LEP = Limited English Proficient; ADA = Average Daily Attendance; SD = Standard Deviation; Skew Coef. = Skew Coefficient [(mean – mode) / standard deviation]

Quantitative research question 3 asked: What were the activities used by the superintendents during their entry into the superintendency? The Current Superintendency – Your Entry or Transition Plan section of the ESS consisted of five (5) subsections. In the first subsection, the respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance of the entry period for a successful superintendency, using a 4-point Likert-type scaling (4 = essential, 3 = important, 2 = somewhat useful, 1 = not applicable). The average response was 3.36 (SD = 0.74), including not applicable. The second subsection included seven (7) items, for which the internal consistency was estimated to be 0.81. *Interacting with the board of education* was the most important activity, while *interacting with the media* was the least important activity (mean = 3.42, SD = 0.79).

The third subsection of this part of the survey provided the superintendents with nine (9) items in which they had the options of choosing yes, no, or not applicable regarding entry to current district activities. The top three activities were *evaluating the current district situation and the concept of “fit” in pursuing the current superintendency*, *having an entry strategy in the current superintendency*, and *having a personal vision for education reflected in the strategy or plan*. The activities which were endorsed the least were *bringing in people from outside of the district upon entering a new district* and *being asked or directed by the board of trustees to create an entry or transition plan*. The fourth subsection included 11 items, for which the internal consistency was estimated to be 0.65. Respondents had the option of choosing yes or no. *Board and community relations*, *fiscal operations*, *pre-existing district conditions* and *student achievement* were the most important activities, while *labor relations and collective bargaining* was the least important activity. The fifth subsection included 10 items, for which the internal consistency was estimated to be 0.65. Respondents marked the items from 1 (least important) to 10 (most important). *Board-superintendent relations* was the most important activity, while *interacting with parent groups, parent teacher organizations or associations (PTO/PTA) and school site councils* was the least important activity.





Quantitative research question 4 asked: What were the leadership efforts of the superintendents during their entry into the superintendency? Specifically, the respondents were provided with four (4) areas of leadership and asked to rank them from the most to the least important. *Political framework* (local, internal, board, community relations) was ranked as the most important, followed by *human resources framework* (empowerment and support personnel), *structure focus* (organizational changes, operation, policy), and *symbolic focus* (outward displays, vision, motivating others).

Quantitative research question 5 asked: What were the factors inhibiting the role of the superintendents? The Current Superintendency – Your Entry or Transition Plan section of the ESS consisted of two (2) subsections. In the first subsection, the respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance of different factors that may inhibit the role of the superintendent and impact their ability to be an effective superintendent, using a 4-point Likert-type scaling (4 = essential, 3 = important, 2 = somewhat useful, 1 = not applicable). *Board relations* was the most important inhibiting factor, followed by *accountability*. The second subsection included 13 items. In this section, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which several factors could affect or inhibit their superintendency responsibilities, using a 4-point Likert-type scaling (4 = major issue, 3 = moderate issue, 2 = slight issue, and 1 = not an issue). The internal consistency of this portion of the ESS was 0.75. *Financial resources and superintendent-board relations* were selected more often than other factors as major issues.

Quantitative research question 6 asked: What were the superintendents' leadership areas of strength? The Current Superintendency – Your Entry or Transition Plan section of the ESS consisted of two (2) subsections. In the first subsection, the ESS provided the respondents with seven (7) leadership attributes. The topic *school board relations* was the most important leadership area, followed by *organizational leadership*. In the second subsection, respondents were also asked to rank their leadership efforts or focus of their current superintendency as related to four (4) factors: human resources framework (empowerment and support personnel), political framework (local, internal, board, community relations), structural framework (organizational changes, operations, policy), and symbolic framework (outward displays, vision, motivating others). The order in which these were ranked by the respondents, from most to least effect on leadership efforts, were symbolic framework, structural framework, political framework, and human resources framework.

The electronic survey had an open-ended question that asked respondents for the key elements of a plan if the respondent were to enter a new district tomorrow. Many of the responses merely echoed the selections from the survey itself. However, a few respondents chose to elaborate and these responses were very similar to the ones gathered during the qualitative data collection with the focus group.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative results are presented in two sections: (1) a description of the sample, and (2) the coding process and results of the focus group. The researcher contacted the executive director of the Regional Service Center 2, located in South Texas. Located in Corpus Christi, Texas, the Region 2 Education Service Center serves 42 school districts in eleven counties in the South Texas, Coastal Bend Area. The executive director holds monthly meetings of the superintendents in the region. The executive director agreed to announce to the superintendents that the researcher would be holding a focus group after the September 2008 meeting and asked that superintendents agree to attend the focus group. The researcher also emailed an invitation to all of the superintendents in the region.

There were a total of eight (8) superintendents who stayed after the meeting for the focus group. The profile of the superintendents was as follows:

- four male; four female
- seven white; one Hispanic
- five with Master's Degrees; three with doctoral degrees (Ed. D. Ph.D.)
- mean age: 47.8
- mean number of years of teaching experience: 11.25

- mean number of years of administrative experience: 15.38
- mean number of years of superintendent experience: 4.38

The focus group was conducted on September 17, 2008, in a meeting room which was set up to accommodate a small group comfortably. The researcher recorded the session and took field notes. All participants signed consent forms at the beginning of the session and provided demographic information about themselves. Although a set of guiding questions was provided, natural discussion was encouraged in order to allow themes to develop independent of the researcher. A tape-recorder was used to record the sessions. In general, all participants made statements about the importance of the first 90 days of a new superintendency and some of the strategies or activities in which they engaged during that time period. One participant was still in the first 90 days of his first superintendency. In particular, they all started by saying that their plan had been informal, but they were then able to delineate the things they did as part of that plan.

The coding process for the results of the focus group used eight (8) codes to analyze and summarize the focus groups' qualitative data: *expectations, goals, listening, trust, visibility, mentors, board relations, and learning on the job.*

Three overall themes emerged from analyzing the codes and their respective meaning statements. The first theme was *community*. In regard to this theme, the superintendent participants discussed relations with the board of trustees, listening to members of the school community, and developing trust and relationships with the school community. Since the board of trustees hires the superintendent, the superintendents worked especially on the relationship with the members of the board, not only during the first 90 days, but continually through their tenure as superintendent. They felt it was important to be visible in the community, not only on each campus, but at various extra-curricular events and around the town in general. Through the activities during this time, the superintendents felt they were building the trust of the board and the community. They all felt that listening to the community during this time was an important component of the entry plan. Quotes from the participants related to the theme of community included: "I think the first 90 days you set your expectations for your staff, what they expect of you, and then you develop relationships" and "First impressions are lasting impressions, especially when you go into a new district and trust they have got to be able to trust."

The second theme was *learning through on-the-job experiences*. Although the superintendent participants said they did not receive any formal training on the entry period through their college or other courses, most of them said that the most important guidance or training they had received on the first 90 days was through a mentor of some type or learning on the job through experience. This was true for both experienced and novice superintendents. They discussed reviewing the actions of effective leaders to try to emulate the positive things they did during an entry period. They expressed that the "hands-on" or on-the job training was more important than what they had experienced in a classroom. Quotes from the participants related to this theme included: "And I think that was just basically a plan that I learned from my mentor, my previous superintendent. He said you have to do this and I said ok I'll do it" and "I think on the job training and really digging in and doing as much as you possibly can...learning as much as you can is how I felt comfortable with the transition."

The third theme was *setting goals and expectations*, not only for themselves, but for the district. This involved finding out what goals and expectations board members had of the new superintendent and the school district, as well as the superintendent setting goals for him or herself. The respondents had a variety of ways to find out expectations and goals of others, but most involved meeting with people and listening to them, while also asking questions of them. In the setting of goals for themselves, the superintendent respondents either set these goals and expectations after listening to others, and/or they set certain specific goals for themselves going into the district, such as the expectation of visiting a certain number of classrooms or visiting certain areas of the district. Quotes from the focus group related to this theme included: "...so I just kind of um went back and looked at our goals and looked at everybody's roles in achieving our goals and um put a plan in place from there" and "I think the first 90 days you set your expectations for your staff, what they expect of you, and then you develop relationships."



FINDINGS

Descriptive statistics revealed that superintendents in Texas did believe that the entry period to a new superintendency is critical, that a plan is important, and that there are certain critical factors to that plan. The study revealed important information related to the entry period of a new superintendent, in particular the type of entry plans, and their implementation for a superintendent. The study also revealed the need for emphasis in both professional development and education in the preparation for aspiring superintendents.

The demographics of the study showed that the participants in the study had a median length of experience in the superintendency of three (3) years with their current district, falling below the range determined by the literature review, which was between four and eight years. Over half (53%) of the respondents indicated that the professional development programs prepared them or prepared them well, leaving 47% of respondents indicating that they were either not prepared or were only adequately prepared. This seemed to indicate a need for additional professional development programs or emphasis in college and university programs on the entry period for a new superintendent. In seeking to find out in which areas of professional development superintendents felt prepared, most of the areas were equal in emphasis, falling between adequately prepared and prepared. These areas included such topics as board-superintendent relations, fiscal management issues, vision creation, and community relations. The only area that fell into the range of not being prepared was negotiating the superintendent's contract. This is a personal issue between the new superintendent and the board that hires him or her. It would appear that professional development was needed in this important issue. Participants in the focus group stated that the best training they received was on the job and/or through mentors.

Participants in the study indicated a number of activities that were useful to them before and during the entry period to determine the district situation. Some of the ones indicated most frequently by the survey and focus group participants included analyzing the district's budget and analyzing the district's student achievement data. Although those responding to the survey indicated participating in these activities and believed that a plan in the entry period was important, only 28.7% indicated they had a written plan or strategy. Professional development in the area of writing entry plans could be useful.

Some of the activities used during the entry period indicated most frequently by the survey and focus group participants included assistance from other colleagues (mentors) and working with the board of education and district leadership team. Working with the media and parent groups was ranked as only somewhat useful. Working with employee groups, the community, and local government were also ranked as somewhat useful. Professional development emphasizing the need to work with stakeholders, such as employees, community members, and local government officials, would be helpful to aspiring superintendents.

Survey participants ranked their leadership efforts during the entry period. Most indicated that efforts in the political area and human resources were the most important. Human resources included the areas of empowerment and support personnel. The political area included local, internal, board, and community relations. The other two areas, structural framework—including organizational changes, operations, and policy—and symbolic framework—which includes outward displays, vision, and motivating others—were not ranked as highly as political and human resources. New superintendents should focus on board and community relations, as well as other areas of the political framework, when entering a new district.

Survey respondents indicated a number of areas that inhibited them in their role as superintendents or inhibited them during the entry period. Interestingly, while relations with board members were selected as an important activity during the entry period, it was also the area that most respondents indicated was the greatest inhibiting factor. They also indicated that dealing with board members who are elected with a single political objective was between a moderate and a major issue. In addition, they ranked superintendent-board relations as a major issue affecting or inhibiting their superintendency. Also, the respondents indicated that accountability is a factor that inhibited them in their job performance and that the demand for assessment and accountability was a major issue. New superintendents should continue to focus on relations with the board of trustees during the entry period to decrease the amount of inhibition caused by board relations.

Survey participants were asked to rank their leadership areas of strength. They indicated that school board relations and organizational leadership were the greatest strength area. School board relations are political, since school board members in Texas are elected. Organizational leadership is associated with human resources and other areas of working in a school district. Other areas ranked as moderate strengths included fiscal leadership and budget, personnel management and evaluation of staff members, assessment, accountability, student achievement, and instructional leadership. The areas with the lowest ranks were community relations and facilities management/safe schools. Respondents to the survey were also asked to rank their leadership efforts or focus for their current superintendency. The highest were political framework and structural framework, with the lowest ranked being human resources framework and symbolic framework. This is different from the responses to the question on their leadership efforts during the entry period, where they ranked political framework and human resources framework as the highest. Participants in the focus group elaborated on the importance of board relations and gave examples of how to foster a good relationship with the board of trustees.

The question regarding successful strategies during the entry period was addressed with the focus group and also in an open-ended question in the survey. Responses from both groups indicated that getting to know the community by being visible and listening to various groups was imperative. They also both indicated that working with a mentor was important and that board relations were crucial.

Responses to the question regarding what they might have done differently in an entry period included continuing what had already been successful. Responses to the open-ended item in the survey included being more visible throughout the district, using a team approach, including key people in decisions and empowering those people, responding to community needs, and building relationships throughout the school and general community. All of these included important components other respondents, both on the survey and in the focus group, expressed as being crucial to a successful entry plan and superintendency.

CONCLUSION

In structuring this study, the researcher tried to focus on the factors contributing to a successful transition into the role of a new superintendency in Texas. In other words, she wanted to determine if there were similar structures for school superintendents as the literature in the business models indicated a structure for the entry of people into new leadership positions in business. She focused on the first 90 days, because that is the model used in business. Furthermore, she believed that conducting a quantitative study involving superintendents from across Texas would be complemented by a qualitative component which focused on superintendents from the south Texas region. In particular, the literature reviewed for this study suggested that actions taken by a new superintendent in the entry period of a new position would fundamentally determine whether he/she succeeds or fails in the position over the long term. This study examined those factors indicated in the business model that might apply to the school setting, such as collegiality, development of a vision and strategies, and communication. Similarities were found between the business and school model in many of these areas.

The information obtained through both the quantitative electronic survey and the qualitative focus group gave support to and provided a foundational framework to the importance and significance of the initial entry period of a superintendent and the factors that make a successful entry period. Although most of the superintendents who either responded to the survey or participated in the focus group did have a specific set of goals or a plan in mind prior to or during their entry, the vast majority were not required by the district or the school board to actually produce or develop a plan. In the electronic survey, over half of the respondents indicated that the professional development programs prepared them or prepared them well. Regarding areas of professional development, however, they indicated that they were only adequately prepared to create an entry plan.

This study supplies commentary from Texas superintendents regarding the entry period, with information concerning their own entry, the circumstances, and also the tools and frameworks used in the entry period. Information pertaining to the superintendent-district "fit" and how this applies to a successful entry was also obtained through the study. Most of the superintendents indicated that the areas of fiscal responsibility and budget, as well as student achievement and accountability, were of primary concern in determining if they fit with the new district. Some used the interview process to determine their "fit" with the district. In fact, the vast majority used their evaluation of the



district situation and the concept of “fit” in pursuing their current superintendency. This would indicate that superintendents should research a district’s situation prior to accepting a position and developing an entry plan.

Overall, it appears that Texas superintendents who responded to the survey, as well as those who attended the focus group, not only believed that an entry plan was important, but they also had an entry plan into a new superintendency. In addition, they had a plan for determining the district’s situation, either before entering the district or immediately after receiving the new position. Working closely and carefully with the board of trustees during the entry period seems to be crucial to the success of a new superintendent.

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