THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUPERINTENDENTS AND THEIR
SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF
TRADITIONAL VERSUS NON-TRADITIONAL SUPERINTENDENTS

A Doctoral Research Project
Presented to
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Doctoral Committee Chair
School of Education
Sage Graduate School
The Sage Colleges

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education
In Educational Leadership

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October, 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Abstract

The role of a superintendent as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a school district may never have been as perilous as it is currently. The diverse range of issues, which challenges today's superintendent, are broad, deep and complex. In this environment, the relationship which a superintendent enjoys with his or her senior leadership team, the cabinet, becomes critically important.

Today's superintendent is expected to perform a number of roles in school districts. Examples of these roles are: day-to-day administration, chief financial officer, instructional leader, public relations manager, political advocate, program evaluator, and others. The purpose of this qualitative comparative study was to explore how the nature of the preparation, training and experiences of traditional versus non-traditional superintendents influences the ways in which they establish professional working relationships or effectiveness with their existing administrative cabinet. It further examined the relationship between the two groups of superintendents and their leadership teams before, during, and up to the date of employment. The inference made from this research is that leaders coming to the position with a prior business background either with business training or as former business officials with business certifications given today's world of diverse skill sets required of district leaders are no more equipped to do a better job and be successful than those superintendents from a traditional academic background.

This research found that it did not make a difference whether the superintendent was from a traditional background or a nontraditional background. Participants were asked how a superintendent with a business background articulated academic issues, whether he or she was

fluent and well informed. Conversely, they were asked whether a superintendent with an academic background was able to speak with confidence about the business issues facing the school district. The participants felt that it was most important that the superintendent regardless of her or his background, do their homework, be well informed, be visible by visiting schools and classrooms, and that they get to know their staff and faculty, management by walking around.

The superintendents were not particularly concerned about the issue of a traditional versus a non-traditional background. All of these superintendents were looking for competent people whether they themselves were business people or academic people. They just wanted to know that the people in the "trenches" with them were competent, capable, and willing to work with them to do whatever it takes to get the job done.

Keywords: Superintendent, leadership team, cabinet, traditional background, non-traditional background, pre-existing cabinet, Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The role of a superintendent as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a school district has grown increasingly perilous in the early years of the 21st century. The diverse range of issues challenging today's superintendent are broad, deep and complex, including the relationship that a superintendent fosters with his or her respective senior leadership team, referred to in this study as the cabinet. The investigation to follow focuses on superintendent-cabinet relationship from three vantage points: developing relationship during the interview process, the Courtship; after the appointment but prior to date of employment, the Engagement; and post date of employment through the first year of the superintendency, the Honeymoon. Additionally, an exploration of the significance of the superintendent's background will be included as well as the length of time the cabinet has been in place.

The relationship between a Superintendent and their senior leadership team begins to evolve from the instant the superintendent candidate walks into the interview room. As described by Bridges (2009), this entrance marks the beginning of transition:

> The starting point for dealing with transition is not the outcome but the ending that you'll have to make to leave the old situation behind. Situational change hinges on the new thing, but psychological transition depends on letting go of the old reality and the old identity you had before the change took place. (Bridges, 2009, p. 7)

After hiring decisions have been made, the formative stages of the Engagement and Honeymoon phases commence. The new superintendent becomes both the new leader and member of the leadership team. It is important for the superintendent to observe, listen, and get to know the school and community during the first year. As these superintendents begin to

develop relationships with people in the senior leadership team, trust building becomes the cornerstone for team development and community relations. Sanaghan (2011) points out:

> For superintendents to be successful, they need the help and support of the cabinet. Effective senior teams can leverage a superintendent's efforts in dramatic ways. When a talented and dedicated team at the top is working together to accomplish a shared vision and mission for the district, great things can happen. When the senior team is dysfunctional, it negatively impacts the entire district, decisions take forever, the rumor mill is in high gear and issues are quickly polarized. (Sanaghan, 2011, p.1)

A well prepared new superintendent will make teaming with the schools in the district a priority for the district staff. Changing the traditional culture and entrenched practices of district office staff might take considerable time. Some superintendents early in their tenure may experience some distrust or disrespect. The superintendent will have to determine if there is a need for new relationships between district administrators and school leaders to create a cohesive, well run central office. (Derrington, 2011)

All in all, the successful superintendent will see and accept his/her responsibility to form a vision, build trust, collaboration, interdependence, motivation and mutual responsibility for the foundation of success to begin and grow in the district. (Derrington, 2011) This effort must involve the cabinet.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore how the background of a superintendent influences the ways in which he or she establishes professional working relationships with an existing administrative cabinet. It further examined the relationship between the superintendent and the leadership team during the phases of courtship, engagement and honeymoon. The

research provided data with which to examine what, if any, significance or bearing the background, training, and experience that the superintendent brings to their relationship with the leadership team.

Research Questions

These questions deal with the relationship between the superintendent and the leadership team during the three phases of courtship, engagement, and honeymoon. Those phases are pre-appointment and post-appointment period that basically terminates at date of employment and the first year of service as superintendent.

The four questions guiding this research were:

1. What is the relationship between the superintendent and his or her cabinet before and during their interview process up to the date of employment?

2. How does a newly hired superintendent work with his or her leadership team? How does he or she become effective?

3. Does a superintendent with a traditional background of academics differ from a superintendent with a nontraditional business background, relative to the effectiveness of his or her leadership?

4. What bearing, if any, does the fact that a superintendent's cabinet may have been pre-existing have on his or her ability to lead?

This study utilized a phenomenological research approach, a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by the participants (Creswell, 2009). This method was selected to explore the relationship between the superintendent of a school district and the members of his or her cabinet and examined two groups of superintendents: those coming to the position with a traditional, instructional

background and those possessing a non-traditional background. The second group will include

superintendents coming from business, those formally educated in business, and/or those who

previously served as School District Business Leaders (SDBL's) or those who held that

certification. Utilizing interview data, the responses from the two groups of superintendents will

be analyzed to determine the extent to which the superintendent's background contributed to a

workable fit between the superintendent and the cabinet. Likewise, the cabinet members within

those same districts will be studied from the perspective of how their pre-existing status affects

the relationship with the superintendent. Interview data will be analyzed using the appropriate

qualitative strategies.

Significance of the Study:

Today's superintendent is expected to perform a number of roles in school districts

including: daily administration, chief financial officer, instructional leader, public relations

manager, political advocate, and program evaluator.

In their Snapshot 2009 report, The Council of School Superintendents (2009) used data

from 2000 to 2006 to predict a mass exodus of incumbent superintendents driven largely by the

bursting of the baby boom bubble – the simultaneous retirement of large numbers of educators

who began their careers in schools in the late 60s and early 70s. These predictions have largely

come to pass as approximately 283 of New York State's approximately 725 superintendents have

retired in the past five years (Fale, et al, 2009).

In order to better understand the transition from one to the next superintendent, the

process of a turnover in leadership was considered through Bridges (2009) phases of transitions:

Letting Go, The Neutral Zone, and A New Beginning (p. 4-5).

In addition, this study explored the pre-existing status of the cabinet; the traditional versus nontraditional background of the superintendent; and whether the cabinet participated in the interview process for the new superintendent.

One of the questions being explored was whether leaders coming to the superintendency with a prior business background, either with business training or as former business officials with business certification, are better equipped to foster functional relationships with the senior leadership team than their more traditionally prepared colleagues.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this paper, several terms which may be unfamiliar to readers are used and abbreviated. Definitions are provided below to clarify for the reader the intent of the researcher when the terms or abbreviations are used in context.

Superintendent of Schools - Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the school district.

City School District - designated and declared to be city school districts: (1) Any school
        district coterminous with a city on January first, nineteen hundred fifty; (2) any
        school district part of which was without and part of which was within a city on
        January first, nineteen hundred fifty, and which then contained the whole or the
        greater portion of the children of the city between birth and eighteen years of age,
        as shown by the school census; and (3) any school district wholly within, but not
        coterminous with a city on January first, nineteen hundred fifty, and which then
        contained the greater portion of the children of the city between birth and eighteen
        years of age, as shown by the school census.
        b. Whenever a city shall be created after January 1, 1950, that school district shall
        be and become a city school district which, on the effective date of the

incorporation of such city, is: (1) coterminous with the city; (2) partly without and

partly within the city and then contains the whole or the greater portion of the

children of the city between birth and eighteen years of age, as shown by the

school census; or (3) wholly within but not coterminous with the city and then

contains the greater portion of the children of the city

between birth and eighteen years of age, as shown by the school census.

c. The corporate existence of any school district, which, by virtue of

the provisions of this subdivision, shall be and become a city school

district, shall continue, and any such school district thereafter shall

be governed by the provisions of this chapter applicable to city school

districts (NCES, 1997, p. 51).

Rural School District- defined as (1) a school district with 25 or fewer students per square

mile. (2) Is located in a rural community, or in a county where 60% or more of the

communities are rural. (NCES, 1997, p. 52)

Suburban School District - a school that exists in the outer suburbs of a city. It is

characterized by its population of students whose parents have moved from the

inner city areas in generations past. (NCES, 1997, p. 55)

Cabinet -A team of people consisting of at least two associate/assistant superintendents; a

chief academic officer and a chief school business official.

Central Office -The administrative offices that make up the superintendent's staff.

Study Limitations

As this exploration served to open the dialogue around the research questions**,** many

potential limitations were present including: the school districts chosen, the people agreeing to

participate, the information exchanged, the settings in which the interviews were conducted and this student researcher's biases.

One limitation of the study was that although seven different districts agreed to participate, the timing of the research was such that it conflicted with the yearly budget calendar and vote which made gaining access to senior leadership difficult. Another limitation was that all participants were selected from a specific geographic region that included the greater Capital District and Hudson Valley of New York State. The original research design anticipated a larger pool of participants and greater diversity among school districts. Although the study included city school districts, small and large suburban districts, and rural districts, there was no representation from large urban districts. These school districts were chosen for ease of access to participants as interviews were conducted face to face. The sample was small and therefore the data are limited in credibility for large scale generalizability.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The role of a superintendent as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a central school district (CSD) may never be as perilous as it is currently. The diverse range of issues, which challenges today's superintendent, are broad, deep and complex. None may be more important than that of the relationship which a superintendent enjoys with his or her senior leadership team, the cabinet (Blanchard, 2010).

District leaders today are working in an environment that is constantly changing and has ever present shifting priorities. In fact, the literature reveals that priorities have been shifting for decades.

During the first half of the 20th century, says the conventional wisdom, district management could be defined by 'the four B's': Bonds, budgets, buses and buildings. By the 1970s, it had become 'the four R's' – Race, Resources, Relationships and Rules. (Usdan, 2001, p. 2)

Threads of the four B's and four C's remain but by the 1980's State and Federal initiatives caused emergence of new priorities, when the contemporary school reform movement gained traction". (Usdan, 2001, pg.2). Today's district leaders have a number of concerns facing them. "The four A's: Academic standards. Accountability, Autonomy and Ambiguity and 'the five C's': Collaboration, Communications, Connection, Child advocacy and Community building" (Usdan, 2001, p. 2).

Districts are focusing on a number of things all at once. "If the basic function of districts is to help students meet newly raised academic standards, it becomes increasingly important that leaders at all levels become more expert in teaching and learning, that in practice and not just in

theory" (Usdan, 2001, pg.3). Some superintendents today don't have the knowledge, training, or skills needed in today's educational world. The current financial crisis in New York State has created another unanticipated issue on the superintendent's table.

> A leader should not accept the organization he enters on its face and assume it runs as advertised. His first act should be to delve into its bowels and see how it is structured and running. The charts and written operating procedures may bear no relation to the organization's real mode of operations. This is especially true of organizations that have been around for a long time and have not had a recent review of their structure and operations. (Zinni, 2002, p. 133)

This research effort focuses on the relationship between a superintendent and his or her respective senior level management team, the cabinet. The research examined the developing relationship during the interview process, the Courtship; after the appointment but prior to date of employment, the Engagement; and first year of employment, the Honeymoon. Additionally, it looks at the significance of the background, education, certifications, and work experiences and where the superintendent's career originated, traditional versus non-traditional, and finally, whether or not the cabinet was in place prior to the superintendent's arrival and how leveraged the cabinet is as a group in terms of multi-year contracts and/or tenure. During these formative stages a vision builds trust, collaboration, interdependence, motivation and mutual responsibility for success to begin and form (Blanchard, 2010). As leaders develop a trusting relationship with people in the one-on-one leadership arena, they become trustworthy. This is great preparation for team development and building a community (Blanchard, 2010).

The work of Quinn (2007) in the area of *Preparing Non-Educators for the Superintendency* guided the development of the research problem statement for this study.

Believing effective leadership at the district level is essential to ensure student

achievement, business leader and philanthropist Eli Broad created the Broad

Superintendents Academy in 2001. The Broad Superintendents Academy is a rigorous

10-month executive management program designed to prepare CEO's and senior

executives from business, non-profit, military, government and education backgrounds to

lead urban public school systems. (p. 4)

In a field where the question of how to move the student achievement needle upward has

defied so many for so long, two-thirds of academy graduates who have served as

superintendents for at least two years are outperforming their peers in raising student

achievement. (p. 4)

The work done by this academy gives superintendents information and tools to create

positive working relationships with his or her leadership team.

The literature reviews in this chapter is divided into four themes: Change in

Organizational Leadership, Background of the Superintendent, Superintendent Turnover, The

Superintendent's Cabinet.

Change in Organizational Leadership

There has been much written about change and transition and how eventful an experience

it can be. Perhaps it would be more accurate to think of the three stages of transition as, letting

go, neutral zone, and new beginning as three processes and to say that the transition cannot be

completed until all three have taken place (Bridges, 2009). "Change causes transition, and

transition starts with an ending, if things change within an organization at least some of the

employees and managers are going to have to let go of something" (Bridges, 2009, p. 23).

Inevitably, when organizational change occurs, likewise transition is soon to follow, sometimes

that is a good thing and sometimes that may be a difficult thing. Managing transition is getting people to let go of the old ways and understanding that they will enter a state of affairs in which neither the old ways nor the new ways work satisfactorily. People are caught between the demands of conflicting systems and end up immobilized (Bridges, 2009).

School districts must set clear goals and expectations in order to respond to new challenges. School leaders engage in periodic review and candid discussions regarding the progress they may or may not be making. Given the many responsibilities of today's leaders it is necessary for them to focus attention on their goals, where they are going; how they intend to get there, strategies; and whether progress is actually being made (Benjamin, 2011).

A recent national study of school leadership in England concluded that

…the key roles of school leaders include: maintaining strategic direction

and ethos, enhancing teaching and learning; developing and managing

people; networking and collaborating; operational matters (i.e.

management); and fulfilling accountability functions. From their national

sample they concluded that school leadership is 'healthy' but not without

concerns. In particular, they observe that too many head teachers are

occupied with the operational aspects of running a school.

(PricewaterhouseCoopers as sited in Spillane, 2009, p. 70-73)

The time invested by the prospective superintendent and interviewing committee, in the courtship and engagement periods can be extremely revealing to all. Leadership lays a foundation for internal stability and cohesiveness through developing a three-dimensional framework (Glickman, 2003). It is in this time frame that the three dimensions: 1) A covenant of

beliefs, 2) A governance structure for school wide decisions, and 3) An action research process

for continuous internal study can be developed and implemented (Glickman 2003).

Phillips (2007) in *the Four-Quadrant Leadership Team* suggests what is required to

develop high performers in a school system's administrative posts. The challenge lies in

knowing which individuals are most likely to be successful in the hiring and promotion

decisions, and in knowing how to help develop those individuals to be more effective (Phillips,

2007). The task as a system leader is to take a hard look at oneself and each of the senior staff

members to determine individual strengths and weaknesses, assess where the group is as a

leadership team, and develop strategies to move the team forward (Phillips, 2007).

With the ensuing change of superintendents, stakeholders know or sense that transition is

soon to follow and begin to prepare for the inevitable. As the district prepares for the entry of a

new superintendent, the community can be left immobile which Bridge's (2009) refers to as the

neutral zone. The neutral zone is a lonely place where people feel isolated. Old problems are

likely to resurface and old resentments are likely to come back to life. It is especially important

to try to rebuild a sense of identification with the group and of connectedness with one another

(Bridges, 2009). During this journey through the wilderness, a significant shift takes place

within people. If that shift does not occur the change is unlikely to produce positive results.

That shift comes from an inner re-patterning and sorting process in which old and no longer

appropriate habits are discarded and newly appropriate patterns of thought and action are

developed (Bridges, 2009).

As the community emerges from this wilderness, stakeholders begin to focus on what's

next. Beginnings are psychological phenomena. They are marked by a release of new energy in

a new direction. They are the expression of a new identity. They are much more than the

practical and situational "new circumstances" (Bridges, 2009). So clearly, the superintendent-elect has to confidently walk through the door with an entry plan which communicates the purpose, vision, future plan, and how to get there. The implementation plan must be comprised of time line and dollars. Finally, the plan must also address the ways in which the new superintendent intends to monitor, measure, and adapt to real time environmental factors (Bridges, 2009).

School leaders have expressed values that relate to the wider educational, social and personal development of students, staff and local communities. "They began to stress the need for developing 'empowering' and 'learning' relationships, combined with a commitment to social justice outcomes" (Campbell, 2003, p. 218).

An editorial about social justice and educational leadership as written by Cochran-Smith (1999):

> Educational leadership – in all its dramatically different forms – is
> inescapably value – oriented and political in nature. In this sense, each
> piece constructs educational leadership and educational leaders…as
> knower's, as activists and as agents in their individual and collective efforts
> to work for social change. (p. 147)

Background of the Superintendent

Another significant area of the research was what, if any, did the background, training and education of superintendents, have on their respective relationship with their cabinet and/or district-wide effectiveness.

Glass (2006) wrote in *Preparing and Training Superintendents for the Mission of Executive Management:*

In some respects the superintendent's role is an anomaly in comparison to

many complex organizations. The roles of leadership (executive) and

management are discrete functions carried out by separate role incumbents

in large private sector organizations. This is only true in perhaps 1% to 2%

of American public school districts. A body of literature in the field of

business not only separates the two roles but also discusses personality traits

and types best needed to fit each role. If this business organization

literature aptly describes leadership and management needed in public

schools, a curious paradox is created for superintendents. Can a

superintendent possess both a leadership and management personality? Or

does the more confining role of the manager inhibit the less confining role

of executive leader? (p. 3)

District leaders have been educating themselves and changing with the evolving issues facing them. One kind of leadership put in place in California focuses on administration and fosters collaborative relationships with new superintendents and other senior staff, sharing the responsibilities traditionally handled by one person. "An example is the 'Chief Executive Officer/Chief Academic Officer' -CEO/CAO- team leadership method" (Usdan, 2001, p. 10). In this model the superintendent is the district's chief executive officer. He deals mainly with management issues, district politics, union relations, and bond issues. The other official is the district's chancellor of instruction and acts as the chief academic officer and handles all matters relating to teaching and learning.

Though it is too early to declare this partnership a success, it appears to have promise.

As a result, the district's 180 schools are incorporating such major changes as the

requirement that each principal spend two hours a day in classrooms helping teachers

strengthen instruction. (Usdan, 2001, p. 10)

This similarity between education and business leadership was also expressed by Ediger

(2008) who says that school leadership and executive officers in the business world are

congruent in many ways. Business world management principles are necessary where billions of

dollars are involved in paying costs for educating public school pupils. New financial resources

must be identified, developed, and monitored wisely. The dual objectives of increasing

achievement of students within the limited revenues available define and prioritize how

resources shall be allocated (Ediger, 2008).

The superintendent of schools is a highly situational position which is influenced by the

board of education and local circumstances. It is suggested that there are three general roles for

the superintendent; change agent, developer, or maintainer of the status quo. These roles require

a specific set of leadership and management skills. These roles significantly affect a board's

decision in the selection process of a new superintendent (Glass, 2006).

There is little leadership literature regarding the essential foundation for a productive

district system as being district level management.

Without a solid district level management platform, leadership strategies of any type are

likely to flounder or be seriously impeded. It is a challenge to find a high academic

achieving district without competent fiscal, budget, facilities, personnel, curriculum, and

support services management. (Glass, 2006, p. 5)

This suggests that a supportive central office will allow the superintendent and his

or her leadership team to perform the functions of leadership in a more constructive

manner.

"If the future of the school district is to include an emphasis on instructional improvement, that perspective will necessitate the selection of a superintendent with considerable sensitivity and skills in instructional processes" (Daresh, 2001, p. 452). Negotiating with teachers, passing tax levies, and engaging in positive relationships with school board members are important duties of superintendents, the main business of a quality education is instruction. Instructional commitment and expertise is an important skill for the district administrator to have (Daresh, 2001).

Census data from the New York State Education Department reveal that the number of central school districts in 2010 was 697. Of the 697 central school districts 40 of them had sitting superintendents who were former school business officials and held School District Business Leadership or equivalent certifications.

Bolman & Deal (2008) in *Reframing Organizations* Described leadership functions and the four frames: Structural, Human Resource, Political and Symbolic. One of the four frames describes a structural scenario that casts managers and leaders in the fundamental roles of clarifying goals, attending to the relationship between structure and environment, and developing a clearly defined array of roles and relationships appropriate to what needs to be done. Without a workable structure, people become unsure about what they are supposed to be doing. The result is confusion, frustration, and conflict. In an effective organization, individuals understand their responsibilities and their contribution. Policies, linkages, and lines of authority are straightforward and accepted. With the right structure, the organization can achieve its goals, and individuals can see their role in the big picture (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Superintendent Turnover

Voluntary turnover is simply the process by which a superintendent seeks a new job for personal or professional reasons. Involuntary turnover usually involves dismissal, and the reasons for such turnover are more difficult to determine. Eaton & Sharp (1996) wrote:

There is a natural and understandable reluctance for superintendents who have been fired to want to document the reasons for some researcher. Both individual superintendents and boards of education go to unusual lengths to make dismissals look like voluntary turnover. This they do in an effort to mask certain local problem situations and as a result of agreements with superintendents who exact pledges to make dismissal look like voluntary turnover in exchange for their quietly leaving before the contract period expires. (p. 79)

Parker (1996) writes in an article on superintendent vulnerability and mobility:

Since the turn of the century, public school superintendents have often exhibited less of their superintendent-scholar persona as they administer ever-increasing expenditures in educational programs. As a survival tactic, the more pragmatic approach of top school chief executive officers, CEOs, has been to utilize business management practices that are thought to increase the length of their tenure as leaders of their districts. The benefit of borrowing strategies from the business world evolved as superintendents fought for recognition as good managers who are regarded as valuable by most school board members, businessmen in the community, and taxpayers in general. That way, it was reasoned, success in at least one arena was guaranteed, even if

the schools under their leadership were not deemed academically successful.

(p. 64)

At the superintendent level, some boards have turned to leaders from the military, business, political, and nonprofit arenas to satisfy their leadership needs. An active core of retired superintendents has found employment as a contracted acting superintendent for a district that has not been able to find a candidate to fill the job. An acting superintendent meets a temporary need, but short tenure ensures that continuity of policy is unlikely. Moreover, when a new system leader announces changes, a strong undercurrent of cynicism remains that says, 'I've outlasted three other superintendents with new ideas, and I'll outlast this one too (Reeves, 2002, p. 168).

Today's superintendent is expected to perform a number of roles in school districts including: daily administration, chief financial officer, curriculum leader, public relations manager, and political advocate. The Snapshot (2009) reports from 2000 to 2006 predicted a mass departure of incumbent superintendents driven largely by the bursting of the baby boom bubble – the simultaneous retirement of large numbers of educators who began their careers in schools in the late 60s and early 70s. These predictions have largely come to pass – in the past five years, some 283 of New York's 725-odd superintendents have retired (Fale, Edward, "et al., 2009). Statistics from Usdan's (2001) Leadership for Student Learning reported:

Current superintendents are worried about recruiting future district leaders.

According to the AASA, districts will need to hire nearly 8,000 new

superintendents, replacing well over half of the nation's 13,500

superintendents by 2008. Eighty-eight percent of superintendents surveyed

agreed that the shortage of applicants for the position is 'a serious crisis in American education. (p. 6)

The following factors are contributing to this brewing crisis:

(1) The average time to fill a superintendent vacancy has more than doubled from about four months a decade ago to about 11 months today.

(2) Although 91 percent of superintendents agreed strongly in a 2000 poll that their work has provided 'real career satisfaction,' only 65 percent say they would 'truly recommend the profession of superintendent as a meaningful and satisfying career.'

(3) In the country's largest urban districts, the average tenure of superintendents dropped from 2.7 years in 1997 to 2.3 years in 1999, according to a survey by the Council of Great City Schools of 48 member districts. Indeed, some evidence suggests that turnover is worst in the big cities that compete most fiercely for leaders for the nation's most challenging districts.

(p. 6-7)

Fewer people are applying to become superintendents when appointed positions become available. Ten years ago a larger school district would receive fifty to sixty applications for a position. Recently only twelve to thirty people are applying. Fewer central office personnel are applying to become superintendents instead building principals are seeking these positions. The assumption is that the pressure of central office is so high that the interest just is not there like it was years ago. Lee Childress, a superintendent said "It does concern me. I think one of the keys to the success of any school district is strong leadership. We as educators, are going to have to work hard to

develop a pool of individuals who are interested in being superintendents" (Childress as

cited in Kieffer, 2011, p. 2).

The Superintendent's Cabinet

Leaders who practice distributed leadership recognize the need to draw upon and build

from the expertise of the teachers. It has become important to include teachers in administrative

meetings to build a culture of open and honest dialogue (Kennedy, 2011). In an article written

by Melissa Ezarik (2003) called *Hire Power,* she writes:

The wrong step forward in choosing an administration team can move a district two steps

back

Thou Shalt Not… Make changes too fast – increasingly, superintendents take

the time they need, even up to eighteen months, to fill top posts. Take too long

– Holding off on a necessary change is the other extreme, and perhaps the

number one mistake superintendents make in team-building. Replace key

people – if there are people in place doing the job well you should try to keep

them. Hire the wrong people – this can destroy a superintendent's career. The

best team members are those who aspire to be district heads themselves. Try

to duplicate a former district – every system's needs and culture are different.

Communicate change without the context of a vision – superintendents can sell

the need for a new position by explaining how it would 'provide energy to

continue to move the educational system forward. (p. 20)

Burns' (1978) early writings defined leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for

certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations

and expectations – of both leaders and followers. The genius of leadership lies in the manner in

which leaders see and act on their and their followers' values and motivations (Burns, 1978).

"What he described as Transformative Leadership: is leadership that occurs when one or more

persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher

levels of motivation and morality" (Burns, 1978, p.20). This is exactly what can occur between

superintendent/cabinet and faculty, students, parents and other community stakeholders. The

leader is more skillful in evaluating followers' motives, anticipating their responses to an

initiative, and estimating their power bases, than the reverse. Leaders continue to take the major

part in maintaining and effectuating the relationship with followers and will have the major role

in ultimately carrying out the combined purpose of leaders and followers. Finally, and most

important by far, leaders address themselves to followers' wants, needs, and other motivations,

as well as to their own, and thus they serve as an independent force in changing the motivation

base of the followers (Burns, 1978). The development of certain leaders or rulers is described

not in order to 'solve' leadership problems or necessarily to predict what kind of leader a person

might become, but to raise questions inherent in the complexity of leadership processes (Burns,

1978).

During this discovery period, both the superintendent and cabinet must try and ascertain

what Glickman (2003) described as what Lewis and Clark did while on expedition: find the right

personnel, the correct information, people who have enhanced interpersonal and communication

skills, the requisite supplies and resources necessary to get the job done and the ability to

develop leaders from within along the away.

Susan Kogler-Hill, PhD. (2010), a professor in the School of Communication at

Cleveland State University, wrote about team leadership or teams as organizational groups

composed of members who are interdependent, who share common goals, and who must

coordinate their activities to accomplish these goals. She further states, effective team performance begins with the leader's mental model of the situation. This mental model reflects not only the components of the problem confronting them, but also the environmental and organizational contingencies that define the larger context of team action. The leader develops a model of what the team problem is and what solutions are possible in this context, given the environmental and organizational constraints and resources (as cited in Northouse, 2010). This model for team leadership is based on the functional leadership claim that the leader's job is to monitor the team and then take whatever action is necessary to ensure team effectiveness. The team leadership model attempts to integrate mediation and monitoring concepts (Northouse, 2010).

One of the ever present concerns of a new superintendent is the effectiveness of the team, especially at the beginning of the relationship. Two critical functions of team effectiveness are performance or task accomplishment and development or the maintenance of the team. Team performance is the "quality of decision making, the ability to implement decisions, the outcomes of team work in terms of problems solved and work completed, and finally the quality of institutional leadership provided by the team" (Nadler 1998, p. 24). Team development is the cohesiveness of the team and the ability of group members to satisfy their own needs while working effectively with other team members (Nadler, 1998) (as cited in Northouse, 2010). This model portrayed leadership as a team oversight function in which the leader's role is to do whatever is necessary to help the group achieve effectiveness (Northouse, 2010). One of the strengths of this model is that it is designed to answer many of the questions not answered in earlier small-group research by focusing on the real-life organizational work and the leadership needed therein. The model places the ongoing work group or team in an environmental context

within the organization, industry, or society (Northouse, 2010). A second strength of the model

provided a cognitive guide to help leaders design and maintain effective teams, especially when

performance is below standards. Such an approach is consistent with the emerging theoretical

notions of the leader as a medium whose job it is to process the complex information inherent in

teamwork (Northouse, 2010). The final piece of the model takes into account the changing role

of leaders and followers in organizations. The model does not focus on the position of power of

a leader but instead focuses on the critical functions of leadership as diagnosis and action taking

(Northouse, 2010).

Leadership and management make a difference in increasing school productivity and

turning around struggling schools. Too often, short shrift is given to the practice of leading and

managing, focusing instead on leadership styles (Spillane, 2009). Spillane's (2009) distributed

framework involves two core aspects: principle plus and practice. Principle plus acknowledges

that multiple individuals are involved in leading and managing schools. The practice aspect

prioritizes the practice of leading and managing and frames this practice as emerging from

interactions among school leaders and followers, mediated by the situation in which the work

occurs.

Spillane's (2009) research suggests that to understand school leadership and

management, we must move beyond the current fixation with the principal to consider the team

of individuals who have or take responsibility for leading and managing.

We need to tend to the characteristics of the team by looking at such factors as team

diversity in terms of experience, career stage, gender, race, education and training. We must

look at the distributed expertise of team members (Spillane, 2009). When viewed through a

distributed frame, organizational routines and various tools define the practice of leading and

managing by focusing interactions among leaders and followers on particular features within the school (Spillane, 2009, p. 72).

By concentrating on the formal school organization, researchers can miss the informal relationships that are fundamental to leadership. Distributed Leadership Studies (DLS) provides a framework for examining school leadership and management that considers the interactions of leaders, followers, and aspects of the context. The framework involves two core aspects: principal plus and practice. The principal plus aspect acknowledges that multiple individuals are involved in leading and managing schools. The practice aspect prioritizes the 'practice' of leading and managing and frames this practice as emerging from 'interactions' among school leaders and followers, mediated by the situation in which the work occurs. (Spillane, 2009, pg 72)

Teams have the power to increase productivity and morale or destroy it. Working effectively, a team can make better decisions, solve more complex problems, and do more to enhance creativity and build skills than individuals working alone (Blanchard, 2010). Leadership is a partnership that involves mutual trust between two people who work together to achieve common goals. Both the leader and the follower influence each other (Blanchard, 2010).

Leading change is like dropping a pebble in a pond. After the initial splash, concentric waves emanate out from the center. The leader with the vision is that center, and the team he or she assembles becomes the waves that affect the rest of the pond. Leading change is like guerilla warfare. The leader assembles a small band of revolutionaries, imbues them with a common vision and purpose, organizes their efforts, and relies on them to "spread the word." One cannot lead change by oneself (Clawson, 2009).

Especially apparent in a cabinet scenario is expertise influence comes about when one

person knows more about a critical issue than another. If the job, for instance, is to build

a bridge, and the group includes only one civil engineer, this engineer is likely to exert

the most influence and become the leader of the group. In another group or relating to

another goal, of course, the engineer might have no influence. Expertise power depends

largely on the task at hand and on followers' perceptions of the relevance of the leader's

skills. (Clawson, 2009, p. 219-220)

The Discipline of Teams (Originally published March 1993) is comprised of several

articles and explained that the essence of a team is a shared commitment. Without it, groups

perform as individuals; with it they become a powerful unit of collective performance (HBR:

Katzenbach, 1993). The best teams invest a tremendous amount of time shaping a purpose that

they can own. The best teams also translate their purpose into specific performance goals and

members of successful teams pitch in and become accountable with and to their teammates

(HBR: Katzenbach, 1993). The fundamental distinction between teams and other forms of

working groups turns on performance. A working group relies on the individual contributions of

its members for group performance. But a team strives for something greater than it members

could achieve individually (HBR: Katzenbach, 1993). Essentially what these articles are saying

is that a team can achieve success that is greater than the sum of its parts.

In practice, then, trust is created by the behavior of leaders toward followers: When

leaders treat followers with respect, followers respond with trust (Bennis, 2008). Leaders show

their respect by always treating followers as ends in themselves – and never as means to achieve

their own ego or power needs, or even to achieve the legitimate goals of the organization.

Leaders demonstrate their respect by giving followers relevant information, by never using or

manipulating them, and by including them in the making of decisions that affect them (O'Toole, 2008, p. 62-63). Unfortunately, the prevailing leadership ideology – called contingency theory – unwittingly leads to the creation of mistrust because it encourages managers to shift course arbitrarily and to do whatever they think expedient to achieve their goals, including going back on their word. To renege on one's word may seem necessary to some leaders, but in the eyes of followers it is a betrayal of trust (O'Toole, 2008, p. 63).

Conclusion

Army Major General John Stanford, was the Superintendent of the Seattle Public Schools between 1995 and 1998. After 30 years in the military, Stanford had concluded that leadership means-inspiring, not commanding. To him, it meant communicating a vision for everyone, a common vision of where they could go together. Non-traditional leaders from business and industry bring business to public education acumen. Each academy cohort came from diverse professional backgrounds allowing for rich learning experiences and a deep cross fertilization of ideas. Stanford reported that his experience brought critically needed strengths and experiences to the job, including: experience managing large, diverse and complex operations; experience leading large-scale systems change and cultural change; high level skills in strategic planning, visioning, accountability and transparency; and expertise in financial management (Quinn, 2007). "Great leadership is definitely a transferable skill said Thelma Melendez, an Academy Graduate" (Quinn, 2007, p. 4).

This study was influenced by Quinn's (2007) work in analyzing the data. Are the concepts of vision, accountability, transparency, and expertise common themes among the participants regardless of the nature of their paths to the superintendency?

The task force on school district leadership created in 2001 to research leadership for student learning and the restructuring of school district leadership "is not suggesting that one arrangement works better than others. However it is urging that all school jurisdictions take a hard look at the quality, qualifications, and growth of their school leaders and not simply assume that they will take care of themselves" (Usdan, 2001, p. 10-11). This resource regarding the quality, qualification, and growth of school leaders is important so the researcher is able to draw conclusions relative to the make-up of the leadership teams.

The most successful school leaders in leading reform are categorized as change agents and are not usually popular with school staff. These leaders have to find a balance between empathy and assertiveness. Moore (2009) asserted in his article:

> Such leaders are usually highly skilled in dealing with their emotions as
>
> well as the emotions of others. These leadership skills are of such
>
> importance to the process of restructuring and redesigning schools, that
>
> policy makers, departments of education, and universities can no longer
>
> ignore the research and must carefully reconsider their continuing education
>
> and professional development programs for school leaders. New programs
>
> must include leadership assessments, feedback, and coaching. In fact,
>
> developing the emotional intelligence of school leaders should be a priority
>
> in leadership programs and in leading school reform. (p. 25)

The information related in this quote will be used by the researcher to assess the responses from the participants so as to form a conclusion based on this information of what superintendents and cabinet members feel make the most successful leaders. Business and educational leaders need to understand that students are customers and should be treated like

customers. In fact, many innovations from business have been useful in education. "Just as the best business leaders know that the proverbial bottom line does not tell the complete story of business performance, the best educational leaders know that accountability is more than a litany of test scores" (Kaplan and Norton, 2001; Epstein and Birchard, 1999) (as cited in Reeves, 2002, p. 7). The first and most important influence exerted by a leader is on his or her own behavior. The second greatest influence of the leader is over the behavior of colleagues (Reeves, 2002). Identify prospective leaders. Create and educational leadership university. Invert the pyramid by supporting students, teachers, and parents. Create synergy by blending leadership, learning, and teaching (Reeves, 2002, p. 159).

The literature has offered a number of perspectives regarding effective leadership teams and the qualities or skill sets required to become an effective leader. This research is based on a problem statement that looks at the relationship between superintendents and their senior leadership team.

In today's ever changing world the role of a superintendent and his or her leadership team is undergoing much scrutiny. As such, the research of this study is to answer four questions that to date have not been explored. First, what is the relationship between the superintendent and his or her cabinet before and during their interview process up to the date of employment? Second, how does a newly hired superintendent work with his or her leadership team? How does he or she become effective? The third question, does a superintendent with a traditional academic background differ from a superintendent with a nontraditional or business background relative to the effectiveness of his or her leadership? And finally, what bearing, if any, does the fact that a superintendent's cabinet may have been pre-existing have on his or her ability to lead?

This study investigated how the nature of the preparation, training and experiences of superintendents influence the ways in which they establish professional working relationships with an existing administrative cabinet. The research produced data with which to examine what, if any significance or bearing the background, training, and experience of the superintendent brings to their relationship with the leadership team.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter describes the various methods used to collect and analyze the data from the study. Included is an overview of the research design, the population and sample used in the research, and the processes used to gather, code and report the data.

Overview of Research Design

This study was conducted as a qualitative phenomenological research. This is an inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by the participants (Creswell, 2009). This approach was used to explore the working relationships between a superintendent and the members of his/her cabinet. For the purpose of this study, the superintendent's cabinet was defined as two associate/assistant superintendents, a chief academic officer, and a chief business official.

Two groups of school districts were identified as candidates for inclusion in the study: school districts led by superintendents who had a traditional academic background and districts led by superintendents who had a nontraditional or business background.

This research design was chosen so that the researcher could compare the superintendent/cabinet relationships for both traditionally prepared and non-traditionally prepared superintendents. The phenomenological approach was used because the participants are the people sharing their experiences and are the principal focus of this research.

Prior to conducting this research, the researcher received approval from the Sage Colleges' Institutional Review Board (Appendix A).

Twenty face-to-face interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed in a confidential manner. In the initial letter to the participants there was a letter of informed consent

explaining the research, asking them if they would participate, and asking them to accept by

signing the consent which they all did (Appendices B and C). Subsequent to obtaining informed

consent, interviews were arranged, sometimes one in a day and sometimes three in a day.

Interviews were conducted during the spring of 2011. After each interview was transcribed, the

transcription was sent to the participant in an un-redacted mode for review and redaction if

appropriate (Appendix D). With minor exceptions the interviews were accepted as recorded and

transcribed. Nineteen were returned by the participants affirming the transcription was

acceptable. The twentieth interview was included with no changes and assumed to be correct.

Population and Sample

The population for this study was geographically based with preference given to central

school districts in the Hudson Valley Region. This purposeful sampling led to the selection of

districts in which the superintendent and two assistant superintendents were participants. A

seventh district was also included in which the superintendent and the chief academic officer

participated.

From the list of superintendents with traditional backgrounds a group of four districts in

the New York State Hudson Valley Region were selected. In these districts the superintendent

and the two required assistant superintendents agreed to participate. A similar process was used

with the list of districts whose superintendents had a nontraditional background. The result was

that three districts agreed to participate.

The traditional background superintendent was defined as having professional roots that

were academic in nature, with some level of classroom experience, followed by experience in the

world of administration. Most of these interviewees followed a similar critical path to the

superintendency in the sense that they started in the classroom, then went to assistant principal,

principal, and finally to a district-wide position. Some may have served as a chairperson along

the way. The nontraditional leaders' backgrounds were from business and/or industry. Some

were former business officials themselves and others had experience from some other career

outside of education. Figure 1 shows the critical path taken by the superintendents with a

traditional or academic background participating in the study. Figure 2 shows the critical path

taken by the superintendents with a traditional or academic background participating in the

study.

Figure 1

 Critical Path of a Superintendent with a Traditional Background
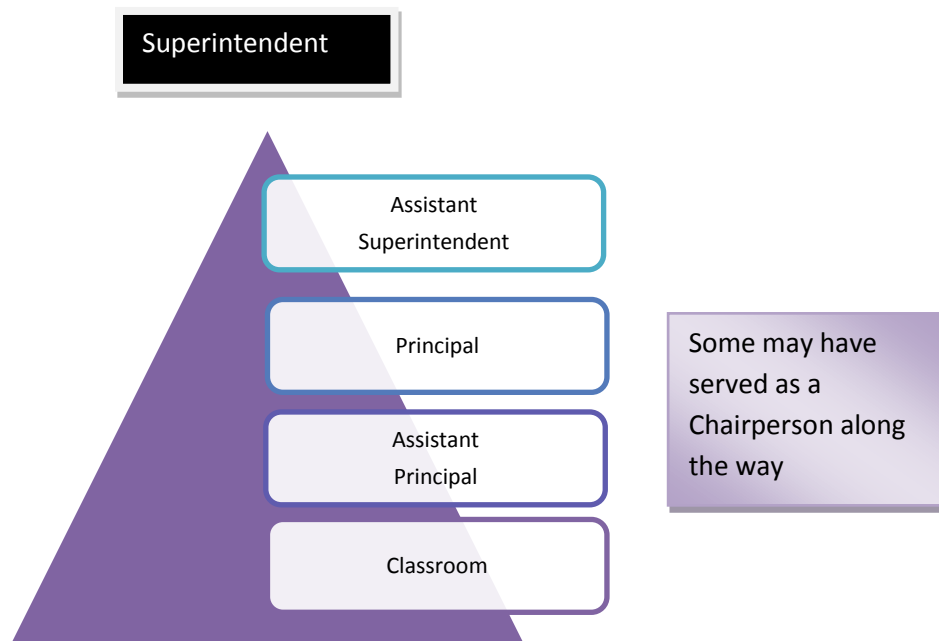
Figure 2

Path of a Superintendent with a non-traditional background

```
                          ┌──────────────────┐
                          │  Superintendent  │
                          └────────┬─────────┘
              ┌────────────────────┴────────────────────┐
      ┌───────────────┐                          ┌───────────────┐
      │ Non Education │                          │   Business    │
      │  Experience   │                          │   Education   │
      └───────┬───────┘                          └───────┬───────┘
    ┌─────────┼──────────────┐                           │
┌─────────┐ ┌────────┐ ┌──────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
│Business/│ │Military│ │   CSEA   │              │ School Business  │
│Industry │ │        │ │          │              │     Officer      │
└─────────┘ └────────┘ └──────────┘              │  Certification   │
                                                 └──────────────────┘
```
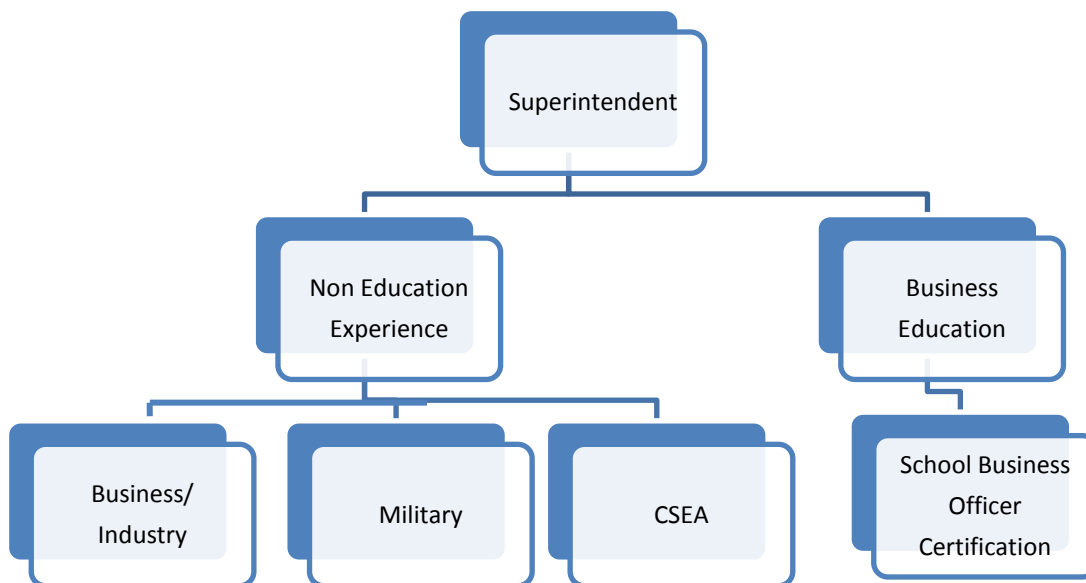
Data Collection

      Three traditional superintendents and their respective cabinet members and four non-traditional superintendents, three with the full cabinet and one with only the chief academic officer from each of those school districts were interviewed. Each cabinet with the exception of one consisted of two members, a chief academic officer and a chief business officer. In total twenty face to face interviews were conducted.

      The interviews were designed so that there were separate interview questions for the superintendents and the cabinet members. These interview questions were used along with a script during the interviews. The researcher also encouraged open dialogue as part of the

interview process to allow free flow conversation so as to better understand their responses in the context of each district.

Participation in this research study was voluntary and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. School districts and participants were assigned pseudonyms to mask their identities which were only known by the researcher. Face-to-face interviewing was the mode of gathering data via audio taping but note taking was also used by the researcher. Audio tapes were transcribed by a professional, independent service. Once transcribed, the transcription was returned to the participant for review and sign-off.

As a means of putting participants at ease with this research process, interview questions were made available prior to actual interview (Appendices F and G). This provided opportunity for prior contemplation, as well as, putting the participant more at ease. They would be less concerned with the prospect of being asked a question for which they were not prepared to respond or preferred not to respond.

The researcher worked with a transcriber on a proprietary basis and there is a transcript confidentiality agreement which was transmitted and signed by the transcriber attesting to the fact that she has seen the interviews and, at all times, respected the confidentially of the project (Appendix E).

Interview process

This research utilized an interview protocol in the collection of data. The interview organization and questions were based on the research purpose statement and the research questions. An interview script was utilized to ensure that all interviews were conducted in a similar manner. The interview protocol and questions were approved as part of the Sage Institutional Board Review process.

A panel of experts was used in the development of the interview questions. Three current superintendents were identified and asked to review the interview questions to determine if they were clear, comprehensive, and addressed the research questions. One superintendent declined to participate but the other two responded with comments. Based on the feedback received from the panel of experts, the researcher changed some aspects of the questions and, in one instance; two of the questions were combined into one. The primary purpose of the panel of experts was to enhance the validity of the study by ensuring that the interview questions adequately addressed the research questions. The secondary purpose was to enhance reliability by ensuring that the interview questions were clear and unambiguous.

Confidentiality

The researcher designed the study in such a way as to protect the confidentiality of the participants. It was of the utmost importance that the strategies for ensuring confidentiality were explained fully not only to the Sage Institutional Review Board (IRB) but also to prospective participants.

From the outset when data were received from the Basic Educational Data System or BEDS, the identities of the superintendents, their respective certifications, and the certifications of their cabinet members were safeguarded. It was imperative that the participants felt confident and comfortable that they would not be placing themselves, their careers, or their respective school districts at risk through the disclosure of research data.

An identification system was devised and communicated to each potential participant prior to his/her agreeing to participate in the study. It was explained that only the researcher had a legend detailing the "code names" that identified which school districts, superintendents and cabinet members were included in the study. Likewise when the face-to-face interviews were

conducted, the procedures for protecting their confidentiality was re-explained and re-enforced to the comfort of everyone involved before proceeding with the interview.

Interviews were audio-taped via a hand-held digital recorder. An independent transcription service, approved in advance by the Sage IRB, was used for transcription purposes. There was no reference on the audio tapes which could connect the actual individual with either his or her real name or respective school district. Direct quotes were used but, in some instances, were restated to the degree necessary to protect the identity of the participant.

All of the research data were stored on the researcher's work computer, which was maintained in a password-protected environment. The requisite coding was performed by the researcher. At the conclusion of the data collection, data analysis and subsequent disclosure of findings, transcripts of interviews were shared with participants for factual review and an opportunity to make certain the record was accurate and complete (Appendix D). Digital recordings were erased, transcripts have been destroyed, and all computer files have been deleted to "trash" and then deleted from the 'trash bin" as well. Lastly, the third party transcription service that was used during the research executed a *Transcription Confidentiality Agreement* to further protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants (Appendix E). The researcher successfully completed and earned his *Certificate of Competency* for Human Subjects via NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research PARTICIPANTS", number 481945.

A coding system was devised before individuals were asked to participate in the study. This system was explained to each potential participant prior to their agreeing to participate. Only the researcher had a legend detailing the "code names" relating to what school districts, superintendents and cabinet members were included in the study. Likewise when the face-to-

face interviews were done this confidentiality was re-explained and re-enforced to the comfort of everyone involved before proceeding with the interview.

Validity and reliability

Strategies were employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the research questions. Feedback (responses) from the participants and the respective coding into meaningful analysis and synthesis was given the highest priority. A panel of experts was used to review the interview questions prior to their use in order to garner feedback as to their clarity, appropriateness and linkage to the research questions. In addition, validity was enhanced by collecting data from a minimum of three sources in each participating site which increased the credibility of the research. In this study the three perspectives were those of the superintendent, the assistant superintendent for finance, and the assistant superintendent for instruction.

Reliability (rigor or repeatability) of information was equally important. A panel of experts, including two practicing superintendents was engaged to stress test the interview questions as they related to the four research questions. The questions were judged to be sufficiently clear and simple enough to elicit the desired data necessary to address the research questions. The panel of experts determined that the interview questions would measure what was intended to be measured.

Data Analysis

All interviews were coded to protect the identities of the participants and the participating school districts. Using the transcripts as the primary source of data, the transcripts were read multiple times to ensure that the researcher had a good sense of the patterns present in the data. Then the data were grouped into trends and themes. The themes were then related back to the research questions. The data were described in sufficient detail such that they demonstrated both

the depth and breadth of the participants' responses to the interview questions. These themes are discussed in detail in the findings section of this report.

Researcher bias

The bias for the researcher in this study arises from twenty-six years of work experience in the field of education. This researcher was trained and educated in management, finance, and accounting. This education and work experience fits the profile of nontraditional as defined in this study. All professional experience was derived from having worked in the world of higher education and private, independent school education. Additionally, the researcher's spouse has been a public, middle school classroom teacher for thirty-seven years and because of this exposure, the opportunity to observe up close, in person through her leadership positions the workings of a suburban central school district has led to potential biases related to school leadership. Consequently, the researcher had preconceived notions of the ways in which superintendents are identified, selected and judged to be successful. Admittedly, the researcher has biases based on lifelong work experiences. One of the main objectives of this study was to identify where potential weaknesses lie in the pre and post appointment of new superintendents; and to also suggest potential best practices when it comes to appointing new superintendents and affording them the opportunity to assemble their own senior level management team. The researcher was interested in trying to expose shortcomings as they relate to any distinct and/or individual but to investigate alternatives

Being cognizant of these biases helped condition the researcher to stay within a very tightly scripted interview protocol. Reflecting observations accurately and as quickly following an interview also helped reduce lack of clarity which may have resulted from a period of time between interview, transcription and researcher analysis. This researcher addressed the bias by

standardizing the interview protocol and data coding methods and by using and describing the results in a transparent manner.

Limitations and Delimitations

The researcher compared this research effort to that of what in a non-academic or business world is called a Statement of Financial Position or SOFP or more commonly known as a Balance Sheet. This analogy was chosen because an SOFP is only as good or relevant as the day for which it was produced. The school districts chosen, the participants agreeing to participate, the information collected, the settings in which the interviews were conducted, and the researcher's biases were all potential limitations of this study.

Since the researcher was a non-public school administrator, there was the possibility that the superintendents and cabinet members might perceive the researcher to be an outsider and/or illegitimate because the researcher had no experience working in a central school district. There may have been some hesitation on the part of the participants thinking that this researcher was predisposed to experiences with non-public school systems and not being able to understand or appreciate, and capture the difference between a public and non-public school system.

Because the sample was small and composed of central school districts in the Hudson Valley Region, the findings, conclusions and recommendations should be generalized with great caution to schools from the rest of New York State or any other state.

Although the researcher has never been a superintendent, he has been a cabinet member to two CEO's: a College President and a Head of School at a private, independent school and therefore has a sound understanding of the relationship between the leader of an educational organization and his or her cabinet.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

Chapter four uses the demographics of the school districts and is organized around four major research questions.

The first research question explored the relationship between the superintendent and his or her cabinet before and during the interview process up to date of employment.

The second research question explored how a newly hired superintendent works with his or her leadership team and how he or she becomes effective.

Research question three explores the difference between a superintendent with a traditional background of academics and a superintendent with a nontraditional business background, relative to the effectiveness of his or her leadership.

The fourth research question explored the effect, if any, that the fact that a superintendent's cabinet may have been pre-existing have on his or her ability to lead?

Chapter four examined the data through several lenses including prior to date of employment versus post employment; traditional or non-traditional background, training, and experiences; and whether the cabinet was pre-existing or hired by the superintendent. The data were collected through a series of interviews with superintendents, both traditional and nontraditional, and then from the chief academic officers and the chief business officers. The same questions were asked of all participants. The data were then analyzed to determine differences between the traditional and nontraditional background of the superintendent and if those differences impacted the relationship with the leadership team.

Background

  Seven different school districts, three employing superintendents with a non-traditional background and four with a traditional background were included in this study. Each district, with the exception of one, had three participants; a superintendent, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, and the assistant superintendent for business or chief business officer. The only exception was a school district whose chief business official opted out due to ensuing budget vote preparation. Essentially the research design was to have three districts with a superintendent from a traditional background and three districts with a superintendent from a non-traditional background. An additional school district was added and the superintendent and the chief curriculum and instruction officer of this district were interviewed to provide additional research material for this study.

  With respect to the three superintendents from a nontraditional background, two of the three were former school business officials who became Superintendent. The third superintendent had been in school administration, subsequently left and went to another situation, and was petitioned by the initial district to come back. This superintendent also has military training and service in his background. Conversely, the four superintendents interviewed with a traditional background essentially all began in the classroom. The critical path for some included academic department chairmanship, assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent. All of the superintendents with a traditional background had instructional training and experiences as compared with business preparation and experiences.

  Regardless of the size of the school district all interviewed had a typical configuration with three officers or school officials, a superintendent, a school business official and a chief instruction officer. One of the districts interviewed had four leadership positions. There were

two chief instructional officer positions; one oversaw kindergarten through sixth grade and the second seventh grade through twelfth grade. Some districts had a human resources person as part of the Leadership Team and some had special education as part of the Leadership Team. In some of the smaller, more rural districts there were no resources to add additional school district personnel. In the larger school districts there were other staff positions, human resources, technology, communications, and/or those services amongst others being contracted from the local BOCES unit.

Demographics of the Districts

All school districts participating in the study possessed multiple school buildings. The participating districts ranged in size from 1,250 students to over 5,000 students. Census data from New York State Education Department reveals the number of central school districts in 2010 was 697. Of the 697 central school districts 40 of them had sitting superintendents who were former school business officials and held School District Business Leadership or equivalent certifications. The population for this study represented seven districts in the Hudson Valley Region of New York State.

Research Questions

Research Question I: Relationship between the Superintendent and the Cabinet

The superintendents, the assistant superintendents for business, and the assistant superintendents for curriculum were asked if they were part of the interview process, what were they looking for in terms of the superintendent's attributes, and what was the superintendent looking for when they hired or had an opportunity to replace cabinet positions? In addition to the research questions, the culture of the district was considered when analyzing the data.

This research question was designed to collect data to address three areas: (1) What were the interviewers and interviewees looking for in the superintendent-cabinet relationship; (2) What attributes and experiences were the interviewees able to bring to the position; and (3) What was the nature of the hiring process and cabinet structure.

What were the superintendents seeking in the superintendent-cabinet relationship?

The interviewee responses to desired qualities are grouped first by Superintendent and then by Assistant Superintendents.

The superintendents were looking for the following qualities in their cabinet or leadership team. One superintendent with a non-traditional background stated that

> … I have a no excuse kind of personality. So, quite frankly, I look for people who have that same drive, that same sense of urgency, and people who don't mind putting in whatever it takes to get the job done… So I look for those, I want to say, those characteristics in individuals assuming that those core competencies are there in terms of particular skill sets we are looking for, and I think that's what makes the team work… I'm not looking for cookie cutter, everyone to be the same…my goal is always to try to figure out how they align, support, and complement each other… I want people who come to the table with ideas and not simply waiting for a prescription to be given and you follow through. … to ensure that when they come to the table that I'm getting honest feedback from folks who are not afraid to give honest feedback…

The following responses were from two superintendents with traditional backgrounds.

> I was looking for someone who had a very strong intellect who was very bright very personable who could motivate people someone who could connect to people someone who was accepting but still strong powerful positive someone with great potential to maybe ultimately assume another position.

> I really was looking for a team willing to come together and forge a vision for the future. I think we have a strong tradition in this district of excellence and I think it gives us a great foundation. So I was really looking for that sense of people who wanted to get on board and have a team approach to really look and move the district forward. To be really open to ideas and innovations and really thinking about ways that we could sort of audit what we do here.

Although this is just a sample of the responses, all of the superintendents regardless of their background were looking for team players who were willing to work together and complete the project.

What qualities were the cabinet/leadership team looking for in their superintendent?

One of the chief instructional officers responded, "I think also one of the things I looked at for my leader is a collaborative leadership kind of style."

The next response came from a chief business officer.

Not on the actual search committee… I'm a little biased; I think it was the best thing that ever happened to this district. I've worked with several superintendents at both of the districts I have been in and he is definitely someone who is aggressive but really forces other people to think, to challenge what we do and I think that's a really good thing and I think we needed that.

The next three responses are from chief business officers and what they were looking for in a leader.

So the first thing is the person had to be hard working, the person had to be flexible so if some new mandate came down from New York State you didn't know who was going to be tapped to participate in that…looking for people who were really experts in their field so that there wasn't any kind of learning curve… So it was more or less looking for the long hours, willing to put in long hours and actually to be a team player and to be loyal.

I think the hardest thing is to find mechanisms of really trying to find out what the person is really all about, what they really know and what their real experiences are and how they handled their career. So to find ways of seeing through that is quite a task and if you can and you find out whether its talking to people who have worked with him in the past or listening to their experience in more in depth conversations.

The important thing is to have someone who is really a hands on worker and understands the business and can make everything work well… you have to have lots of people skills and lots of other skills to survive. Political savvy and communications skills assuming everybody has a core set of skills pertinent to their job it's more than that. He has to be able to get people motivated. Really Superintendents have to be such a rounded individual.

In one case, the superintendent hired the chief academic officer. The superintendent was hired first and then shortly after the chief academic officer was hired. The chief academic officer was looking for a decisive, knowledgeable, open-minded, and a strong leader. The next quote is spoken through the eyes of a cabinet member.

> I wanted somebody that was decisive and can make a decision despite tough times and do it in such a way that he keeps the integrity of the district and that he has people skills. I wanted somebody that I could lean on and learn from but could also hold that hard line when they needed to… someone who would listen to my ideas…I was looking for someone who could really lead this district and pull up the morale.

All cabinet responses indicated the same qualities: collaborative, hard working, flexible leadership as illustrated in figures 3 and 4. The above quotes are representative of all responses.

Figure 3

Qualities a Superintendent was looking for in his/her Cabinet and what Cabinet Members were looking for in a Leader

Superintendent	Cabinet
Personal drive	Aggressive
Sense of urgency	Forces others to think
Willing to work long hours	Challenges people
Individuals (not cookie cutters)	Hard working
Willing to express opinions	Flexible
Strong intellect	Willing to work long hours
Personable	Experts in their field
Bright	Team player
Motivating	Innovative
Collaborative Leadership	Collaborative leadership
	Decisive
	Integrity
	Mentor
	Listens and values ideas
	Hands on
	People skills
	Political savvy
	Communication
	Motivating

Figure 4

Common Attributes Both the Superintendent and the Cabinet were Looking For

Common Attributes

Personal Drive/ hard working
Willing to work long hours
Innovative/ individuals (not cookie cutters)/ challenges people
Willing to express opinions/decisive
Personable/ people skills
Motivating
Collaborative Leadership/ team player

What attributes and experiences were the interviewees able to bring to these positions?

The following testimony speaks about skills, attributes, and experiences that the members of the leadership team possess and are able to bring to their respective positions.

One superintendent on speaking of their own skill sets said "…because I have a tendency to really listen when somebody says something of a different view and try to spin it around a little bit and see if it does make sense".

Another superintendent spoke to his experience.

> But along the way adding to that experience other than the classroom was several years of coaching, advising classes, supervising after school events, chaperoning all the events that are the fabric of the school outside of the classroom. So my experience in and out of the classroom and within three or four districts is pretty rich as far as education goes.

These two quotes capture the essence of what the other superintendents had said. They all spoke to strong skill sets, communication, and experience.

The following section describes the skills and experiences that the chief academic officers and business officials were able to offer to the position.

> Well I think my attributes, well certainly the experience that I had and also that I was a Building Principal…to be able to supervise a high school principal and a middle school principal who have been here for a number of years. So they were veteran administrators somebody who had some credibility at that level. I think also one of the things found in me was a collaborative leadership kind of style.

> However, I think the superintendent doesn't have the secondary background that I have. The superintendent's background is from elementary education so I think it's very good to have me as kind of a balance point.

The important theme brought forward in these responses was that communication and listening skills are important and essential for everyone on a leadership team. Work experience was also an important element in showing knowledge and growth opportunity. Figure 5 below illustrates the critical skills that the superintendent and the cabinet were looking for.

Figure 5

Critical Skills that the Superintendents and Cabinet were looking for

Superintendent	Cabinet/Leadership Team
Vision	Participatory
Communication	Collaborative
Lineage/History	Temperament
Credentials	Tone
Certifications	Organization
Collaborative	Accountability
Not top down Administration	Transparency
Competence	Meaningful conversation
Willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done	The leader was willing to back them up
Loyalty	Trust

What was the nature of the hiring process and cabinet structure?

The third area of responses addresses the hiring process both from the perspective of the superintendents and cabinet members. The key responses from the superintendents are discussed first.

In this particular instance the superintendent was hired from within by the Board of Education with no interview and/or process. This particular superintendent was hired on his own particular merits and the board of education in that district sought him out and basically made him an offer he couldn't refuse.

> It went well, I mean I brought in some folks. So there were three people who went on to be Superintendents. I'm tough when it comes to hiring people, I know what I want… so if you got into my Cabinet or we got to be colleagues we were all working together.

In the case of this superintendent it wasn't an interview process, it was a selection process based on personality, credentials, certification, and being in the right place at the right time.

> The process was a little different. The Superintendent gave his announcement but several months earlier he came to me and asked if I was interested in being

considered. There weren't people who were concerned or questioned it so when it got to the process the Board decided on a process that basically posted it internally and I was the only person who applied. They did interview/meetings one was a straight interview, one was basically me doing a presentation to them about a transition plan and goals that I had and who I was, and then a third component was a writing piece. They said their process was that if they were not satisfied with this, with me, that they would go out and do a search. I think from internal mechanisms people knew who I was and what I was about and I had a pretty good track record so I don't think there was an internal "Oh my God" this is a flawed process. I think what happened on the outside was the Board may have been perceived as maybe having a flawed process. So there was this kind of wait and see attitude, nobody was really negative they just said we will see what happens."

This particular quote speaks about the members of the cabinet who were in place and also to a superintendent who had opportunity to transition and change the cabinet/leadership team into the team that he wanted.

The Business Manager he was in place, he has been here probably twenty-five years. He was the only constant. We had a Human Resources Manager who was gone and we cut the position. We had an Assistant Superintendent who, we still have the position but we have a new one that came on shortly after I came on and our Director of Special Education is a new one as well. The office staff has remained the same and clerical support. When I interviewed here two of the people who are in my Cabinet were not in my Cabinet. I just felt that if I were to get the job and assume the Superintendency. I would just work with whoever was here. But once I got into the position a couple members of my Cabinet, although very experienced and very talented people, were not the fit for me and not the fit for this district.

Although the next response is from a chief academic officer not a superintendent it is another example of the process leadership team members go through to be awarded these positions.

There were three stages, the first stage was the general committee and that was comprised of students, parents, teachers and administrators and maybe there were fifteen people on that committee. That interview was maybe an hour and fifteen minutes followed by a written question. And the second one was a one on one with the Superintendent which was about two and a half hours. And then the third was a public forum that was moderated by a consultant from the Communications Department and then there were designated people representing all the different

bargaining units and community groups who each got to ask a designated question and then it was open to the general audience who got to ask questions.

The assistant superintendent for business in this school district has been in place for almost three decades and he preceded his current superintendent by a year so although he was not directly involved with the hire, he certainly was aware of what was going on. The superintendent has worked with this individual on and off in a number of positions, as a teacher, a chair, assistant superintendent and now superintendent so there is a long history there and trust that has built up in the relationship. This quote relates to the jostling that takes place between candidate and interviewers and expectations from either perspective.

> And one of the things, interviewing here, it was very clear by the Board of Education that they wanted someone to come and really effect change. But the Board recognized, to a large degree, that we were resting on our laurels, you had people saying why should we do anymore, we are doing enough? So the Board wanted to effect change in some real ways and one part of the conversation that I had with the Board was Ok if we really want to effect change in real ways, I need to look at the structure and the people because that's the only way I can effect change. They were very much open to that so one of things that I did in my first year, actually my first couple of months of being here was looking at our organization structure, who is doing what from an administrative perspective, not only the people but the actual positions and responsibilities and asking some real critical questions. We made some significant shifts around and then reclassified some positions and changed some roles and responsibilities and dropped some others and that led to people making some decisions about staying with the organization or not as well as it gave me chance to again hire people with some specific things in mind as we were moving forward.

The process for hiring the superintendent and cabinet members was varied among all participants. The processes were different and all were given the position based on their ability to perform the duties required. The background of the participants did not seem relevant with regard to the relationship between the superintendent and his or her cabinet prior to and up to the date of employment.

Research Question II: Effectiveness of the Leadership Team

The next group of questions and responses with regard to research question two are best grouped into three sub categories: (1) The skill sets the assistant superintendents were looking for; (2) the effectiveness of the cabinet; and (3) the makeup of the management team. There were common themes expressed by all participants in the study. These themes were repeated by both the superintendents and their leadership teams throughout the interview process.

The skill sets the assistant superintendents were looking for in their leader

There was some overlap between research question I and research question II. Consequently, the responses presented below cross both research questions I and II with regard to pre-hire as well as post-hire. They address the attributes or skill sets the assistant superintendents were looking for in a superintendent. Figure 6 below illustrates responses from cabinet members and common themes expressed regarding effective leadership. These responses were the ground work for explaining how a superintendent works with his or her leadership team and how they became effective leaders.

> Whether they are a communicator, whether they think globally, their interpersonal skills, their ability to get along with others, ability to inspire people to the best of their ability as opposed to dictating. Those are some of the qualities. I was going to say communication but I wrap that in with ability to work with people because if you don't work well with people you are not communicating. You're dictating.

> The superintendent has a very well developed skill set so she does a lot of things well…so I think it's good that we have that kind of balance. This superintendent is very sharp when it comes to finances.

> So the first thing is the person had to be hard working, the person had to be flexible.   So it was more or less looking for the long hours, willing to put in long hours and actually to be a team player and to be loyal.

Figure 6

Common themes regarding effectiveness of a leadership team

_____

Create a vision through a story
Force people to think and express ideas
Be consistent in your goals
Participate in the conversation
Have an open dialogue
Recognize strengths and weaknesses
Empower people to contribute
Support all members of the leadership team
Show a willingness to be hands on
Be visible
Become involved in the community

_____

The effectiveness of the cabinet

This subset of responses speaks to the effectiveness of the leadership team and the interaction not only with each other but also with the community and how the members of the leadership team stay in touch with the school community.

The responses that follow are representative examples of how a superintendent uses his or her skills to be an effective leader. These responses are from superintendents with a non-traditional background.

> I think part of my leadership has been to fashion a particular story, that is what we are about, this is what we are going to do and tell a story because the bottom line is my leadership is about effecting positive change for kids, and not necessarily go with the political winds. With the administrative teams if you have turnover you have to ensure that the peoples, their personal beliefs align with the organizational beliefs because otherwise it's always a pull and tug so how can we be in alignment at all times?

> I want to hear your thoughts on how can we reform, restructure, retool what we are doing as a school knowing that we cannot continue doing the same thing that we are doing now based upon the fiscal constraints or the change in mandates from the State and Federal level. Forcing people to bring ideas out and on to the table I'm giving you permission to think.

A lot of contact time. One of the things I found out is that while it's time consuming, it's worth while spending the time talking to people and a lot of interface with folks. I am consistent in what we say, consistent in terms of what we put in writing, consistency in our policies that are supporting certain things, so people are always getting the message that yes this is what is important to the district.

Well I was participatory, we would share ideas. There were no silos. If you were in charge of the business end and you saw something in the curriculum end somehow some way in terms of what you dealt with every day or visa-versa, you didn't have to just sit there. You know, contribute, share your ideas, let's vet them out and sift through.

These are responses from four superintendents regarding the effectiveness of his or her cabinet. These represent what all of the superintendent participants indicated.

The following is testimony from superintendents, with a traditional background, in terms of how they work with their cabinet and its effectiveness.

It is literally a team and I think I am not authoritarian and sometimes I think my life would be simpler if I was. Because I have a tendency to really listen when somebody says something of a different view and try to spin it around a little bit and see if it does make sense. And I sometimes do change my mind if somebody has an alternate point of view. I think the more experience you have sitting in the chair the more you start to figure out where the places are that people really just want to be told this is what you need to do. I still have the open dialogue. I said we are going to have our individual meetings every two weeks but when we meet every two weeks we are going to have an agenda and you are going to submit agenda items and I am going to have agenda items. So as a team my conversations with them are about I think really important instructional issues. When I go to expand to the bigger team meeting, the Administrative Council we actually have a part of our meeting every time now that is what I consider to be professional development.

I think essentially my view of my position is that I think a wise decision maker goes out and gathers the entire realm of inputs that are out there but I think ultimately it is my responsibility to make the decision. So I view myself basically as someone who has to be a decision maker.

The following quote is from a superintendent who is also adept at performing human resource duties. That sill set was developed along a career path in smaller districts where leaders perform more cross sectored functions. Larger districts allow for greater specialization.

I think the good thing about being a strong team is that although I may perceive that certain positions have to have certain qualities, we all have strengths and we all have weaknesses. One of the things that I don't love to do is the PR stuff. I'm one of those behind the scenes kind of people which is why I didn't want a Superintendency but I have (name withheld for privacy) who is good at that. But all the presentations that are done I do pretty much publically. I think that the thing that consumes the most of your time is the personnel stuff and I think to be fair I'm better at dealing with those things. We sit together with the people that we have to have those conversations with but I'm the one I think that has the skill of being able to be direct and let people leave with their dignity.

 One of the interview questions asked of all the superintendents was - How do you interact with your leadership team?

 I wouldn't say that I do not micro manage but I need to know that things are going to get done and that they are going to be done well. I expect people to keep me posted on everything that's going on. Things that they might not think could really explode, I don't want minute details but I want to know, oh heads up this could hit the public or whatever. I have high expectations, I expect people to tell me what they think.

They report to me and share with me the projects or the initiatives that they are working on. I only get involved mostly as needed. I believe very much in delegation and empowering people and if you have talented people around you then let's exercise their talents. It's an open enough and trusting enough relationship that any one of the three will come to me and say I'm working on this issue in special education or in curriculum or in business and I would like to dialogue with you on this or I would like your input on this."

All of the superintendents interviewed regardless of his or her background spoke about the importance of working as a team. The above quotes are an example of the sentiment expressed by all of the superintendents.

 The following quote illustrates the relationship with the leadership team. The question posed to this superintendent was "Now you being from the academic side or traditional side and you have an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. Is that a tighter or deeper relationship in terms of you both being from the same part of the landscape?

I think so, I think it makes for a deeper relationship. I think it makes for great conversations about curriculum and instruction and learning and teaching. Often

times she will bring things over because I have a little bit more experience in the classroom than she does and she will say – take a look at this plan, I need your eye to look at this. Mark it up and give it back to me. So yes it really makes for very rich discussions between us about what's going on with curriculum and instruction and learning, very free and very easy.

This particular question was only asked to this particular superintendent but the researcher felt that the response was important because it raised another question. That question was - Do like backgrounds attract?

The other members of the leadership were asked - How do you interact with your Superintendent?

He would back his Cabinet one hundred percent. He worked harder than everyone else did. He had high expectations for his staff. He wanted a quality work product when you were finished and he was a great person to work for. He made you want to work harder"

Well the three of us plus our special ed. director is what this superintendent calls our cabinet and we formally meet every Monday morning. That's formal and then we have administrators every meeting which includes us and the building administrators Tuesdays. Informally I feel like we all work together pretty much all day long there is just constant interaction. The superintendent is very accessible and he is great to work with. He does a lot of the things that are necessary to be a superintendent and he understands and is willing to roll up his sleeves and get into all. He knows the budget inside and out he knows every line he knows everything about it. He can talk and speak it he is very comfortable to be around. I have had other superintendents that really didn't know a lot about it and that's kind of uncomfortable.

It's interesting because I have worked with the superintendent on so many different levels. I have worked with this superintendent as just an assistant principal who was nervous and didn't even come to district level stuff back in the day and then I became principal and this superintendent was the assistant superintendent. Then became the superintendent and I was the principal so it's been an interesting road for us, it really has. I think we each have our different set of strengths that we bring. The superintendent has kind of been a supervisor of mine pretty much since I came here.

We meet every week, there is a cabinet meeting and there is a fourth person included in our cabinet even though she is on the administrative unit, director of special services. So we meet as a team of four to discuss the pertinent information, the hot topics that we are dealing with that week so that we can wrap our heads around it and help each other come up with a strategy perhaps for board

meetings to adequately inform the board and the public of what we need to consider. So those meetings are very helpful in pulling us together and making us find time to sit down as a team.

These responses represent the responses from all cabinet members who all responded in the same way.

All of the participants in this study felt very strongly that it is important for a leadership team to be able to express their points of view.

The following responses speak to the ability to express contrarian points of view. A non-traditional superintendent specifically addressed this.

Yes they were and in that school district they had to be. The right people were given the ability to communicate and to lead. So in terms of being an intellectual kind of grouping, shall we say, being a district that people looked upon as being somewhat progressive when it came to curriculum. And that came about because people like I just described were willing to come forward and to share ideas and to make things happen and to get people to buy into that vision. I always thought you could have the worst idea in the world but if you have people who will buy into it, put legs underneath it, it could be successful. If you have the greatest idea and you don't communicate it and nobody buys into it, it will die a slow death, maybe a rapid death.

Following are responses from leadership team members regarding the receptiveness of the superintendent to contrarian points of view.

It is important that you feel comfortable to verbalize how you feel. And it's also important because he might have another perspective that I or someone else on the team didn't have.

Oh yea I think so. Yes I mean I think so, it's done respectfully, and it's done when people feel strongly that; well wait a minute here that may not be the best direction to go in and here is why. Yes, we do that quite frequently.

All of the participants, both the superintendents and cabinet members responded that it is necessary to be able to express as well as to hear contrarian points of view.

Following are responses by superintendents as to how they stay in touch with the issues.

 A lot of contact time. One of the things I found out is that while it's time consuming, it's worth while spending the time talking to people and a lot of interface with folks. So I spend, either bringing people in or going to people, from the large to the small, from the individual, because it's that whole notion of fashioning your story and telling your story everywhere you go so it's very consistent.

 You need to be visible, we used to go once a week, I would split the cabinet into two groups, one group might go to one of the elementary schools this week and another group might go to a secondary and we would rotate. We would spend anywhere from two hours depending on the size of the building to four or five to go into the classrooms talk to the kids, see the teachers. Your school may have a play and it's nice for the superintendent to be seen at the play. Just to get out and be exposed. The district joined a chamber of commerce and we would be there monthly for meetings and I got involved with some of their activities to give the school district some visibility, to give the superintendence some visibility. I dragged board members to some of the events to give them some visibility. I think the visibility, communication, the concern in terms of what's going on and showing that sincerity personally as opposed to trying to show it from a far.

 It is important and it has made a real difference with the faculty and staff seeing me around. With the students I'll see, because I live in town now, so when I'm at the store or something a lot of the younger students will say that's our superintendent. I think that's important that they know that I am there. Also I am involved in any initiative that we have outside the classroom, concerts, plays, and sporting events, I go to all of those as well. But I am also involved in a reading program initiative that was started by our literacy coach. Those are great connections it reminds you of what we are doing."

This is question was posed to all interviewees. How do you stay in touch with what is going on out there given the myriad of responsibilities? How do you make time to get up and get out? Some of the teams had weekly meetings, some managed by walking around, some did nothing but in all cases the superintendents found that visibility was a key factor.

The following speaks to the management team and their makeup

Testimonials from two traditional superintendents as to what their management team looks like.

When I became superintendent I restructured those two positions to be equal positions, one totally focused on elementary and one totally focused on

secondary. Two assistant superintendents and both reporting to me but gave each one of those positions – one got curriculum and one got special ed. and some of the assessment and reporting functions. When I moved into superintendent I did not want to lose the grounding in instruction so I felt if I delegated that whole boat of instruction to a deputy then I never have an opportunity to kind of I would have to drill through two people to have that.

 My direct leadership team would be the assistant superintendents for curriculum and instruction and for business and our HR director. That's my direct Leadership Team and then I have the Administrative Council which would include all my building principals, their assistant principals or hall principals, department supervisors, district directors and the like and that's about thirty people all together."

The following quote speaks to the cabinet or leadership team and the synergy

needed to be effective. It comes from the chief academic officer but addresses the

effectiveness of the leader in terms of how they work with the cabinet.

 I think he is someone who ultimately listens and validates the opinions of many. I would say he really does listen to a lot of different people. I think he is collaborative, I think we have a very frank professional relationship where someone who came in from the outside couldn't perhaps challenge him in the ways that I can. Sometimes he agrees and sometimes he doesn't and I respect that but I always feel it's my obligation and I feel that he wants me to be in that role to say Ok but have you thought of this or could we do it that way? I meet alone once a week with the Superintendent for an hour and a half on Mondays and then after we are done then the other Assistant Superintendent comes in and we meet for another hour. So today I will spend two and a half hours over there and then on Fridays the three of us and the HR director will meet for another hour. So I have two standing meetings each week at Central Office.

This particular quote speaks to the respect that business officials and academic

officials have for one another and how very important it is that they all work together.

 You see the way the offices are laid out we are pretty close knit we talk constantly. As finances weave into what I want to do to improve instruction we talk and we discuss what can we do, where can that money come from. I try to be creative in some of my approaches. Even though he is in charge of business and I don't step on his toes and I am in charge of curriculum and instruction we have a respectful relationship where sometimes we blend our ideas together. So we blend ideas pretty well and he accepted a new perspective.

Regardless of the background of the superintendent all leadership teams were comprised of a minimum of the leader, chief business official, and chief academic officer. Those core three positions existed in all instances.

Research Question III: Superintendent's background and the cabinet

The responses to this research question lent itself to two areas of response: (1) the background of the superintendent; and (2) the parallel between the superintendent and cabinet in terms of their background and how they arrived at their current position. The question posed to all of the interviewees was, what if any effect does the background of the Superintendent have on the leadership team? Is there a difference between a superintendent with a traditional academic background and a non-traditional superintendent from another discipline or with a business background?

The background of the superintendent

Following are responses given by superintendents and their perspective on their particular backgrounds. This speaks to the superintendent after the fact, after date of employment, as well as their effectiveness, based on their background. This particular superintendent was a former business official.

> In terms of style and focus, because of my background, I think I have the background because it also fits with my personality, I'm much more a production person. I think it's tradition in education, you have people who are more, what I call, program thinkers, they come up with great ideas and someone else has to implement them and I'm the person who says, Ok, not every great idea needs to be implemented because I come from an implementation perspective. Which is a whole different perspective so therefore I need people with their talent and tolerance level to run herd on certain things, it's not an optional thing. Therefore, it does impact the type of cabinet. I have been fortunate over the past, particularly over the past two years, because of the turnover to really bring some folks in to target some of the initiatives that we are focused on."

The following quote is particularly important because it identifies a superintendent who was a former school business official and had to "pull some strings to even get the interview to make the opportunity available to me." This superintendent began his career in business, then left for another career opportunity and then came back to education. He received his certifications and moved up in the hierarchy.

This superintendent stressed the absolute importance of how varied, wide, and deep the constituencies are within the physical boundaries of the school district from the board right down to the students, board members, families, all very sure in what they want. Obviously they want the best for their child. But dealing with all of that on a large volume basis is different from many districts although the problems are consistent in terms of being apparent in all districts they are not necessarily there in the volume or scale of bigger districts.

> My background is mostly business. I have bachelors in business; I wanted to go on and get my Masters, …, actually I was working at a couple of different places, on the corporate side and working on my Masters part time. While I was at (school name withheld for privacy), my mentor knew a guy in a school district who was a superintendent and I guess he owed him a favor. So I took the interview and I don't know what possessed me but I took the job, I took the offer and took the job. I spent a year or two there. It was quite a commute. An opportunity came available at another school district closer to home. I applied for that, got it, spent three years there then the people in the school district where I previously worked called me up and said they had lost the person who had replaced me and asked if I would come back. While I was there I would have interesting conversations with some of the Board members. One of the members in particular and I would go back and forth all the time about being a superintendent coming up from the non-traditional side. He would say unless you are going to teach at some point in your career it's probably not going to happen. So while I was there I went back to school to get my certification. Well it was like pulling teeth to get into the program because I was from the non-traditional side but I got my certification.

One of the key interview questions was what effect, if any, was there with a superintendent whether he came from the traditional vs. the nontraditional background. What was the dynamic involved from the opposite side of the house?

Case-in-point being a business official who was a superintendent, what was the cooperation coming from the academic side of the district?

I think most of the upheaval – that's probably a poor term but I will use it anyway – came from some of the teachers who didn't want to buy into the fact that the Superintendent never taught, never administered at the building level.

But over time, as you lead people and they buy into your vision, people see that you work hard. I would tell people in the third year of my career and I didn't care who they were, there is no such thing as an alternate route, there is no such thing as the other side of the house. You tell me how many corporations in this Country have a department called CEO, you come up through marketing, engineering, sales, research, R&D, you come up some way. You have a core set of values and qualities that make you a leader, whatever they may be, and that core along with some other tangibles bring you to the CEO chair eventually. So in education to me my thinking was its kind of half ass backwards, you're not just a teacher, you're not just an instructional leader, there is finance, public relations, in today's day and age there are a lot of negotiations that go on. If any one person whether you are sitting in that chair on the corporate side or sitting in the superintendent's chair unless you surround yourself with people who have the expertise and are good people, people who share the same values and vision, you are not going to be successful, or you are going to be successful depending on how you want to look at it".

The next quote from a superintendent explains the benefit of a military background.

I thought it was helpful. I think it was helpful in terms of opening some doors. It was good for me in a couple of different perspectives: one, was just making me a better person, stronger knowing what I could do, what I couldn't do, stretching me out a little bit in terms of taking me out of my comfort zone. That gave me a chance to develop there too so it was good for a lot of reasons.

Another factor researched was the critical path related to how they got to the superintendency…

I applaud you for taking on the study. I wish we could have met maybe fifteen years ago or something like that in terms of having an ally to fight the cause because there were people who were trying to make that commitment and people would say you never taught you never administered. I became superintendent just by happenstance, it wasn't a career goal but having had the opportunity to sit there to me was a challenge. Could I put all those years that I had together? One thing about my career that was different than maybe some people's careers is that my thirty years is all at that level just beneath the Superintendent so I attended a lot of Board meetings, a lot of negotiation sessions, a lot of public presentations, gave a lot.

… So I went through the process and told my Board of Education and asked if they were OK with this. It was my first year as Superintendent but I was Deputy here for six years previous to that so it wasn't like I had to get to know all the new people, it was a transition, a lot of the succession planning had occurred. So they said they were comfortable with it. What I found was it was absolutely the best opportunity for me to get professional development and support in my first year as a Superintendent than I could ever have imagined.

The superintendent's quoted below had a traditional background and explains how that

impacted the superintendency.

The simplicity of it, if it looks easy it's because probably the person sitting in the seat is able to do the job and get the right people around to do the job. When you see a challenged Superintendent or somebody who is in the cross hairs or under fire and you peel it back it's generally because they don't have the skill set to either manage the Board in terms of the governance aspect. Or if you are not skilled in the financial, and I would have to say personally that was my area of growth, although I had a lot of accesses, and I was a sponge and tried to learn it but there is nothing like having to learn it and do it yourself. Now I can find myself speaking the language and I think to myself I wouldn't have been able to do this a few years ago. So that growth curve for me was the financial side and how much time it takes and how do you balance as an instructional leader, a lot of Superintendents come through that instructional train, and then they get thrown into the financial piece and then sometimes they also get thrown into the political piece. And then you have the aspect of negotiations and the collective bargaining and the relationships with those groups that if they are going well it looks that isn't everything going well and there is no work to be done. But if it's not going well it becomes another… So you have all these balls that you are bouncing and any one of them goes south you can manage it if you know what you are doing and you can kind of get it back in. But if you are not real skilled you can have two or three of those things kind of going off and you just want to focus on what you know, you are going to fall apart it's not going to be successful.

So I taught in the district for a number of years. From there I moved on to a department supervisor and then became the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction and finally I became the superintendent. So that was my path to glory.

OK, I guess I have thought about this a lot lately, why I approached things in a different way than people I know did. I feel like I am still practicing art which is interesting, it's just not graphic art and it's not sculpture but it's kind of molding a picture, I guess. I started as a special ed. person and taught for about nine years and decided I was never going to teach again. I moved to a completely different career outside of education for about a year and a half. I decided that I was still teaching people. I went back to school and got my Special Ed. degree and taught

Special Ed. for a while then I went and did my administrative work. I took a job with (school district name withheld for privacy) as a staff and curriculum development specialist. I came back down here as an elementary principal. I worked with the superintendent who was a business superintendent prior to his superintendence. I didn't want to be a superintendent but my team kept saying you need to step up to the plate and feeling like I had an obligation to keep things stable, I did that. So that's what brought me here."

The superintendent from this district speaks about coming from a traditional background

and the challenges and his relationship with his business official.

I would say for me in all the areas that I was preparing for or going through my career probably budgeting presented the biggest challenge moving into the district office, moving into the superintendence. He is very easy to work with, he shares information well. He helps to educate me in areas that I needed to be educated in. He is very clear, very concise.

Well in that sense I am from the traditional side. I am a career educator; this is my thirty-third year in education. I always aspired to be an administrator but having a couple of children myself I wanted to wait until they were out of high school because of the time I would miss due to time demands. So I went back to school to do my administrative work, completed that and got my school building certification and then school district certification and started out as an assistant principal. Now I am here as the superintendent. So I moved up through the ranks definitely, I taught for over twenty years, I was an assistant principal, a high school principal and then a Superintendent. I didn't do the assistant superintendent seat which sometimes is the succession of seats but it is not to uncommon for a superintendent to come from a high school principal seat so that's sort of traditional as well. So my experience in and out of the classroom and within three or four districts is pretty rich as far as education goes, and that brings me here."

Germane to the existence of this superintendent is also being a product of the community

in which he serves.

I really aspired to be here, growing up here and I lived in the community most of my life. I was looking for people to surround myself with who were very knowledgeable, knowledgeable about district, about the uniqueness of our student population, about the challenges that we face here in this district and then also district office support who could help us help me bring the district together. Our different campuses weren't connected, we weren't necessarily connected to the community as strong as we could be, the faculty might have been feeling a little isolated. So I wanted somebody in place with me who could begin to build

bridges between the buildings, elementary, junior high, middle and high school and then also to the community as well."

The following is a quote from a chief academic officer regarding the relationship with the superintendent and whether the background of the superintendent affected that relationship.

> Well, I, that personally didn't influence my working relationship with him. My father was a superintendent of schools, and then when he retired he became worked with the business officials. So with those experiences I've had work with both superintendents and business officials and the relationships so I wasn't overly concerned that he couldn't fulfill the role. Sometimes the concern comes up from the fact that we are so tightly into budget. Does the superintendent really understand the instructional picture? Because he came from a business background, it's all about numbers. But to his credit he knows more about education than many of us as far as trying to make sure that the instructional programs come first with that big eye on the budget.

This quote comes through the eyes of a School Business Official in terms of the superintendent whose background is from the business side of things.

> I certainly think that the expectations are higher now. Just in general as far as work product and quality and professionalism and all of those things. The people that were here and that were inherited, there certainly was a culture that they learned and brought with them. There was a huge culture shift for me to deal with coming from outside, because I don't think it's a typical culture, even for a school district. As a very large school district, there was very little centralization of direction or management because a lot of independence was given to the various school buildings. And trying to bring that back so that there is some oversight has been very difficult.

The research showed that it did not make a difference whether the superintendent was from a traditional background or a nontraditional background. The question was how a superintendent with a business background would articulate academic issues, would he or she be fluent and well informed. Conversely would a superintendent with an academic background be able to speak with confidence about the business issues. Most important was that the superintendent regardless of background, do their homework, be

well informed, visible, visiting schools and classrooms, and that they know the staff and

faculty, management by walking around.

The parallel between the superintendent and cabinet/leadership team in terms of their
background and how they arrived at their current position.

The parallel between the superintendent and the assistant superintendent in terms

of how they arrived in their position is very important because essentially that is where

the superintendents are drawn from.

> I graduated from college and taught for twenty-one years so I was a teacher for a
> long period of time. And then I was kind of nudged, pushed, pulled and
> encouraged to become an administrator. And then my immediate supervisor was
> a principal and he was leaving, retiring, and he encouraged me to start applying
> for positions. I became a curriculum coordinator and that evolved into director of
> curriculum. It was a very, very heavy job.

The next quote is also the parallel with respect to the Superintendent and the background

of the Assistant Superintendent.

> He is the kind of person that will take the time to make sure you understand. I
> also don't think sometimes that the vocabulary of the business office is well
> understood on the instructional side. I'm not saying I'm a finance person by any
> stretch, could I do the work that the business official does, no. I'm a pretty quick
> study and once I really sit down and go through it then you can have the
> conversations about big picture. So it has to be a marriage and if an instructional
> person doesn't have a sound financial person they are in trouble. And if a
> financial person doesn't have a sound instructional person they are in trouble.

Another testimonial from an assistant superintendent illustrates the perspective of

someone coming in who doesn't necessarily have the so called traditional background and what

the perceptions were.

> Well here's the thing, you look at the person coming in. He did the right thing he
> surrounded himself when he could, you know when there was an opening and he
> could fill it, with people that were experts and well respected in the area that they
> were coming from. You have to have the skills to know who to surround yourself
> with that will support you and get the job done because the better people you have
> around you the better you will look. So the person at the top can't, there is no
> way, they can be an expert in everything but they have to have the knowledge in

order to create a team of people that are fully capable and confident to get the job done and who work well together.

> Alright, this is my twenty-fourth year in public education and I am certified in social studies grades seven through twelve. I taught social studies in two different school districts for the first ten years of my career. Then I went on to become an assistant principal at the high school level and then became a principal. I became an assistant superintendent and have been that now for almost four years."

The research showed that the superintendent's background with respect to the

relationship with the leadership team not sharing the same background was not a concern

or an issue. The more important issue was if the superintendents able to lead, manage,

administrate? Can the superintendent communicate? Is this a person with good values

with high integrity? What is the credibility factor, is the superintendent believable? Is

this a leader that others will follow?

The following quote speaks to the future regarding training, background, and

experiences.

> I think I am sensing that district wide leadership is requiring people with more diverse skills especially for folks sitting in the top chair. Trying to run a district like this is much more complicated than the big districts because you have all of the same problems and many more that some of the big ones don't. I see consolidation and I'm not sure that's a bad thing but I am also sensing that the small elementary school model is not going to disappear and I think that's a good thing as well. There are not enough qualified people applying for these positions because of the small differential in salaries for a senior person to go from a classroom or a building position to go to a district position.

This is interesting because this individual began in business administration and then went

back into education basically because of a love for teaching children and the district**.**

> I am a hybrid model, I went from Business Administration and then went into education later on. I'm not the Superintendent I am the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. I think in today's economy you do need a little bit of both.

Having interviewed six different chief business officials, seven different chief academic

officers, and seven different superintendents it became obvious who had the credentials and

experience, in terms of moving from either chair of the assistant superintendents to the chair of the leader.

It was not apparent that the background or the education or the certification had an impact on the success of the leader as a leader. The ability to communicate and surround oneself with the right people were the most important qualities needed to be effective whether or not the background was traditional or nontraditional.

The fourth question asked of all the research participants was, What bearing, if any, does the fact that a superintendent's cabinet may have been pre-existing have on his or her ability to be an effective leader. Pre-existing being defined as, in place and are tenured or long term multi-year contract employees with little or no chance of changing if desired unless they redefine the position.

The research revealed very little reaction to the question regarding the effectiveness, if any, of the preexisting status of the cabinet, management team, or leadership team. These responses lend themselves to this situation being a non factor. It is not clear if this was a non-factor because the interviewees were reluctant to answer. All of the responses indicated that it was not a factor because they were all willing to work with the leadership team. The superintendents would use retirements or reconfiguration to make changes. It should be noted that several responding cabinet members were hired by existing superintendents and therefore were unaware of prior circumstances.

Research Question IV: Effect of the pre-existing cabinet on the superintendent

The first group of responses are from superintendents and they illustrate how they think a pre-existing cabinet affected their leadership.

> This is my second Superintendency, and I guess in many ways I have been
> fortunate, the team that we have here now, everyone of the entire cabinet right

now is new this year for the first time. And it's a combination of things, and I think as Superintendent that's a wonderful opportunity to have. To be able to hire people, especially in this case, hiring people with specific skill sets to carry out some of the things, not only the work we are doing now, but some of the things we anticipated doing in the next several years coming down the road. So I have a new cabinet which comes with some advantages but also comes with some disadvantages. There is some constant need to engage, in what I call, on the job professional development.

…at one point during my tenure there we had individuals who were long time tenured administrators and whenever we had what we call those moments of reckoning, I quickly realized that certain people can say, you know what, I'm tenured and unless I am grossly incompetent there is not much you can do. Instead of focusing on the negative aspect of that, I would focus on the positive aspect of that. In some cases it worked out and in some cases it didn't work out. In some cases we just had to have those conversations. If they are not willing then I am going to say; you know what, you need to make a decision. So that tenure piece can place a dynamic in the sense that people start using it as their crutch.

That did once and what I did in that case was sat the individual down and we talked about the performance we would talk about objectives. We go through the annual evaluation, there was a process. If the person still wasn't getting it in terms of the coaching and the goal setting and things of that nature, one time I just sat across from the individual and said I think you need to get your papers in order I don't think you are going to make it here. Not every school district is the same, not every corporation is the same, look at the people who play musical chairs with CEO's. You get fired from this place and you show up here. But it's just amazing the people I've seen in my career who have been bought out and moved on.

With the Cabinet level there is always the possibility, I restructured when I became Superintendent. I had two positions a Deputy and a Director I abolished both of them and created two Assistant Superintendents. We also had an opportunity when we had a Pupil Services Director and two assistants when the Pupil Services Director left one of the assistants took the Director job and we abolished another position. So as positions open up there is the opportunity to change and I am comfortable with this structure now for my purposes. But the next person in could, technically you can abolish, the people who are in Cabinet are not part of a bargaining unit. The Assistant Superintendents have contracts that are three year contracts but there is an extender every year. They have Perf rights if I abolish a position I couldn't recreate that position for seven years, any position for seven years that didn't have more than fifty percent of that responsibility. So there is some labor law that comes into it but the basic premise is that when positions vacate you can… Or technically the Board could say we are tired of that position and we want to abolish it and you can shrapnel the job…

I think it depends on how people are tenured, first of all. I'm the only person in the district not tenured. My two assistants are tenured and everyone else is tenured. Most of my leadership team, everyone on this team now are people that I have hired with the exception of one person. It's certainly a struggle because sometimes that person doesn't reflect the philosophy of the team so we all work together to try and get them to that place. I could see that it would be difficult to walk into a structure.

The quotes shown above represent responses from five of the seven superintendents

interviewed. These responses represent over ninety percent of superintendents interviewed.

Following is feedback from cabinet members regarding a pre-existing Cabinet.

From my perspective it doesn't really make much difference in my relationship with the Superintendent. We basically, although we have a three year contract, we basically just have a one year contract. At the end of each year the Board can choose not to renew us and then we have two years left and after two years if you don't find another job you are out of a job. But for me it doesn't enter into my thinking or my working relationship with the Superintendent. I don't really think much about it, it's a fact of the contract or it's a fact of the economics of the job. Day to day it's all about personal relationships and professional relationships.

 I personally, right now I would say I don't think so simply because I think…I suppose I would say a lot of it has to do with the relationship that the Superintendents has with the Board. I think it's a very open and a very healthy relationship and it has been. The research shows that the longer your Leadership Team is in place the more effective it can be. So I think we have sort of a sense of security about that this district values trying to bring people in and keep them in as opposed to a quick turnover.

 I don't think it does. I think all of us, I feel comfortable and confident in my position and I think (name withheld for privacy) does as well. First of all we have tenure but secondly even if we didn't I think we both feel we do a good job. Both of us take on a million things, some of the leadership team has left and we just have not rehired those positions because of the times. We have consolidated their jobs and taken on their jobs.

I came here about three and a half years ago and at that point, being the new member of the team, you sort of find your way to fit in and the superintendent, I don't think at that time, hired any of the other cabinet members on the team except for me. Let's just say, it wasn't the team he might have otherwise chosen. I think he inherited the team, let's put it that way. Now I would say that there is maybe two members on the Leadership Team that are ones he inherited while the rest are those that he has chosen and due to retirements for the most part I would say. But it's interesting that I see far more team work, certainly those that he has

been able to hire fit far better into the team structure that we have now then the group that existed previously."

Four cabinet members are quoted above but all felt that a pre-existing cabinet situation was not an issue. They were all willing to work with the superintendent to make sure that the business of the district was being done.

Summary

With regard to research question one, regarding the relationship before, during, and up to the date of employment. The responses were from both the superintendents looking at leadership teams and the leadership teams looking at superintendents. The sense was that it was a two way street in that the team has as much to gain or lose in terms of who the leader is as well as the incoming superintendent has in terms of the individuals with whom he or she will be working.

The nontraditional superintendents view on the background of the team was black and white in terms of making sure that the people they were working with had the skill set, were credible, were willing to do whatever it took to get the job done, and were not fully invested. There is always the question of personality fit; can I work with this person? Can I trust this person? What does the index say on the scale of integrity? This is another intrinsic subjective assessment was not openly discussed.

Another point that came out in conversations several times was who the leadership team was looking at given where the district was at the time. What were the needs, what were the contentious or important factors? Another factor regarding pre date of employment was the sharing of vision by the superintendent with the team, looking at the reaction to that vision and determining who was going to agree or "buy in" and who was not. There was not much difference there between traditional and nontraditional superintendents with regard to receptivity by the leadership team.

Another observation with regard to research question one was the superintendent's influence with the leadership team. Do the like positions attract or do the unlike positions attract? The research suggests that the positions with similar backgrounds attract as opposed to differing backgrounds attracting.

The interview process was a varied, myriad of configurations. No two districts used the same process in arranging everything from interim appointment, permanent appointment, field commission, or the complete year long consultancy outside search process which is long and arduous.

Research question two explored the relationship post date of employment between the superintendent and the cabinet and their degree of effectiveness.

Critical skills required to be an effective leader are one's ability to put forth a vision and one's ability to articulate and communicate. This research shows that the district a superintendent was previously from is a factor in their effectiveness as well as the previous position. Whether it is a preexisting superintendent, internal or external hire, the pedigree, degrees held, credentials, certifications are all very important to the effectiveness of the superintendent as well as the leadership team. So through the eyes of the superintendents the background makes little difference in the sense of being traditional versus nontraditional. All superintendents are looking for competent people whether they themselves are business people or academic people. They just need to know that people in the "trenches" with them are competent, capable, and willing to work with them to do whatever it takes to get the job done. Attributes that kept recurring among all the interviewees were; loyalty, one's ability to be a communicator, willingness to put in the time.

Collectively the attributes identified by cabinet participants were collectively the attributes taken from all participants were that they wanted to see a superintendent in place not necessarily in terms of background but in terms of how they work with people. They were looking for a collaborative, participatory type of environment. Other important traits the management/leadership teams were looking at were temperament and tone. They were all less concerned with the background and more concerned with the person themselves.

The mechanics of how a superintendent organizes himself and meets with people is also very important. It is also something that is viewed publicly in terms of how the leaders organize themselves which speaks to how they get information, how often they get information. Most superintendents if they were not meeting weekly with their cabinet and intermittently they would bring in other high level administrative people, director level people right below the assistant superintendents, the direct reports to the assistant superintendents.

Another finding relating to the superintendent's effectiveness with their leadership team was accountability and transparency. Were they accountable and transparent or was it smoke and mirrors? Was everything put on the table where everyone participated in meaningful conversation? The leadership teams were looking for people, who, to some degree, protected them, shielded them from the board and the public. The leadership team needed to know that their leader was there for them.

All of the leadership teams were comprised of a minimum the leader, chief business official, and chief academic official so it didn't really seem to matter whether the superintendent had a traditional or a non-traditional background. Those core three existed in all instances and in some of the districts which were larger had additional positions. But interestingly enough even

in the smaller districts they somewhere along the line contracted for those additional services either externally or through BOCES.

Responses to research question III indicated that the background of the superintendent did not matter to the cabinet.

The data collected from both traditional and nontraditional were compared and there was no bearing on the situation. However, the fact that someone came from the community, understood the community, was able to communicate with the community did lead to the degree of their success.

The more important issue was if the superintendents were able to lead, manage, administrate? Can the superintendent communicate? Is this a person with good values with high integrity? What is the credibility factor, is the superintendent believable? Is this a leader that others will follow? An interview question asked of all interviewees was how do you win your "stripes" with the opposite side of the house? For a business official it would be winning credibility with the academic side of the house.

The final research question, research question four, regarding the superintendent's cabinet having been in place prior to the appointment of the ability to make changes once in place, produced the following results.

When the superintendents were asked if the interaction with a preexisting cabinet was of any consequence the overwhelming response was that it had no effect. It is unclear if this became a non-factor because it was not a factor or because the interviewees were reluctant to discuss it. This finding was surprising from the perspective of walking into a scenario where you are leveraged on the left by the board and leveraged on the right by your management team where you have little or no ability to mold or change either the board or the leadership team who

have tenure of multi-year contracts. Although it is not impossible to replace people on the leadership team if the situation warrants.

While the superintendents did not want to surround themselves with "yes" people, they were surrounding themselves with whom they were comfortable with, who would be loyal to them, and always professional.

In a perfect world it seems that everyone should exist on their own merit. The superintendent should have a multi-year contract in order to put in place and execute a plan. Multi-year contracts for both the superintendent and leadership team create a sense of security for both the individual and their families which is a good thing. However, having the ability to terminate a contract, the "fear factor" is also a positive thing because it speaks to merit not the political, personality, or any other spin on the scenario.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The purpose of this research study was to explore how the nature of the preparation, training and experiences of superintendents influence the ways in which they establish professional working relationships with their administrative cabinets. Further examined was the relationship between the superintendent and his or her cabinet before and during the interview process up to the date of employment, research question 1. The research also looked at how the newly hired superintendent works with his or her leadership team and how he or she becomes effective, research question 2. Additionally, this research provided data to examine if a superintendent with a traditional academic background differs from a superintendent with a non-traditional or business background relative to the effectiveness of his or her leadership, research question 3. Finally examined was the bearing, if any, the fact that a superintendent's cabinet may have been pre-existing have on his or her ability to lead, research question 4.

Two groups of school districts were chosen for this study. One group of school districts was led by superintendents who had a traditional academic background and the other group of school districts was led by superintendents with a non-traditional or business background. Superintendents and cabinet members were interviewed and asked specific questions. The responses from those interviews framed the data analysis for this study.

A superintendent's preparation and training has remained substantially unaltered for fifty years. State certification requirements have driven the content and activities of programs designed to train new superintendents. (Glass, 2006)

In the current environment, school districts are beginning to discuss whether or not the superintendent should come from a traditional academic background as opposed to a superintendent with a non-traditional or business background. In recent years, a small but growing number of school boards have turned to non-traditional superintendents to spur their efforts at reform. For example, New York City, San Diego, and Los Angeles have hired superintendents who have no educational experience at all. (Usdan, 2001) Census data from New York State Education Department reveals the number of central school districts in 2010 was 697. Of the 697 central school districts 40 of them had sitting superintendents who were former school business officials and held School District Business Leadership or equivalent certifications. There is still sentiment that a good educator will make the most effective superintendent. The selection of a leader from within, whether a traditional or non-traditional superintendent, provides the boards affirmation that things are going well. (Ezarik, 2003) Five of seven superintendent's who participated in this study were promoted from within. Three of the five had traditional backgrounds and the remaining two had non-traditional backgrounds.

What is the relationship between the superintendent and his or her cabinet before and during their interview process up to the date of employment?

These superintendents had the opportunity to bring in members of the leadership team and some members of the leadership teams had the opportunity to be part of the hiring process for the superintendents. The sense was that it was a two way street in that both the leadership team and the superintendent had as much at stake. The leadership team was concerned with the person to whom they would report and the superintendent was concerned with the cabinet with whom he or she would be working.

The scenarios regarding the hiring of the superintendents were varied. Two of the superintendents were put in place through a field commission by the board, one with a traditional

background and one with a non-traditional background. In these cases the background did not seem relevant to those interviewed. In both cases the incoming superintendent had long standing stature and tenure in the sense of service to the district. They were credible, known, and desirable from the perspective of those who were part of the hiring process.

Given that the majority of cabinet members were not in place during the phase of courtship and engagement, it was difficult to ascertain what significance a pre-existing cabinet played in the hiring process. Consequently their responses to this particular question were given little weight as a factor in terms of establishing, solidifying or weakening the relationship between the superintendent and his or her leadership team. However, it could be hypothesized that in a perfect world where the cabinet was pre-existing, a meaningful dialogue between those who would serve together could be significant.

Another courtship factor was related to the sharing of a vision by the superintendent with the team, looking at the reaction to that vision and determining who was going to agree or "buy in" and who was not. There was not much difference between traditional and nontraditional superintendents with regard to receptivity by the leadership team. Further observations were made regarding the differences in the ways in which superintendents with different backgrounds attempted to persuade the cabinet. This research suggests that positions with similar backgrounds attract as opposed to differing backgrounds attracting. People migrate to their strengths; does the superintendent with a business background migrate to the business official? Is that a positive or good thing? Is that a negative or bad thing? Or does he or she migrate to their weaknesses in the sense of going to their chief academic officer and trying to learn and fortify everything they can there? This study revealed that the superintendent works with the entire leadership team but

tends to migrate toward the official with a like background. This study did not seek to determine if this situation was either a positive or a negative.

How does a newly hired superintendent work with his or her cabinet and how does he or she become effective?

A strong observation from the research was the difference in approach for traditional versus non-traditional leaders. The superintendents with a non-traditional background exhibited a more objective approach. One that could be characterized as a more black and white, nuts and bolts, approach to doing business. These superintendents were more concerned that the members of their leadership teams had the necessary skill sets, were credible to their constituents, were willing to do whatever it took to get the job done, and were not nine-to-fivers. The superintendents with a traditional background tended to be more subjective in their responses to the interview questions, a little more concerned with the subjective aspects of each situation. There was always the question of personality fit. Can I work with this person? Can I trust this person? Where do they score on the scale of integrity?

Critical skills required to be effective are one's ability to put forth a vision, and one's ability to articulate and communicate that vision. This research also shows that the superintendent's prior district was a factor in their effectiveness as well as their prior position. Whether he or she was a pre-existing superintendent, internal or external hire, the pedigree, degrees held, credentials, certifications were all judged by the respondents to be very important to the effectiveness of the superintendent and the leadership team. A superintendent's ability to work and collaborate with others was found to be an important skill. Participants wanted someone who can communicate and coordinate with their leadership team at least to the extent that they are asked for their input and that their input is given due consideration. Cabinet members wanted to be part of the decision-making but recognized that their involvement would

be by providing input to the superintendent. The participants did not want a leader who would function as a top down administrator.

The superintendents were not particularly concerned about the issue of traditional versus nontraditional background. All of these superintendents were looking for competent people whether they themselves were business people or academic people. They just wanted to know that the people in the "trenches" with them were competent, capable, and willing to work with them to do whatever it takes to get the job done. Attributes that kept recurring among all the interviewees were; loyalty, one's ability to be a communicator, and the willingness to put in the time necessary to perform their roles effectively.

Similarly, the cabinet members wanted to see a superintendent in place not based on his or her background but more based on how he or she worked withth people. The cabinet members were looking for a collaborative, participatory type of environment. They were also seeking superintendents with a certain temperament and tone. They wanted a superintendent who was open minded and willing to work as part of the team.

The mechanics of how the superintendents organized themselves and met with people was also judged to be very important. This related specifically to how they got information and how often they sought information. Most superintendents, if they were not meeting weekly with their cabinet, were meeting at least twice a month. Generally once or twice a month, the superintendent would include other high level administrative people, directors or the direct reports to the assistant superintendents, in their meetings.

Finally, the most important finding relative to the superintendent's effectiveness with their leadership team was accountability and transparency. Was everything put on the table where everyone participated in meaningful conversation? The leadership teams were looking for

superintendents, who to some degree protected them, shielded them from the board and the public. The leadership team needed to know that their leader was there for them.

Does a superintendent with a traditional academic background differ from a superintendent with a non-traditional business background relative to the effectiveness of his or her leadership?

This research showed that it did not make a difference whether the superintendent was from a traditional background or a nontraditional background. Participants were asked how a superintendent with a business background articulated academic issues, whether he or she was fluent and well informed. Conversely, they were asked whether a superintendent with an academic background was able to speak with confidence about the business issues facing the school district. The participants felt that it was most important that the superintendent regardless of her or his background, do their homework, be well informed, be visible by visiting schools and classrooms, and that they get to know their staff and faculty, management by walking around.

Although not specifically identified as a research question, it was important to consider the interview responses that addressed the relationship between the superintendent and the board of education. Without exception the participants reported that the superintendent was the primary person to interface with the board of education, although they reported that the board does expect other members of the leadership team to speak about his or her specialty when necessary.

What became clearly evident was that the degree of fit given the background of the superintendent was certainly dependent on the interaction of the superintendent, board of education, and cabinet. Does that fact that the leader comes from the community help or hinder him/her in terms of being a more successful leader? The responses for both traditional and nontraditional were compared and no differences were found. However,

the fact that someone came from the community, understood the community, was able to communicate with the community, was judged to be a factor in the degree of their success.

What bearing, if any, does the fact that a superintendent's cabinet may have been pre-existing have on the effectiveness of the superintendent and his or her ability to lead?

The final research question examined the influence of a pre-existing cabinet on the superintendent's ability to make changes once in place. When the superintendents were asked if the interaction with a preexisting cabinet was of any consequence the overwhelming response was that it had no effect. This was not a factor for them. The difficulty with this research question was that in many instances the leadership team was not in place when the superintendent was appointed or the leadership team that was in place when the superintendent was appointed was no longer available to be interviewed. So the research was gathered from the people currently in these positions. Only one of thirteen cabinet members interviewed had been a cabinet member at the time the superintendent was appointed. The design of this study does not permit the researcher to conclude why that happened. However, it was unclear if this became a non-factor because it was not a factor or because the interviewees were reluctant to discuss it. This finding was surprising since it appeared to indicate that the superintendents accepted it as a part of the role. They could walk into a scenario where they were between the Board of Education and the cabinet with little or no ability to mold or change either the board or the leadership team who have tenure or multi-year contracts. One might expect the superintendents to be more concerned about being placed in such a situation but they were not.

The results of the study also indicated that superintendents did not want to surround themselves with "yes" people. Instead, they were surrounding themselves with people with

whom they were comfortable, who would be loyal to them, and would always function in a professional manner.

General Observations

Unanticipated Findings

The population for this study represented seven districts in the Hudson Valley Region of New York State. The criteria for inclusion included the superintendent's background and that a superintendent and cabinet members agreed to be interviewed. In the course of data collection the researcher discovered three unanticipated findings that merit reporting.

The pool of superintendents was comprised of four traditional and three non-traditional superintendents. It was surprising that the interviews revealed five of the seven had been promoted from within. These internal promotions were evident in both sub groups. Two of the traditional superintendents received their appointment by the field commission process.

Secondly, the degree of turnover on cabinets within participating districts was unanticipated by the researcher. All of the participating superintendents have been in that role for less than ten years. Five of them had been in their role for less than five years. It was the expectation of this researcher, given contract and tenure law in New York State, that the majority of the cabinet members would have pre-existed the appointment of the superintendent. In actuality, at the conclusion of the data collection, it was found that only one of thirteen cabinet participants preceded the superintendent appointment. The data gathered from the participants caused the researcher to conclude that there was no impact of the cabinet's lack of pre-existing presence. Questions remain in the researchers mind about the conclusion.

The purpose of this study was not to examine the board of education and the superintendent relationship. Never the less another interesting finding emerged. In this small

sample it appeared that boards of education were inappropriately involved in management areas in districts where the superintendent had a traditional background. The line separating the executive function from the policy function appeared to be more frequently crossed. Future study would be helpful in all three of the above areas.

Policy Recommendations

Educational Leadership Programs should develop and deliver coursework which is broader and deeper in terms of exposing aspiring district leaders to the entire landscape of professional issues likely to confront them during their professional lives as district leaders. This could include cross-training with other professional programs (i.e. Business and Health/Science, etc.) which would underscore the generic nature of leadership skills necessary for 21st century leaders.

Leadership professional development expectations should be on-going and never ending for not only newer district leaders but also for the more seasoned and experienced leaders as well. Leaders should be taught how to effectively engage in team building with the leadership team and relationship building with faculty, parents, students, community, etc. This should be part of a conscious strategy by the leader to engage and remain engaged with their constituents.

Recommendations for Future Study

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic between the superintendent and her or his cabinet, it is recommended that in-depth case studies be conducted. While the interview process was extremely informative, a deeper examination of a particular school district where the cabinet members were in place and participated in the interviewing process would potentially yield greater insights relevant to the relationship under study.

A quantitative approach, using a survey instrument which would go to a much wider array of superintendents and school districts, could provide a better sense of whether the patterns revealed in this study are generalizable to other schools around New York State.

Concluding Thoughts

Based on the results of this research, the logical conclusion is that successful superintendents who also have developed good effective working relationships with their cabinets are not dependent on who interviews the perspective superintendent, not dependent on whether sitting cabinets have long-term, multi-year contracts, many of which also have tenure, and are not dependent on whether a superintendent has an academic background versus a business background. Superintendents must be leaders who establish effective relationships and continue to develop those relationships with their cabinets and also with all constituencies across their school districts' landscapes. Although where leaders come from and what their predispositions may be is important, even more important is the leader's ability to reach out to all groups within their school district to build and develop relationships.

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Appendix "C"
Informed Consent Form

To: School Leader or Cabinet Member

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled**:**

To Explore how the nature of the preparation, training and experiences of superintendents influence the ways in which they establish "fit" (professional working relationships) with their existing administrative cabinet.

This research is being conducted by **:**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Raymond O'Connell

Student Investigator: Peter D. Hughes

> A Phenomenological Research Approach or Qualitative Methodology Approach (a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by the participants) will be used to explore the relationship between a newly appointed superintendent and the members of her/his pre-existing Cabinet. (Cabinet being defined and comprised of associate/assistant superintendents) This qualitative comparative study will examine two groups of superintendents: those coming to the position with a traditional, instruction based perspective and those possessing a non-traditional background. The second group will include superintendents coming from business, those formally educated in business, and/or those who previously served as School District Business Leaders (SDBL's). Utilizing interview data, the two groups of superintendents will be studied to determine the extent to which the superintendent's background contributed to a workable fit between the superintendent and the cabinet. Likewise, the cabinet will be studied from the perspective of how their pre-existing status affects the relationship with the superintendent. Data will be analyzed using the appropriate qualitative strategies.

> **Research Questions:**
> 1. In what ways, if at all, does the working relationship between the superintendent and his/her cabinet begin to develop during the selection process of the new superintendent?
> 2. In what ways, if at all, does the working relationship between the superintendent and his/her cabinet continue to develop after the selection process of the new superintendent?
> 3. Does the overall enterprise effectiveness depend upon the fit (cohesiveness) between superintendent and their cabinet as a whole and/or with each cabinet member individually?

4. In what ways does the background of the cabinet being consistent with the background and experience of the superintendent help or hinder the relationship?
5. In what ways does the background of the cabinet NOT being consistent with the background and experience of the superintendent help or hinder the relationship?
6. Does the pre-existing status of the cabinet affect the relationship between the superintendent and the cabinet? (By pre-existing status I am referring to the scenario of cabinet already being in place, pre-ordained if you will, and having tenure status with probably 1 to 3 year rolling contracts)

As part of the research, through the process mentioned above, I have selected to meet with you for up to a 60-minute interview so that I can explore with you your background, training and experiences en route to your appointment as a superintendent and/or how/what was your professional route to your position on the superintendent's cabinet. The interviews will be audio taped using a digital recorder to better help the researcher capture the essence of the interview. All digital recordings will be destroyed after the research is completed. The researcher will not share the recordings with anyone else and your identity will be kept confidential. **This interview is voluntary and you can opt out at anytime without penalty by the researcher or your school district.** A series of pseudonyms will be used to mask the real identity of school districts, and the identities of individual superintendents and cabinet members. The benefit of your participation is that your input for this project will add to the literature in the area of relationships between superintendents and their respective senior management teams.

There is minimal risk involved with this study based upon the subject matter that is being investigated, and your position in the school district, should you agree to participate. The researcher will take all precautions to maintain the confidentiality of all participants. Participation in the study is voluntary.

The interview, and the information I receive from your school district, will be confidential. All interviews will be coded by the researcher (coding at this juncture is undefined but will be disclosed for your benefit prior to us interviewing). All interviews will be audio taped for keeping an accurate account of the conversation, and will not be used in public. The researcher will be using an audio tape and create a file on his computer where your audio tape will be filed during data collection and other interviews. The audio tape of our interview session will be transcribed by an independent outside service. This transcription service will have no knowledge or be aware of any linkage between you and your respective school district as a participant. The file will be labeled as confidential and only the researcher has access to the computer used during the study. All audio files will be destroyed upon completion of the study and by no later than June, 2012. Please place your initials here to indicate your permission. _____

I understand that I may at any time during the course of this study revoke my consent and withdraw from the study without any penalty.

I have been given an opportunity to read and keep a copy of this Agreement and to ask questions concerning the study. Any such questions have been answered to my full and complete satisfaction.

I, _____, having full capacity to consent, do hereby volunteer to participate in this research study.

Signed: _____

Research participant: This research has received the approval of The Sage Colleges Institutional Review Board, which functions to insure the protection of the rights of human subjects. If you, as a participant, have any complaints about this study, please contact:

Dr. Susan Cloninger   (518) 244-226
Sage Graduate School   clonis@sage.edu
65 Ferry Street, Troy, New York 12180

Appendix "D"
E-mail and transfer letter

Dear Educator:

I greatly appreciate your generosity of time and information relative to my doctoral research study entitled, "To Explore how the nature of the preparation, training and experiences of superintendents influence the ways in which they establish "fit" (professional working relationships) with their existing administrative cabinet". Enclosed you will find a copy of the transcription that was derived from your interview. I request that you review this document for accuracy and completeness. If you should find any discrepancies or would like to comment on the document for any reason please feel free to contact me at any time.
Please use the self-addressed, stamped envelope for the above reasons.

I enjoyed our time together and thank you for contributing in a significant manner to my study and to the

advancement of the relationships between superintendents and their senior management teams.

Thank you,

Respectfully,

Peter D. Hughes

Appendix "E"
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: SUPERINTENDENTS

(Interview Questions in Script Sequence)

1. Could you please take a couple of minutes and share with me your background (experience), educational preparation and professional certifications?
    - ➢ (PDH) Ask informant if they would be willing to share a copy of their resume?
    - ➢ (PDH) Clarify as to whether traditional or non-traditional background?
2. What positions comprise your Cabinet?
3. What areas of certification are represented in your cabinet?
4. What members of your current cabinet interviewed you?
5. Were you interviewed individually by each cabinet member or was it a collective interview? Please describe the setting and how did it go?
6. Were you able to ascertain, during the interview process or subsequent to it, whether any members of cabinet were also candidates for the superintendence?
7. Were you able to ascertain from other interviews during the selection process any helpful information about the existing cabinet which was helpful to you in formulating an opinion about the existing cabinet and if so what was it ?
8. Did the opportunity to meet, discuss and interview with your potential cabinet during the interview process help establish a rapport with them and if so-how?
9. As an incoming Superintendent, what attributes and skill sets were you looking for in cabinet members as potential members of your senior level management team?
10. How do the backgrounds, experiences and certifications of the Cabinet members compliment yours?
11. How did you feel about inheriting an existing cabinet versus having the ability to formulate you own team?
12. Describe your style of management in terms of how you work with your Cabinet?
13. How do you rate your working relationship with your cabinet? If you could please address it from the perspective of how responsive, they are to your leadership vision. Do they support it, do they offer contrary perspective for you to consider or do they not engage you in any meaningful and challenging way
14. How do you assess the fit between the cabinet and the superintendent and their overall effectiveness as a senior level management team? Example?
15. In what ways, if at all, do you work with individual Cabinet members on specific tasks you assign to them?
16. As superintendent, do you engage your cabinet in any team building initiatives and if so, could you provide an example-please.
17. In what ways do you encourage feedback from your cabinet members?

18. Do you feel as though your background and training compliments or supplements your cabinet members' training and background and could you provide an illustration-please?

19. Looking at your cabinet's background, strengths and weaknesses coupled with your own, how do you identify where the opportunities are in hopes of improving your overall effectiveness as a management team?

20. In what ways, if at all, how do you accommodate any missing areas of expertise within your Cabinet?

21. As a new superintendent, how did you deal with the fact that members of your Cabinet had tenure and/or long-term contracts, and/or the fact that you had little or no opportunity to assemble your own senior level management team?

22. As superintendent, do you feel that you could field a more effective management team if you had total discretion to appoint respective senior level administrators

23. Given their long-term protected status, do you feel as though you receive the best guidance from your cabinet based on the merits of a particular situation versus being politically correct?

Appendix "F"
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: CABINET MEMBERS

(Interview questions in Scrip Sequence)

1. Could you please take a couple of minutes and share with me your background (experience), educational preparation and professional certifications?
2. As a current cabinet member, did you participate in the interview process of superintendent candidates and what observations can you share.
3. Did each cabinet member individually interview the candidate or was it a collective interview? Please describe the setting in which the interviews took place?
4. As a current cabinet member, did you ever consider applying for the superintendent's position yourself and if so, did you eventually apply?
5. While interviewing potential superintendents, what information were you able to ascertain from these interviews, which was helpful to you in determining whether they could do the job, and was a good fit?
6. Did the opportunity to meet, discuss and interview with the candidate during the interview process help establish a rapport with the successful candidate and if so-how?
7. When talking with the candidate what attributes and qualities were you looking for in terms of adding value to your team?
8. What positions currently comprise your Cabinet and what recommended changes, if any, in cabinet composition would you recommend to the new superintendent?
9. Now that the new superintendent has been appointed, what synergies do you see in each other's background, which will lead to cabinet being a more effective team?
10. Do you believe that a cabinet mainly comprised of professionals who are tenured or who have long-term contracts is an advantage or detriment to an incoming superintendent?
11. Could you please describe how the cabinet works with the superintendent, by that I mean tell me what a typical week in the life of the senior level leadership team (superintendent and cabinet together) might look like?
12. How do you rate your working relationship with your superintendent? If you could please address it from the perspective of how responsive, the superintendent is to cabinets input and suggestions. Is the superintendent receptive to contrarian perspective to consider or does he/she not engage you in any meaningful and challenging way
13. How do you assess cabinet's overall effectiveness as a senior level management team and could you cite an example or two-please
14. Do individual cabinet members work on specific assignments with the superintendent one-on-one or do you work collectively as a team on solutions and what initiatives does the superintendent undertake to develop a team approach to solving problems?

15. What professional growth opportunities are provided for Cabinet members?
16. How do the cabinet's strengths and weaknesses align themselves with those of the new superintendents?
17. How does the superintendent accommodate for any short comings in terms of expertise on the cabinet?
18. Does the fact that the Cabinet has tenure and/or long-term contracts affect the working relationship between the members of the cabinet and the new superintendent?
19. As a cabinet member, do you feel that you could be a more effective management team if both the superintendent and cabinet were all at will appointments with appropriate terms contracts, say 3-5 rolling agreements?

In what ways, if at all, does the nature of the superintendent's term contract (3-5 years) impact the nature of her/his leadership?