

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY DESCRIBING SUPERINTENDENT PERCEPTIONS IN
FOCUS DISTRICTS IN NEW YORK OF THE UTILIZATION OF THE DIAGNOSTIC
TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS TO SUPPORT STUDENT
SUCCESS**

A Doctoral Research Project

Presented to

Assistant Professor Jerome D. Steele, Ed.D.

Doctoral Committee Chair

Esteves School of Education

The Sage Colleges

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

Mario Fernandez

August 22, 2017

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY DESCRIBING SUPERINTENDENT PERCEPTIONS IN
FOCUS DISTRICTS IN NEW YORK OF THE UTILIZATION OF THE DIAGNOSTIC
TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS TO SUPPORT STUDENT
SUCCESS**

We represent to Sage Graduate School that this thesis/dissertation and abstract are the original work of the author and do not infringe on the copyright or other rights of others.

Mario Hernandez

9-7-2017

Date of Signature

Jerome D. Steele, Ed.D.

9-7-2017

Date of Signature

Assistant Professor of Education

Doctoral Research Committee Chair

Permission for The Sage Colleges to release work:

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY DESCRIBING SUPERINTENDENT PERCEPTIONS IN
FOCUS DISTRICTS IN NEW YORK OF THE UTILIZATION OF THE DIAGNOSTIC
TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS TO SUPPORT STUDENT
SUCCESS.**

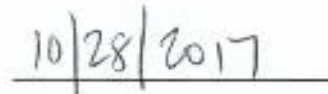
A Doctoral Research Project Presented to Assistant Professor Jerome D. Steele, Ed.D., Doctoral
Committee Chair, Esteves School of Education, The Sage Colleges, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education In Educational Leadership, by Mario
Fernandez. Submitted on August 22, 2017.

I hereby give permission to The Sage Colleges to use my work in the following ways:

- Place in the Sage College Libraries electronic collection and make publically available for electronic viewing by Sage-affiliated patrons as well as all general public online viewers (i.e. "open access").
- Place in the Sage College Libraries electronic collection and share electronically for InterLibrary Loan purposes.
- Keep in the departmental program office to show to other students, faculty or outside individuals, such as accreditors or licensing agencies, as an example of student work.

_____

Name

_____

Date of Signature

**The Sage Colleges
Ed.D. in Educational Leadership**

**Final Approval of the Individual Doctoral Research Report
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Ed.D. in Educational Leadership**

Date August 22, 2017

Candidate's Name Mario Fernandez

Candidate's Sage ID Number 997149

Title of Final Doctoral Research Report

A QUALITATIVE STUDY DESCRIBING SUPERINTENDENT PERCEPTIONS IN FOCUS
DISTRICTS IN NEW YORK OF THE UTILIZATION OF THE DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR
SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

The Doctoral Research Committee for the above named Doctoral Candidate gives final approval of the individual Doctoral Research Report.

Signature _____ Chair

Signature _____ Member

Signature _____ Member

Copies to: Graduate Dean, SOE Dean, Program Director, Director of Research, Members of Doctoral Research Committee, Candidate and Candidate's File

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Time is the most valuable asset we own. In every journey of life, our priorities become a horse trade in time with others knowing in some cases their permanence in our lives is short-lived but all so critical to our evolving as human beings. And then there are those that we are indebted to simply because we decided to become parents or friends with these people to make the time of our lives and theirs meaningful. I am indebted to my son Troy who watched me struggle and rejoice through this dissertation journey and in the end decided that he would one day take a walk down a similar path. Knowing us, this will not be a repeat of the song the Cat's in the Hat. Not as long as there is soft-serve ice cream to eat.

I cannot repay the time and energy that Dr. Jerome Steele, my Chair, provided through his encouragement and thoughtful guidance in the research and writing process. I also want to thank the many professors at Sage who took time from their lives to build mine. A special thank you to Dr. Francesca Durand and Dr. Deb Shea. Heaven is forever because that is the amount of time owed to you both for the ridiculously quick responses, the thoughtful inquiry and revisions, and the overall care you demonstrated for me at the drop of a dime. You are the heart and soul of the Sage Program.

A special thanks to my Executive Coach, Dr. Cosimo Tangorra, for the many hours of personal conversations. Dr. Tangorra taught me much dissertation kung-fu. Thank you Cos for the down-to-earth anchoring I needed from time to time to "get 'er done". I also want to thank Dr. Stanley Maziejka, an informal coach of sorts, for introducing me to the Sage program and offering suggestions and approaches to the work from his perspective as a Sage Doctoral graduate from Cohort One. From what I understand, you guys were almost as good as Cohort Nine.

I cannot thank my cohort colleagues enough for their support. Cohort Nine, you were an oasis to me, a place to find refreshment for my soul, or that rock I needed to stand upon to get out of the spin. Kermit the Frog uttered in a movie, “Life is made up of meetings and partings. That is the way of it.” I shall not forget our meeting. Thank you my friends for inspiring me to think, encouraging me to embrace excellence, or reminding me that I’m only human, and a good one at that. Kermit the Frog also sings, “One day we’ll find it, the rainbow connection, the lovers, the dreamers, and me”. This experience connected us like the colors of the rainbow though we are people of many colors and shades. We make the sunlight visible and beautiful in our bending across the vast sky. We are a unique and awesome occurrence. Cohort Nine, we are the “spork” in the cutlery drawer of successful cohorts who have ventured through the Sage program. I believe that makes twenty-two.

Lastly, to my parents Sila and Marco, thank you for giving my spirit the opportunity to soar. More importantly, thank you for teaching me how to land. Papi, I raise the work of your hands to heaven and celebrate this accomplishment with you. To my siblings, Marco Jr., Carmen, and Ruben, your inspiration throughout this adventure has been phenomenal especially when my way grew dark and my path uncertain. We are the original Fantastic Four.

ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE STUDY DESCRIBING SUPERINTENDENT PERCEPTIONS IN FOCUS DISTRICTS IN NEW YORK OF THE UTILIZATION OF THE DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

Mario Fernandez

The Sage Colleges, Esteves School of Education, 2017

Dissertation Chair: Jerome Steele, Assistant Professor of Education

Superintendents confront a number of external and internal demands as leaders of complex educational organizations. Compounding the external demands superintendents confront is the recent, heightened advancement of national educational reform policy occurring through the Clinton, Bush, and Obama Administrations. The federal education reform legislation enacted through these presidential administrations contained provisions to address low-performing schools. Subsequently, state educational agencies constructed and imposed corrective action policy for low-performing school districts and schools. This study delves into the perceptions superintendents hold regarding state imposed corrective action policy for low-performing schools.

This study describes the perceptions of superintendents in low-performing schools around the federal and state sanctioned Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE) process and the theoretical rubric upon which the DTSDE is built upon. A qualitative research design was used to collect and analyze data interviews of 11 district leaders of public school districts identified as Focus school districts in the Capital, Mohawk, and Mid-Hudson regions of

New York State. The researcher focused upon the roles superintendents perceive they play in the DTSDE process, how superintendents use state recommendations to support student success at the district level, and the strengths and limitations of the DTSDE instrument and process. The data collected was analyzed around three research questions, yielding 19 findings. The results of the research conducted in this study underscores the critical role of the superintendent in the intergovernmental federal to state to local district implementation of national and state educational reform policy.

Of the several recommendations resulting in this study, perhaps the most significant recommendation is identifying the role of the superintendent as a critical agent in enacting school reform practices as a result of state imposed corrective action policy. In the DTSDE process, the principal and not the superintendent of schools is responsible for school building reform. It is recommended that the process New York State uses to diagnose low-performing Focus school districts amplify the role of the superintendent in the reform process to better link external policy demands to school district organizational practices leading to student success.

Key Words: context-responsive leadership: national education reform; state imposed corrective action

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Charts, Figures, and Tables

Chapter One: Introduction

Background/Overview of the Study	1
Statement of the Problem	5
Research Questions	6
Theoretical/Conceptual Framework	6
Significance of the Study	8
Definition of Terms/Keywords	10
Scope of the Study	12
Assumptions of the Study	12
Delimitations	12
Limitations	13
Organization of the Study	14

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Introduction	15
Federal Accountability	17
Federal Accountability Under the Clinton Administration	19
Addressing Low-Performing Schools Under the IASA	22
Waiver Policy Under the Clinton Administration	25
Federal Accountability Under the George W. Bush Administration	27
Issues with NCLB implementation	30
Federal Accountability under the Obama Administration	32

The Race To The Top initiative	34
School improvement under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)	37
State Accountability in New York State Under Race To The Top	39
The Focus District Review Process	40
The DTSDE Tool and District Leadership	42
Impact of Legislation on Local Control and School Accountability	48
The “Optimal” Influence of the Superintendent in Low Performing Schools	49
The Roles of Superintendents in Low-Performing Schools	55
Summary	58

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction	61
Research Design	63
Sample and Sampling Procedures	63
Instrumentation	65
Data Collection	66
Data Analysis	67
Researcher Bias	69
Validity	70
Reliability	71
Summary	71

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction	73
Descriptive Information	74
Research Question 1	77
Research Question 2	90
Research Question 3	102
Summary	121

Chapter Five:

Introduction	124
Summary of Findings	125
Discussion and Analysis of Findings	127
Recommendations for Policy	142
Recommendations for Practice	143
Recommendations for Future Research	143
Summary	144

References	146
------------	-----

Appendices

A. Superintendent Contact Letter	163
B. Cover Letter Script to Participants	164
C. Interview Protocol	165
D. Informed Consent Form	167
E. NVivo Codes	169
F. IRB Approval Letter	170

List of Charts

Chart 1: Generalized components of the federal reform agenda of the 1990's

Chart 2: Eight National Goals of the Goals 2000 Act

Chart 3: Federal Expectations for State Plans Submitted to Acquire IASA Funding

Chart 4: Corrective Action for LEAS Failing To Achieve Adequate Yearly Progress Under the
IASA

Chart 5: Six Priorities of Race to the Top Grant Distribution

List of Figures

Figure 1: Primary roles of the superintendent in historical, community, and organizational
context

List of Tables

Table 1: Descriptions of Tenets Two Through Six of the DTSDE Rubric

Table 2: DTSDE Components Applicable to District Leadership

Table 3: Tesch (1990) - Eight Steps in the Coding Process

Table 4: District Leader Demographics

Table 5: School District Demographics

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In sum, superintendents must be cognizant of a wide array of economic, social and political changes unfolding in the nation as well as the state where they serve; be well-versed in national, state-level and local policy initiatives; and have the capacity to translate that knowledge into a systemic implementation plan that will withstand the rigors of continuous public inspection and criticism. Consequently, the nature of the superintendents work is as complex as it is intense, requiring multiple and diverse roles (Bjork, 2005, p. 21).

Background/Overview of the Study

Under the provisions of the First and Tenth Amendments, the United States Constitution reserves to states and the people all powers not specifically delegated by the federal government or prohibited by the Constitution regarding the education of the populace (Pulliam, 1987, U.S. Const. amend. 1 & 10). The prevailing view of the founding fathers was “knowledge was the best guardian of liberty” but the founding fathers also knew “education did not belong under federal control” (Pulliam, 1987, p. 56). Through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) the federal government appropriated funding to eliminate disparities in educational opportunities for low-income students. Under the original intent of the ESEA and true to the 10th Amendment notion of state and local control of education, federal financial assistance expenditures complemented state and local funding to public schools (McClure, 2008).

The reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), administered under the Clinton, Bush, and Obama presidential administrations were a stark

departure from the traditional historical context that characterized federal and state policy relationships and the use of ESEA funds to complement state and local funding (Manna, 2011; Sunderman & Kim, 2004b). By controlling how federal funding would be dispersed through the reauthorizations of the ESEA, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) and No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) were the key instruments Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama used to leverage national education policy at the state and local levels (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Jennings, 1998).

The ESEA authorization of 1994, or the IASA, ushered in national education policy that defines the core of teaching, assessment, professional development, teacher qualifications, and definitive systems of accountability for all students at the state and local levels (Cross, 2004a; Manna, 2011). Whereas the administration of President Johnson and authors of the ESEA of 1965 saw equity in education as both a civil rights issue and an issue of resources, recent reauthorizations of the ESEA through the IASA and the NCLB Acts heralded specific federal mandates on school accountability based on federally derived quantitative measures (Cross, 2004a; Sunderman & Kim, 2004a; U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

When major changes to federal law occur, limited federal resources are set aside for technical assistance, training, and support (United States Government Accountability Office, 2015, Cross, 2004). Coordinating the rollout of national federal policy across fifty different state education agencies and over 15,000 school districts that include 80,000 schools through one agency, the United States Department of Education, creates further issues with federal policy fidelity and actualization at the state and local level. National education policy presented by the Clinton Administration provided waivers to state education agencies to control the level of inconsistencies in practice and policy among states.

Through waivers, states were given relief from federal expectations in return for assurances state education departments would implement specific federal programming. By 1999, the Clinton Administration moved legislation that allowed all 50 states flexibility with national education policy in return for creating state standards, assessments for those standards, and the development of corrective action processes for low-performing schools.

The practice of offering waivers during the Bush Administration subsided with the promise of adequate federal funding to all states for implementing national education policy. However, the promise of adequate funding under the Bush Administration was not realized. States began litigating against the Bush Administration seeking relief from the stringent federal expectations of NCLB including the mounting costs created by the overwhelming number of failing schools state educational agencies were required to address under NCLB. Exacerbating the lack of federal funding to meet federal reform initiatives was an economic recession lasting from 2007-2009 that made implementation of national education policy difficult for states and localities already strapped for resources (Mann, 2015; McMurrer & Yoshioka, 2013). Rather than reauthorize the ESEA, Congress issued waivers to states providing relief from the overbearing federal mandates of NCLB. When the Obama Administration took office, NCLB became a series of treaties between federal and state agencies (Mann, 2015; Manna, 2011).

The same economic recession that caused funding dilemmas for state education agencies and subsequently, the end of NCLB, ushered in the Obama Administration. Under the Obama Administration, the development of a national stimulus package, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) was conceived (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a). The ARRA set aside nearly \$4.35 billion dollars in competitive grants to bolster the education sector through the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative. In 2012, the New York State Education

Department (NYSED) was awarded RTTT grant funding to support the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE) (U.S. Department of Education, 2013b). The DTSDE was recognized by the United States Education Department as an effective tool to address low-performing schools and provide guidance on overall school improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2013b).

The DTSDE review process purports to provide low-performing schools with an “optimal” tool for improving student success (New York State Education Department, 2012f). State-led reviews are periodically conducted by NYSED using six tenets found in the DTSDE rubric to rate the efforts school districts and schools pursue to improve student success. These reviews target building leadership specifically the work of building principals in effectuating school improvement. District leadership, including the role of the superintendent, is also reviewed under Tenet 1, District Leadership and Capacity. After the review process is completed, recommendations are forwarded to the building principal.

States, and not the federal government, are the highest level of government with the most leverage over the 90,000 schools in America (Symonds, 2001). Nevertheless, Abelman, Elmore, & Fuhrman (1996) noted,

Nested within these developing external accountability systems are real schools: schools that have their own distinctive organizational characteristics and problems; schools that have unique student populations; schools situated in diverse and particular communities; and schools with their own institutional histories (p. 1).

Plans for policy implementation from the state to the local level often fails due to the failure of state policy makers in recognizing the local school district as the arbiter of how and what change actually occurs (Patterson & Czajkowski, 1976, Manna, 2011, Abelman et al., 1996,

Honig and Hatch, 2004). Contrary to the beliefs that increased federal and state policy intrusion would result in diminished local control, researchers posit that school districts successfully interpreted and navigated state policy expectations (Kristen, Wilcox, Lawson, Angelis, Durand & Gregory, 2017; Abelman et. al, 1999; Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001; Elmore & Fuhrman, 1995). The interpretation and navigation of state policy expectations typically falls upon the superintendent of schools (Björk, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014; Zavadsky, 2012). How superintendents make meaning of their work given the historical, community, and organizational context of the district and how superintendents perform the managerial, political, and instructional roles of their office within these contexts will dictate the responsiveness of a school district to state accountability measures (Abelman et al., 1996; Bredeson, Klar, & Johannsson, 2008; Durand, Lawson, Wilcox & Schiller, 2016; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Johnson, 1996; Schlechty, 1990).

With the advent of national education policy in the mid-1990s, the work of superintendents as instructional leaders has received considerable attention (Anderson, 2003; Björk et al., 2014; Chingos, Whitehurst, & Lindquist, 2014; Honig, 2012; Johnson & Crispeels, 2010; Johnson, 1996; Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011; Marzano and Waters, 2009; DuFour and Marzano, 2009). Recent research suggests successful schools demonstrate better system and structural alignment when the systems are directed by district leadership (Aladjem, Birman, Orland, Harr-Robins, Heredia, Parrish, & Ruffini, 2010; Massell & Goertz, 2002; Zavadsky, 2012; Marzano and Waters, 2009). If federal and state policy leading to student success is to succeed at the local level, understanding the perspectives superintendents have of their work is critical to understanding relationships among school reform, leadership, and educational outcomes (Bredeson et al., 2008; Togneri and Anderson, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to describe the extent to which New York State superintendents in school districts identified as Focus districts utilize the District Level Rubric elements of the New York State Education Department Diagnostic Tool for District and School Effectiveness (DTSDE) to inform and implement efforts to support student success. At this stage in the research, the use of the DTSDE to support student success were constrained to the expectations of DTSDE Tenet 1 and the other district level rubric elements of Tenet 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, and 6.1, in which the district leadership developed a theory of action to examine, define, and support, school-based systems and structures leading to student success. More specifically, the study focused on how superintendents at the local level make sense of federal and state reform policy and how state reform tools are utilized by superintendents to develop programming leading to student success based on local perceptions.

Research Questions

This study is built upon the premise that superintendents are the primary actor at the local school district level for legitimizing external accountability efforts. The following research questions guided the collection, analyzing, and reporting of information:

1. To what extent do superintendents in Focus school districts perceive their role in the DTSDE process at the district level?
2. To what extent do superintendents of Focus school districts utilize District Level DTSDE recommendations for improving student success as defined by the DTSDE instrument?
3. How do superintendents in low-performing schools perceive the strengths and limitations of the District Level DTSDE tenets in effecting school improvement efforts?

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework that will guide this study emerges from the work of Cuban (1988), Johnson (1996), and Bredeson, Klar, & Johannsson (2008). Cuban (1988) describes three roles - political, managerial, and instructional - that dominate the work of the superintendent. Johnson (1996), recognizing the roles described by Cuban (1988), adds that superintendents not only work in these three sometimes conflicting roles, but also work within the historical, organizational, and community contexts of each district the superintendent serves.

Bredeson et al., (2008) similarly recognize that the role of superintendent is context-responsive built upon “such factors as district size, community demographics, organizational culture, history, geography, and local political realities, not to mention individual personalization of the role” (p. 3). How superintendents perform the managerial, political, and instructional roles of their office within these contexts will dictate the responsiveness of a school district to state accountability measures and to what degree school districts act to legitimize state recommendations for improvement (Abelman et al. 1996; Björk, et. al., 2014; Bredeson et al., 2008; Cuban, 1988; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Johnson, 1996; Schlechty, 1990).

Creswell (2009) notes, similar to quantitative theory methodology, qualitative theory “is used as a broad explanation for behavior and attitudes, and it may be complete with variables, constructs, and hypotheses” (p. 61). Johnson’s (1996) framework captures Cuban’s (1988) research on roles that dominate the work of superintendents and is sufficiently broad in scope to capture the many facets in which superintendent perceptions of the context in which they work can be described in this qualitative study. Bredeson et al. (2008) adds to Johnson’s (1996) notion of superintendents working in a historical, organizational, and community context by adding the personalization of the role as a characteristic of superintendent responses to internal

and external mandates. The notion of personalization suggests superintendents are not only context-responsive but, are active agents in the development of the district context to which they are responding (Abelman et al., 1996; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Schlechty, 1990).

The New York State Education Department's (NYSED) approach to address corrective action for low-performing schools is framed through the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE). The introduction to the DTSDE instrument found in the DTSDE handbook indicates the rubric provides the "optimal conditions of an effective school" (New York State Education Department, 2012, p. 4). The DTSDE purports to measure the gap between the conditions found in a low-performing school against the optimal conditions recorded in the DTSDE rubric through a process enacted by state reviewers. The DTSDE review process focuses primarily on the work of building principals. The DTSDE review process provides recommendations to building principals to close the gap between the optimal conditions of an effective school identified in the DTSDE rubric and the current conditions of the low-performing school. The DTSDE protocol purports to be a research-based approach to school improvement approved by NYSED. Within the DTSDE instrument tenets, the role of district leadership is designed to support building principals through the school improvement process (New York State Education Department, 2012).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is a benefit to researchers who seek to better understand the role of the superintendent in the era of educational accountability beginning with the Clinton Presidential Administration and ending with the Obama Presidential Administration (Abelmann et al., 1999; Cohn, 2005; Elmore et al., 2002; Fuhrman et al., 2004; Honig, 2012; Lasky, 2004;

Waters & Marzano, 2006, Bredeson et. al., 2008; Johnson, 1996). Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, (2000) conclude that,

The superintendency is so very different from district to district that making generalizations is hazardous. In fact, there is really no such thing as the superintendency; instead, there are many superintendencies. Often they are more unlike than like each other (pg. ix).

This study purports to add to the burgeoning research of superintendents in the accountability era by offering superintendent perceptions on the reform efforts implemented by state actors in an era of waiver-supported, national educational reform.

Similarly, this study focused on the role of the superintendent during a specific time period in federal and state educational policy development history in which waiver-supported educational reform provided state funding for the development of a state sanctioned approach to identifying and attending to the low performing schools found in one region of New York State. The Obama Administration's use of economic stimulus funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 suggests federal educational policymakers will seek funding outside of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to maintain control over national educational policy and reform. Determining whether the expectations of federal and state policymakers in a waiver-based educational reform era reaches the local level with the intended impact is reported in this study via the perceptions of superintendents.

Understanding the initial response by NYSED to federal control and the use of the DTSDE as a policy tool to exert control over local school districts is also featured in this study. This study is significant because it provides a historical understanding for researchers of how superintendents shaped federal and state policy. This study describes how superintendents

perceived their efforts to enact policy at the local level in some parts of New York State and to what degree federal and state control was legitimized at the local level during this unique policy period spanning from the Clinton to Obama Presidential Administrations.

Understanding the context in which superintendents operate is significant to state policy researchers. This study incorporates face-to-face interviews with superintendents in low-performing schools in New York State to understand how local school governance accepts, rejects, or accepts in part, the recommendations for corrective action set forth by the New York State Education Department. Much like the diagnostic tool used by NYSED to correct school districts and schools, this study provides field insight into how the DTSDE tool is being interpreted and utilized. Given this feedback from the field, state policy researchers can benefit from this study in recognizing the organizational complexities that exist in various districts and adjust their approaches to guide and assist school districts and schools with context-specific processes for improving student success. With the insight from this research, state policy researchers have a limited but significant study in how state efforts are interpreted by local school district leaders.

This study extends Cohn's (2005) hope that federal policy researchers will focus research and resources on the issues of policy implementation specifically, understanding the role of the superintendent in enacting reform and creating structures that take into account the unique role of the superintendent in school improvement. Elmore (2004) laments in his research findings regarding external accountability policy that, "it is pointless to work on (policy) structures until you know specifically what kind of practice you are trying to engender" (p. 4). This study is significant for federal policy researchers who wish to end the inconsistent messaging from

intergovernmental agencies as federal policy moves from layer to layer and person to person from the state level down to the local level (Cross, 2004).

Definition of Terms/Keywords

Throughout this study, the following terms and keywords will be defined as follows:

District Leadership – District Leadership is defined as the office of the superintendent and as such, will refer to the office of superintendent for this study (see Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Era of educational accountability – Fuhrman (1999) described national educational policy new accountability approaches. These new accountability approaches characterize national education policy between the beginning of the Clinton Presidential Administration in 1993, and the completion of the Obama Presidential Administration in January of 2017.

Low-Performing Schools – Low-performing schools relates specifically to the notion of school performance according to NYSED based on the performance of the school in the bottom 5% or 10% on state assessment tests and/or graduation rates within the state (New York State Education Department, 2015).

Student Success – For this study, student success is defined as the facets of the educational system outlined by the DTSDE rubric that engender student success (New York State Education Department, 2012b).

Waiver policy – waiver policy is defined as the practice of federal policymakers of providing states a waiver from federal policy expectations in return for state assurances other federal policy will be enacted (Manna, 2011; New York State Education Department, 2012; Sunderman & Kim, 2004).

DTSDE – The Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness was conceived by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) in compliance with federal law requiring state

educational agencies to address low-achieving schools (New York State Education Department, 2012c).

Focus District – a school district with at least one school in Focus or Priority status (New York State Education Department, 2016b)

Focus School – Low performing schools in which an accountability subgroup was not improving on state assessments (New York State Education Department, 2016b).

Priority School – a low performing school that is performing in the lowest 5% of all schools in the state based on the combined English language arts and mathematics performance on state assessments or in graduation rates (New York State Education Department, 2016b).

Scope of the Study

This phenomenological qualitative study will take place in eleven school districts that have been identified as Focus districts by the New York State Education Department.

This study includes responses from leaders in city school districts, central school districts, and rural school districts located in the Capital Region and the adjoining Mid-Hudson Region that were identified as Focus districts in March of 2016 (New York State Education Department, 2016b). The study was limited to these districts and this region as the number of Focus school districts in this region provided sufficient background and support for this study.

Assumptions of the Study

An assumption was made that district leadership can accurately provide a phenomenological description of how national and state education policy is filtered into the local school district. Using district leadership to describe how state policy processes are enacted presumes that these agents have the greatest degree of efficacy within the organization to accept, reject, or accept in part, some or all of the policy components forwarded by the New York State

Education Department in conjunction with corrective action policy pursued through the district level DTSDE process.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study are found in the purpose statement. The study only focuses on the perceptions of superintendents in low performing schools on external accountability instruments constructed and implemented since 2012. The superintendent perceptions and the use of a particular instrument by the state educational agency is further nestled in the federal policy environment of the past three presidential administrations. In sum, this study is a snapshot of a particular era in which a new approach to funding national education reform led to the creation of a specific instrument by one state education agency and how superintendents in low-performing schools in one region of that state perceived the utility of the instrument to diagnose and improve upon student success.

Limitations

Limitations for this study result from the small sample size and region used to collect and analyze qualitative data. There were 84 Focus school districts identified in 2015-2016 on which this study is based (New York State Education Department, 2016b). Focus districts within the big five school districts of New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers were excluded from this study as, unlike other school districts in the state, these school districts operate as a branch of government with no taxing authority. Big Five school districts account for 34 Focus district schools, 30 of which fall under the auspices of the New York City Department of Education. Of the remaining 50 Focus districts in the state, 11 responses were collected for this study from a possible total of 16 Focus districts located in the Capital, Mohawk, and Mid-Hudson regions of New York State.

Limitations also exist for inconsistencies across variations in the DTSDE review process enacted by NYSED. The DTSDE review process was enacted in 2012 (New York State Education Department, 2012b). The DTSDE review process continues presently however, over the course of the past five years, NYSED has made changes to the review process, the DTSDE instrument rating rubric, and the methodology of the review process. Some superintendents have led their districts through the entire evolution of the DTSDE process from its inception while other superintendents are experiencing the newer revisions recently implemented by NYSED. Superintendent perceptions of the review process will differ based on which version of the state process and instrument a superintendent has experienced. Additionally, though the process is diagnostic, variability exists when different reviewers provide recommendations based on their perceptions of district operations.

The assumptions, delimitations, and limitations of this study do not diminish the significance of this study on the unique perspectives of superintendents around mandated external accountability systems or the voice of local control in the shaping of national education policy. Equally significant in this study is understanding how superintendents make meaning of their work through the roles and contexts superintendents personalize in the districts in which they serve.

Organization of the Study

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the research and provides the background for the study. Chapter Two provides a literature review of the study conducted. Chapter Three explains the research methodology and the procedures followed to conduct the study. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study. Chapter Five provides recommendations and conclusions as a result of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to describe the extent to which New York State superintendents in school districts identified as Focus districts utilize the District Level Rubric elements of the New York State Education Department (NYSED) Diagnostic Tool for District and School Effectiveness (DTSDE) to inform and implement efforts to support student success. This chapter will include a review of existing literature on federal and state policy development in the era of educational accountability.

The era of educational accountability is defined as the period of national educational reform policy enacted during the Clinton, Bush, and Obama Presidential Administrations. (New York State Archives: Office of Education, 2009). Federal reform policy will be examined to frame the legislative backdrop behind the development of policy focused on corrective action for low performing schools (Aladjem et al., 2010; Riley, 2012). Included in the examination of federal reform policy will be the Obama Administration's Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative. RTTT was enacted as part of a national stimulus package to encourage educational reform through a competitive grant.

In 2012, the New York State Education Department initiated the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE) review process developed through RTTT funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2013b). The United States Department of Education described the New York State DTSDE as "a new tool that measures performance against the conditions that the State has determined are optimal for effective schools" (United States Department of Education, p. 3, 2013). Using a prescribed rating system, the DTSDE instrument evaluates several elements of school operations including district leadership, school leader practices, curriculum

development support, student socio-emotional development, and family and community engagement (New York State Education Department, 2012f). This study will examine the District Level Rubric elements of the DTSDE and the foundational literature the DTSDE purports to use as a basis for recommendations to school district leaders to improve Focus Districts. Focus Districts either have one or more Priority or Focus schools in the district (New York State Education Department, 2016b). Priority schools perform within the bottom five percent of public schools based on measures including low performance on English Language Arts and mathematics assessments and high school graduation rates persistently below 60 percent (New York State Education Department, 2016b). Focus schools maintain student subgroups that perform within the bottom 10% of public schools.

Having defined the comprehensive structure of the DTSDE process from the state level, this chapter will present a review of the existing literature outlining the role of the superintendent using two perspectives. The theoretical notion of an optimal district leadership management approach described in the DTSDE Resource Guide will be compared to the ideal of superintendents working as managers, politicians, and instructional leaders within the historical, organization, and community contexts of the districts they serve. Comparing a theoretical notion of district leadership found in the DTSDE process to the reality of superintendents working within the contexts of the districts they serve opens the door for analyzing how superintendents make sense of state policy through a state reform tool such as the DTSDE.

Federal Accountability

The founding fathers of the United States reserved responsibility for education to states and local governance through the 10th Amendment of the United States Constitution (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1999). Although states have authority over schools, the power to determine the education of students has traditionally been delegated to local school boards (Jennings, 1998). Through the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) of 1965, the federal government allocated funds for education with the intent of providing all students with equal educational opportunities. Under the original intent of the ESEA, federal financial assistance expenditures complemented state and local funding to public schools (McClure, 2008).

With new presidential administrations come new federal influences and approaches to educational policy. Distinct events, social movements, and national crises also shape federal initiatives that have characterized the changing educational policy landscape over time including how appropriations are utilized under the ESEA (Björk, et. al., 2014; Cross, 2004; Jennings, 1998; Manna, 2011). Kaestle (2000) notes, the proper function of the federal level in education hinges “upon the inventiveness and the persuasiveness of the proponents, the economic resources available to the federal government, and the level of partisanship on the issue in the Congress and the electorate” (p. 26). To Kaestle’s (2000) point, President Lyndon Johnson’s efforts to eliminate educational and social disparities through civil rights legislation using federal appropriations led to the establishment of the ESEA in 1965.

The introduction of school district and school accountability measures based on student test scores has been a heightened feature of federal reform policy. Elmore, Abelman, & Fuhrman (1996) characterized the emerging federal to state and local governance model of that time as “the new educational accountability” (p. 65). Fuhrman (1999), in an attempt to

describe the new federal model, generalized several components of the federal reform agenda of the 1990's (see Chart 1). Among those characterizations, Fuhrman (1999) noted consequences were now attached to schools that performed poorly.

Chart 1.

Generalized components of the federal reform agenda of the 1990's

-
- More emphasis on student performance
 - Schools as the unit of measurement
 - State-determined performance standards leading to continuous improvement
 - State run inspections of schools
 - Discrete categories of performance including school ratings for all schools
 - Public reporting of district/school test results
 - Consequences attached to specific levels of performance
-

Note: Adapted from "The New Accountability," by Susan Furhman, 1999, *Consortium for Policy Research in Education*. Copyrighted 1999 by the University of Pennsylvania.

The reform policy efforts of the presidential administrations of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama will provide the backdrop for the first part of this research. Both the Clinton Administration's Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Goals 2000) of 1994, and Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994, and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) under the Bush and Obama Administrations, were a stark departure from the traditional historical context that characterized federal and state policy relationships and the use of ESEA funds to improve school (Cross, 2004a; Jennings, 1998; Loveless, 2006; Manna, 2011; Ravitch, 2010a; Sunderman, 2006; Sunderman & Kim, 2004a). Although external forces such as distinct events, social movements, and national crises may influence federal policy making, federal

educational policy making in the new era of educational accountability was more the domain of “savvy and creative policy entrepreneurs” who “recognized that agenda expansions in one part of the federal system may actually provide them with opportunities to push their own favorite ideas in the arenas where they work” (Manna, 2006, p. 165).

The control of federal funding through the ESEA, the IASA and NCLB Acts were the key instruments Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama used to impose national education policy on school reform (Cohen and Moffitt, 2009). States vying for federal funding now faced the prospect of initiating federal reform policies in return for federal funding consideration. State education agencies were required to create and develop new systems for adopting standards, improving teacher quality, and address the educational needs of all students. A common federal policy reform item was the expectation for states to monitor and evaluate poorly performing schools (Elmore et al., 1996).

In 2009, the Obama Administration provided relief from NCLB mandates to states through numerous federally conceived waivers. States seeking relief were granted reprieve from NCLB’s overwhelming mandates only if states provided assurances of implementing federal reform policy. Later in his administration, President Obama’s Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative, enacted as part of the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), issued competitive grants to innovative school systems (United States Department of Education, 2010). How the intergovernmental relationships of state and local educational policymakers responded to changes in federal policy is addressed in the following section.

Federal Accountability Under the Clinton Administration

During the Clinton Administration, spanning two terms from 1993 to 2000, federal attention to educational policy was a key platform of President Clinton’s campaign for office

(New York State Archives: Office of Education, 2009). In February 1994, one year into President Clinton's first term, the Goals 2000: The Educate America Act (Goals 2000), was passed (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Goals 2000 proposed to use federal funds to leverage educational reform at the state level and create new national frameworks to lead states toward a national strategy for educational reform (Schwartz and Robinson, 2000). Chart 2 provides the eight national goals described by Goals 2000.

Chart 2

Eight National Goals of the Goals 2000 Act

-
- Every child will start school ready to learn.
 - The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
 - Students at grades 4, 8 and 12 will be tested
 - Improved teacher preparation programs
 - U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement
 - Adult literacy
 - Elimination of drugs, alcohol, firearms and violence in schools
 - School partnerships to increase parental involvement
-

Note: Adapted from "H.R. 1804, Goals 2000: Educate America Act," 103rd Congress of the United States of America, 1994. Copyright 1994 by the U.S. Department of Education.

The National Education and Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC) established by the Goals 2000 legislation oversaw the creation of voluntary national content standards. States had the option of creating state specific standards. State-created standards were reviewed by NESIC and compared to national standards before NESIC certification was offered to state education agencies (SEAs).

State education agencies were required to create a system of assessments aligned to NESIC certified state content standards. To build capacity for SEAs tasked with new mandates, state and local educational agencies were provided grants by the federal government under Goals 2000 to help defray the cost of developing, field testing, and evaluating assessment systems. The Goals 2000 Act also empowered the Secretary of Education to fund grants to assist in school improvement plan development and implementation in urban and rural school districts with large concentrations of economically disadvantaged or limited English proficiency students. Through Goals 2000, the national government determined educational policy and states and local governments were charged with the implementation of federal goals (Cibulka, 1996).

In October 1994, the reauthorization of the ESEA under the Improving America's School Act (IASA) was passed. Whereas Goals 2000 organized the creation of voluntary national content standards, the reauthorization of the ESEA under the IASA used federal funding to assist state and local school districts' efforts to reach challenging state standards (Rhodes, 2012; Riley, 1995). The IASA promoted the alignment of ESEA programming along the four major comprehensive systems of educational reform namely, the development and integration of high standards, teacher preparation, accountability for results, and close family and community partnerships (U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

Apart from building SEA capacity to meet federal mandates, IASA legislation provided funding streams to support specific student subgroups. These subgroups were supported through additional programming contained within the IASA including, the Helping Disadvantaged Students Meet High Standards program, the Education of Migratory Children program, the Indian Education program, and the Bilingual Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). The additional funding for specific subgroups under the IASA along with the

reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Act in 1997, ensured that states would be accountable for the performance of all students by 2004, a prominent goal of the IASA legislation (105th Congress of the United States of America, 1997). Providing all students with equal educational opportunity expanded the federal expectations for serving underperforming students expected under the original intent of the ESEA conceived in 1965.

Goals 2000 and the reauthorization of the ESEA through the IASA present the evolving reorganization of national educational reform that policymakers sought to implement at the local level in the new era of accountability. The Clinton Administration mandated new standards linked to new assessments, provided federal oversight through the NESIC, and bolstered funding to subgroups based on economic, racial, English language proficiency and disability status. The identification of student subgroups was a critical piece to ensuring the IASA goal of ensuring all students were held accountable for performance by 2004.

Addressing low performance schools under the IASA

Another key component to the IASA legislation was the introduction of federally mandated corrective action. The major accountability measures states were expected to demonstrate under plans submitted to the federal government to receive IASA federal funding are identified in Chart 3.

Chart 3

Federal Expectations for State Plans Submitted to Acquire IASA Funding

English and mathematics standards must be developed before other standards;

Challenging assessments in at least English and mathematics;

Challenging content standards specifying what children are expected to know and be able to do, contain coherent and rigorous content; encourage the teaching of advanced skills; and are aligned to State standards;

Describe two levels of high performance, “proficient and advanced”, to demonstrate student proficiency with mastery of State standards’ materials;

Describe a third level of performance, “partially proficient”, to provide complete information about the progress of lower performing students;

State mandated adequate yearly progress for student performance standards;

State testing to occur sometime between grades 3 and 5, grades 6 through 9, and grades 10 through 12;

Enable reporting to be disaggregated by gender, major racial and ethnic group, English proficiency status, migrant status, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students.

Note: Adapted from “The Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,” by Richard W. Riley, 1995, U.S. Department of Education.

The theory of action that evolved under this federal reform policy suggests student improvement would occur if periodic state assessments aligned to challenging content standards were administered to all students. If improvement was not recognized across disaggregated student subgroups, the IASA outlined a plan for corrective action.

Corrective action under the IASA

SEAs were authorized to identify any local education agency (LEA) for improvement that failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two years. SEAs were expected to establish a statewide system of intensive and sustained support including the provision of technical assistance when developing and implementing LEA improvement plans. LEAs had the right under IASA to review any data used to evaluate the LEA. LEAs were expected to revise their local education agency plan “in ways that have the greatest likelihood of improving the performance of schools served by the local education agency in meeting the State’s student performance standards” (105th Congress of the United States of America, 1994, p. 29).

The SEA could take corrective action against an LEA if the LEA was unable to meet the State criteria for AYP. After four years of failure to make adequate yearly progress, corrective action was considered by the SEA against the LEA as outlined in the IASA (see Chart 4).

Chart 4

Corrective Action for LEAS Failing To Achieve Adequate Yearly Progress Under IASA

Withholding of federal funds;

Reconstitution of school district personnel;

Closing schools and establishing alternative arrangements for public governance and supervision;

State appointed receiver or trustee replacing the school board and the superintendent;

Abolition or restructuring of the LEA

Student transfers to another school within the district

Create a joint plan between the SEA and LEA with specific responsibilities taken by each entity
to address specific elements of student performance problems

Note: Adapted from “The Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,” by Richard W. Riley, 1995, U.S. Department of Education.

Corrective action policy at the state level produced enormous variation and levels of sophistication in the development and implementation of accountability measures (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000). By 2000-2001, 22 states had single accountability system for all students required by the IASA. More than half the states had dual accountability systems where low-performing schools were subject to different AYP standards (Goertz, 2001). Only one-third of states focused on closing the achievement gap between low- and high- achieving students in high needs schools (Goertz, 2001). Few states had addressed closing the achievement gap between students of different races, economic status, with or without disabilities or with limited language proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Waiver policy under the Clinton Administration

Under both Goals 2000 and the IASA, states and local school districts were encouraged to seek out waivers if statutory or regulatory requirements were an impediment to implementing effective programs or reform efforts (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Waivers of state law or regulation that impeded local agencies from effectively educating children were also encouraged but not mandated under the IASA (H.R. 6-30, ii). Though not explicitly stated in either legislation, states held the right to voluntarily opt out of Goals 2000 forfeiting federal funding for educational reform.

Goals 2000 carried a waiver provision under the Educational Flexibility Partnership Demonstration (EFD) program of 1994 (Kildee, 1994). In 1994, six states were selected as demonstration states based on population sizes under the EFD (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). In 1996, legislative changes made to Goals 2000 removed the population criterion, and six more states were designated as EFD demonstration states. The EFD waiver provisions allowed states, school districts, and schools in EFD states increased flexibility in implementing

innovative programming that may not have directly aligned with federal reform policy dictated by the IASA.

When Bill Clinton signed the Educational Partnership Act of 1999 (EdFlex), an extension of the EFD, all fifty states were eligible to receive waivers from the federal government (Raphael & McKay, 2001). Though EdFlex was beneficial to a few states when initially implemented by the Clinton Administration, the use of waivers to offset unpopular federal policy expectations and promote innovative programming would become commonplace in federal reform policy.

Weick (1976) and Cross (2004) provide some insight into why Goals 2000 and the IASA may have featured waivers. The notion of loosely coupled systems to describe the organizational structures of schools has appeared in literature (Cross, 2004; Fuhrman & Elmore, 1995; Weick, 1976). In loosely coupled systems, structures respond to one another but retain their own identity in the organization. The notion of tight-loose coupling forwarded by Weick (1976) and Cross (2004), suggest the federal system of accountability established expectations through the development of national standards (tight control), provided flexibility to states and local districts to enact expectations (loose control), and then tightened responsibility by holding agencies and people accountable for student performance.

This tight-loose principle used by the Clinton administration to enact federal reform suggests states' structures could keep their identities in intergovernmental relationships however, the response to federal systems would require states to accept federal mandates in order to receive federal funding. Through a tight-loose structure, the federal government was able to avoid any indictment of federal intrusion into states and local rights. Under the IASA, states had the flexibility to respond to the prevailing federalism based on need, capacity, and forwarding

state agendas for educational reform or forfeit participation in the federal programming (Smarick & Squire, 2014).

The IASA lacked any real force for monitoring and encouraging state compliance (Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding, & Darwin, 2008) however, any further push from the federal government would have severely hampered passage of either act (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000). Most states initiated some form of performance-based accountability typically incorporating periodic testing of students, reporting test scores, and the design of a mechanism to identify schools needing improvement (Elmore, 2003; Goertz, 2000).

Seidman (1989) noted, “Reorganization is deemed synonymous with reform and reform with progress” (p.3). Though lacking consistency across states, Goals 2000 and the IASA, reduced the variability of educational content left to local school boards (Cibulka, 1996; Jennings, 1998; Sunderman & Kim, 2004b). Through the development and implementation of a national framework for state-created standards, funding to build SEAs capacity, addressing low-performing schools through corrective action, and waivers to incite innovation, the Clinton Administration effectively reorganized the federal to state to local intergovernmental relationship.

Federal Accountability Under the George W. Bush Administration

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (PL 107-110, 2001; NCLB) was the first legislative proposal initiated by President George W. Bush coming just three days after his inauguration in January 2001 (New York State Archives: Office of Education, 2009). The reauthorization of the ESEA under the NCLB strengthened the ideological continuity found in the Clinton’s Administration Goals 2000 and IASA reauthorization of the ESEA (Cross, 2004; Rudalevige, 2005; Sunderman & Kim, 2004). Like Goals 2000 and IASA, the law made its

academic standards and assessment requirements a condition for receiving funds under the ESEA and intensified provisions for corrective action for low-performing schools.

Whereas Goals 2000 and IASA legislation in 1994 was focused on aligning state standards to a national framework, NCLB mandated state compliance to federally determined timelines for identifying failing schools and improving student achievement. Owing to the tight federal control through NCLB, United States Secretary of Education Rod Paige indicated to chief school officers that, “the Secretary of Education shall not grant any additional waivers or enter into any additional agreements to extend the deadlines that were established in 1994” (Paige, Letter to Chief State School Officers, 2002). With NCLB, the wide autonomy states had been historically accorded under the IASA with implementing federal educational policy under a tight-loose approach, was severely curtailed (Rudalevige, 2003; Supovitz, 2009).

NCLB created more tightly coupled accountability requirements than the IASA reauthorization by requiring states to implement a single, statewide accountability system covering all schools by the school year 2002-2003, not just those schools receiving ESEA funding (Clune, 1998; Firestone, 2009). Additionally, NCLB expectations included annual assessments of all students in Grades 3-8, plus one high school grade, based on challenging academic content standards established by the state in reading, mathematics and science. The state was responsible under NCLB to create annual statewide performance targets for schools to ensure all students demonstrated proficiency in reading, mathematics and science by the year 2014.

As a means to enact educational reform to improve student achievement for all students, NCLB requirements revolved around the test performance of students as a unit of measurement of school quality (Betebenner & Linn, 2009; Herman et al., 2008; Ravitch, 2010; Rudalevige,

2003). NCLB required all schools to meet state annual performance targets for adequate yearly progress (AYP) measured as a percentage of students scoring a “proficient” rating. Students were identified according to numerically significant subgroups (greater than or equal to 30) defined by race or ethnicity, language status, poverty, and disability status. Schools and school districts that failed to meet state established AYP after two years were designated as “in need of improvement” and subject to corrective action including restructuring, reconstitution or closing (Kolodziej, 2011).

The United States Department of Education guidelines and consequences for low-performing schools were also time sensitive. After three years of failing to meet AYP, parents of children attending schools in need of improvement were given options under NCLB for sending their children to other schools in the district with transportation and supplementary services subsidized by the school district. School districts were required to provide tutoring or remedial classes to low-income families. Schools that did not meet AYP after four years required a district corrective action response of replacing staff or implementing new curriculum as well as offering parent choice and remediation. After five years of failing to meet AYP, school districts were required to initiate plans to restructure schools. Restructuring schools included reopening the school as a charter school, replacing most or all of the school staff, or granting receivership for school operations to the state or to a private company demonstrating prior success with school restructuring (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Additionally, NCLB required states and districts to strategically support schools that consistently failed to meet AYP. These “state systems of support” ideally included school support teams, distinguished principals and teachers, and other individuals with expertise to provide

guidance and direction through the school improvement process (107th Congress of the United States of America, 2002).

Unlike Goals 2000 and IASA, the George W. Bush administration did not provide SEAs waivers from federal legislation in return for assurances of federal educational reform policy implementation to receive federal funding. In the first year of implementation, the Bush Administration appropriated \$10.4 billion to assist SEAs with NCLB implementation (Garcia, 2002). Under the NCLB “unfunded mandate” provision, the federal government would subsidize any costs to SEAs and LEAs for fulfilling NCLB mandates (Lecker, 2004).

Issues with NCLB implementation

As was the case with Goals 2000 and the IASA, NCLB federal funding targeting the most needy schools rose by 20 percent. Despite the fiduciary support, litigation promulgated by school districts in several states against the federal government claimed NCLB was an unfunded federal mandate and subsequently sought relief from NCLB through legal means (Sunderman & Kim, 2004). For example, in a 2005 report to the Governor of Virginia, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) reported that NCLB funded just 65% of the mandates issued by the federal government leaving 35% of the costs of implementation to the VDOE as new costs (Virginia Department of Education, 2005). The VDOE reported “resources that would otherwise be devoted to direct instruction are diverted to satisfy the training, analyzing, reporting, and communicating requirements of the federal legislation (Virginia Department of Education, 2005, (p. 8).

Claims of unfunded mandates intensified when from December 2007 until June 2009, the United States fell into the longest economic recession since World War II (Rich, 2013). Deemed the “Great Recession”, the economic downturn of that period resulted in plunging state and local

revenues, severe dips in property taxes, and state cutbacks in local aid to education (Gordon, 2012). In 2007-2008, states were facing major capacity challenges in administering annual tests and assisting the thousands of schools that were in improvement status for not meeting AYP under NCLB (Manna, 2011). Approximately one-third of public schools, nearly 30,000 schools across the nation, failed to make AYP for the 2007-2008 school year (Manna, 2011).

With the advent of the Great Recession in late 2007, cuts to educational programming at the federal and state level exacerbated what was already a tenuous relationship between federal and state governments (McMurrer & Yoshioka, 2013; Rudalevige, 2003). Rather than seek out a reauthorization of NCLB in 2007 when NCLB expired, waivers in the form of relief from NCLB sanctions were initiated by Congress in 2007 (Mann, 2015). By enacting waivers, Congress in effect maintained the provisions of the law until a new reauthorization of ESEA could be sought. Through Congressional waivers, SEAs were provided relief from initiating sanctions for school improvement, corrective action, restructuring or any other sanctions tied to academic assessments (Wong & Reilly, 2014).

While waivers issued by Congress may have solved the short-term political issue between federal and state partners, resentment and cynicism over federal administration of NCLB stifled political action and the possibilities of wholesale adaptations realized under a new reauthorization of the ESEA (Mann, 2015; McMurrer & Yoshioka, 2013). Disparities in state content standards and assessments, the lack of student growth measures in the accountability framework, costs of implementing state assessments across grades 3-8, the lack of coherent data to rate teacher performance, and local resistance to external service providers intended to assist with school improvement, further strained the intergovernmental policy system (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Manna & McGuinn, 2013; Wong & Reilly, 2014). The No Child Left Behind

Act, once hailed as remarkable presidential bipartisanship (Manna, 2011), melted into a set of bargains and treaties with various states (Cross, 2004).

Orfield (2006) claimed that, “Inevitably when a sweeping, one-dimensional policy is imposed on a vast and sprawling nation with a tradition of striking decentralization and massive differences in many conditions affecting schooling, there will be problems and adjustments to make” (Sunderman, 2006). The Bush Administration’s reluctance to change and modify requirements that schools demonstrate improvement every year, or achieve above average performance for all students when opposition was present at the onset of this legislation, was a major setback to developing strong federal to state relationships. Embracing a strict, accountability based system left little opportunity for federal policymakers to adjust expectations across fifty different SEAs. How the Obama Administration would preserve the NCLB in whole or part or continue with waiver policy to support new approaches to federal educational reform policy is addressed in the next section.

Federal Accountability under the Obama Administration

Lacking Congressional action for reauthorization, the Obama Administration recognized an opportunity to advance federal reform initiatives in the absence of ESEA reauthorization (Wong, 2015). In September 2011, President Barack Obama announced ESEA Flexibility, an initiative that would allow states relief from NCLB’s “one-size fits all” approach (United States Department of Education, 2007). Pursuant to section 9401 of the ESEA, in which education secretaries were authorized to issue waivers from federal regulations, the president looked to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to issue waivers under the ESEA Flexibility initiative.

ESEA Flexibility, unlike waivers used to provide relief from NCLB by Congress, were based on states’ assurances to preserve a series of preset conditions established by the Obama

Administration (Riley, 2012). Conditions included adopting challenging academic standards, developing principal and teacher evaluation systems, and improving low-performing schools. By the 2012-2013 school year, 45 states had adopted college and career-ready standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2012a). For example, in New York State, improving low-performing schools included assisting school districts with individual subgroups falling short of state goals even though the overall district performance had been highly rated (U.S. Department of Education, 2012a).

Under the Obama Administration, kindergarten through 12th grade education waivers rose from nearly 50 in 2008, to almost 300 waivers in 2009 (Mann, 2015). In 2012, the Obama Administration had enacted more than 400 waivers, effectively delaying the reauthorization of ESEA using waivers to manage adjustments to NCLB legislation (Mann, 2015; Sunderman, 2006; Sunderman & Kim, 2004). Arne Duncan, former U.S. Secretary of Education under the Obama Administration, wrote, “The nation’s most sweeping education law – the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, better known as No Child Left Behind – is outmoded and broken” (Duncan, 2013). Though ESEA Flexibility dismantled most of the primary tenets of NCLB, NCLB would come to an end with the announcement of the next reauthorization of the ESEA, the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015.

Goals 2000, the IASA, and NCLB could not engender cohesion across thousands of state and local jurisdictions that had long histories of fragmentation with wide variations of autonomy. Federal policy implementation contended with state and local jurisdictions in which no common professional knowledge existed across all school districts and that operated as loosely-coupled structures (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Cross, 2004a; Manna, 2011). Federal policymakers surmised that changing policy would reorganize the intergovernmental relationships that existed

with states and quickly build capacity in systems that failed millions of children. Elmore (2003) recognized that standards, testing, and accountability could not erase the educational disparity that exists among students with limited access to educational resources separated by socioeconomic and racial conditions. In other words, although federal policy makers during the Clinton and Bush Administrations were optimistic about the effects of federal policy, the ills that plague poorly functioning education systems could not be wiped away with policy, even policy funded through the ESEA (Elmore, 2003).

The Race To The Top initiative

The economic recession plaguing the nation that helped usher Obama into office in 2008 led to the enactment of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 (McGuinn, 2016). The ARRA was designed to stimulate economic growth, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors including education (U.S. Department of Education, 2009b). The ARRA provided \$4.35 billion for Race To the Top (RTTT), a competitive grant program designed by U.S Secretary of Education Duncan to reward states pursuing innovative and effective educational programming. RTTT differentiated itself from previous federal reform initiatives through the use of large pools of federal funding acquired through a competitive process to allocate funds to states and schools. RTTT used competition as a force for change and to steady the tension between intergovernmental systems by allowing states to design systems with federal dollars.

President Barack Obama announced RTTT as a challenge to governors, school boards principals and teachers, businesses and not-for-profits, and parents and students (Office of the Press Secretary, 2009). RTTT grants totaling \$4.35 billion would be awarded to states that adopted and set rigorous standards and assessments leading to college and career readiness; built

data systems that measure student performance and provide for evaluations of teachers and principals; recruited, trained and rewarded effective teachers and principals; and turned around the lowest-performing schools. The President indicated that states that outperform other states would be rewarded through RTTT funding (Office of the Press Secretary, 2009).

The selection of RTTT grant recipients rested on the assignment of points based on six selection criteria. Selection criteria included State Success Factors (125 points), Standards and Assessments (70 points), Data Systems to Support Instruction (47 points), Great Teachers and Leaders (138 points), Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools (50 points) and General Selection Criteria (55 points). In addition to the 485 possible points garnered from the selection criteria, applications were assessed across six priorities for grant distribution adding an additional 15 points for a total of 500 points. The six priorities of RTTT grant distribution are identified in Chart 5.

Chart 5

Six Priorities of Race to the Top Grant Distribution

Priority 1: Absolute Priority – Comprehensive Approach to Educational Reform

Priority 2: Competitive Preference Priority – Emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) (15 points, all or nothing)

Priority 3: Invitational Priority – Innovations for Improving Early Learning Outcomes

Priority 4: Invitational Priority – Expansion and Adaption of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems

Priority 5: Invitational Priority – P-20 Coordination, Vertical and Horizontal Alignment

Priority 6: Invitational Priority – School-Level Conditions for Reform, Innovation and Learning

Note: Revised from “Race to the Top Program Executive Summary,” U.S. Department of Education, 2009. Copyrighted 2009 by the U.S. Department of Education.

Couched in the Selection Criteria of Standards and Assessments, under “Reform Plan Criteria,” RTTT awarded points to states for the extent to which states transitioned participating LEAs to the implementation of internationally benchmarked K-12 standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2009b). These internationally benchmarked K-12 standards would later be referred to as the Common Core Learning Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2009). For the remainder of this research, the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) will be used to identify these internationally benchmarked standards.

The CCLS purported to build the skills graduating students would need for college and career readiness. States earned points on their RTTT grant application for aligning high-quality assessments to the CCLS proposed by the Obama Administration (McGuinn, 2012). Much like Goals 2000 and the IASA, the development of national standards and assessments under RTTT provided the foundation for addressing teacher and principal quality and student performance issues leading to the identification of schools in need of improvement.

RTTT funding expanded from 2010 to 2014 to include the development of tests aligned to the CCLS, development of RTTT Early Learning Competitive Grants (RTT-ELC), and RTTT personalize learning grant awards to school districts (RTT-D). Throughout the RTTT funding period, states that did not receive funding during initial application submissions were provided funds through subsequent follow-up applications. These follow-up application submissions for RTTT grants were awarded based on portions of the initial application that were acceptable to federal grant distributors. RTTT grant awards were provided to 37 states from 2010-2014 and to two private organizations charged with developing assessments to complement the CCLS (Chubb & Clark, 2013).

School improvement under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

Apart from funding for RTTT, the ARRA (2009) set aside \$650 million for the Investing in Innovation Fund (i3). Like RTTT, i3 was a competitive grant awarded to nonprofit LEA partnerships to investigate and develop evidence based approaches to improve student achievement, close achievement gaps, and improve teacher and principal effectiveness (Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rahmatullah, & Tallant, 2010). School Improvement Grants (SIG) received a \$3.55 billion dollar boost under the ARRA with funds to be granted competitively by SEAs to address the lowest-performing 5% of schools. SIG funding ranged from \$50,000 to \$2 million for schools applying to an SEA (Kutash et al., 2010). All told, the federal government had allocated nearly \$14 billion dollars to school-improvement efforts through the ARRA (Kutash et al., 2010).

The ARRA provided large funding pools for states willing to develop sophisticated systems for monitoring and evaluating poorly performing schools. Under Priority 6: School-Level Conditions for Reform, Innovation and Learning, states were awarded points for creating conditions for reform, innovation, and optimal learning environments. These systems for monitoring student success were teacher recruitment, increased learning time, fiscal control, awarding credit to students based on student performance instead of instructional time, providing comprehensive services to high need students through school-community partnerships, mentoring arrangements and other service provisions, creating school climates and cultures that remove obstacles, and actively support student engagement and achievement and engaging family and communities in the academic success of their students (U.S. Department of Education, 2009b).

With the significant funding through RTTT and SIG, the federal government required SEAs and LEAs to use four turnaround models to address Focus Districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a). The federal government introduced these four models to ensure RTTT and SIG funding was spent on dramatic rather than incremental reform. These models were an adaptation to the restructuring models originally proffered in NCLB and the six models found in SIG requirements for low-performing schools:

Turnaround Model: Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the school's staff, adopt a new governance model, provide job-embedded professional development, offer staff financial and career advancement incentives, implement a research-based instructional program aligned to state standards, extend learning and planning time, create a community orientation, and provide operating flexibility. The Turnaround Model is designed to establish new, highly qualified staff, programming, training and support (Kutash et al., 2010).

Transformation Model: Same as the Turnaround Model with no requirement for staff replacement. Teachers are held accountable for student growth. The Transformation Model works on the assumption staff is competent but needs new leadership, programming, training and support (Kutash et al., 2010).

Restart Model: The school is closed and then reopened under the direction of a charter or education management organization. A school under the restart model must enroll any student who was previously enrolled in the school and wishes to continue attending the school. Restart assumes private operators are more adept than public school districts at fostering greater innovation and improvement in schools (Kutash et al., 2010).

Closure Model: The school is closed and students attend other schools in the district.

The most extreme option, the Closure Model eliminates schools that are beyond improvement and allows students to experience success at other schools (Kutash et al., 2010).

The Obama Administration's use of the ARRA was a different approach to inciting innovative school improvement measures. States that had been diligently creating systems to meet federal reform requirements under NCLB were now rewarded for their sophisticated and advanced systems. Though the impact of the ARRA was temporary, the funding provided through the RTTT, SIG, and i3 grants provided SEAs with opportunities to restructure state-based reform agendas.

State Accountability in New York State under Race To The Top

On May 29, 2012, the United States Education Department granted the New York State Education Department (NYSED) a waiver from specific provisions of NCLB under the ESEA Flexibility initiative (New York State Education Department, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Under ESEA Flexibility, states were required to identify schools with the lowest achievement of subgroups on state assessments and low graduation rates as Focus Schools. Similarly through ESEA Flexibility criteria, Priority schools were identified as schools in which all student groups were not reaching proficiency on statewide assessments or not attaining baseline graduation rates for a number of years. Focus Districts were identified as districts with Focus or Priority schools within the district.

In 2012, the United States Department of Education described the New York State Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE) as “a new tool that measures performance against the conditions that the State has determined are optimal for effective schools” (United States Department of Education, p. 3, 2013). Using a prescribed rating system,

the DTSDE instrument evaluates several elements including district leadership, school leader practices, curriculum development support, student socio-emotional development, and family and community engagement (New York State Education Department, 2012f).

The Focus District Review Process

Researchers claim that coherent educational policy sends the same message, is void of contradictions, and builds upon each element to deliver a holistic perception of school operations (Augustine, Gonzalez, Ikemoto, Russell, Zellman, Constant, Armstrong, & Dembosky, 2009). According to the DTSDE self-assessment document, the purpose of the NYSED DTSDE is to provide all New York State stakeholders “cogent messages around school improvement and highly effective educational practices” (New York State Education Department, 2012b, p.1). The DTSDE also purports to establish the common practices and language to evaluate and describe effective schools through a high-quality self-assessment tool (New York State Education Department, 2012).

Although the DTSDE addresses both district and school effectiveness, the primary focus of the DTSDE instrument is on school effectiveness across six tenets (NYSED, 2012). District effectiveness is addressed through Tenet 1, District Leadership and Capacity, and mirrors the expectations found in the ARRA application under Priority 6. District leadership is embedded as a support feature in each of the five Tenets described by the DTSDE. Tenet 1 will be described later in this review. The remaining Tenets Two through Six are described in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptions of Tenets Two Through Six of the DTSDE

Tenet	Title	Description
Tenet 2	School Leader Practices and Decisions	Visionary leaders create a school community and culture that lead to success, well-being and high academic outcomes for all students via systems of continuous and sustainable school improvement. Statements
Tenet 3	Curriculum Development and Support	The school has rigorous and coherent curricula and assessments that are appropriately aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) for all students and are modified for identified subgroups in order to maximize teacher instructional practices and student-learning outcomes.
Tenet 4	Teacher Practices and Decisions	Teachers engage in strategic practices and decision-making in order to address the gap between what students know and need to learn, so that all students and pertinent subgroups experience consistent high levels of engagement, thinking and achievement.

Tenet 5	Student Social and Emotional Developmental Health	The school community identifies, promotes, and supports social and emotional development by designing systems and experiences that lead to healthy relationships and a safe, respectful environment that is conducive to learning for all constituents.
Tenet 6	Family and Community Engagement	The school creates a culture of partnership where families, community members and school staff work together to share in the responsibility for student academic progress and social-emotional growth and well-being.

Note: Reprinted from “Comprehensive School Rubric for DTSDE Tenets”, issued by the New York State Education Department, 2012, in the *New York State Education Department Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness*. Copyrighted 2011 by the New York State Education Department.

The DTSDE Tool and District Leadership

For the purposes of this study this section will be a review of the DTSDE tool to evaluate district effectiveness for promoting student success under DTSDE Tenet 1, District Leadership and Capacity. Additionally, the rubric elements of Tenets 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, and 6.1, speak to district support of school leaders, curriculum, teachers, student growth, and family and community partnerships respectively. Recommendations derived through the DTSDE process for building principals to address also fall under the auspices for district leadership in the support role. With the exception of this facet of district leadership supporting school leaders, the DTSDE

rubric reflects the comprehensive school reform components originally found in the IASA (Riley, 1995).

Section 100.18 of the New York State Commissioner's Regulations requires all Focus Districts to undergo a diagnostic review using the DTSDE to evaluate school performance criterion for accountability groups for which the school district failed to meet adequate yearly progress (New York State Education Department, 2012a). Focus Districts are identified as a result of sustained, low performance on 3-8 testing in ELA and mathematics, and low graduation rates among student subgroups. Any school within a school district identified as a Priority School will also trigger Focus District status. Priority schools are identified as those schools in the lowest 5% of New York State for the combined 3-8 ELA and mathematics results and low graduation rates for at least two years (New York State Education Department, 2016b).

The onsite school district review is carried out by an Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) appointed by the Commissioner and usually takes 1-3 days to complete (New York State Department of Education, 2012). Review results, typically delivered as recommendations to districts and schools, are used to inform the District Comprehensive Improvement Plan (DCIP) and the school Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) (New York State Education Department, 2012a). The DCIP and SCEP are filed annually with NYSED by school districts identified as Focus Districts.

The Comprehensive District Rubric for DTSDE (2016) defines Tenet 1 – District Leadership and Capacity as:

The district examines school systems and makes intentional decisions to identify and provide critical expectations, supports and structures in all areas of need so that schools are able to respond to their community and ensure that all students are successful (p. 1).

As a footnote to Tenet 1, NYSED expects districts and schools to align improvement plans with the performance of subgroups demonstrating significant achievement gaps citing students with disabilities and English language learner subgroups specifically but not inclusively.

Under Tenet 1 are five components labeled 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5. Tenets two through six also have district components and are included in the DTSDE district review however, these tenets speak to district support for schools in the district. Table 2 provides the components of Tenet 1 and Tenets two through six that apply to district leadership under the DTSDE instrument (New York State Education Department, 2012b).

Table 2.

DTSDE Components Applicable to District Leadership

Tenet 1		Tenets 2 through 6	
1.1	Recruiting, hiring, and retaining personnel	2.1	District support for school vision
1.2	District vision	3.1	District support for curriculum development
1.3	Fiscal, facility and human resources	4.1	District support for professional development
1.4	Comprehensive professional development	5.1	District support for student social and emotional development health
1.5	Data-driven Culture	6.1	District support for family and community partnerships

Note: Adapted from “The Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness Handbook”, issued by the New York State Department of Education, 2012. Copyrighted 2012 by the New York State Department of Education.

The theory of action regarding each component is provided on the DTSDE document as Statements of Practice (SOPs). The 257-paged DTSDE Handbook provides a crosswalk between tenets and the research and resources utilized to develop the DTSDE SOPs (New York State Education Department, 2012). Many of these resources reflect standards governing different associations and professions such as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) or the Parent and Teacher Association National Standards. Massell (2000) is the only resource cited supporting the District Role in Building Capacity. Massell (2000) provides an investigation of four distinct district improvement plans as successful paths to individual school improvement through case studies that demonstrate a pragmatic approach to school improvement utilized by each of the four districts.

Impact statements for each SOP are bolded for each component of Tenet 1. Each impact statement provides a specific element that when read concurrently summarizes the theory of action behind what the District DTSDE purports to accomplish through the DTSDE review process. The impact statement is identified followed by the tenet in parentheses:

All schools have personnel that are able to effectively address the student's needs (1.1).

All students achieve at a high level (1.2). This results in school improvement and success (1.3). Therefore, the targeted professional development leads to increased teacher effectiveness (1.4). As a result, student achievement increases and successfully meets school goals (1.5) (New York State Education Department, 2012b).

A similar structure of bolded impact statements summarizing Statements of Practice for elements 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1 and 6.1 complete the theory of action behind the Comprehensive District Rubric for DTSDE:

Leading to a school community that has a clear vision supported by district staff members that positively affects student achievement (2.1). Therefore, the curriculum created and used provide teachers opportunities to deliver instruction that is CCLS aligned and challenges every student (3.1). As a result, teachers and instructional staff provide students with consistent rigorous learning opportunities (4.1). As a result, students receive supports that appropriately address their needs (5.1). That leads to a family and school connection connected to effective supports to student achievement (6.1) (New York State Department of Education, 2012b).

The district review process under the DTSDE has six components (DTSDE Handbook, 2012). Prior to the review, a document review of the NYSED District Review Report, the District Self-Assessment, all district curriculum and professional development plans, and the District Organization Sheet, is conducted. The document review is followed by interviews of the offices of the superintendent, human resources, and fiscal management. Focus Group interviews with the district cabinet members regarding collaboration among central office staff, curriculum and instruction, and professional development follow individual interviews. The student support staff is also interviewed so reviewers can ascertain how the district supports the social and emotional health of students.

The remaining components of the district review include a comprehensive summary of district and school review findings. Also included in this component are perceptions school staffs have of district support for student needs across each of the tenets. The final component is a review debrief in which the superintendent and district staff are provided the preliminary findings of the district-level performance as compared to the DTSDE District rubric. Districts

are assessed across four ratings including Highly Effective (H), Effective (E), Developing (D) or Ineffective (I) also recognized as the HEDI scale.

Following the DTSDE District review, district leaders are referred to the DTSDE Resource Guide for concomitant next steps (New York State Education Department, 2012f). After the final report of district and school effectiveness in which strengths, progress markers, and needs for improvement are identified and described, the district and schools are advised to use the final report to inform the DCIP and SCEP reports submitted to NYSED. District and school plans will inform their school improvement plans targeting the assessed needs and priorities per the DTSDE review process.

The Resource Guide also includes an improvement rationale indicating how entire districts and schools are likely to improve in three demonstrable ways if the strategies and priorities in the guide are implemented with fidelity. These three demonstrable ways are, 1) HEDI scale ratings will improve; 2) Organizational capacities and people-centered competences for innovation and improvement will improve, and 3) given time, results for students, schools, and entire districts will improve (New York State Education Department, 2012f).

Each DTSDE Tenet is addressed by topic (see Table 7) in the Resource Guide (New York State Education Department, 2012f). Each Statement of Practice is accompanied by an impact statement before multiple strategies are presented. Supplementing the strategies is a bulleted list of practical applications a district or school should follow with fidelity to experience improvement. For example, Tenet 1.1 offers three strategies followed by 18 practical strategies for improving the recruiting, hiring, supporting and retaining of staff.

Following the suggested strategies, districts and schools are encouraged to investigate multiple research and resources to inform leadership practices. The research and

resources bank of sources is similar for District Tenets 1.1 through 1.5, and Tenet 2.1. For Tenet 3.1, alignment to the Common Core Standards; Tenet 4.1, Professional Development of Teachers and Staff; Tenet 5.1, Student social and emotional behavior; and Tenet 6.1, Family and Community Partnerships, the research and resources differ substantially with subparts for districts and schools to disseminate for each of these tenets.

Impact of legislation on Local Control and School Accountability

When the founding fathers reserved education as an institution under state and local control, the overarching interpretation was that states and local entities would act as partners in developing education for the masses (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1999). Rhodes (2012) asserted that, “state and local officials not only possessed considerable political power and legal authority of their own; many of them also enjoyed an alliance, grounded in shared opposition to overweening federal involvement” (p. 191). Symonds (2001) claimed, states and not the federal government, “are the highest level of government with leverage over the country's 90,000 schools” (p. 69). The legitimate authority of the state over school districts remains largely uncontested by school districts (Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010).

In the new era of educational accountability under the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations, the SEA was viewed by state and federal policymakers as the primary vehicle for enacting federal reform policy (Cross, 2004; Smarick & Squire, 2014). Subsequently, the adverse effects of federal policy, whether by design or not, established a division of labor between the state and local school districts in which the partnership for education oversight was dramatically altered (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Manna, 2011). Under federal reform initiatives, states were required to monitor and evaluate individual school district performance through a

federally imposed approach promoting the state as policy enforcer (Elmore, 2004; Smarick & Squire, 2014; Timar, 1997). Failing schools and school districts were charged with improving student performance while “expert planning, educational guidance, and funding come from the state” (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009, p. 163).

In New York State, for example, the DTSDE review process used by NYSED purports to provide an “optimal” plan for improving student success to failing schools (New York State Department of Education, 2012b, p. 3). After DTSDE recommendations are delivered to an identified low-performing school, the school district and school are left to examine the many print and computer based resources to optimizing systems and programs found in the DTSDE Resource Guide (New York State Education Department, 2012f). Schools then report on their progress with the DTSDE recommendations by submitting reports to NYSED on a periodic basis. NYSED plays the part of expert while school districts and schools are left to implement approaches to improve student success forwarded through the DTSDE process.

The “Optimal” Influence of the Superintendent in Low Performing Schools

In an attempt to further understand the structures that superintendents create for student achievement, Marzano and Waters (2006) conducted a meta-analysis to synthesize and uncover the relationship between district leadership and student achievement. Marzano and Waters (2006) used the key words of “superintendent leadership”, “district leadership”, effective superintendents” and “effective districts” across four databases to target all available research involving the work of the superintendent from 1970 to 2005. For the purposes of this review, “district leadership” and “superintendent” will be used as synonymous terms to describe the work of superintendents.

Throughout the new era of educational accountability, researchers have focused on the role of school principals as the critical actor in school improvement (Augustine, Gonzalez, Ikemoto, Russell, Zellman, Constant, Armstrong, & Dembosky, 2009; Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010; DuFour & Marzano, 2009; Fullan, 2015; Knapp & Feldman, 2012; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). Federal interest in large-scale, systemic reform during the late 1980's raised serious concerns about superintendent efficacy in reforming schools and improving student academic achievement (Keane & Moore, 2001). The granular attention of federal and state policymakers on student performance and classroom teaching made the classroom and not the district the focal point of educational reform (Doherty & Jacobs, 2015; Galluci, Boatright, Lysne, & Swinnerton, 2006; Hannaway & Hamilton, 2008; Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005; Louis et al., 2010; Weiss & McGuinn, 2016). The DTSDE rubric does not mention the office of the superintendent but rather bundles the office under the term "district leadership" (New York State Education Department, 2012e).

Clouding the federal perceptions of superintendent efficacy in the late 1980's was the lack of research on the role of superintendents. Despite access to definitive historical data on the role of superintendents, Cuban (1988), identified three dominant roles of superintendents including a managerial role, a political role, as negotiator and facilitator to school constituencies, and an instructional role as a teacher of teachers. The first two roles, manager and politician, dominated the lives of superintendents more so than the role of instructional leader (Cuban, 1988; Elmore, 2004). Petersen (1999) concurred, stating in his examination of five California superintendents that,

Surrounded by politics, a superintendent would never admit that he/she is not focused on issues of curriculum, instruction and student achievement. The managerial reality of the

position often forces the district superintendent to concentrate on issues other than instruction (p.4).

Echoing Cuban (1988) and Petersen's (1999) assertions of the managerial and political roles dominating the work of superintendents, researchers have recently posited that the quantitative effect between superintendents and student achievement is negligible (Chingos, Whitehurst, & Lindquist, 2014). In their study of superintendents in Florida and North Carolina, these authors argue that superintendents are "imperfect reflectors of the civic values, investments, and supports of the school district in which they serve" (Chingos et. al., 2014, p. 13). The idea of successful school reform would benefit from a superintendent with instructional utility (Aladjem et al., 2010; Elmore, 2004) otherwise, some researchers would suggest superintendents serve little purpose in their instructional capacities to affect student achievement (Chingos et. al., 2014).

The notion of superintendents as managers and politicians, not instructional leaders, can be recognized in the approach taken by NYSED in the development of the DTSDE. The development of the DTSDE was not a new endeavor initiated by NYSED. The DTSDE handbook clearly states the DTSDE tool was an evolution of past instruments used to assist struggling school districts and schools (New York State Education Department, 2012). Mirroring the thinking of researchers' beliefs in the principal as critical actor in school reform, the NYSED DTSDE (identified by the federal government as an optimal structure for reforming low-performing schools) relies on building principals to enact reform while central office plays a supporting role (U.S. Department of Education, 2013b). Inherent in the NYSED DTSDE approach is a decentralized approach to school reform led by principals with support from district leadership. Whether a centralized or decentralized approach is more effective in

improving student achievement is debated by researchers (Augustine et al., 2009; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Johnson, Marietta, Higgins, Mapp, & Grossman, 2015).

To assist low-performing school district leadership with developing better systems and alignment to support building principals, districts are encouraged to turn to the DTSDE Resource Guide (Guide) for next steps after state evaluators have forwarded their recommendations. The Guide opens with a primary purpose statement suggesting the Guide provides leaders with useful resources leading to student improvement (New York State Education Department, 2012f). A secondary purpose of facilitating collegial professional development is also noted with a statement suggesting adult learning and development is a fundamental key to school improvement (New York State Education Department, 2012f).

For instance, the Guide, under DTSDE Tenet 1.1, lists three comprehensive “Strategies for District Leaders” to pursue in the development of “a comprehensive approach for recruiting, evaluating and sustaining high-quality personnel that affords schools the ability to ensure success by addressing the needs of their community”:

- a. The district has a comprehensive approach to recruiting, hiring, assigning, and retaining high quality personnel for all positions.
- b. District officials use the District Comprehensive Improvement Plan to support school leaders through professional development and professional feedback.
- c. District officials collaborate with school leaders to develop, implement, and monitor staff hiring, assignment, and retention strategies (New York State Department of Education, 2012, p.5).

One interpretation of the three comprehensive strategies would suggest the district has a system for acquiring high quality personnel (part a.); uses state recommendations through the

District Comprehensive Improvement Plan, a state report, to inform professional development efforts (part b.); and collaborates with school building leaders to address the sustainability of a high-quality workforce (part c.).

Within Tenet 1.1, district leaders are introduced to 18 different strategies in the Resource Guide to use when “recruiting, hiring, supporting, and retaining all staff” to support the development of the three systemic comprehensive approaches (New York State Education Department, 2012f). The heading for this section reads, “District leaders use the following strategies in the when (sic) recruiting, hiring, supporting, and retaining all staff” and is underlined for further emphasis (New York State Department of Education, 2012, p. 5). For example, the first four of the 18 strategies listed in Guide under Tenet 1.1 for supporting a comprehensive approach to human resources are:

- In partnership with higher education institutions and other providers (BOCES, non-profit professional development organizations), develop a formal plan with explicit criteria for hiring, assigning, and retaining high-quality personnel.
- Frame every new hire as an opportunity to innovate, learn and improve and develop induction systems that capitalize on newcomer’s fresh knowledge and skill.
- Assess staff members’ working conditions, including their job descriptions, available equipment, and the quality of their facilities and improve them where needed.
- Review the status of teacher, school leader, student support staff members’ contracts ensure that they are aligned with performance expectations and accountabilities and also to pave the way for contractual improvements, including ones recommended by staff members.(New York State Department of Education, 2012, p. 5).

The section after the 18 strategies are listed is entitled, “Research and resources for guidance” (New York State Department of Education, 2012, p. 6). According to the Guide, the optimal district leader seeking to improve recruiting, hiring and keeping quality personnel identified in Tenet 1.1 may select from state-provided resources ranging from 17 research articles or reports, three websites containing multiple resources from which to investigate, three books, and six internet videos. Although school boards are not reviewed in the DTSDE process, there is a resource for school boards to examine as well.

The intent of this review of resource suggestions is not to link the 18 strategies addressing comprehensive systems to a working premise of what the optimal superintendent does to improve student success. One can argue that the complexity of school reform is hard to determine given the many components of a school system and therefore, some and not all resources can be explored (Lasky, 2004).

Rather, the intent of this review of resources is to underscore the notion that there is abundant research regarding the role of the superintendent collected by NYSED for local districts to consider through professional development (i.e. Augustine et al., 2009; Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). The construct of the DTSDE in terms of district leadership and capacity is limited in scope to the notion of central office support of principals as the key to student improvement. The optimal superintendent in the DTSDE process is a theoretical, administrative premise void of context for the many factors superintendents confront in running a school district. The DTSDE purports to be an optimal diagnostic tool however, like any diagnostic tool, the DTSDE review process and Guide are instruments that reflect the current systemic efforts of low-performing schools against what NYSED claims are high leverage strategies and approaches for effective school improvement. These high leverage strategies and approaches provide the

basis for goals and objectives for low-performing school districts to pursue to recognize school improvement.

The Roles of Superintendents in Low-Performing Schools

With the advent of standards-based reform in the mid-1990s, renewed attention has been focused on school districts and the work of superintendents as instructional leaders (Anderson, 2003; Björk et al., 2014; Chingos et al., 2014; Honig, 2012; Johnson & Crispeels, 2010; Johnson, 1996; Kowalski et. al., 2011, Marzano and Waters, 2009, DuFour and Marzano, 2009). Recent research on school accountability in the United States cites leadership, especially leadership exercised by school superintendents, as a major influence on the responsiveness of school districts and schools to greater demands for accountability (Björk et al., 2014; Johnson & Crispeels, 2010; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Successful schools typically demonstrate better systems and alignment when the systems are directed by the district leadership rather than from the school (Aladjem et al., 2010; Zavadsky, 2012). For example, Elmore and Burney (1997) discovered the work of a superintendent in District #2 in New York City was a critical factor in raising the once average performing district to one of the highest performing districts in the city. District #2 is just one example of how the traditional or experimental organizational structures superintendents create either enable or impede the district's ability to enact change in response to federal and state policy (Johnson, 1996).

Recognizing the importance of the role of the superintendent, Johnson (1996) highlighted a lack of research on the work of the superintendent especially in the context of “what leaders do and how they do it” (p. 19). Much like Fuhrman (1996) conjectured about the characteristics of

the new era of educational accountability (see Chart 1), Johnson (1996) forwarded a framework that augments Cuban's (1988) research on the primary roles of superintendents (See Figure 1). Johnson (1996) claims superintendents work as instructional, political, and managerial leaders however, the author adds that these roles work within three contexts; the historical context that paints superintendent approaches to improving education, the community in which they operate, and the context of the organizations they lead (Johnson, 1996). Successful superintendents in their primary roles of instructional, political, and managerial leaders deftly adjust to these overlapping contexts of historical, community, and organizational characteristics as they embrace the work of manager and leader (Johnson, 1996).

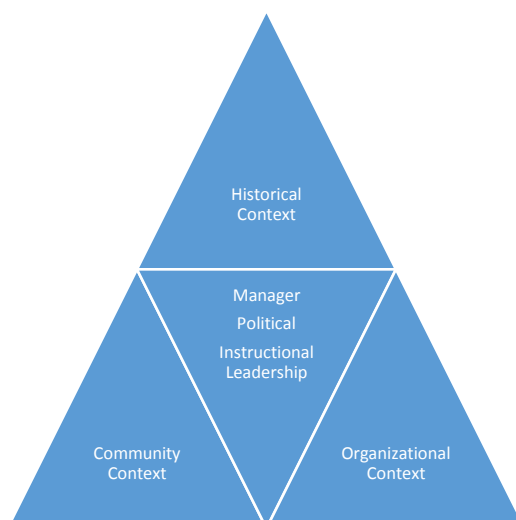


Figure 1. Primary roles of the superintendent in historical, community and organizational context.

Source: Adapted from "Leading to Change: The Challenge of the New Superintendency", by S. Johnson, 1996. Copyright 1996 by Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Although similar roles, tasks, and functions are commonly used to describe the work of superintendents, it may be reasonable to assert that each superintendent, like any high ranking administrator, personalizes the role, enacting his or her administrative role uniquely given such factors as district size, community demographics, organizational culture, history, geography, and

local political realities (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Bredeson, Klar & Johansson 2008). In contrast to a quantitative approach to understanding the role of superintendent (Chingos et al., 2014), understanding the perspectives superintendents have of their work is crucial to understanding relationships among school reform, leadership, and educational outcomes (Bredeson et al., 2008). School systems operate in direct response to how superintendents make meaning of their work given the history, community, and organizational context of the district, how superintendents perform the managerial, political, and instructional roles of their office within these contexts, and how the superintendent personalizes the role (Bredeson et al., 2008; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Johnson, 1996; Schlechty, 1990).

Delving deeper into what leaders do to improve student achievement, Marzano and Waters (2009) were able to glean five correlates from their study positively associating district level leadership to student achievement. These five correlates, ensuring collaborative goal setting, establish nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction, creating board alignment with and support of district goals, monitoring achievement and instruction goals and allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction were used to define specific action district level leadership should pursue to improve student achievement. Johnson (1996) contends, superintendents as managers fight political battles to gain necessary resources to address critical system components including instructional improvement. In Focus districts where poor student performance on state assessments led to corrective action, Marzano and Waters' (2009) work will be used to understand the specific structures superintendents build to address academic improvement along with their perceptions of the state corrective action process and tool.

In an exploratory study of dramatic school improvement, Aladjem et al. (2010) found that “Schools engaged in varying combinations of reforms that they often adapted and changed over time to meet their changing needs and circumstances” (p. 68). State imposed corrective action using rubrics to rate school performance requires school districts to examine their assumptions about how they operate (Bridges, 2009; Kotter, 1999; Lewin, 1947b; Schein, 2010). Elmore (2000) claimed that organizational improvement occurs through an intentional approach to organized social learning. Implied then within the work of the superintendent, is the notion of changing the assumptions of how the district operates to effect improvement.

Summary

The intergovernmental relationship between federal, state, and local entities drastically changed when national educational policy became a major focus of the last three presidential administrations. By using funding provided through the ESEA and competitive grants ushered in through a government stimulus package, the federal government has influenced educational reform by requiring states to implement federal reform initiatives in return for federal funding. Whether intended or not, the federal approach to educational reform refashioned the federal to state to local relationship. Low performing schools and school districts were charged with improving student performance while state education departments took on the role of providing expert guidance, planning, and funding (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Cross, 2004; Smarick & Squire, 2014).

In New York State, the creation of an optimal diagnostic tool, the DTSDE, was hailed by the federal government as a new and innovative approach to assisting low-performing schools. The DTSDE purports to diagnose the dissonance between low-performing school practices and optimal practices backed by research found in the DTSDE Resource Guide. Coupled to a state

review process and the submission of recommendations for improvement to school principals, the DTSDE process, if followed with fidelity, promises higher scores on state school reviews, improved student achievement, and increased human resource capacity across all levels of the school system.

To rectify the discord between optimal and actual outcomes, the DTSDE review process focuses specifically on the work of the building principal to engender student success and relegates the superintendent and central office to a supporting role. This sense of superintendent in a supporting role is etched into the DTSDE under Tenet 1, and across the first sub-point of each of the other five tenets that make up the DTSDE. The “optimal” superintendent, according to the DTSDE, is focused on supporting the building principal in developing a vision; recruiting, hiring and maintaining a highly-qualified staff; the professional development of staff in curriculum and instruction; the social and behavioral systems for student health; and family and community partnerships. The impetus for change comes from the school building and not the district office.

Although the local school district is at the end of the intergovernmental chain of policy implementation, the local school district by no means loses voice in how federal and state policy reform will be implemented. Oftentimes, states fail to acknowledge the influence local culture plays in the acceptance and execution of federal and state educational policy (Abelmann et al., 1999; Manna, 2011). Most notably, states underestimate the influence of the superintendent to legitimize state reform efforts to improve local school performance (Björk et al., 2014; Elmore, 2004; Glass et al., 2000; Schlechty, 1990). The state derived DTSDE suggests principals are the key to student success however, examining how superintendents make meaning of their work through this qualitative study is crucial to understanding how school districts effectuate federal

and state reform policy. The following chapter will focus on the methodology used to report the perceptions of superintendents on the use of a state designed corrective action tool.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents the research design, population and sampling method, instruments, data collection, and data analysis procedures undertaken by the researcher of this study.

Research demonstrates that national education policy over the past three presidential administrations from 1993 to 2017 has had an impact on how states address low-performing schools. In New York State, the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE) was developed to assist low-performing schools by offering an state-sanctioned tool from which school districts and schools create strategic reports to address areas in need of improvement (New York State Education Department, 2012c). The DTSDE was developed with funds from the federal government as part of a competitive grant (U.S. Department of Education, 2013b).

Recent reform efforts in education often overlook the importance of the superintendent in reform work (Bredeson, et. al., 2008; Johnson, 1996; The National Institute for Educational Governance, Finance, Policymaking and Management, 1999). Schlechty (1990) writes, "who the superintendent is, what the superintendent values, and the style of operation supported by the superintendent will be manifest throughout the school system" (p. 128). Elmore, Abelman, & Fuhrman (1996) indicate that in order for external accountability systems to succeed in school reform, schools must, as a precursor to adapting external systems, have strong internal accountability systems. These internal accountability systems are typically engendered by the superintendent of schools (Björk et al., 2014; Glass et al., 2000; Hoyle, Björk, Collier, & Glass, 2005; Johnson, 1996; Zavadsky, 2012).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to describe the extent to which New York State superintendents in school districts identified as Focus Districts utilize the District Level Rubric elements of the New York State Education Department Diagnostic Tool for District and School Effectiveness (DTSDE) to inform and implement efforts to support student success. The use of the DTSDE to support student success will be constrained to the expectations of the DTSDE Tenet 1 and the other district level rubric elements of Tenets 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, and 6.1, in which the district develops a theory of action to examine, define, and support, school-based systems and structures leading to student success. School and district practices are compared to the DTSDE rubric tenets of district leadership and capacity, school leader practices and decisions, curriculum development and support, teacher practices and support, student social-emotional development and health, and family and community engagement (New York State Education Department, 2012f). The DTSDE purports to be an optimal description of best-practices leading to student success and as such, the definition of student success will be derived from the theoretical definitions contained within the tenets of the DTSDE (New York State Education Department, 2012f).

Interviews of superintendents in Focus school districts were conducted and responses collected based on the following research questions:

1. To what extent do superintendents in Focus school districts perceive their role in the DTSDE process at the district level?
2. To what extent do superintendents of Focus school districts utilize District Level DTSDE recommendations for improving student success as defined by the DTSDE instrument?
3. To what extent do superintendents in Focus school districts perceive the strengths and limitations of the District Level DTSDE process in effecting school improvement efforts?

Research Design

This qualitative study used face-to-face interviews to capture the phenomenological experiences of superintendents in Focus Districts and their perceptions of the NYSED DTSDE instrument as part of the school improvement process. According to Alemu (2016), a phenomenological study is the best approach when a researcher is interested in describing the experiences of participants as they are experiencing particular phenomena. Creswell (2013) further defines the researcher as phenomenologist when he notes, "Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (p. 76). In order to capture a phenomenological experience from participants, the research questions were formatted to focus on the participants' direct experience with the DTSDE and to what extent the participant perceives the value of the DTSDE to drive student improvement efforts.

The research design was chosen to investigate how local control shapes federal and state policymaking, specifically as it resides in the role of superintendent. Variation in how superintendents approach their work has been a focus of researchers throughout the national education reform era (Björk et al., 2014; Glass et al., 2000; Sanders, 2012; Schlechty, 1990). A phenomenological approach describes the variation that exists among some superintendents in New York State through interviews leading to the collection of data expressed in this study. The research design also assists the researcher with understanding the unique experiences of district superintendents who are expected to balance compliance with state mandates for low performing schools and the demands of the superintendent position.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

In February 2016, the Commissioner of the New York State Education Department (NYSED) announced the identification of 84 Focus school districts (New York State Education

Department, 2016b). Focus school districts in New York represent school districts with at least one school within the district performing in the lowest 5% of all schools in terms of student achievement. The superintendents from the aforementioned 84 Focus school districts represent the population for this qualitative phenomenological study. As required by NYSED regulation, all Focus school districts must undergo the DTSDE process as part of NYSED's response to federal mandates for addressing low-performing schools (NYSED, 2012).

A convenience sample of 10-15 superintendents was taken from Focus school districts in the Mid-Hudson, Mohawk, and Capital regions of the State of New York as several Focus districts are clustered in each of these areas. New York State's five city school districts, New York City, Yonkers, Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo, were excluded from this study. Unlike other school districts, Big Five districts are fiscally dependent on the respective cities in which they exist and there are no requirements for the provision of local funds to support additional spending for meeting federal or state requirements (Asciutto, 2012). All of the Focus districts participating in this study were within reasonable distances of the researcher's primary base of operations.

The Capital Region of New York has the greatest number of student enrollment in upstate New York and was the central point for district selection for this study (Denton, Friedman, & D'Anna, 2010). The Mid-Hudson and Mohawk regions, which adjoin the Capital Region, were also included in this study to broaden the availability of Focus districts for this study. Of the 84 Focus school districts identified, superintendents of the 18 Focus districts residing in the Capital, Mid-Hudson, and Mohawk Valley regions were contacted by the researcher via personal correspondence. Of the 18 district superintendents contacted, 11 district leaders were able to provide perceptions for this study.

According to Creswell (2014), a phenomenological narrative study is well-established using three to ten participants. Creswell (2012) also mentions that convenience sampling may not provide a high degree of confidence between the sample group and the population. Nevertheless, Saevi (2014) recognizes that, “The relation between phenomenology and education requires a responsible remembering of the character of educational situations and an awareness of the logic of educational practices as being self-sustaining and therefore only partly researchable” (Saevi, 2014, p.1). Therefore, the number of Focus Districts around these particular areas provided a sufficient sample of possible interviews to, as Moustakas (1994) would contend, “capture the essence” of how superintendents respond to the DTSDE process (Moustakas, 1994, p.4). The focus of this study, for the sample selected, is just one unique phenomenological sample of an expansive approach to logical reactions to educational reform initiatives.

The researcher cannot preclude the premise that superintendent perceptions may be shaped by regional and organizational differences. Focus districts used in this study are situated in urban centers, non-urban, and rural areas. For example, rural school districts experience more challenges than other school districts with parent involvement, teacher retention, and acquiring resources for staff development (Rosenburg, Christianson, Angus, & Rosenthal, 2014; Ziskin, 2016). These issues affecting rural schools may account for the perceptions shared in this study by superintendents of those districts.

Instrumentation

The research instrument use for this phenomenological study was a researcher-developed interview protocol. The interview questions were developed after research on the theoretical underpinnings of what the DTSDE purports to accomplish was concluded to ensure questions did not include DTSDE specific language. Preliminary interview questions were developed to create

a sense of comfort with the interview process. Research questions were used to guide the development of interview questions. The complete interview protocol can be found in Appendix C.

Data Collection

This phenomenological, qualitative study examining how superintendents respond to the DTSDE process was conducted through direct interviews, one telephone interview, and one written response, with sitting superintendents of Focus school districts in New York State. Interview questions were proposed to participants using a semi-structured, open-ended interview process in which participants recounted their experiences based on researcher prompts.

Interview data from 11 superintendents located in Focus districts throughout the Mid-Hudson, Mohawk, and Capital Regions of the State of New York was collected. Following Sage College IRB approval, sixty to ninety minute face-to-face interviews with nine superintendents were held in their perspective districts. Face-to-face interviews were audio taped, in person, in a setting of the participants choosing. In one case, scheduling difficulties resulted in a telephone interview. In one case, the superintendent provided written answers to the interview questions. This study was conducted with eleven participants in total.

Interview questions were developed using Johnson's (1996) framework in which superintendents assumed three dominant roles of politician, manager, and instructional leader (see Cuban 1988), but enact these roles in the historical, community, and organizational context of the districts in which superintendents serve. Participants were provided a copy of interview questions prior to the interview. The researcher collected documents from participants to supplement digital tape recordings and subsequent transcribed interviews with participant consent (Alemu, 2016).

Superintendents accepting participation in this study were contacted directly by the researcher to arrange interview opportunities and for discussion of IRB expectations for confidentiality and protection. Informed consent forms were provided for superintendent review and signature prior to the interview and for permission to audio-record. All information regarding districts and superintendent identities obtained through the interview and writing process has remained confidential. Collected data is housed in a locked cabinet in the home of the researcher.

All participants in this study volunteered to be interviewed. There was no financial remuneration for being interviewed. As part of the interview process, each participant signed a consent form to be interviewed, as well as a consent form to be audio-recorded. Interviews were conducted and recorded at each participant's district site when feasible. The organization and conducting of interviews were held in accordance with Sage College IRB Guidelines for human subject research.

Data Analysis

The data collected from interviews has been transcribed, field notes typed, and any visual material catalogued for validating the accuracy of information (Creswell, 2014). As this study is phenomenological, the use of member checks (Creswell (2014) coupled with descriptive and reflective notes secured during the interviews were used to ensure proper understanding of participant answers.

QSR NVivo 11 software was used for analyzing and coding interview transcriptions. At Creswell's (2014) suggestion, Tesch's (1990) eight steps in the coding process were used as a framework to assemble a thorough approach to developing themes and pertinent connections within the data (see Table 3). Initially, key words drawn from the research questions including

role, utilization, strengths, and limitations were gleaned from original transcripts during the first read. Themes were identified and grouped to develop codes. Transcripts were then coded for themes relevant to each of the research questions using QSR NVivo 11. Collected data that is not relevant to the purpose of this study was analyzed to formulate plausible constructs for further research.

Table 3

Tesch (1990) - Eight Steps in the Coding Process

-
1. Get a sense of the whole. Read all the transcriptions carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind as you read.
 2. Pick one document (i.e. one interview) – the most interesting one, the shortest, the one on the top of the pile. Go through it, asking yourself, “What is this about?” Do not think about the substance of the information but its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.
 3. When have completed this task for several participants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns, perhaps arrayed as major, unique, and leftover topics.
 4. Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try this preliminary organizing scheme to see if new categories and codes emerge.
 5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for ways of reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships.
 6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.
 7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
 8. If necessary, recode your existing data.
-

Note. Reprinted from “Research Design; Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches”, Creswell, J., 2014, p. 198.

Researcher Bias

The researcher for this study is an aspiring superintendent with a career in low-performing districts throughout the State of New York. In preparation for the superintendency, the researcher has undergone superintendent development program training. The researcher has also gone through the DTSDE review process as a central office employee. The researcher's interest in the DTSDE process was sparked by this professional experience and the desire to further understand the real theories of action that govern superintendent decisions around state mandated school improvement. As Moustakas (1994) suggests, the first step a researcher using a phenomenological approach must take is to isolate the area of study from personal characterizations the researcher has experienced. Suspending any judgment based on the researcher's training is expected for a valid phenomenological study. A second bias exists under the premise that the researcher understands the DTSDE theoretically and has also witnessed the process in a practical application. Observations of the DTSDE process linked to the researcher's experience with the DTSDE were avoided. Observations of the DTSDE process by the researcher are strictly through its theoretical construct that purports to inform practical application at the district level.

Validity

A validity measure for this study was the use of research questions in a pilot study (Creswell, 2014). For this study, three superintendents who have experienced the DTSDE process as superintendents reviewed the interview questions for coherence, clarity and content. Validity was addressed by recognizing feedback on the interview protocol questions from the pilot group. Member checking was provided to all participants to review transcripts for recording accuracy as a second validity measure (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell

(2014), triangulation of different data sources can be established once member checks are complete and themes are established among the convergence of several sources. The results of the member checks did not yield any significant changes to the transcribed data.

Reliability

For study reliability, all participants were asked the same questions during the interviews. Transcripts were produced by the researcher, checked against a second and third session of transcription, and forwarded to participants for member checking. For the purposes of this study, all transcripts were initially coded according to key words in the research and interview questions. From these key words, themes were developed to capture the consistent perception data proffered by the majority of participants.

Summary

Chapter 3 provides information pertaining to the research design, population and sampling method, instruments, data collection, and data analysis strategies to be undertaken by the researcher of this study. The last three presidential administrations from 1993 to 2017 have impacted state and local control through national educational reform efforts by providing funding to states for assurances state education departments will implement federal reform initiatives (New York State Archives: Office of Education, 2009). Recently, after accepting federal funding, the NYSED developed the DTSDE to identify and assist Focus school districts with school improvement efforts (New York State Education Department, 2012c; U.S. Department of Education, 2013b). From the DTSDE review process, superintendents are provided several recommendations extracted from six tenets the DTSDE advances as optimal systemic and structural best practices leading to student success. Research based on the work of Johnson (1996) and Bredeson, et. al. (2008) were utilized to describe superintendent roles and how these

roles play out in the district context in which superintendents operate. Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, the researcher interviewed a sample of 10 superintendents and one assistant superintendent from the Capital Region and the adjoining Mohawk and Mid-Hudson regions of New York State to investigate the perceptions of superintendents regarding the utility of the DTSDE process as a school improvement approach.

In Chapter Four, the findings from the interviews conducted with district leaders were examined to develop specific themes or perceptions. Using the three initial research questions to frame the role, utilization, and strengths and limitations shared by participating district leaders, several findings are forwarded by the researcher based on participant responses.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Introduction

A common feature of national educational reform policy over the course of the Clinton, Bush, and Obama presidential administrations includes school district and school accountability measures based on student test scores. In New York State, school districts and schools that fail to meet federal and state standards for accountability are subject to a process of corrective action imposed by the state education agency. According to federal regulations, those school districts with at least one school performing in the bottom 5% of all schools in a state are identified as Focus school districts. This phenomenological study explores the perceptions of superintendents of Focus school districts regarding corrective action procedures and processes implemented by the New York State Education Department (SED) through the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE).

This study examined to what extent 11 district leaders from low-performing school districts in New York State utilize the DTSDE to inform and implement efforts to support student success. The participants, 10 superintendents and one assistant superintendent, responded to 19 interview questions designed to gather perceptions around three research questions. The three research questions examined the extent to which superintendents perceived their role in the DTSDE review process, the extent to which superintendents utilized DTSDE recommendations to improve student success, and the extent to which superintendents perceived the strengths and limitations of the DTSDE in effecting school improvement efforts.

This chapter of this study is organized into six sections. The first section presents descriptive information using graphical and narrative descriptors to present information about the

participants in the study. The following section provides an analysis of data to support the findings of the study that emerged from interviews with participants and the evidence collected from the interviews to support the findings. The final section of the chapter will contain a summary of the findings and an introduction to the next chapter of the study.

Descriptive Information

The participants in this study included 10 superintendents and one assistant superintendent representing rural, suburban and small city school districts in upstate New York who are undergoing the DTSDE process as Focus school district (see Table 1). Of the 11 participants, four participants were male and seven participants were female. Of the male participants, three of the four participants had more than four years of superintendent experience in the district. The length of time in the district for female participants varied with three participants having 2-4 years of superintendent experience and four female participants having less than two years of experience as a superintendent in the district. Two female superintendents were employed as interim superintendents.

Only one male and two female participants claimed to have a high degree of experience with the DTSDE District rubric prior to being identified as a Focus school district. All other participants indicated no experience with the DTSDE District rubric prior to being identified as a Focus school district. Seven of the 11 districts have central office personnel consisting of at least one assistant superintendent. The school district business official was excluded from this count as all participants indicated during the interview process that the business official was not directly involved in the DTSDE process. Table 4 provides a summary of district leader demographics.

Table 4

District Leader Demographics

District Pseudonym	Gender	Date of Interview	Past Experience with DTSDE ^a	Cabinet ^b	Years as District Leader in Current District ^c
1A	M	January 17, 2017	No Experience	Yes	>4 years
2B	F	January 23, 2017	No Experience	Yes	< 2 years
3C	F	January 30, 2017	No Experience	No	2 – 4 years
4D	M	January 30, 2017	No Experience	Yes	>4 years
5E	F	January 31, 2017	No Experience	No	2 – 4 years
6F	F	January 31, 2017	High Experience	Yes	< 2 years
7G	F	February 7, 2017	No Experience	No	2 – 4 years
8H	F	February 7, 2017	No Experience	No	2 – 4 years
9I	F	February 7, 2017	High Experience	Yes	< 2 years
10J	M	February 13, 2017	No Experience	Yes	< 2 years
11K	M	February 21, 2017	High Experience	Yes	>4 years

^aDistrict Leader indicated a high degree of experience with DTSDE either as a superintendent or in prior experiences as a building leader, or central office employee.

^bDistricts with no central office administrators other than a business official were identified as having “No” Cabinet.

^cThe term “District Leader” refers to the number of years participants in the study have served in their current districts.

Table 2 provides a summary of school district demographics. The districts ranged in size, enrollments in six school districts range from 0 - 2,000, two districts with enrollments between 2,001 – 6,000, and three school districts with enrollments of 6001 – 10,000 students. Six of the 11 school districts were identified as High Need/High Resource Capacity school districts. The remaining five school districts are identified as Average Need/High Resource Capacity school districts. The needs/resource capacity index used by SED measures a district’s ability to meet

the educational needs of its students with local resources (New York State Education Department, 2016).

Six of the 11 school districts have been identified as Focus school districts since the utilization of the Focus designation by SED beginning in 2012-2013 (New York State Education Department, 2011). Two school districts have been identified for the past three years as Focus school districts. Three school districts were newly identified as Focus school districts during the 2015-2016 school year. Of the three newly identified districts, two of the districts were identified as a result of having one school identified as a Focus School. Five school districts have some schools identified meaning these school districts have more than one school identified but not all schools in the district identified as either Focus or Priority schools. Four schools districts have all schools identified as Focus schools.

Table 5

School District Demographics

District	Size	Need/Resource Capacity (N/RC)	Non-White Majority ^a	No. of Identified Schools ^b	No. of Years as Focus District
1A	2,001-6000	High N/RC	No	All	4
2B	0 – 2,000	High N/RC	No	All	1
3C	0 – 2,000	Avg N/RC	No	Some	3
4D	6,001-10,000	Avg N/RC	No	Some	4
5E	0 – 2,000	High N/RC	No	Some	3
6F	2,001-6000	High N/RC	Yes	Some	4
7G	0 – 2,000	Avg N/RC	No	Some	4
8H	0 – 2,000	Avg N/RC	No	One	1
9I	6,001-10,000	High N/RC	Yes	All	4
10J	0 – 2,000	Avg N/RC	No	One	1
11K	6,001-10,000	High N/RC	Yes	All	4

^aThe district has a higher percentage of non-white students than white students

^bThe district was identified as a Focus district as either one, more than one (some), or all schools in the district are identified as either a Focus or Priority school.

Research Question 1

To what extent do superintendents in Focus school districts perceive their role in the DTSDE process at the district level?

The data collected to address this research question was based on answers to two interview questions posed by the researcher to participants. The two questions were designed to elicit solicitous and reflective responses regarding superintendent roles in the DTSDE process.

The first question asked for the superintendent's perception of state expectations for their role in the DTSDE process. There were five findings related to each of these questions from the data collected and analyzed from the participant interview responses. The findings discussed in this section are as follows:

- All district leaders in this study indicated that they believe the state expects the district leader to ensure quality assurance of the DTSDE process at the district and school level including compliance and the implementation of recommendations proffered by state reviewers.
- The majority of district leaders, 10 out of 11, believe their role as system leaders is to integrate the DTSDE recommendations into current district school improvement plans.
- The majority of district leaders, 10 out of 11, believe their role is to interpret DTSDE recommendations and legitimize approaches that are relevant and meaningful for schools in the district.
- All district leaders in Focus school districts perceive the DTSDE process promotes the role of superintendent as instructional leader.
- The majority of district leaders, 7 out of 11, perceive their role in the DTSDE process at the district level is to support building principals through the DTSDE process.

Finding One: Superintendents in the Role of Quality Control Manager

All 11 respondents indicated the superintendent of schools plays a primary role in the quality assurance management of the DTSDE process. For district leaders, quality assurance around the DTSDE process included notification to schools within the district of DTSDE processes and procedures, assisting principals with properly staging and organizing the DTSDE review event at individual school buildings, the completion of state, district and school reports,

and assuring the review process and recommendations were followed according to SED expectations. District leaders felt the district office, specifically the office of the superintendent, was responsible for all aspects of the DTSDE review process.

Superintendent 10J believed the state expects quality assurance around the DTSDE process to come from the superintendent's office.

They (SED) want to have a point person that can be held accountable to the deadlines, when things need to be submitted. What I see as my main responsibility is I'm the main point of communication with SED. I completed the SIG grants, last spring and again in the fall for this year. I led the DCIP writing process and got that completed with input from different groups within our district. I worked with the school principal to make sure that he had appropriate groups that could help guide the creation of the SCEP plan.

Superintendent 9I similarly reported the quality assurance component of the superintendent's role in the DTSDE process expected by the state.

I believe SED thinks our role is to make sure the process is done with integrity and clarity and that we hit all the benchmarks that are necessary to have a good state-led or district-led review. The information we get from those reviews are accurate and reflect what is happening in those buildings. I think that SED wants superintendents to guarantee that this process is whole and that you're actually reflecting on the recommendations that come through and making the necessary changes reflected through the process. The superintendent is supposed to guarantee that the process comes full circle. The superintendent supposedly guarantees the process is being implemented. Prior to my arrival, the DCIP and the SCEP were not connected to the DTSDE. The DTSDE was more a separate event and the SCEP plans for each building were not connected to the

review. We aligned the DTSDE to the DCIP to the SCEP to connect the dots so that the district has an improvement plan across all schools.

Superintendent 5E indicated that SED expectations are “As a system leader they expect that their expectations are addressed and reinforced to faculty and staff.”

District leaders play a primary role in the implementation and attendant processes that occur before, during, and after the DTSDE process. By attendant process, the meaning signifies any activities that occur after DTSDE reviews have been completed and DTSDE initial recommendations have been delivered to building administrators. Additionally, district leaders feel responsible for ensuring state expectations for running DTSDE processes including attendant processes attached to recommendations are systemically supported at the local level, accurately implemented, and disseminated among staff. Although specific review events occur at the building level, participants indicated the DTSDE process is better managed at the district level to ensure a high level of quality assurance around the DTSDE process. Superintendent perceptions indicate superintendents take ownership of the DTSDE process in their districts.

Finding Two: Adapting DTSDE Recommendations into School District Plans

The majority of district leaders, 10 out of 11, believe their role as system leaders is to integrate the DTSDE recommendations into current district school improvement plans.

Superintendents perceive the DTSDE recommendations provided at the district or school level are a subset to a more comprehensive district plan. The majority of superintendents perceived the DTSDE recommendations are adapted by superintendents to support current district needs or policies.

Superintendent 11K summarized the general feelings of the majority of district leaders who believe their role is to integrate DTSDE recommendations into current district school plans.

My role is as an integrator. So I look at whatever it is the state is asking us to do.

Whatever it is that we're doing has to include the recommendations but that can't be the end all. Whatever it is that we're doing as a district wide school improvement plan, it needs to subsume the DTSDE.

Superintendent 7G stated the role of the district leader is to adapt the entire DTSDE process as part of the district plan. She believes her role is to synergize all DTSDE tenets into district plans for student success.

It's the synergy of all six tenets that makes the growth happen. If you concentrate solely on Tenets 3 and 4 with instruction and decision making, problem solving and professional development, you will not be able to look at the student's social and emotional developmental issues, the staff's social and emotional developmental issues or the parent support you need or the leadership you need. I think it's fortunate that I can sit in the role of seeing all of those knowing that they have to be synergized, even though the State comes in and only looks at (tenets) 3 and 4.

As the primary systems leader in the district, the superintendent of District 2B explained the role of the superintendent is to activate the DTSDE recommendations through school district improvement plans.

I'm all about leading my district forward. I know we're going to improve, we're making great gains, so, this is what I'm really focusing on (points to district mission and vision brochure) but the real point is it's intertwined. I'm not saying we can't use extra help, or their expertise, I'm not saying that. But just because you fill out a template doesn't mean that things are going to change.

The majority of participants in this study indicated DTSDE recommendations and district improvement plans intersect or are “intertwined” as the superintendent of district E2A notes. Each district leader in this study ensures DTSDE recommendations are addressed through district efforts to improve the district and the schools under review.

Finding Three: Interpreting and Legitimizing DTSDE Recommendations

The majority of district leaders, 10 out of 11, perceived their role is to interpret DTSDE recommendations and legitimize approaches that are relevant and meaningful for schools in the district. By relevant and meaningful, superintendents adapted DTSDE recommendations to the organizational and community context of the school district. The majority of district leaders indicated superintendents play a primary role in establishing the legitimacy of DTSDE recommendations, interpreting DTSDE recommendations as systems leader, and establishing the context in which the DTSDE will be used to improve student success. Finding three builds on findings one and two by identifying the superintendent as the primary interpreter of DTSDE recommendations within the organizational context of the school district. The district leader ensures the DTSDE recommendations which are presented after a review is completed are accurately actuated (Finding One), adapted district plans (Finding Two), and interpreted across the school district according to the superintendent’s perception of the organizational context of the school district.

Superintendent 6F stated the role of the district leader is to interpret the DTSDE and develop goals that are relevant and meaningful for schools in the district. For example, superintendent 6F indicated her role is defining the context for activating DTSDE recommendations through a district action plan.

My role is, how do we take this tool and convert it into a growth tool for the district?

Think about context. The state is giving you the tool. You are establishing the context in which this particular tool will be used. Where do you want to be? Where do you want to go and how will you use this tool to get the district there? You can use it that way or decide they don't know what they're (SED) talking about and shelf it. It was on paper and the action plan I provided makes it a living document. What's on paper must be alive.

Similarly, Superintendent 4D reported that DTSDE recommendations can be difficult to implement unless the district leader understands the organizational context of the district. Superintendent 4D saw his role as legitimizing and effectuating DTSDE recommendations at the district level.

When the reviewers come in and they give us our, I mean their recommendations, I don't see the reviewer, who's an agent of the state presumably, seeing things much differently than we do. I think they want to see us more focused on student achievement with the things that we're doing. Recruiting highly qualified personnel, allocating our resources effectively, that's one of those things I don't think they recognize what they're asking for. It's very easy for them to come up to me and say, well, you should be allocating your resources differently in your schools and actually giving your building principals more autonomy. That's all well and good to say, but they don't live within the world I live in where 75% of my budget is already spent. A lot of time principals may see things they think will work but, we're up here doing the actual research on those things and whether they work.

Superintendent 11K commented on the importance of the role of district leadership in making sense of the DTSDE process and recommendations at the district and school levels. Superintendent 11K noted his role is to define the DTSDE recommendations according to the organizational context.

I have to make sure that what I'm asking folks to do, what I'm asking them to look at, what I'm asking them to be compliant with, and to push towards, is resonant with those things and be really mindful that I'm not asking them to do stuff that takes away. When I evaluate principals, we choose goals really carefully. We make sure that things they're doing for me in an evaluation are in line with the SCEPs. We spend time looking for and ensuring that we've got that alignment between what's in their rubric, which are the tenets that are really important in their SCEP and what are the tenets we're looking at for the district and let's make sure everything lines up. Whatever it is that you're focusing on is going to hit all three of those. My goal, my job is to make sense of that to not allow for this other interpretation to be all over the place. I've have to say, here's what it means, here's how we do that.

Finding three forwards the perception of superintendents as primary agents in linking DTSDE recommendations to the organizational context of the school district. Interpreting DTSDE recommendations includes defining how DTSDE recommendations will be enacted, measuring school district capacity to meet recommendations proffered by state reviewers, and legitimizing DTSDE recommendations by adapting recommendations to the school district action plan.

Finding Four: The DTSDE Promotes Instructional Leadership

All district leaders in Focus school districts in this study believe the role of the superintendent as instructional leader is accentuated as a result of the DTSDE process. Superintendents in Focus districts perceive the superintendent's role as instructional leader is critical to understanding how to interpret the DTSDE rubric and how to interpret the recommendations forwarded by state reviewers. Superintendents perceive their role as instructional leaders as a component of system leadership required to implement DTSDE recommendations, legitimize the DTSDE process, and as a natural extension of their prior experiences as teachers.

Superintendent 7G indicates that in small districts, superintendents take on many roles including the role of instructional leader when dealing with state processes.

There's this assumption by the state that someone is going to take these instructional reigns. In a larger district you have district staff. I know some of the smaller districts are hiring vendors to do sections of data or work on curriculum. My graduate program both as an administrator and then in my doctorate clearly emphasized that superintendents are instructional leaders. When I came to New York that was not the model here. Other people were instructional leaders. Superintendents hired them and perhaps directed them, but no longer or if they ever, fulfilled that role. I am happy to say that in a small district, that is one of the many hats I wear.

Superintendent 6F, a small city superintendent, declared the DTSDE process provides an opportunity for superintendents to develop their role in instructional leadership. Superintendent 6F perceived the role of superintendent as instructional leader critical to activating the DTSDE process.

I'm an instructional leader and I think superintendents have to own the fact that they're instructional leaders. In the same way principals went from managers to instructional leaders, the bell curve now for superintendents is you have to be instructional leaders and you have to take the pulse of your organization's readiness for change and support the change and provide the support so that you can move forward. Is that a natural change for the majority of superintendents? I think that's something that is new based on who I see around the table. We still have many superintendents that were managers that pay attention to facilities and grounds and leave the instructional piece to their cabinet. I think that when you are not a main player in the instructional decisions then this review means nothing. The state review does not take the prominent place it should take.

Superintendent 5E describes her primary role as an instructional leader stemming from her development as a teacher, and then as a superintendent.

Teachers think that they're different from us but the truth of the matter is that we are teachers. We were teachers before we became administrators. I prize that more than anything, that I was a teacher and then became an administrator. It's not us and them. We are them too. We're teachers. I am first and foremost, a teacher. It's just a diagnostic tool, but it diagnoses exactly what we know already about teaching.

Finding Five: Supporting Building Principals

The majority of district leaders, 7 out of 11, perceive their role in the DTSDE process at the district level is to support building principals through the DTSDE process. The fifth finding relays the importance that superintendents place on supporting building principals through the DTSDE process. Superintendents perceived a primary role in the DTSDE process is supporting building principals who experience the bulk of the review process, subsequent ratings, and

recommendations. Superintendents perceive that recommendations provided at the building level may be systemic issues that require redress at the district level.

Realizing the DTSDE process is a critique of building operations, Superintendent 9I perceived her role is to support building principals when recommendations are proffered by state reviewers that negate improvements that are occurring in the school building.

You need to be there for that principal when they go through that process. The superintendent sits apart from the process. The DTSDE is occurring at the building level with that principal, their team, their teachers, their parents and their kids. They take it very personal because it's a report card on their building. You need to support that because everything comes to light through the review. Here you are with data going in the right direction, increases in level 2 scores, decreases in level 1, you're doing periodic bench marking, your kids are really demonstrating gains from the Spring to the Fall to the Spring, you're seeing kids participating in clubs at an increasing level, your discipline data is improving, you're really starting to feel encouraged by the direction you're heading in and making changes that are really improving the school environment. The DTSDE reviewers enter the picture and assess you at level 1. We then have to get into the buildings and explain what happened with the DTSDE review and affirm the positive things that are happening every day. We have to review the report and pull out the things we can use to help us continue on the positive path we established as a district. That's debilitating to a building. The principal has the hardest job of the DTSDE review. They're the least respected through the process.

Superintendent 8H saw her role as supporting her principal through the DTSDE process. Superintendent 8H indicated that her role is to bolster her building principal and subsequently, bolster the principal's performance through the DTSDE process.

Certainly I get the most bang for my buck working with the building principals. I have a new elementary principal and our elementary is the one that is identified, which led to our district being identified. I see that I get the most results when I help the principal be the best principal she can be and work with her faculty hand-in-hand. Your focus is really to keep the fidelity of the process in that you're recognizing the principal is the central focus of the state.

District Leader 10J ensured support was provided although building administration changed midway through the school year. District Leader 10J helped the building principal understand her role in the DTSDE process.

When our new school principal started in January we actually had an outside education person here the very first week she started. She had a heads up that we were going to meet with our consultant that first week. Our main objective at that point was to really give the principal a chance to have looked over the SCEP plan and look over the state review that was done to identify the areas that people had talked about as areas of concern. So I wanted to give the principal an opportunity to redraft any of the goals that she didn't feel were as measurable in a way that she could access the data immediately. When the new principal started working with the consultant, there was a nice opportunity for the school principal to tweak the Smart goals and make some slight revisions to take ownership of the targets and how we were going to get measured.

The superintendent in District 5E commented on the interactions between state reviewers and the principal of a building under review. The superintendent believes the DTSDE review process should hold the superintendent and the building principal responsible for what occurs in a school building.

For the most part, I found the DTSDE process flawed with the way reviewers attacked the principal. The principal in the building did not have an associate principal at the time of the review. The principal was alone trying to manage multiple levels of curriculum along with having to confront students with severe behavioral problems. It's a daunting job and I thought they were a little harsh. I felt bad because I didn't get tagged as the district leader. They went after the principal and I think it's as much a district leader's responsibility as it is a building level person. My experience with this whole process has been the building principal is responsible for working through all those tenets and my role is to hand over the reins and support. They are unforgiving with the principal. You're going to have a handful of kids in every classroom that are going to be challenges on a daily basis. I think it was unnecessarily harsh on the principal.

District leaders acknowledged the evidence of student success falls upon the principal of the identified school building in the DTSDE process. District leaders are cognizant that the professional integrity of building principals is called into question by state reviewers who maintain a limited view of building operations garnered through the review process.

Research Question 2

To what extent do superintendents of Focus school districts utilize District Level DTSDE recommendations for improving student success as defined by the DTSDE instrument?

The data collected for this research question was framed around five questions regarding the use of district resources. The five questions posited to interview participants asked superintendents whether they have engaged in any collaborative goal setting, established non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, established board support, used central office personnel, or created or modified resources to support DTSDE district recommendations to improve student success. Each of these components are identified by researchers as critical components to effective district leadership to effect positive student achievement (Elmore, 2003; Honig, 2012; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Massell & Goertz, 2002; Siskin & Lemons, 2001) and are an integral part of effectuating the recommendations proffered through the DTSDE review process. There are five findings relating to Research Question number two that are disseminated in this section.

- The majority of district leaders, 10 out of 11, used the District Level DTSDE recommendations to stimulate organizational change leading to student success.
- The majority of district leaders, eight out of 11, use the DTSDE recommendations at the district level for purposes not directly tied to the DTSDE. For example, these 8 out of 11 superintendents used the DTSDE to establish board of education district wide goals. The board of education is not mentioned in the DTSDE rubric or addressed through the DTSDE review process.

- The majority of district leaders, eight out of 11, utilize District Level DTSDE recommendations for improving student success to create or modify resources to align with DTSDE recommendations at the district level. These resources include hiring additional staff, developing new structures or systems to inspect building level practices or aligning all resources within the district to mirror the DTSDE process for improving student success.
- The majority of district leaders, eight out of 11, utilize District Level DTSDE recommendations for developing non-negotiable goals for student achievement and instruction. Non-negotiable goals include setting expectations for student proficiency levels, and developing systems to monitor and evaluate district and building goals.
- Of the seven school districts that maintain central office personnel (see Table 1), six school district superintendents use central office administrators in managerial roles to support the DTSDE District Level recommendations.

Finding One: Stimulating Organizational Change

The majority of district leaders, 10 out of 11, used the District Level DTSDE recommendations to stimulate organizational change leading to student success. Researchers indicated that organization change occurs when change agents strategically use a catharsis event to unfreeze entrenched organizational thinking (Bridges, 2009; Lewin, 1947; Kotter, 1995). The third party observation provided by the state reviewers through the DTSDE process were used by superintendents as catharsis events to engender a sense of urgency for change in the district.

Superintendent 5E used the DTSDE as means to validate the superintendent's insistence on changing ineffective systemic approaches.

It doesn't do any good to keep using the same systemic approaches if the kids are not responding. Doing more of the same isn't helping these kids. We have to do things differently. The DTSDE help me have teeth to make changes. They're not changes that resulted because of that. They're changes that had to happen whether we were under review or not. How the review came in handy was they had nothing to lose by changing because they are in trouble. It gave me the chance to be aggressive with the overhaul. It doesn't work if it's only my work. It has to have buy-in and that's where the teeth came in. It's more like nibbles. We got this and we could do this. It got people thinking differently. They were ideas that I was growing in my mind that we never would have accomplished in one year if we didn't have the DTSDE review. The review was where the teeth came from.

Superintendent 6F stated the DTSDE recommendations gives permission for districts and schools to deeply examine their work, collect data, and enact change leading to student success.

The review gives you permission to collect different parts of data. We criticize the process thinking that the only thing we're being judged by is state examinations. Each component allows you to capture your work with data. Parent surveys, teacher surveys, there's lots of different components. You can introduce teacher portfolios, you can introduce student portfolios. You can look at student work. So it doesn't have to be progress monitoring on just where the kids score on skill development. I think when you look at the teacher's role, they think that the only thing that this review does is to categorize them. It should be a measure that tells us we have to get better. You don't have to be bad to get better.

Superintendent 3C indicated the DTSDE recommendations were instrumental in motivating change.

The former administration's perception was to do the paperwork because nobody cares. When we talk about leadership, the prior leadership characterized the DTSDE as a necessary evil from the state. That's unfortunate because I look at it very differently. I look at it as an objective vehicle that can move things forward and you as a leader can use that to your advantage. In other words, it's not me saying we have to change, we have to do this, or we have to do that. It's let's get this objective opinion and let's really see how that can help us along with any funds we get to move forward. It's interesting changing that dynamic.

In finding one, superintendents use the DTSDE review process to engender change and affect organizational culture. For example, superintendents described how they used DTSDE recommendations to expedite change processes among staff, introduce new approaches, or as an outside opinion on district operations that require investigation when student achievement is not occurring. Rather than rely on their own insistence for change, superintendents in this study used the DTSDE recommendations as a third point of communication in their efforts to lead their systems to increased student success.

Finding Two: Establishing Board of Education Goals

The majority of district leaders, eight out of 11, use DTSDE recommendations to establish board of education goals. The board of education is not mentioned in the DTSDE rubric or addressed through the DTSDE review process. Finding seven describes how superintendents used the DTSDE recommendations to inform constituents within the district to

drive buy-in into the state process. Informing the board of education ensures district goals permeate the entire organization and include DTSDE recommendations.

Superintendent 3C used DTSDE recommendations to establish board goals that affect the entire district. This superintendent perceived the creation of board of education goals was crucial to legitimizing district work around district level DTSDE recommendations.

Recommendations at the district level were all about professional development and leadership. There was a serious lack of working together in the district. I made the commitment especially in my second year here to start every meeting with "What are the goals?" We created five goals and the next thing I did was have the board adopt the goals. So now you have board adopted district goals. These goals are not my goals. They're not school goals. They are district goals. These goals are centered around what we were cited for on the DTSDE and they drive every single thing we do. I learned long ago in administration that everyone will have a reason why they can't do something. And if you let people and things take you off the path you're not going to get anywhere. The goals hang in every room, the goals are in every single classroom, and we have a glance at the week that every school provides.

Superintendent 9I believes educating the board of education is critical to aligning district plans for student success. Although the DTSDE process reviews the district and the school building, superintendent perceptions of the DTSDE process require the superintendent to inform the board of education to further legitimize the work of district leaders.

We report out on all the DTSDE reviews that occur in the district. They (the board of education) are now educated to the importance of the DTSDE, what they are, the impact on DCIP and SCEP plans. The board knows the DTSDE is the preliminary work that

helps design the SCEP plans the buildings are utilizing. Our board, in May and June, sits down and looks at the SCEP plans for the buildings and actually understands what those reports really mean. Now there's a connection between the DTSDE work that helps plan for that, that helps the district work that goes on. They have been taught within the last year by the administrative cabinet the importance of the SCEPs.

Superintendent 7G indicates her board of education has taken an active part in understanding how the DTSDE process works. Superintendent 7G feels the active participation of two board of education members helps with gaining board of education support for district plans informed by the DTSDE recommendations.

They were not really understanding the connection between what we were planning and the professional development services we were purchasing. The principals are reporting on their SCEPs. We called them plans and whatever isn't in the SCEP is in the DCIP. I report on that piece. We have two former educators on the Board now. They have decided to form an education committee. When we meet, the principals come in and present a complete debrief of everything getting everyone up to speed. They come to our professional development trainings. They sit in, they watch things, and they've learned so much. They become the conduit of information to the Board to further understand the goals. As we are going into budget, it's terrific.

Finding two indicates that superintendents as systems leaders ensure their boards of education are knowledgeable regarding the DTSDE process and the reporting process of state reviews. Superintendents strategically embrace the role of the board of education in governance and policy environments that support the DTSDE recommendations and ultimately, district plans created by superintendents.

Finding Three: Creating or Modifying Resources

The majority of district leaders, eight out of 11, utilize District Level DTSDE recommendations for improving student success to create or modify resources to align with DTSDE recommendations at the district level. Finding eight describes how superintendents use the DTSDE recommendations to secure resources. For example, the superintendents interviewed below indicated these resources include hiring additional staff, developing new structures or systems to inspect building level practices, or aligning all resources within the district to mirror the DTSDE process for improving student success.

Superintendent 6F used the DTSDE recommendations to address aspects of Tenets 3, 4, 5, and 6. She looked to the DTSDE Tenets to develop district wide systems to align resources across all schools within the district.

We didn't have a community schools coordinator or facilitator so we created that so domain five and six can reflect best practices. We created district wide protocols of best practices so all schools have expectations of what those look like and what support we have to provide at the district level. There was no attention to student attendance when I got here so we created protocols for that so that it supports the DTSDE Tenets. We had lots of good things happening in pockets but nothing system wide or district wide. We created a direct response to what we read in the reviews as there was no uniform process for this prior to my arrival.

District Leader 10J used the DTSDE recommendations to create protocols for enhancing Tenet 4. District Leader 10J modified the use of technology to gather data for Tenet 4.

We created a walk through tool to check for student engagement. We created a google form and we actually discovered the idea at the DTSDE January focus training we

attended. That was a nugget a school district had talked about using and we came back the next week after training and we created a version. We created a version with our consultant when we heard about the use of google forms. That makes better sense because it gives you the graphical display and the percentage of teachers that are incorporating different things.

The superintendent of District 4D believes the DTSDE process drives all of the processes at the district and school level. The creation or modification of resources supports District 4D through the internal school improvement process based on the DTSDE process enacted by the district.

I think that it's really driving everything. Even our budget conversation is different now. I would say all of our resources have changed as a result of having the DTSDE. We've had a bunch of schools come off the list. At the end of the year we had a little celebration when we got that information, and those principals were like, "no more DTSDE reviews". I said, no, we're still doing DTSDE reviews, we're still coming through your buildings. We can do them ourselves now. Why would we take the tools that got us to improve and say, "Now that tool that we used to improve has got us to improve we don't need it anymore?" So now we can still use it to set our goals, use it for our building leadership teams, and use reviews for checks to see where we are. They were a little disappointed about it but I think they each understand the value of the process.

Finding three highlights the role of superintendent as system leader and resource allocator. Superintendents recognize the importance of the DTSDE process as a vehicle for

expediting the acquisition of resources necessary to address DTSDE recommendations through the attendant phase of the DTSDE process.

Finding Four: Developing Non-Negotiable Goals

The majority of district leaders, eight out of 11, utilize District Level DTSDE recommendations for developing non-negotiable goals for student achievement and instruction. Non-negotiable goals include setting expectations for student proficiency levels, and developing systems to monitor and evaluate district and building goals.

Finding four describes how superintendents use DTSDE recommendations to enhance district performance by honing in on specific goals at different levels. Based on superintendent perceptions gathered in this study, non-negotiable goals can refer to performance goals in which students achieve higher scores on state assessments, the solidification of observations of student performance by augmenting district systems such as data collection, or presenting approaches at the classroom level that assist teachers and students with engaging essential learning objectives.

When asked what non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction the superintendent has established as a result of DTSDE District recommendations, Superintendent 11K indicates goals around incremental gains in proficiency are goals the system can reasonably obtain.

The gist of it is, if every teacher moves two kids in a section that were not proficient, the job is to maintain everybody that is proficient, keep them proficient, and those two kids that aren't, get them over that line. Can you move two kids? Is it fair for me to ask you to move two kids? If you have two kids in your section that are already proficient, is it fair for me to ask you to move two more? Can you move two kids? These can be kids on the bubble. High twos. Can you move two kids? I have yet to meet the person who

says that's not reasonable. You move from 8% proficiency to 16% to 24%

proficiency. How would you feel if that's what your district was making as progress?

The Superintendent of 8H indicated that data collection was a critical piece of supporting non-negotiable goals.

I would say the non-negotiable goals have to do with data collection. That was the biggest piece, the biggest change for us. We had a lot of anecdotal data, a lot of gut checks, and gut feelings, but really there was no real data collection. The culture here was our kids aren't numbers, our kids are kids, to which I completely subscribe. But there's clearly a value to measuring things like discipline. How can you change your program? So the DTSDE has helped take the data conversation in a good direction. The principals know what we're focused on and have shared our goals with their staff. We have to collect more data. We can talk about what that looks like, where we put it, and how we communicate it out, but that's the non-negotiable piece.

The superintendent of District 5E stated non-negotiable goals coming from the DTSDE review process provides teachers with clear objectives for lesson development.

The biggest non-negotiable goal that came out of the review was that teachers were to write their objectives on the board every single day. There was a lot of push back on that. That was one time where I could say "it's not us telling you to do that, it's the state". It was hard for teachers to learn but now people are hanging their hats on that. It reminds the teachers and the students of what they're doing. It seemed like to them to be silly and a waste of time but when I do observations what I see, the first thing I notice is the objectives are posted and lesson matches the objectives. So it gives the teacher something to hang their hat on. It gives the kids something to refer to.

Finding four describes how superintendents as system leaders use DTSDE recommendations to inform all levels of the school system from performance on state assessments to building level goals to classroom teaching. In the participant perceptions presented, the role of superintendent as system leader includes active monitoring and evaluating of various systems conducted all levels of the school system.

Finding Five: Using Central Office Personnel

Seven school districts in this study maintain central office personnel (see Table 1). Of the seven school districts with central office personnel, six school district superintendents indicated central office administrators are used in managerial roles to support the DTSDE District Level recommendations. Finding five describes how superintendents as resource allocators and communicators of district goals use cabinet members to disseminate DTSDE recommendations to ensure the DTSDE process permeates district and school operations. As the superintendent of District 1A notes, “They are the key cogs to the implementation and oversight of anything we do with the DTSDE process.” Cabinet members assist with staging the state review event, developing systems for addressing DTSDE processes within the district, or organizing the work around the DTSDE for the superintendent of schools.

Superintendent 9I indicates the use of central office personnel is critical to implementing DTSDE District Level recommendations for student success as defined by the DTSDE instrument. This superintendent used central office personnel as building level case managers to assist principals with preparing for DTSDE reviews.

My role has been to designate an assistant superintendent to every DTSDE building. That assistant superintendent is key to the process and the support for DTSDE reviews and making sure all the staging is done by principals. We now have an assistant

superintendent meeting with those buildings to connect resources, organize DTSDE reviews, and operationalizing recommendations. Our assistant superintendents are spending 10-12 days with each school around the DTSDE review. At the same time, the assistant superintendents are meeting with principals bi-monthly around building issues so when they go around the building to do the DTSDE there are no surprises. That wasn't happening before. Our elementary assistant superintendent knows the building as well as the building principal. When they sit down it's a hearty conversation because of her knowledge of the building. She meets with them and goes over all aspects of that building from Tenet 2 to Tenet 6. We don't just do the DTSDE pro forma. We use the DTSDE to have constructive conversations with our buildings.

Superintendent 4D fully deploys his cabinet members to utilize DTSDE District Level recommendations across all DTSDE Tenets. Superintendent of District 4D assigns one tenet to each of his cabinet members to lead and monitor the DTSDE process.

One of the things of a district of this size is, when I think about smaller districts, it was the superintendent and then it was the principals. Your principals are your cabinet. I'm lucky in that I have deputy superintendents, I have assistant superintendents, I have directors, so there's a lot of people taking a piece of this of the DTSDE. So, while I'm familiar with it, the work being done in the process itself within the Tenets is being done by my administrative team, my cabinet. You can see behind you we have our tenets, and each of the categories in the Tenets and their goals they're working on. We actually have our DLT (district leadership team) which took the place of the old school, DCIP, the old improvement plan. The team that use to be met once quarterly. We changed that to the District Leadership Team and broke our tenets down. There's subcommittees out of that

group, so we have about 40 people in that group, so each member of my cabinet, has taken one of the tenets, including myself, and we have our team.

In a school district with only one school identified as a Focus school, District Leader 10J, an assistant superintendent, handles the entire DTSDE process for his district.

I'm the one who provides the BOE and the superintendent with an update on how we're doing in regards to progress on our goals. All of the tenets are addressed in an effort to help us improve the graduation rate.

The responses to imposed state corrective action presented through the interviews of superintendents in this study indicate the attendant process pertaining to implementing state reviewer recommendations from the DTSDE review is left solely to the superintendent to devise. Finding five validates the perceptions of superintendent who see themselves as resource allocators by using supporting personnel for the purposes of improving student success.

Research Question 3

To what extent do superintendents in Focus school districts perceive the strengths and limitations of the District Level DTSDE process in effecting school improvement efforts?

For this section of this study, district leaders were asked four question regarding the strength of the District Level DTSDE process, the limitations of the District Level DTSDE process, suggestions district leaders would proffer for improving the DTSDE process, and whether the DTSDE process was a worthwhile endeavor for their district. The first part of this section will provide findings that support superintendent perceptions regarding the strengths of the District Level DTSDE process. The second section will report on the collection of data regarding superintendent perceptions of the limitations of the District Level DTSDE process.

Strengths of the District Level DTSDE process.

- The majority of superintendents, 10 out of 11, believe the DTSDE process causes Focus districts to be intentional regarding efforts to effect school improvement efforts. By intentional, the perception of superintendents is that the DTSDE causes district leaders to address specific aspects of district operations.
- The majority of superintendents, 10 out of 11, believe the DTSDE instrument is a research based, statement of good practices, leading to student improvement.
- Six of the 11 district leader responders provided additional perceptions regarding the receipt of school improvement grant monies as a result of having Focus status that allows superintendents to enact initiatives to support student achievement. The remaining five superintendents did not provide additional responses regarding the acquisition of grant funds as a strength.
- Six of the 11 district leaders provided additional responses regarding the user friendliness of the state process as the process at the state level changes each school year. The remaining five superintendents did not comment on the subject of the state review process and user-friendliness.

Finding One: Intentionality Around School Improvement Efforts

The majority of superintendents, 10 out of 11, believe the DTSDE process causes Focus districts to be intentional regarding efforts to effect school improvement efforts. By intentional, the perception of superintendents is that the DTSDE causes district leaders to address specific aspects of district operations as a result of district or school reviews. Finding one describes how superintendents perceive the DTSDE review as a process that requires superintendents to be more intentional around district operations leading to student success. In some cases, the

intentionality around district operations led to major changes in how the Focus districts in this study approached the processes leading to student success.

The superintendent of District 9I used the DTSDE process to support areas of concern in the district specifically classroom instruction in state-tested areas of ELA and Mathematics.

We're using the process to reflect and drive the change necessary to improve literacy and numeracy skill sets for our kids. We also use it to improve teaching, the support services we put around kids in Tenet 5, and parent and community communication in Tenet 6. We're getting strong in Tenets 5 and 6 because of the culture of the district. There is not one building that does not have four or five community partners coming into the building to help with certain needs of that building that has emerged through the DTSDE or surveys. We are looking at the DTSDE as a means to improving the lives of our kids, how we make our buildings stronger, and how to we support our families.

The superintendent of District 11K stated the DTSDE process, which the superintendent stated evolved from a more passive process used by the state, requires superintendents to be more intentional about the work of school improvement.

Prior to the DTSDE, it was okay to have an assumption in place in your plan that we will do good things and we will leave unexamined these assumptions that good things will then result from having done good things. The DTSDE process brought to the surface a lot of what I call miracle thinking. It's not going to play out that way exactly if you don't start with the intentions. It forces us to spend time at that level.

The superintendent of District 5E used the DTSDE recommendations to amend past practices and become intentional around how time is used in the district.

It was one of those things where I said, "Guys, this is a state report. We didn't say it, they're saying it." Time on task was a non-negotiable. We used to close for Regents week but now we don't. I just don't see closing the school down for three students. But this (the DTSDE) gave me the time to say "the state's requiring us to have more time on task", so there's time on task. We just reclaimed four days.

Finding one summarizes how superintendents use the DTSDE process to become more intentional around the work leading to student success. Intentionality begins by looking specifically at DTSDE recommendations and creating attendant processes for addressing deficiencies in the school district.

Finding Two: The DTSDE Instrument – A Statement of Best Practices

The majority of superintendents, 10 out of 11, believe the DTSDE instrument is a statement of best practices. By subsuming the DTSDE into district plans, superintendents are able to legitimize the focus on DTSDE recommendations as best practices district and school staff should embrace to effect student success.

The superintendent of District 8H forwards a commentary that was evident throughout the interview process regarding superintendent perceptions around the legitimacy of the DTSDE rubric and the supporting research behind the process.

If we're talking about the DTSDE we're talking about good school practice. The DTSDE really does encompass some very clear research for what makes for optimal school performance. The reality of the plans that we are manufacturing are all optimal and they fit with the DTSDE. They're parallel. For the most part, very few things have come up through the DTSDE process that wouldn't have been something we shouldn't have been doing in the first place.

The superintendent of District 6F echoed the sentiment that the DTSDE rubric is built upon sound educational research.

So there's nothing in the review that is not an anchor to an educational community.

That's how I see it. They're pillars. And these are the pillars we all know are part of a sound educational community regardless of what you're state scores say. No one can argue that a clear vision, student achievement, professional development, student wellness, and true partnerships are not part of a vibrant educational community.

Finding twelve points out that the DTSDE rubric is perceived by superintendents as a statement of good practices. For most of the superintendents in this study, the adaptation of the DTSDE rubric into district plans has been a key feature superintendents utilize to develop district wide goals that reflect best practices.

Finding Three: Funding Support

Finding three describes how six participants voluntarily and without prompting by the researcher chose to respond to questions regarding the strength of the DTSDE recommendation process. The remaining five superintendents did not mention grant monies as part of their response either to the strengths of the DTSDE or to other interview questions. Participant responses referencing grant monies were directed specifically at the additional monies granted through the state for schools that were identified as Focus districts. These six respondents perceived the additional grant monies assisted with developing and sustaining programs leading to student success.

The superintendent of District 8H recognizes that the financial support helped with DTSDE recommendation implementation.

Certainly the financial support is welcome. I wouldn't say that was the best. The urgency it created to make some changes that we knew had to be started was really beneficial. We had some serious gaps in our ELA particularly at the elementary school level. Everybody knew it but they held fast and tight to what they always did. This created an urgency to have a different conversation.

The superintendent of District 2B immediately used funding to promote teacher leadership, a DTSDE Tenet 3 support.

So what has been positive? We got the money. We are able to promote and grow teacher leadership because of that money. We never even had middle school and high school get together. So what I did was start two half-days on elementary conference days.

The superintendent of District 3C addressed teacher professional development by using funds to hold professional development sessions over the summer. Working in a rural community allowed the superintendent of District 3C an opportunity to have teachers work with other districts.

I reallocated the entire \$200,000 with the exception of \$15,000 for consultants. All of it went to summer workshop monies and I negotiated a rate with the union and so we did mega-work this summer. I sent people places, I was able to send teachers to AP training. Here, you can wake up and be an AP teacher. Just get out of bed and you're all set. I know from my experience that that can't happen. We did a ton of training this summer and I used all the money for that.

Finding three, for six superintendents, describes how superintendents were able to use grant monies proffered through the Focus identification process to develop district operations

leading to student success. The district operations benefitting from additional funding were operations the superintendent perceived would enhance student success.

Finding Four: A More User-Friendly Process

Similar to the previous finding, six out of 11 district leaders, volunteered perceptions indicating the state process has become more user-friendly as the process at the state level evolves each school year. By user-friendly, these six district leaders indicated the state was more receptive to inquiries by Focus districts around completing reports or forms, reviewers were more inclined to provide fewer recommendations that seemed plausible to implement, or trainings provided networking opportunities with other Focus districts with similar recommendations for improvement or similar district contexts. Five superintendents did not offer any responses regarding their perceptions around the implementation or sense of compatibility around the DTSDE review process. Finding four describes how superintendents perceived that the current DTSDE process provides superintendents and school districts with more support through the attendant process that occurs after reviews are complete and recommendations are forwarded to building principals.

The superintendent of District 6F, who has experienced the DTSDE process from its inception, reflected on what occurred when the process was first implemented and how the DTSDE process has recently improved.

If I was to respond to when it first started five years ago, people were learning the components as they were doing the reviews and the visits. The reports were fifteen pages long with 30 recommendations and there was no way to meet everything. It was more of a downer and there wasn't accuracy to some of the arguments that had been made. I think we've gotten better with accuracy and better with what reliability and validity of

information. They're a lot deeper and to some degree the overwhelming feeling goes away. The state use to sit there and tell me everything that was wrong and that's what made initial reports over 30 pages long. Now, a report identifies one thing we can work on that can make a difference. It has even changed the reviewer's perceptions.

The superintendent of District 8H, whose district is new to the DTSDE process, felt the last training the district attended was user-friendly.

This past training was structured to have some conversation at the beginning of the day and the rest was sessions interacting with other schools so that's how the training was set up. It was structured interaction. Very positive. You had informal networking with whoever was sitting at your table. There were structured presentations where we could ask really good questions specific to a particular sub-group. How did you do your parent outreach? Because we're really struggling with that. So that was very meaningful. When the state comes in and says you have to do more with parent outreach have you tried things? They may be good things but not applicable to your school district's dynamics. For example, our district doesn't have a bus line so offering free tokens, or free food is not going to make a difference with getting parents in. But to speak to another district that's similar to you, that's powerful, very powerful. So I was able to refine some generic suggestions the state gave, well intended, to practical applications that we can use here. SED must have taken a look at the feedback from other trainings and concluded the trainings have to be more meaningful. They offered office hours at the end of the last training so people could go ask a specific question to their district, but we didn't need it.

Finding four, according to the superintendent of District 8H, a newly identified Focus school district, indicates NYSED has been reflective in an attempt to present a more viable attendant process to the DTSDE review process. Linking school districts with similar issues or providing question and answer sessions with live NYSED employees has enhanced the experienced for districts currently experiencing the DTSDE process. This is significantly different than the experience of the superintendent of District 6F who remembers an attendant process informed by “six tenets, five elements in each tenet, and several recommendations for each tenet”, leading to “a report that was 30 to 40 pages long”.

Limitations of the District Level DTSDE Process.

- The majority of the superintendents, 7 out of 11, felt the initial onboarding and training sessions with SED on the DTSDE process were ineffective.
- The majority of superintendents, 8 out of 11, perceived the follow-up process after the DTSDE process is completed is ineffective. The follow-up process is perceived by these superintendents as ineffective because either the state does not have a follow-up attendant plan to enact meaningful reform, or the state does not recognize the superintendent of schools as the primary agent of change, or the state reviewers lack expertise and cannot provide a relevant attendant plan.
- The majority of superintendents, 7 out of 11, perceive state reviewers were not qualified to present school district or building leaders with solutions to the recommendations state reviewers proffered to school districts and schools.
- The majority of superintendents, 8 out of 11, believe state reviewers lacked an understanding of school operations in Focus district schools.

- The majority of superintendents, 6 out of 11, perceive the DTSDE process is not a comprehensive process.

Finding One: Ineffective Onboarding and Training Protocols

The majority of the superintendents, 7 out of 11, felt the initial onboarding and training sessions with SED on the DTSDE process were ineffective. Onboarding processes include initial notification by the state, completing the district reflection tool, and attending training on the DTSDE process. The training sessions utilized by the state provided the majority of superintendent perceptions regarding the onboarding process. Superintendents perceive the training format, the attitude of presenters, and the inability of state professional developers in DTSDE process to deliver a coherent perception of how the DTSDE review process works were some of the aspects of the onboarding process superintendents perceive were ineffective.

Although the superintendent of District 8H enjoyed the user-friendliness of the last DTSDE training she encountered, the original onboarding process the superintendent of District 8H experienced was less than helpful.

I think the process was really clunky at the beginning. For example, we were told we were having a school wide review. Everybody gets 6-8 weeks to develop their questionnaire that helps with the review. We were given than less than two weeks. Our review was based on that questionnaire that we weren't able to fully complete. That whole process was really clunky. We were the first of our group to be selected in this area and the state kept apologizing but it didn't make the review any better.

The superintendent of District 2B, a newly identified school district, indicated the shortcomings of the state-run training.

We went to training last year. It was the worst professional development I have ever attended in my life. It was so condescending to us, treating us as if we didn't know anything, as if we were bad administrators or superintendents. We were totally turned off by all of that.

The superintendent of District 9I provides some insight into the training process and how it occurred. The superintendent begins by answering an interview question on the introduction experience to the DTSDE process.

The training consisted of a series of meetings in ballrooms, within the hotel in downtown Albany. They brought speakers in to talk. They had hundreds and hundreds of people there. They had the outside experts with district personnel in there at the same time in what was a large lecture format run like it was a workshop. That was tough. I don't think it worked for anybody. What they found is what you find in any other kind of situation like that. They found, in their small exercises, even in the stuff that they did, they got a rubric, they put evidence up on the screen, and then asked people to rate the evidence on the rubric. With the rubric, you're writing your indicators in such objective language that it's self-evident where things are. In that room, the outside educational experts, district superintendents, assistant superintendents for instruction, the variance on how people rated these evidence pieces was as wide as could be. The range was the existence of the scale.

Finding one of research question three describes how the first encounter between the state and identified Focus districts were perceived by superintendents as experiences that ineffectively introduced the DTSDE process. Although one excerpt from the study regarding the self-reflection tool is mentioned, three superintendents including the superintendent from District 8H

indicated several applications of the self-reflection tool were returned by the state.

Superintendent perceptions of the training process suggest the initial interaction with the state may appear as a negative experience for some superintendents in this study. All seven of the superintendents in finding one personally participated in the training provided to school districts identified as Focus school districts.

Finding Two: No Attendant Policy

The majority of superintendents, 8 out of 11, perceived the attendant process after the DTSDE process is completed is ineffective. The attendant process can be described as the process for implementing recommendations handled by NYSED. Finding two describes superintendent perceptions of the attendant process as ineffective because the state does not have an attendant plan outside of reports filed with the state on a periodic basis. No participant in this study mentioned the Resource Guide as a viable reference guide for developing district or school capacity for student success.

The superintendent of District 9I lamented the lack of attendant interaction by the state after the DTSDE review is completed. The superintendent indicates that the follow-up process is little more than a component of state reporting to federal authorities.

The reviewers come into the district, delivery their recommendations and then leave you with several recommendations. After that, it's the districts job to complete reports indicating the recommendations are being implemented. You don't really talk to anyone at SED. They tell you what they think and you fill out paperwork. What would make it more palatable if it was something that evoked change and support or was looked at as something more than compliance between the feds and SED. Then it would come full circle. Think about education and what you do in the classroom as a teacher. I use

assessment to drive instruction before moving forward for those students who are not getting it. The DTSDE is basically an assessment, a test. It's a tool that's used as a test. You get thumped on the head about it and in some cases you should be. But I don't know what SED does with the DTSDE, except report out on it. Then you start all over again. Is there more to it?

The superintendent of District 6F noted the exclusion of the superintendent in the follow-up process by state reviewers when initial recommendations are forwarded to building principals at the end of a school review is a serious omission. The meaning of exclusion in the DTSDE process relates to the state review procedure of not permitting the superintendent of schools to interact with reviewers during the part of the DTSDE process in which reviewers provide their initial recommendations to building administrators.

I think SED missed a piece on the superintendent's role in the follow up conversation. You're not invited by SED to the general audience with the school during the recommendation reporting. You can quietly insert yourself as a superintendent in the back of the room. But when the lead evaluator returns to check on the goals there is no conversation with the superintendent. Yet you're responsible for the instructional achievement of your district. I find that that conversation must include the superintendent. The lead evaluator has to have time, even if they don't have it when they're talking to the principal, to report back to the superintendent to say this is what we have seen. They're leaving a huge portion of responsibility out of the conversation.

Finding two indicates superintendents perceive district leaders are responsible for the attendant process after recommendations are offered by DTSDE reviewers. Superintendents perceive that attendant processes are non-existent with the exception of reporting district

progress through periodic submissions of state reports. Superintendent perceptions from this study indicate superintendents are responsible for activating DTSDE recommendations and are not engaged with DTSDE reviewers during the review and after verbal recommendations are shared.

Finding Three: Unqualified Out of State Reviewers

The majority of superintendents, 7 out of 11, perceived state reviewers were not qualified to present school district or building leaders with recommendations state reviewers forwarded as part of the review process. Finding three documents the frustrations superintendents perceived with reviewers from other countries conducting the DTSDE review process. These state reviewers lacked an understanding of the American education system, school district and building practices, and the community context of some Focus districts.

The superintendent of District 3C was willing to embrace the DTSDE process however, the superintendent perceived the use of reviewers from other countries limited the efficacy of state reviewers to deliver recommendations.

Whether their guidance and the document is the best there is, or the process is as thorough as it can be, we can talk about that. For example, it was a little surprising to me that at the middle and elementary state reviews both lead people were from England. I get a little nervous when you have to explain a program to someone who doesn't know anything about the program. The sad thing is, going back to leadership, I see them as leading, and when staff see them struggle with what they think are basic things, they notice that. Why are they evaluating me when they don't even know what these programs are? I was not so sure that was a good move by the state.

The superintendent of District 9I stated the use of reviewers from other countries disqualified state reviewers from offering relevant recommendations.

Outside evaluators were coming from outside the country. I had someone from Great Britain come off the plane and make a derogatory comment saying "You're not in the ghetto?" The reviewer was surprised the building had a high minority population but was shocked by the realization the building and the campus were beautiful. I thought, we're in trouble. The first thing the reviewer says to me on the first day of the DTSDE review was "You're not in the ghetto?"

The superintendent of District 4D had similar issues with the use of reviewers from other countries when the superintendent notes, "They sent people from England. (Shaking head) It's frustrating to have to explain everything to someone who is not familiar with the language of education in the states."

Finding Four: Unqualified New York State Reviewers

The majority of superintendents, 8 out of 11, believed state reviewers lacked an understanding of school operations in Focus district schools. Superintendent perceptions include limitations of the DTSDE process due to state reviewer lack of knowledge of how recommendations play out in the local community context, state reviewers lack of contextual knowledge of Focus districts, state reviewers did not know the DTSDE rubric, or state reviewers lack the expertise to diagnose Focus district issues related to the DTSDE review process.

The superintendent of District 3C felt state reviewers would forward recommendations void of an understanding of school and community operations.

The other thing that is a huge challenge to me is they (SED) continue to say things like the district has to provide more professional development. In any school district when

am I going to have ten days off? You serve a community. When their kids are sent home for 12 half days, no one is too happy with you. The value for staff development in schools is about zero. So how do you find ways for things to happen?

The superintendent in District 6F vented some frustration because some DTSDE reviews are conducted by reviewers lacking an understanding of the operations of urban schools.

The people that are doing the review should know something about or have had experience with that type of district. It used to drive me insane when suburban evaluators we're evaluating an urban district without understanding urban education. People who don't have a clue about the context of urban schools should not be conducting reviews because you're clueless and your recommendations will not be valid in terms of understanding. Last year the state reviewers were from England.

The superintendent of District 4D echoes similar frustrations with reviewers whose credentials are questionable.

I think it's frustrating sometimes that the people coming in the door that do the state reviews are questionable reviewers. I question their competency. Not all. But some. That's a frustrating piece for us if they're not prepared, if they don't know the tenets well enough, they don't know our district at all, those are frustrating things for us.

The superintendent of District 11K noted that state reviewers lack the expertise to provide meaningful feedback because the reviewers conducting the DTSDE review lack building leadership experience and an understanding of the internal capacity within a district or school to deliver a meaningful attendant plan.

Many times when the state came in, they would say where are these things? You don't have this. You need to do that. The principals are saying, they (SED) told me this is my

priority but you (superintendent) told me this is my priority. Which am I supposed to do? I feel pretty stuck now. That was a lack of understanding by the state in terms of what really goes on with a principal and they're very few state reviewers that came through that had an understanding that had been building principals that have those kind of experiences. In reality, when I push with some of the folks from the state about ways to improve that process, I was told flat out, they don't have the internal capacity, the ability to provide expert advice to schools and what it is they need to do to get better. It's not that they don't have the volume of people, it's that the number of people who really have that expertise aren't around.

Findings three and four provided superintendent perceptions of reviewers superintendents encountered during the DTSDE review process occurring within Focus districts. If reviewers are providing recommendations for improving district and school operations, superintendents in this study perceived that the reviewers should be able to link those recommendations to the context of the district under review. When superintendents perceptions include reviewer qualifications and subsequently recommendations as questionable, the validity of recommendations suffer.

Finding Five: The Comprehensive DTSDE Rubric Overlooks the Community Context

Six out of 11 respondents in this study offered volunteer perceptions indicating the DTSDE review process overlooks community factors that affect student readiness to learn. The DTSDE purports to be a comprehensive rubric built upon six tenets and as such, carries the title “Comprehensive DTSDE Rubric” (New York State, 2012). By comprehensive, SED forwards the notion that districts and schools that obtain proficient ratings across the tenets of the rubric are addressing all elements of administrator, teacher, and student interactions leading to student

success. In Tenet 6 of the Comprehensive DTSDE rubric, school to family and community partnerships are also rated.

Superintendents however, perceived the context from which DTSDE reviewers rate the school to family and community partnerships tenet does not take into account the unique factors of the community including the community influence on student readiness to learn or the high number of students within the community requiring special services. From the standpoint of student learning and community support for student learning, these superintendents perceive community factors that greatly influence the ability of students to learn in school, the ability of families to provide a stable environment outside the school environment, and the ability of community agencies to respond to the services students require to learn is overlooked or ignored in the state review.

The superintendent of District 9I, a small city district, recognizes that reviewers do not take into account the resources necessary to support a high number of students who are economically disadvantaged.

If the school is acting appropriately in Tenet 5 resources and services naturally line up. How can you line up resources and services when 75% of your kids are high-needs kids who fall under Tenet 5? Are you going to give me points in Tenet 5 because we're dealing with our high needs population? If I'm dealing appropriately with Tenet 5, you're going to ding me in Tenets 3 and 4 because of the instruction and what's happening in the classroom doesn't compare favorably to the rubric. Making it all the more difficult is that you're going to ding me on Tenet 5 anyway because the greeter doesn't have a happy face at the door.

The superintendent of District 11K indicated the state focus on classroom performance negates the importance of external factors that hinder school performance. The superintendent perceives the external environment plays a significant role in the success of the school district.

It's a dilemma. I understand why they created it the way that they did. It's designed to be a feedback mechanism for the district. What can you do different? Change what you can. Within that context it's good. Using it differently as the state did, going from what are you going to do about what you can do differently to now let's use it as an accountability lever, there's a big difference. This notion of the external environment, this notion that there are other agencies in a district wide city who play a significant role in whether or not we can be successful is ignored by that. In terms of our reflection and thinking how do we sharpen our saw, I don't necessarily need that. But if you're going to say, to what degree are we responsible for these outcomes? I think you better account for the external environment and the agencies that play a significant role in whether we're successful or not. It's a question of community capacity. It's a question of state fulfillment of obligation. There are multiple components.

The superintendent of District 5E does not value the DTSDE process because the DTSDE process states what is overly obvious to district leaders regarding student success and the characteristics of the district they serve.

Poverty is a reality. The reactions to things relative to poverty are realities. We deal with them on a daily basis. The dysfunction we deal with is real. Here, we don't have access to resources for our kids. Our school is not to be a mental health facility, it's to be a school. Our job is negotiate what's happening to get our kids a high school diploma after this. We're left so often with the sociological aspects that we have to deal with. We feed

kids every weekend. We send backpacks home every weekend. We have mental health situations where we're dealing with crises. We know the environment at home the kids are returning to every night is not helping the crisis but we have to deal with this every day. How can you ignore it? That's why I don't value the process, per se, because it's acting as if we don't know we have these community issues. I think that most of us who work in those schools that are high need would like to say to the state "you don't have a clue". It's just a diagnostic tool, but it diagnoses exactly what we know already. It would be like my arm is bent out of shape and I say I have a broken arm. That's true, you have a broken arm. We have things that are broken. It's not because of bad administration or bad teaching.

Finding five highlights the limited view superintendents perceived the DTSDE process maintains towards districts where a large proportion of students require additional assistance to legitimize the school experience at a personal and community level. Superintendents perceived the socio-economic conditions that create district and school environments and subsequently, challenges to meeting proficient ratings on the DTSDE rubric, are not taken into account by reviewers as part of the state proclaimed comprehensive DTSDE process.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the extent to which New York State district leaders in 11 school districts identified as Focus districts utilize the District Level Rubric elements of the New York State Education Department Diagnostic Tool for District and School Effectiveness to inform and implement efforts to support student success.

All of the district leaders in this study perceived the superintendent has the primary role of ensuring district and school compliance with DTSDE processes and the implementation of

DTSDE recommendations at the district and building level. As systems leaders, the majority of superintendents, 10 out of 11, believe their role is to adapt DTSDE recommendations into current district plans by legitimizing approaches that are relevant and meaningful for schools in the district. Most superintendents perceive their role in the DTSDE process is to support building principals who are the central focus of DTSDE reviews.

Utilization of the DTSDE process is not limited only to district plans. The majority of superintendents utilize the DTSDE recommendations to stimulate organizational change. Because DTSDE recommendations become part of the comprehensive district plan, the majority of superintendents present DTSDE recommendations to their boards of education as part of a goal-setting process for the school district. Within the goal-setting process, a majority of superintendents perceived the district level DTSDE recommendations provided the foundation for setting non-negotiable goals for student achievement and instruction. The DTSDE process also presents superintendents in this study with opportunities to secure resources to improve student success. The majority of superintendents also use central office personnel to manage the DTSDE process and the district level recommendations that emerge from the DTSDE process.

Regarding the perceived strengths of the DTSDE process, the majority of superintendents perceived the DTSDE process causes superintendents to be more intentional around district actions leading to student success. The majority of superintendents perceive the DTSDE rubric is built upon leading research and is a statement of good practices every superintendent should recognize. Grant funding received by schools to enact initiatives to support student achievement and a more user-friendly approach currently offered by the state were two strengths most superintendents perceive as strengths of the DTSDE process.

The perceived limitations of the DTSDE process as perceived by superintendents were most superintendents felt the initial onboarding and training sessions used by the state were not helpful. Limitations were also perceived by a majority of superintendents who felt state reviewers were not qualified in many cases to review districts and present recommendations. Additional limitations perceived by superintendents include the lack of state participation in the attendant process that occurs after reviews are completed and recommendations forwarded to building administrators and a perception by most superintendents that the DTSDE process is not comprehensive as the state suggests.

Chapter 5 of this study will provide a series of conclusions based on the review of literature found in Chapter 2 and an analysis of the findings presented in Chapter 4. In addition to conclusions, suggestions for further study will be offered along with recommendations for policy and practice relating to superintendent perceptions of the utilization of the DTSDE review process to improve student success.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary of Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the extent to which New York State superintendents in school districts identified as Focus districts utilize the Diagnostic Tool for District and School Effectiveness (DTSDE) to inform and implement efforts to support student success. The study described the perceptions of 11 district leaders in the Capital, Mohawk, and Mid-Hudson regions of New York State. Respondents provided their perceptions on the roles of superintendents in the DTSDE process, the utilization of DTSDE recommendations, and the strengths and limitations of the DTSDE instrument and process.

The study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent do superintendents in Focus school districts perceive their role in the DTSDE process at the district level?
2. To what extent do superintendents of Focus school districts utilize District Level DTSDE recommendations for improving student success as defined by the DTSDE instrument?
3. How do superintendents in low-performing schools perceive the strengths and limitations of the District Level DTSDE tenets in effecting school improvement efforts?

This chapter includes a section summarizing the findings of this study. The following section will present a discussion and analysis of findings leading to conclusions. The next section will present implications for policy and practice along with recommendations for future research. The final section of this chapter summarizes the chapter drawing upon the significance of the study to current and future practice.

This study contributes to existing research on the role of the superintendent in enacting federal and state policy regarding corrective action in a heightened era of national educational reform (Bredeson et al., 2008; Elmore et al., 1996; S. M. Johnson, 1996; Manna, 2011; Sunderman & Kim, 2004a). It further explored the perceptions of superintendents regarding state corrective actions imposed upon local school districts and schools as a result of federal and state policy. Although district leaders are relegated to a support role in the NYSED corrective action process, these superintendents are critical agents in mediating, legitimizing, and vivifying state recommendations at the local level.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1

To what extent do superintendents in Focus school districts perceive their role in the DTSDE process at the district level?

The interview questions guiding this research asked superintendents about their perceptions of their roles in the DTSDE process. A second question posed to superintendents asked what they perceived the state's expectations for their role in the process. The state's authority to impose corrective action is not questioned by any of the respondents in this study. However, the majority of superintendents perceive their role is to mediate the DTSDE process, create meaningful and relevant district plans that subsume DTSDE recommendations, and develop district plans that activate DTSDE recommendations within the district context. Superintendents in this study identified two roles that align with DTSDE rubric language regarding expectations for district leaders specifically, support for building leaders and instructional leadership. However, these support and instructional roles take on new meanings in practice that are a vast departure from the intent of the DTSDE rubric language.

Research Question 2

To what extent do superintendents of Focus school districts utilize District Level DTSDE recommendations for improving student success as defined by the DTSDE instrument?

Superintendents in this study utilize DTSDE recommendations to stimulate organizational change and effectively run their school districts. These superintendents aptly refashion the negative connotation of “Focus” status by challenging their staffs to see the DTSDE process as an objective look at current school operations by an outside agency. This study found that respondents engage in effective practices to address DTSDE recommendations through the allocation of resources, creating collective and nonnegotiable goals, and aligning board and superintendent functions. These effective practices align directly with Marzano and Waters’ (2009) research regarding district leadership and improving student achievement.

Research Question 3

To what extent do superintendents in Focus school districts perceive the strengths and limitations of the District Level DTSDE process in effecting school improvement efforts?

The majority of superintendents in this study indicated the strengths of the DTSDE process are the opportunity to intentionally reflect on school practices by using an instrument perceived by respondents as a statement of best practices. These superintendents also believed strengths in the DTSDE process lie in gaining additional resources to fuel school improvement efforts. Many superintendents felt the state imposed corrective action process has also become more user-friendly over time.

The limitations of the DTSDE process cited by the majority of superintendents in this study begins with perceptions of an ineffective onboarding and training experience. The review process following the onboarding and training experience includes superintendent perceptions

that state reviewers delivering recommendations for school improvement were either unqualified, lacked expertise with the instrument or with Focus school organizational complexities, or both. Many superintendents in this study lamented the lack of a resultant policy or procedure after reviews are completed. Apart from limitations regarding the different facets of the review process, these superintendents also felt the DTSDE rubric fails to acknowledge the community factors that affect students' ability to learn.

Discussion and Analysis of Findings

Research Question 1

To what extent do superintendents in Focus school districts perceive their role in the DTSDE process at the district level?

That superintendents assume the role of quality assurance manager is not solely a product of external demands or internal selection processes. Louis, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) noted that while state variances exist in how states respond to local education, the states' "legitimate authority in many areas of local practice is largely uncontested" (p. 248). Superintendents perceived their role on behalf of the district is one of quality assurance manager in recognition of state authority to impose corrective action policy.

In this study, the state sanctioned attendant policy includes periodic reporting and a resource guide for superintendents to review. Administrators are encouraged to use the DTSDE resource guide to design professional development opportunities to build staff capacity around systems lacking proficiency (New York State Education Department, 2012f). As superintendent of District 9I notes, "I think that SED wants superintendents to guarantee that this process is whole and that you're actually reflecting on the recommendations that come through and making the necessary changes reflected through the process."

As the attendant policy does not facilitate any further interactions between reviewers and administrators, the responsibility of acting upon recommendations falls upon the school district. It follows then that superintendents in this study incorporate DTSDE recommendations into district plans to recognize the legitimate authority of the state. The eventual operationalization of state recommendations, absent an attendant policy, allows superintendents to use the district context to interpret and vivify DTSDE recommendations within school district operations (Abelmann, Elmore, Even, Kenyon, & Marshall, 1999; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Johnson, 1996; Manna, 2011; Patterson & Czajkowski, 1976). The superintendent of District 6F clearly recognizes, “It (the DTSDE review) was on paper and the action plan I provided makes it a living document. What’s on paper must be alive.”

The interpretation and navigation of state policy expectations typically fall upon the superintendent of schools (Bjork et al., 2014; Zavadsky, 2012; Manna, 2011). In this study, superintendents interpreted and navigated state policy expectations by adapting DTSDE recommendations into district plans. Abelman et al. (1999) notion that school districts successfully navigate external policy demands requires amending in light of external demands such as corrective action that contain no meaningful attendant policy. School superintendents navigate external demands with no attendant policy through the roles that dominate their work within the context of the district in which they serve. From the preceding analysis, there are three conclusions that emerge as a result of this study.

Conclusion One - Superintendents perceived that their role in the DTSDE process is to recognize the legitimate authority of the state to impose corrective action but implement state recommendations for improvement through the district context.

Elmore (2004) contends that educational policy in the United States has little to do with education or at least the education that occurs among teachers and students (p. 212). Corrective policy as it is enacted by New York State through the DTSDE process boils down to a district or building review followed by periodic reporting to the state. Superintendents in this study perceive their role is to vivify state educational policy that has little to do with education in low-performing schools by incorporating DTSDE recommendations into a district plan these superintendents perceive will lead to student success. Furthermore, superintendents tailor external demands through district plans that epitomize the superintendent's perception of the district's capacity to enact meaningful student success.

Conclusion Two - Superintendents perceived that their role in the DTSDE process at the district level is to create coherence between external demands and internal responses to corrective action.

When incoherent policy messages emerge, educational organizations have an opportunity to craft a response to external demands that fits their needs (Augustine et al. 2009). This study bolsters the research indicating leadership exercised by school superintendents is a major influence on the responsiveness of school districts to greater demands for accountability (Björk et al., 2014; Johnson & Crispeels, 2010; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters & Marzano, 2006). The perceptions of the majority of superintendents in this study indicate the superintendent has the role of crafting the response to corrective action processes through a comprehensive district school improvement plan designed to meet the superintendent's perceptions of district needs and issues. The district plan addresses external demands and informs internal practices leading to student success.

Because successful schools typically demonstrate better systems and alignment when the systems are directed by the district leadership rather than from the school, it follows that superintendents acting as systems leaders, are in a better position to activate recommendations as part of a coherent systems approach activated through a district plan (Aladjem et al., 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Zavadsky, 2012). Researchers posited that some large urban school systems have experienced student success with decentralized approaches however, these researchers continue to grapple with measuring student achievement in relation to school district organizational structures (Johnson, Marietta, Higgins, Mapp, & Grossman, 2015). In this study, superintendents exercised full authority over the schools in their district through a centralized approach to organizational management. Whether centralized or decentralized organizational structures produce sustained student improvement is left for future study.

Conclusion Three: The DTSDE rubric language pertaining to supporting building principals and instructional leadership take on different meanings in the practices employed by superintendents in Focus districts.

Recognizing that building principals experience the brunt of the DTSDE review process, superintendents in this study perceived their support for building principals includes providing context to DTSDE recommendations within ongoing district plans. A vital role principals play in improving instruction is the transmittal of the district vision into the school building (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). District leaders in this study see their role as partnering with building principals to enact systems and processes to address DTSDE recommendations and sustain current district improvement plans by supporting efforts occurring at the building level. While the state continues to press building principals as key actors of reform, superintendents in this study perceive their role is to manage and lead the reform effort through district planning that

envelopes building deficiencies identified through the DTSDE process. Summarily, the district plan organized by the superintendents in this study subsume the DTSDE and any building level plans for addressing corrective action forwarded by the state.

In reciprocal fashion in which district leaders legitimize the DTSDE process, superintendents legitimized their own instructional leadership tendencies by tying district goals and objectives to the state purported “optimal” practices found in the DTSDE instrument. Much like Petersen (1999) reported, given the managerial and political environments in which superintendents act, these superintendents may have been reluctant to share any responses suggesting they are not focused on student achievement. Superintendents subsuming the recommendations into the district plan use the DTSDE rubric language to validate the superintendent’s attention to instructional leadership and student success.

Research Question 2

To what extent do superintendents of Focus school districts utilize District Level DTSDE recommendations for improving student success as defined by the DTSDE instrument?

Bridges (2009) and Kotter (1995) indicate a catharsis event can be the focal point for changing how people respond in an organization. Similarly, using the Focus identification and the subsequent review as catharsis events, superintendents in this study derived new perspectives to confront organizational assumptions about student performance, created or modified systems to accurately measure student success, or accelerated systemic progress. Superintendents working within a context-responsive environment (Johnson, 1996; Bredeson et al., 2008) use the DTSDE process to alter the district context in low-performing districts. The superintendent of District 3C noted, “I look at it (DTSDE recommendations) as an objective vehicle that can move things forward and you as a leader can use that to your advantage.”

Stimulating organizational change is an integral part of assimilating unknown external demands into internal cultures where members have maintained assumptions of how schools operate (Bridges, 2009; Kotter, 1999). Once organizational assumptions are open to change, Marzano and Waters (2009) indicated that board alignment, collaborative goal setting, nonnegotiable goals, and targeted resource allocation are elements of effective district leadership. Research question two focused on these elements to ascertain whether superintendents were engaged in practices that researchers deemed effective as part of the response to state imposed corrective action processes.

Like the federal reauthorization entitled the No Child Left Behind Act, the NYSED DTSDE process overlooks the work of the board of education in low-performing schools (Lee & Eadens, 2012). Superintendents believe the second most important issue behind financing schools, is their relationship with the school board (Björk et al., 2014). Superintendents in this study perceived DTSDE recommendations are better received by school and district staff when legitimized by the board of education as part of the district and school improvement process. As the superintendent of District 3C noted,

We created five goals and the next thing I did was have the board adopt the goals. So now you have board adopted district goals. These goals are not my goals. They're not school goals. They are district goals. These goals are centered around what we were cited for on the DTSDE and they drive every single thing we do.

Along with board alignment as a means to improving student achievement, Marzano and Waters (2009) recognized, "Resources are the lifeblood of any reform effort" (p. 77). Allocating resources to support goals for achievement and instruction is most effectively maintained when resources are targeted at specific actions (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005; Sebring, Bryk, &

Easton, 2006). Superintendents must be managers but must also be willing to wage political battles to obtain scarce resources in support of instructional programming (Johnson, 1996). Superintendents who respond to the basic needs of teachers and principals signal “respect for teachers’ work, empowers teachers and principals to define their own needs, and establishes an atmosphere of concern and a foundation for change” (Johnson, 1996, p. 131). Resource allocation then, is a means by which superintendents can effect change by determining which priorities will receive the attention of the collective including those resources dedicated to addressing DTSDE recommendations.

Every person in an organization acts explicitly or implicitly to interpret policy (Carver, 1997). Collaborative goal setting limits the extent to which organizational actors interpret policy and encourage or diffuse district momentum for school improvement. Marzano and Waters (2009) recognize that school principals who typically act as “autonomous agents” must have their actions framed around specific goals and directions for the school district (p. 102).

Ensuring building leaders embrace and operationalize nonnegotiable goals is central to superintendent efficacy for addressing student improvement. The principal as the determinant factor in leading school improvement has been recognized by research (DuFour & Marzano, 2009; Elmore, 2003; Fullan, 2002; Marzano et al., 2005; Mitgang, Gill, & Cummins, 2013). These researchers found that student success improved when superintendent and principal communication is tightly knitted around district and school goals that connect district office to the work of the school and improvement occurring in the classroom.

Central office personnel, if properly deployed, can play unique roles in facilitating the administrative control functions of the organization (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Johnson et al., 2015). For some superintendents, the use of central office

personnel as DTSDE tenet leaders or as case managers to identified schools was a solution to managing the DTSDE process and maintaining district level control of the state corrective action process. In this study, six of the seven schools with cabinet members ensure the district plan is followed after reviews are completed. Those superintendents in this study who lacked cabinet members to monitor and evaluate the district plan and DTSDE process took a lead role in ensuring district plans are enacted at the building level.

Conclusion One - Superintendents utilize the DTSDE recommendations to stimulate change processes within the organization.

Organizational change can occur when a catharsis event occurs that unfreezes organizational perceptions around performance (Bridges, 2009; Kotter, 1999; Lewin, 1947b). Superintendents in their roles as managers and politicians, use the DTSDE process to engender changes in organizational priorities. The DTSDE process provided several superintendents with an opportunity to escalate, expedite, and execute initiatives leading to student achievement.

Conclusion Two - Superintendents, as systems leaders, utilize DTSDE recommendations to effect positive educational outcomes.

Marzano and Waters (2009) contend that effective district leadership can occur when all facets of the organization are focused on teaching and learning goals. The authors recognized that collaborative goal setting, board alignment, establishing nonnegotiable goals, and the allocation of resources to support achievement and instruction are effective practices district leadership can enact to improve student achievement. Superintendents in this study are keenly aware of the managerial and political approaches necessary to focus multiple stakeholder groups around academic improvement. Although the DTSDE process does not address the board of education through any tenet, superintendents ensure board of education members are aware of

the process, how resource allocations are used to meet recommendations, and how the district is progressing on addressing DTSDE recommendations. Superintendents in this study engage all stakeholder groups through intentional collaborative and nonnegotiable goal setting approaches leading to student success.

Research Question 3

To what extent do superintendents in Focus school districts perceive the strengths and limitations of the District Level DTSDE process in effecting school improvement efforts?

Strengths of the District Level DTSDE tenets

Marzano and Waters (2009) indicate the role of the district leader is to foster teacher and principal investigation of best practices. Implementation of best practices requires district leadership to understand and estimate district and school capacity for executing best practices with fidelity. Intentionality occurs when district leaders purposefully address organizational assumptions around district performance. Superintendents in this study perceived the DTSDE process led to conversations about increasing student performance, addressing assumptions about how the district operates, or, as in research question two, develop specific non-negotiable goals and objectives leading to coherent systems aimed at improving student achievement.

The majority of superintendents in this study indicated the DTSDE is an obvious declaration of best practices superintendents should already have in place to effect student success. The majority of participating superintendents used this perception of universal best practices tied to the DTSDE to legitimize the adaptation of the DTSDE instrument language to district language or plans for student improvement. Although these superintendents believe the DTSDE instrument is a statement of good practices, the individual tenets of the DTSDE instrument are supported by primary research emanating from the work of a narrow band of

researchers utilized (New York State Education Department, 2012d). Additionally, the DTSDE instrument and process is dubbed “optimal” by the state, however, the Reviewer’s Handbook only offers a crosswalk to well established standards of practice as a point of validation (New York State Education Department, 2012c). The DTSDE leaves the research component of the DTSDE process to the Resource Guide for superintendents to reference after recommendations are forwarded by state reviewers.

The acquisition of resources to support school district improvement plans can be difficult to acquire in uncertain economic times (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005; Lasky, 2004). Superintendents in this study perceived the funding provided through the Focus identification process assists with the promotion of district initiatives and responses to adapted DTSDE recommendations. By strategically tying DTSDE recommendations to school district plans, these superintendents simultaneously used state funds to support DTSDE recommendations and district initiatives. As mentioned before, superintendents in their roles as managers access the political role, in this case policy compliance, to gain resources to improve the organization (Johnson, 2003).

The fourth finding addressing superintendent perceptions of the strengths of the DTSDE tenets is that the DTSDE process has become more user-friendly over the time it has been in place. Six of the 11 district leaders responding to the study indicate the state education agency changed the DTSDE process by limiting recommendations to one or two recommendations that do not incur additional resources to implement. During training sessions, districts now work to network with other districts to discover new approaches to district issues.

Conclusion One – Superintendents perceive that the strength of the District Level DTSDE tenets relies upon superintendent agency in reflecting upon and activating district responses to state review recommendations.

Superintendents in low performing schools in this study valued the DTSDE process as a necessary conversation around school improvement. Superintendents felt the reflection on DTSDE recommendations was an important part of establishing priorities and examining assumptions around school improvement efforts. Similarly, when school improvement priorities are identified, having sufficient funding to realize expected outcomes is an indirect asset emerging from the state review process noted by superintendents in this study.

Limitations of the District Level DTSDE tenets

Superintendents focus on events occurring at the national and state level to ascertain effects of external policy on the local school district (Björk et al., 2014; Elmore et al., 1996; Manna, 2011). When the initial message sent by SED on the DTSDE process is replete with inconsistencies as the findings of this study indicate, the validity of the entire process is at question. The DTSDE initiative follows a number of federal and state initiatives whose implementation was not without controversy. At the time of the DTSDE process initiation in 2012, the state of New York was confronting the implementation of the Common Core Standards, a requisite to receiving funding through the Obama Administration's Race to the Top initiative. This occurred on the heels of the Obama Administration's ESEA Flexibility waivers which were in response to the overwhelming expectations of the federal reauthorization of the ESEA, the No Child Left Behind Act (Cross, 2004a; McMurrer & Yoshioka, 2013). Whether the poorly designed and delivered onboarding and training sessions utilized by the state DTSDE policy events tainted superintendent perceptions of the validity of the DTSDE process was not

explored in this study. However, in a historical context, the DTSDE process would have benefitted from effective introductory practices as a signal of competency leading to validation by superintendents as a meaningful process to diagnose school improvement efforts.

Augustine et al., (2009) indicated “coherent education policies should send the same message, avoid contradictions, and build upon one another in some way to form a larger whole” (p. 73). Superintendents perceived that state reviewers conducting the review process, whether from other countries or from NYSED, lacked an understanding of the complexities of school district organizations in New York State. Specifically, reviewers lacked an understanding of the district context for which recommendations were created, underestimated the capacity of districts to address recommendations, lacked expertise with the DTSDE rubric, or lacked the expertise to accurately diagnose student achievement issues. Given superintendent perceptions offered in this study, after an ineffective onboarding and training experience, a superintendent in this study could have encountered a less than effective reviewer leading the DTSDE process.

If superintendents are context-responsive, then the successful superintendent who manages and leads a school district is also context-sensitive (Johnson, 1996; Bredeson et al., 2008). Superintendents perceived that state reviewers ignored the district context, that is, reviewers nullified other factors such as community capacity or the capacity of school systems to address specific needs or issues. Given the structure of the DTSDE instrument and the role of the superintendent in the process as defined by the state, it would appear the state has removed the discussion around district context by placing the superintendent in a support role, limiting superintendent voice in the recommendation process, and using the corrective action process to focus solely on the work of principals to enact reform.

From the interviews conducted of 11 district leaders, it was discovered that these superintendents operate as strategic leaders responsible for tracking state imposed corrective action, determining the district and school plan for corrective actions, and shaping the grand design of how the district and district schools will respond to corrective action. Within the construct of strategic leadership is the assumption of the different roles that superintendents play as they respond to the context of the district and the challenges of being identified and confronting a state imposed corrective action process.

Superintendents in this study utilized the DTSDE process to engender change within the organization, legitimize district planning that includes DTSDE recommendations, use funding to stimulate progress with student success, and keep the board of education apprised of district planning around corrective action identification. Utilization of DTSDE recommendations provided superintendents with an opportunity to exercise their roles as politicians with board members and principals, manage resources, and create intentional non-negotiables around instruction leading to student success (Carver, 1997; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

The haphazard onboarding or initial training experiences, the use of unqualified reviewers or reviewers unfamiliar with the educational system, and the lack of a follow-up policy in New York State does not go unnoticed by superintendents. Superintendents aptly perceived there is a serious lack of capacity within the state educational agency to assist low-performing schools given the inadequate resources dedicated to the corrective action process. As the superintendent of District 11K indicated, “These people (reviewers) are walking into complex organizations and their implementing an organizational development intervention with no real knowledge of organizational development. That's a problem.”

Conclusion Two – The DTSDE recommendations and processes forwarded by state reviewers do not align with the three leadership roles - manager, politician, and instructional - that dominate the work of superintendents.

The superintendent of District 11K acknowledged in an interview that state reviewers perceive themselves as “surrogate principals and superintendents.” Superintendents in this study recognized that state reviewers lacked managerial expertise to understand how recommendations play out, lacked political expertise when reviewers nullified the district context superintendents in low-performing schools experienced, and/or lacked the expertise with the DTSDE rubric or with the New York State educational system to offer instructionally sound recommendations.

Conclusion Three – The DTSDE rubric, and not state reviewer recommendations, are the primary source of information superintendents use to craft responses to state recommendations.

If state reviewers by virtue of their inability to present a cogent message around school improvement are perceived as questionable by superintendents, then the information contained in the DTSDE instrument, and not reviewer recommendations, promotes the information superintendents use to create intentionality around school improvement initiatives. Lacking the opportunity to interact with the reviewers who presented recommendations after the review is completed, superintendents may look to the DTSDE tenets for guidance and clarification on how to achieve higher ratings in future reviews.

Conclusion Four – Superintendents perceive their role is to subsume the DTSDE process as a result of a poorly communicated and implemented state corrective action process.

In conclusions one and two of research question one, superintendents in this study perceive their roles as creating coherence between state and school district policy and practice.

In conclusions two and three of research question three, superintendents perceive several deficiencies with state policy practice including unqualified reviewers. The majority of superintendents in this study, after receiving recommendations from state reviewers they perceived were ill-qualified, use the district plan to capture the recommendations from the DTSDE rubric, as well as, the overall operations of the school district the DTSDE process does not address.

Conclusion Five – Superintendents in low-performing school districts in this study ensure district systems are tightly aligned from the district level.

A review of the conclusions across all three research questions indicates superintendents in this study perceive their role as creating coherence between state policy and district practices (research question one) through stimulating change and the creative use of resources (research question two) to enforce and legitimize a state corrective action policy that they perceive lacks credibility (research question three). Additionally, superintendents of Focus districts in this study ensured principals undergoing state review are focused on district goals, central office personnel is extending the district vision to all school buildings, and collaborative and nonnegotiable goals are being established around district operations. The perceptions of superintendents in this study strongly suggest that in low-performing school districts, superintendents will ensure district and school operations are tightly aligned and centrally managed.

Recommendations for Policy

Recommendation One – If the state chooses to engage in diagnosis and prescription, state reviewers should minimally demonstrate proficiency with the DTSDE rubric tenets, have a working knowledge of Focus district operations under the purview of the assigned state reviewer, and have a degree of expertise with Focus district issues such as high need student populations.

Recommendation Two – If the state continues to use the DTSDE process, it should consider amplifying the role of the superintendent in effecting reform efforts. Implicit in the DTSDE process is an instrument detailing a state imposed decentralized approach to school reform by accentuating the role of the building principal as the reform leader. The superintendents in this study played a critical role in Focus districts linking external demands to internal systems including boards of education through a centralized approach. The DTSDE instrument would benefit from positing an instrument that models mutual interactions that capitalize on the roles most effectively delivered by central office or school administrators.

Recommendation Three – Along with training in the DTSDE instrument and process, the state should adopt a definitive consultancy model. Consultants who maintain an effective liaison with school districts as clients helps the consultant with effectively accessing parts of the system where data is collected and establishes credibility so that the data obtained will be ultimately valid (Alderfer, 1980). The liaison system adds the behavioral dynamics of the client system to the data being collected (Alderfer, 1980). Consultants through a working partnership with schools may produce data warehouses to match districts with similar data and behavioral dynamics to increase the level of practical expertise in solving issues Focus districts confront.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendation One – NYSED representatives should consider visiting school districts (urban, suburban and rural) that use the DTSDE process to improve student achievement as a practical model to learn how to present and support the DTSDE process. One identified district in this study used the DTSDE process as a means to regularly review individual school progress. The state should consider investigating the use of the DTSDE by identified and non-identified school districts to learn more about the consultant model the state implements or to experiment with models that allow for district-led processes that mirror the DTSDE outcomes state policy makers are seeking.

Recommendation Two – NYSED should consider hiring former Focus district superintendents and principals to conduct trainings and reviews with NYSED reviewers and school districts. With the number of retiring building and district administrators across the country, the state should investigate the use of reviewers with practical experiences in running low-performing districts to train new reviewers who lack building experience as principals or superintendents. Understanding how school districts operate is a critical component to developing shared meanings over effective practices superintendents in Focus districts and reviewers can evaluate before, during, and after state reviews. Additionally, former superintendents can facilitate training and communication between networks of school districts with similar issues to fashion relevant responses to areas of concern identified through the DTSDE process.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendation One – Future research should include an examination of whether Cuban's (1988) three leadership roles – manager, politician, and instructional – that dominate superintendent work are acknowledged by state reviewers. Although Cuban's (1988) research is

typically used to discuss superintendent roles, Cuban (1988) also claimed through this research that teachers work within the same dominate roles.

Recommendation Two – The majority of the superintendents in this study operated from a centralized organizational structure. Research used to inform the DTSDE process indicates a decentralized approach is necessary to enact meaningful reform. Future research should hone in on what practices and organizational structures best fit Focus school districts in a larger sample size.

Recommendation Three – Superintendent perceptions of state policy initiated during an era of controversial federal and state policy implementation may provide insight into whether superintendents validate new state policy via a historical, organizational, and community context.

Summary

The phenomenological qualitative study of the perceptions of 11 district leaders in Focus districts regarding the New York State DTSDE process yielded several perspectives around the importance of the superintendent in the intergovernmental chain of federal to state to local district educational reform efforts. These district leaders volunteered their perceptions regarding a corrective action procedure that ignores, or lacks expertise around, the three leadership roles – managerial, political, and instructional – that dominate the work of the superintendent. These superintendents recognize that the corrective action process also negates the historical, community, and organizational context of Focus districts in which these superintendents operate. Federal and state policy structures will only be effective when policy makers understand the practice policy makers are attempting to engender (Elmore, 2004).

The most significant finding to the researcher in this study emanates from the state's relegation of the office of the superintendent to a support role and, as the superintendent of

District 4D notes “hand over the reins of the district to the building principal”. The superintendents in this study kept tight control over the Focus districts they served recognizing resources such as funding for programs, community support, and finding qualified applicants were in short demand. Despite the complexity and unpredictability of the educational environments in which they served, these superintendents complied with state sanctioned reviews although these reviews were froth with confusion from the onset, manned by poorly qualified personnel, and lacked any meaningful partnerships with the state education department after the review was completed.

References

- Abelmann, C., Elmore, R. F., Even, J., Kenyon, S., & Marshall, J. (1999). *When Accountability Knocks, Will Anyone Answer?* Consortium for Policy Research in Education Report RR42.
- Aladjem, D. K., Birman, B. F., Orland, M., Harr-Robins, J., Heredia, A., Parrish, T. B., & Ruffini, S. J. (2010). *Achieving Dramatic School Improvement: An Exploratory Study. United States Department of Education*, 197.
- Alderfer, C. P. (1980). The Methodology of Organizational Diagnosis. *Professional Psychology*, 11(3).
- Anderson, S. E. (2006). The School District Role in Educational Change. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 15(1), 13–37.
- Asciutto, G. M. (2012). *Conference of Big 5 School Districts: Testimony Before The New NY Education Reform Commission. September 10, 2012.*
- Augustine, C. H., Gonzalez, G., Schuyler, G., Jennifer, I., Zellman, G. L., Constant, L., ... Dembosky, J. W. (2009). *Improving school leadership: The promise of cohesive leadership systems*. Santa Monica, CA.: Rand Corporation.
- Betebenner, D. W., & Linn, R. L. (2009). Growth in Student Achievement : Issues of Measurement , Longitudinal Data Analysis , and Accountability. *Exploratory Seminar: Measurement Challenges Within the Race to the Top Agenda*, (December 2009), 1–23.
Retrieved from <http://www.k12center.org/publications>
- Bjork, L.G. (2005). Superintendent-board relations: An historical overview of the dynamics of change and sources of conflict and collaboration. In G.J. Petersen & L.D. Fusarelli (Eds.), *The district superintendent and school board relations: Trends in policy*

- development and implementation* (pp. 1-22). Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Publishing.
- Björk, L. G., Kowalski, T. J., & Browne-Ferrigno, T. (2014). The school district superintendent in the United States of America. *Educational Leadership Faculty Publications, Paper 13*.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2013). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership*. (5th ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Bottoms, G., & Schmidt-Davis, J. (2010). *The three essentials: Improving schools requires district vision, district and state support, and principal leadership*. Southern Regional Education Board.
- Bredeson, P., Klar, H., & Johansson, O. (2008). *Context - Responsive Leadership : How Superintendents Understand, Take Action and Shape the Context of Their Work*. . UCEA Conference Proceedings for Convention 2008. Orlando, FL.
- Bridges, W. (2009). *Managing transitions: Making the most of change* (3rd ed.). Philadelphia: Da Capo Press.
- Carver, J. (1997). *Boards that make a difference* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Chingos, M. M., Whitehurst, G. J., & Lindquist, K. M. (2014). *School superintendents: vital or irrelevant?* Washinton D.C.: The Brookings Institute.
- Chubb, J., & Clark, C. (2013). The New State Achievement Gap: How Federal Waivers Could Make It Worse—Or Better. *Education Sector*, 22. Retrieved from www.educationsector.org
- Cibulka, J. (1996). *The reform and survival of American public school: An institutional perspective*. Washington D.C.: The Falmer Press.

- Cohen, D. K., & Moffitt, S. L. (2009). *The Ordeal of Equality: Did Federal Regulation Fix the Schools?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Cohn, C. A. (2005). NCLB Implementation Challenges: The Local Superintendent's View. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 80(802), 156–169. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3497065>
- Common Core State Standards (CCSS)* (2010). Retrieved from National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers website: <http://www.corestandards.org/>
- Creswell, J. (2012). *Educational Research; Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Cross, C. T. (2004b). *Political Education: National Policy Comes of Age*. New York City: Teachers College Press.
- Cuban, L. (1988). *The Managerial Imperative and the Practice of Leadership in Schools*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Denton, N., Friedman, S., & D'Anna, N. (2010). How the Other Third Lives: A Focus on Upstate New York. Retrieved from <http://mumford.albany.edu/mumford/UpstateProject/geography.html>
- Doherty, K. M., & Jacobs, S. (2015). State of the States Evaluating Teaching, Leading and Learning, (November), 106. Retrieved from <http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/StateofStates2015>

- DuFour, R., & Marzano, R. J. (2009). Strategies for Principal Leadership. *Educational Leadership*, 66(5), 62–68.
- Durand, F. T., Lawson, H. A., Wilcox, K. C., & Schiller, K. (2016). The role of district office leadership in the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards in elementary schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 51(1), 45–74.
- Elmore, R. F. (2003). Knowing the right thing to do: school improvement and performance-based accountability, 1–20.
- Elmore, R. F. (2004). *School Reform from the Inside Out: Policy, Practice and Performance*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.
- Elmore, R., Abelman, C., & Fuhrman, S. H. (1996). The New Accountability in State Education Reform: From Process to Performance. In *Holding Schools Accountable: Performance-Based Reform in Education* (pp. 65–98).
- Elmore, R. (2002). *Bridging the Gap Between Standards and Achievement in Education: The Imperative for Professional Development in Education*. Albert Shanker Institute.
- Elmore, R., & Burney, D. (1996). *Investing in Teacher Learning: Staff Development and Instructional Improvement in Community District #2*. New York City, NY: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future and Consortium for Policy Research in Education.
- Elmore, R. F., & Fuhrman, S. H. (2001). Research Finds the False Assumption of Accountability. *The Education Digest*, 9–14.
- Fuhrman, S. H., & Elmore, R. F. (1995). Ruling Out Rules: The Evolution of Deregulation in State Education Policy. *Consortium for Policy Research in Education*.

- Fuhrman, S. H., Elmore, R. F., Hightower, A. M., Knapp, M. S., Marsh, J. A., McLaughlin, M. W., ... Murphy, J. (2004). *Redesigning Accountability Systems for Education*. (S. H. Fuhrman & R. F. E. Elmore, Eds.). New York City, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2015). *The Principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Impact*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Galluci, C., Boatright, B., Lysne, D., & Swinnerton, J. (2006). District reform as teaching and learning: How the system “Learns” to improve instruction. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California, April 2006. University of Washington.
- Glass, T. E., Björk, L. G., & Brunner, C. (2000). *The study of the american school superintendent, 2000: a look at the superintendent of education in the new millenium*. American Association of School Administrators, 190.
- Goertz, M. E. (2000). The Federal Role in an Era of Standards-Based Reform. In Center on Education Policy, *The Future of the Federal Role in Elementary & Secondary Education*. (pp. 51-60). Washington D.C.
- Goertz, M. E. (2001). The Federal Role in Defining “Adequate Yearly Progress:” The Flexibility/Accountability Trade-off. Washington D.C.: Consortium for Policy Research in Education.
- Goertz, M. E., Duffy, M. C., Carlson, K., & Floch, L. (2001). Assessment and Accountability Systems in the 50 States: 1999-2000. CPRE Research Report Series RR-046. Washington D.C.: Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

- Gordon, T. (2012). *State and Local Budgets and the Great Recession*. Washington, D.C. The Brookings Institute.
- Hannaway, J., & Hamilton, L. (2008). Performance-based Accountability Policies : Implications for School and Classroom Practices. *Washington Urban Institute and RAND Corporation*, 1–41. <http://doi.org/10.1037/e722482011-001>
- Hanushek, E. A., & Raymond, M. E. (2005). Does school accountability lead to improved student performance? *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 24(2), 297–327.
- Herman, R., Dawson, P., Dee, T., Greene, J., Maynard, R., Redding, S., & Darwin, M. (2008). Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools, 1–49. <http://doi.org/Article>
- Honig, M., & Hatch, T. C. (2004). Crafting Coherence: How Schools Strategically Manage Multiple, External Demands. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 16–30. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ727592>
- Honig, M. I. (2012). District central office leadership as teaching: How central office administrators support principals' development as instructional leaders. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(4), 733–774.
- Hoyle, J. R., Björk, L. G., Collier, V., & Glass, T. E. (2005). *The superintendent as CEO: Standards-based performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications.
- H.R. 5-105th Congress of the United States of America: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/idea/idea.pdf>.
- H.R. 6-103rd Congress: Improving America's Schools Act of 1994. Retrieved from <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/103/hr6>
- H.R.1804 - 103rd Congress: Goals 2000: The Educate America Act of 1993.

- Jennings, J. F. (1998). *Why National Standards and Tests?* Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications.
- Johnson, P. E., & Chrispeels, J. H. (2010). Linking the central office and its schools for reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 4(5), 738–775.
- Johnson, S. M. (1996). *Leading to Change: The Challenge of the New Superintendency*. Jossey-Bass Education Series. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Johnson, S. M., Marietta, G., Higgins, M., Mapp, K., & Grossman, A. (2015). *Achieving coherence in district improvement: Managing the relationship between the central office and schools*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.
- Kaestle, C. (2000). Federal Aid to Education Since World War II: Purposes and Politics. In Center on Education Policy, *The Future of the Federal Role in Elementary & Secondary Education*. (pp. 13-36). Washington D.C.
- Keane, W. G., & Moore, D. (2001). *The disappearing superintendent applicant: the invitation to apply goes unanswered*. In C. Brunner & L. G. Bjork (Eds.), *The New Superintendency: Advances in Research and Theories of School Management and Educational Policy*. (pp. 3-19). Bingley, UK.: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Knapp, M. S., & Feldman, S. B. (2012). Managing the intersection of internal and external accountability. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 50(5), 666–694.
<http://doi.org/10.1108/09578231211249862>
- Kolodziej, T. (2011). The Benefits and Detriments of the No Child Left behind Act. *ESSAI: Vol. 9, Article 21*. Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/essai/vol9/iss1/21>
- Kotter, J. P. (1999). John P. Kotter on What Leaders Really Do. *Harvard Business School Press Books*,

- Kowalski, T.J., McCord, R.S., Peterson, G.J., Young, I.P. & Ellerson, N.M. (2011). *The american school superintendent 2010 decennial study*. Roman and Littlefield Education.
- Kutash, J., Nico, E., Gorin, E., Rahmatullah, S., & Tallant, K. (2010). *The Turnaround School Field Guide*. New York City, NY.: The Wallace Foundation.
- Lasky, S. G. (2004). *Toward a Policy Framework for Analyzing Educational System Effects* (Report No. 71). Johns Hopkins University.
- Lecker, W. (2004). *The Promise and Challenges of the "No Child Left Behind Act"*. Campaign for Fiscal Equity.
- Lee, D. E., & Eadens, D. W. (2012). The Problem: Low-Achieving Districts and Low-Performing Boards. *International Journal of Policy & Leadership*, 9(3), 209–224.
Retrieved from www.ijepl.org
- Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S. E., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). Review Of Research: *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.
- Lewin, K. (1947b). Frontiers in Group Dynamics: Concept, Method and Reality in Social Science; Social Equilibria and Social Change. *Human Relations*, 1(1), 5–41.
- Louis, K. S., Febey, K., & Schroeder, R. (2005). State-Mandated Accountability in High Schools: Teachers' Interpretations of a New Era. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 27(2), 177–204.
- Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning*. New York City, NY.: The Wallace Foundation.
- Loveless, T. (2006). *The Peculiar Politics of No Child Left Behind*. Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institute.

- Mann, E. (2015). *The Long-Term Impact Of NCLB Waivers On Esea Renewal*. Washington D.C. Brookings Institution. Retrieved November 11, 2016, from
- Manna, P. (2006). *School's In: Federalism and the national education agenda*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2tt5bq>
- Manna, P. (2011). *Collision Course: Federal Education Policy Meets State and Local Realities*. Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Manna, P., & McGuinn, P. (2013). *Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century: Overcoming the Structural Barriers to School Reform*. Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institute.
- Marzano, R. J., & Waters, T. (2009). *District Leadership That Works; Striking the Right Balance*. Bloomington, IN.: Solution Tree Press.
- Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School Leadership that Works*. Alexandria, VA.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Massell, D. (2000). The District Role in Building Capacity: Four Strategies. *The Consortium for Policy Research in Education*, (1), 1–4.
- Massell, D., & Goertz, M. E. (2002). District strategies for building instructional capacity. In A. M. Hightower, M. S. Knapp, J. A. Marsh, & M. W. McLaughlin (Eds.). New York City: Teachers College Press.
- McGuinn, P. (2016). From No Child Left behind to the Every Student Succeeds Act: Federalism and the Education Legacy of the Obama Administration. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 46(3), 392–415.

- McGuinn, P. (2012). Stimulating Reform: Race to the Top, Competitive Grants and the Obama Education Agenda. *Educational Policy*, 26(1), 136–159.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/0895904811425911>
- McMurrer, J., & Yoshioka, N. (2013). States' Perspectives on Waivers : Relief from NCLB , Concern about Long-term Solutions, (March), 1–28.
- Mitgang, L., Gill, J., & Cummins, H. J. (2013). Districts matter: Cultivating the principals urban schools need, (February), 1–40. Retrieved from papers3://publication/uuid/DBEAE1AC-5DBB-42B7-ABF6-E7F4998C7C2C
- New York State Archives: Office of Education, N. Y. S. E. D. (2009). Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009. *States' Impact on Federal Education Policy Project (SIFEPP)*, (November), 84.
- New York State Education Department. (2011). NYSED:NCLB and New York State Accountability. Retrieved May 13, 2017, from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/accountability/>
- New York State Education Department. (2012a). *Comprehensive District Rubric For DTSDE*. Retrieved October 18, 2016, from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/diagnostic-tool-institute/home.html>
- New York State Education Department. (2012b). *Diagnostic tool for school and district effectiveness: Reviewer's handbook*. The New York State Education Department.
- New York State Education Department. (2012c). *Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness Institute*. Retrieved October 18, 2016, from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/diagnostic-tool-institute/home.html>

New York State Education Department. (2012). *DTSDE District Self-Assessment*. Retrieved October 18, 2016, from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/diagnostic-tool-institute/home.html>

New York State Education Department. (2012). *DTSDE Resource Guide*. Retrieved October 18, 2016, from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/diagnostic-tool-institute/home.html>

New York State Education Department. (2015). Commissioner's Regulations: Part 100:EMSC:NYSED. Retrieved April 15, 2017, from http://www.p12.nysed.gov/part100/pages/100_18.html

New York State Education Department. (2016a). *Need / Resource Capacity Categories*. Retrieved May 6, 2017, from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/accountability/2011-12/NeedResourceCapacityIndex.pdf>

New York State Education Department. (2016b). *Newly Identified Focus Districts, 2016–2017*. Retrieved from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/ESEAMaterials.html>

Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2002). *Department of Education 34 CFR Part 200 Title I: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged; Final Rule Title I: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged. Federal Register*, 67(231202), 20202–6132.

Office of the Press Secretary (2009). Remarks by the President at the Department of Education. Retrieved November 22, 2016, from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-department-education>

Paige, R. (2002). February 15, 2002 -- Letter to Chief State School Officers highlighting key provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and listing early deadline dates for implementation.

- Patterson, J. L., & Czajkowski, T. J. (1976). Implementation: Neglected Phase in Curriculum Change. *Review of Educational Research A Merican Educational Research Journal*, 47(14), 335–97263.
- Peterson, G.J. (1999). Demonstrated actions of instructional leaders: An examination of five California superintendents. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 7(18), ISSN 1068-2341.
- Pulliam, J. D. (1987). *History of Education in America* (4th ed.). Columbus: Merrill Publishing Company.
- Pulliam, J. D., & Van Patten, J. J. (1999). *History of Education in America* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
- Raphael, J., & McKay, S. (2001). *Analysis of the Education Flexibility Partnership Demonstration Program State Reports Final Report*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.
- Ravitch, D. (2010). *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*. Education. New York City. Basic Books.
- Rhodes, J. H. (2012). *An Education in Politics: The orgin and evolution of No Child Left Behind*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Rich, R. (2013). The Great Recession of 2007–09 - A detailed essay on an important event in the history of the Federal Reserve. Retrieved November 20, 2016, from <http://www.federalreservehistory.org/Events/DetailView/58>
- Riley, B. (2012). Waive to the Top: The Dangers of Legislating Education Policy from the Executive Branch. *American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research* (1), 1–6.

- Riley, R. W. (1995). The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Retrieved November 5, 2016, from <https://www2.ed.gov/offices/OESE/archives/legislation/ESEA/brochure/iasa-bro.html>
- Rosenburg, L., Christianson, M. D., Angus, M. H., & Rosenthal, E. (2014). *A focused look at rural schools receiving school improvement grants*. National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.
- Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and schools: Using social, economic, and educational reform to close the black-white achievement gap*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.
- Rudalevige, A. (2003). The politics of No Child Left Behind. *Education Next*, 9, 48–56.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/0022487106297844>
- Rudalevige, A. (2005). Adequacy, Accountability, And The Impact Of No Child Left Behind. Paper prepared for presentation at the Adequacy Lawsuits: Their Growing Impact on American Education conference at Harvard University, October 2005. Dickinson College.
- Sanders, M. G. (2012). Sustaining Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships A Qualitative Longitudinal Study of Two Districts. *Educational Policy*, 26(6), 845–869.
- Schein, E. H. (2010). *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Schlechty, P. (1990). *Schools for the 21st Century: Leadership imperative for educational reform*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Schwartz, R. B., & Robinson, M. A. (2000). Goals 2000 and the Standards Movement. *Brookings Papers on Education Policy*, 2000(1), 173–206.

- Sebring, P., Allenswork, E. Bryk, A., Luppescu, S. & Easton, J. (2006). The Essential Supports for School Improvement. *Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago*.
- Siskin, L., Luschel, T. & Lemons, R. (2003). Leadership and the Demands of Standards-Based Accountability. In Carnoy, M., Elmore, R., Siskin, L. (Eds.) *The New Accountability: High Schools and High-Stakes Testing* (pp. 97-124). New York City. Taylor and Francis Books, Inc.
- Smarick, A., & Squire, J. (2014). *The State Education Agency: At The Helm, Not The Oar*. Washington D.C.: Thomas Fordham Institute.
- Sunderman, G. L. (2006). *The Unraveling of No Child Left Behind: How Negotiated Changes Transform the Law*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- Sunderman, G. L., & Kim, J. (2004). *Expansion of Federal Power in American Education: Federal-State Relationships Under the No Child Left Behind Act, Year One*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- Supovitz, J. A. (2009). Can high stakes testing leverage educational improvement? Prospects from the last decade of testing and accountability reform. *Journal of Educational Change*, 10 (2-3), 211-227.
- Symonds, W. C. (2001). How to Fix America's Schools. *Business Week*, 67-80.
- Timar, T. (1997). The institutional role of state education departments: A historical perspective. *American Journal of Education*, 105(3), 231-260.
- Togneri, W., & Anderson, S. E. (2003). Beyond islands of excellence: What districts can do to improve instruction and achievement in all schools-A leadership brief. *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and the Learning First Alliance*, 1-84.

U.S. Department of Education. (1994). Archived: GOALS 2000: Educate America Act.

Retrieved October 31, 2016, from

<https://www2.ed.gov/offices/OESE/archives/legislation/ESEA/brochure/iasa-bro.html>

U.S. Department of Education. (1995). Archived: The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994.

Retrieved October 31, 2016, from

<https://www2.ed.gov/offices/OESE/archives/legislation/ESEA/brochure/iasa-bro.html>

U.S. Department of Education. (2001). *High Standards for All Students: A Report from the National Assessment of Title I on Progress and Challenges Since the 1994 Reauthorization*.

U.S. Department of Education. American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 Public Law 111-5 (H.R. 1) (2009). Retrieved from

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/statutory/stabilization-fund.pdf>

U.S. Department of Education. (2012). ESEA Flexibility. Retrieved November 22, 2016, from

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.ed.gov%2Fpolicy%2Fesea%2Fflex%2Fapproved-requests%2Fflexrequest.doc>

U.S. Department of Education. (2012). RTTT: New York Report Y1. *Race To The Top: New York State Report; Year 1, School Year 2010-2011*, 1–22.

U.S. Department of Education. (2013a). No Child Left Behind: Early Lessons from State Flexibility Waivers. Retrieved October 26, 2016, from

<https://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/no-child-left-behind-early-lessons-state-flexibility-waivers>

- U.S. Department of Education. (2013b). RTTT, New York Report Year 2. *Race To The Top: New York State Report; Year 2, School Year 2011-2012.*, 1–22. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/performance/new-york-year-2.pdf>
- United States Government Accountability Office. (2015). *GAO-15-295, Race To The Top: Education Could Better Support Grantees and Help Them Address Capacity Challenges.* Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/669571.pdf>
- Virginia Department of Education. (2005). *Report To The Governor And General Assembly On The Costs Of The Federal No Child Left Behind Act To The Virginia Department Of Education.* Retrieved from http://www.doe.virginia.gov/federal_programs/esea/reports/appendices_cost_fulfilling_requirements.pdf
- Waters, J. Timothy, E. D., & Marzano, R. J. (2006). School District Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement, (September), 1–25.
- Waters, T. J., & Marzano, R. J. (2006). School district leadership that works: The effect of superintendent leadership on student achievement. *Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning.*, (September).
- Weick, K. E. (1976). Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems. *Science*, 21(1), 1–19. <http://doi.org/10.2307/2391875>
- Weiss, J., & McGuinn, P. (2016). States as change agents under ESSA. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 97(8), 6.
- Wilcox, K. C., Lawson, H. A., Angelis, J. I., Durand, F., Gregory, K., Zuckerman, S., & Schiller, K. (2017). *Innovation in odds-beating schools : exemplars for getting better at getting better.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Wong, K. K. (2015). Federal ESEA Waivers as Reform Leverage: Politics and Variation in State Implementation. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* , 45(3), 405–426.
- Wong, K. K., & Reilly, M. (2014). Education Waivers as Reform Leverage in the Obama Administration: State Implementation of ESEA FLeXibility Waiver Request. *Prepared for delivery at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 28-31, 2014* (p. 29).
- Zavadsky, H. (2012). *School turnarounds: the essential role of districts*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.
- Ziskin, D. (2016). *Behaviors and Decisions of Successful Superintendents in High Needs to Resource Capacity Rural Schools in New York State*.

Appendix A

Superintendent Contact Letter

Dear Superintendent:

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity for you to participate in a research study about your perceptions of the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE). This study is being conducted by Mario Fernandez, Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership at The Sage Colleges.

This study will investigate how superintendents perceive their roles in the DTSDE process. The study will also explore superintendent perceptions of the utility of the DTSDE in school improvement efforts. Finally, the study seeks to identify superintendent perceptions on the strengths and limitations of the DTSDE process in effecting school improvement efforts.

You are receiving this letter because your school district was identified as a Focus school district by the New York State Education Department in February, 2016.

I would greatly appreciate your permission to conduct an interview with you. This would require 30 minutes of your time to respond to 17 interview questions, tape-recorded for further coding and analysis. Participation is entirely voluntary and you may stop the interview at any time. The interview is completely anonymous and all responses will be aggregated from all superintendents participating in the interview. There are no identifiers by school or district associated in any way with the interview. A copy of your interview responses will be forwarded to you for your review.

Your assistance in conducting this education study is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact me at (518) 605-3965 or at fernam3@sage.edu. You may also contact the dissertation chairperson, Dr. Jerome Steele at steelj2@sage.edu for further information regarding this study.

Sincerely,

Mario Fernandez
Enclosure

Appendix B

Cover Letter Script to Participants

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of the doctoral dissertation by Mario Fernandez, Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership at The Sage Colleges. The purpose of this project is to understand the perceptions of superintendents in Focus Schools of the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE). For this reason, superintendents of Focus districts recently identified in February 2016 are being asked to participate. To obtain a complete, accurate picture of your perceptions, we need thoughtful, candid responses from every participant.

Participation in this interview is voluntary but greatly appreciated.

- As you respond to each interview question, please focus on your thoughts and feelings based on your own personal experiences as a superintendent with the DTSDE process.
- Your responses will provide us with important information about perceptions superintendents recognize as they interact with the DTSDE process.
- All your responses are completely confidential. No one from your school or district will ever see your answers. No identifying information (name, ID, BEDS code) will be connected to your answers. Results will be reported as anonymous quotes or collected as aggregate themes consistent with the perceptions of other superintendents participating in this survey.
- Not everyone may need to respond to every interview question posed. (For example, if this is your first experience with the DTSDE process, your familiarity with the DTSDE process may not be extensive.)
- This interview is expected to take no more than 30 minutes to complete.
- Once interviews are transcribed, we will provide you with a copy to validate your comments as they were recorded before any analysis is completed.

Further questions can be directed to Mario Fernandez, at fernam3@sage.edu or the dissertation chairperson, Dr. Jerome Steele at steelj2@sage.edu.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

All participants will be asked the same questions.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Introduction:

Hello, my name is Mario Fernandez from the Sage College, Esteves School of Education, and we are conducting a study of your experiences with the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE).

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed*. This interview should take about 30 minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

- We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record that is all right, too.
- If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
- Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

Interviewer: Mario Fernandez

Preliminary entry questions

1. How long have you been superintendent of this district?
2. How long has the district been identified as a Focus district?
3. Have you been through the DTSDE process before?

Descriptive Information

1. How did you learn you were a Focus district?
2. How familiar are you with DTSDE instrument?
3. Were you familiar with the district level DTSDE review process before you learned you were a Focus district?
4. What was the process NYSED used to introduce you and your office to the DTSDE process and review procedure?

Perceived roles of the superintendent

5. What do you believe are the State's expectations regarding your role in the process?
6. How do you perceive your role in the DTSDE process?

How are recommendations used?

7. Have you engaged in any collaborative goal-setting as a result of DTSDE District recommendations?
8. What non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction have you established as a result of DTSDE District recommendations?
9. How does your board support your utilization of DTSDE recommendations to improve student success?
10. How do you use central office personnel to support DTSDE district recommendation implementation?
11. Have you created or modified any resources at the district level to specifically focus on implementing DTSDE recommendations?

Perceived Strengths of the Process

12. What are positive aspects of participating in the DTSDE District level review process?

Perceived Limitations of the Process

13. What are the challenges of participating in the DTSDE District level review process?

Exit Question

14. What would you suggest to improve the process?

Thank you for your time and assistance with this project.

Appendix D
Informed Consent Form
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

To: **Superintendent of Schools**

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled, Perceptions of Superintendents in Focus Districts of the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness Process.

This research is being conducted by Mario Fernandez, Doctoral Candidate, at the Esteves School of Education at the Sage Colleges. The purpose of this research is to describe the perceptions of superintendents in Focus Districts of the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE). To recognize this purpose, superintendents are being interviewed for up to one hour regarding their perceptions of the DTSDE.

Participating superintendents will be asked to provide a location of their choosing to conduct a tape-recorded interview. Once interviews are completed, these interviews will be transcribed. Participating superintendents will be provided a copy of the transcribed interview to validate their responses. All materials will remain secured residing in either a physical locked cabinet in the researcher's home or, if a virtual copy, upon the researcher's password protected computer.

All responses and communication will remain confidential. Interview questions do not require responses with any identifying information and all transcribed interviews will be coded using fictitious names to protect the identity of the participant and the participant's district affiliation.

Participation in this study will benefit research by providing a clear lens of the phenomenological experiences of superintendents attempting to balance local and state mandates. Participation in this study provides minimal risk in that interviewees may have to contend with personal reflections of emotionally-charged comments provided to the researcher through the interview process. If participants feel uncomfortable with a taped interview, the participant may stop the interview at any time. Interview responses can be hand-written if the participants feels uncomfortable with a tape recorded event. All transcribed materials will be shared with the participant to validate participant responses.

A digitally taped interview process will be used to record superintendent responses to several interview questions. The recordings will be used by the researcher for data analysis only. All interview responses will be coded for themes and some comments may be directly quoted using fictitious names to retain the confidentiality with responses provided by all participants.

I give permission to the researcher to play the audio or video recording of me in the places described above. Put your initials here to indicate your permission. _____

Participation is voluntary. 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: _____ Date: _____
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 participants. If you, as a participant, have any complaints about this study, please contact:

Dr. Donna Heald, PhD
Associate Provost
The Sage Colleges
65 1st Street
Troy, New York 12180
518-244-2326
healdd@sage.edu

Appendix E
NVivo Codes

Research Question	NVivo Codes
Superintendent perceptions of their roles (Code Prefix R)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visionary (R-Vis) • Quality Assurance Manager (R-QAM) • Change Agent (R-CHGAGT) • Inspectors of DTSDE process (R-QAM) • District Planning (R-DISTPLN) • Meaning Maker (R-LEGIT) • Building Support for Principals (R-SUPP) • Organize district response to state (R-QAM) (R-LEGIT) • Organize district office response to schools (R-QAM) (R-LEGIT) • Instructional Leader (R-INSTLDR)
Superintendent utilization of DTSDE recommendations (Code Prefix U)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create Board Alignment with district goals (U-BOE) • Organizational Management (U-ORGMANLDR) • Create or support collaborative goal setting process (U-COLGOL) • Create or support non-negotiable district goals (U-NNGOAL) • Resource Allocation (U-ORGMANLDR) • Stimulate Change in the organization (U/R-CHGAGT) • “Get off the list” (U-LIST) • Networking (U-NET)
Strengths of the DTSDE Process (Code Prefix S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulate organizational conversation around instruction (S) • Funding to create resources district did not have previous to identification (R/U/S – ORGMANLDR) • Becoming more user-friendly over time (S) • Statement of good practices (S)
Limitations of the DTSDE Process (Code Prefix L)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineffective communication regarding self-reflection (L-COMM) • Condescending training session (L-COMM) • Poor professional development around DTSDE process/meaning (L-COMM) • No follow-up process (L-COMM) • State use of data collected ineffective (U/L-NET) • Reviewers/Process (L-REW/PROC) • Process leaves superintendent out of conversation (L-COMM) • Does not acknowledge incremental growth (L-NGROW) • Changes in process occur every year (L-DIAG)

Appendix F

IRB Approval Letter

School of Health Sciences

Deans Office
65 1st Street
Troy, New York 12180
518.244.2264
Fax: 518.244.4571
sage.edu/academics/health-sciences

December 16, 2016

Mario Fernandez
8 Glenwood Drive
Schenectady, NY 12302

IRB PROPOSAL #529-2016-2017
Reviewer: Francesca Durand, Chair

Dear Mario:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application and has approved your project entitled "Perceptions of Superintendents in Focus Districts of the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness Process." Good luck with your research.

Please refer to your IRB Proposal number whenever corresponding with us whether by mail or in person.

When you have completed collecting your data you will need to submit to the IRB Committee a final report indicating any problems you may have encountered regarding the treatment of human subjects, if the project goes on for more than one year.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Francesca Durand, PhD
Chair, IRB

FD/nan

Cc. Dr. Jerome Steele

THE SAGE COLLEGES

RUSSELL SAGE COLLEGE

SAGE COLLEGE OF ALBANY

ESTEVEZ SCHOOL OF
EDUCATION

SCHOOL OF HEALTH SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL
& CONTINUING EDUCATION

RUSSELL SAGE ONLINE