

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Setting of the Study

The tenure of school superintendents is becoming a serious concern for those interested in the superintendency as well as those who are charged with finding quality superintendents. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA, 1999) reported “the water, it seems, is evaporating at a time when school boards in districts large and small are thirsty to fill the top job” (p.1). An alarming number of school superintendents in the country and throughout Texas have been retiring--and more are expected over the next few years. Currently, nearly half of the superintendents are older than fifty and are either eligible to retire or soon will be (Hewitt, 2000). Moses (2000) reported that in 1999, 272 of the 1129 superintendents in Texas changed jobs. AASA (1999) noted fewer people are applying for positions and more are leaving the field because of abuse and blame. Kowalski (1999) concluded superintendents now face more difficult situations regarding social, economic, and political conditions than superintendents in the past. Still others find that administrators, like other professionals, appear to move to acquire better positions; usually greater financial reward or higher status in the profession are good reasons to move (Dlugosh, 1994).

There is a need to assess the characteristics of superintendents, the school districts in which they work, and the school board and communities they work within. The concern with superintendent tenure seems to have begun in the late 1980's, as Zakariya (1987) explained the perception of a lack of qualified candidates is reality-not perception. She also found that consultants attributed the lack of applicants to early retirement

incentives, rapid board turnover, and the fact that the superintendency is not a glamour job anymore. This is very evident in large urban districts where tenure averages a little more than two and one half years. AASA (1999) reported one superintendent search consultant saying, “We’re really into what I would call a crisis situation” (p. 1).

Background of the Study

Why has superintendent tenure become such a concern to consultants, school boards, and superintendents? Carter and Cunningham (1997) believe that today superintendents are dealing with many more complex and threatening forces than their predecessors. They describe challenges and dilemmas including: (a) negotiating community politics, (b) education reform initiatives, (c) conflicts with school boards, and (d) generally dealing with the daily stresses of the position of superintendent. Despite these problems, 80% of superintendents polled said if they had it to do all over again they would still seek the top position (AASA, 1999). Shepherd (1986) concluded a superintendent must have three things in order to establish long tenure in a school district. He must be able to (a) survive in a political world, (b) have a vision and be able to translate that vision into a plan, and (c) he should be able to apply the game of poker and know when to fold, hold, or run.

Much of the information for this research was derived from the Study of the American School Superintendency 2000, which is a study conducted every 10 years by the American Association of School Administrators. The researcher used data charts and survey questions from this study to help develop the concept and research questions for this study. The National Education Association sponsored these national surveys on the American superintendency in 1920 and again in 1930. The purpose of the study was to

compile demographic data, profiles, and opinions on many issues important to educators. It also served as a document to compare the superintendency over a period of time. In 1949, the AASA took over the administration of the study. Since then, these studies have been produced every 10 years and have become known as the leading source of comprehensive information concerning the state of the school superintendency.

In 1999, the data for the AASA 2000 study were gathered by surveying 5,336 superintendents. These superintendents were identified from a stratified random sample generated by the Common Core of Public Data, in the Department of Education. The survey received responses from 2,262 superintendents from all across the nation. However, only 11.8% of the surveys collected were from the southwestern portion of the United States, which included Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Because of this, the researcher questioned whether results from this study would be generalizable to Texas. It is this important fact that has led the researcher to examine the state of superintendent tenure specifically in Texas.

In the AASA (2000) study, several findings related to tenure were summarized. The 2000 study did not ask superintendents their current length of tenure in their school districts. The researcher explains they did not ask this question because they had prior data that showed nearly 50% of the sample were in their first year as superintendents and this would have resulted in a national average tenure of two to three years. The researchers from AASA felt this would have made the length of tenure seem much shorter than it actually is. They did mention that due to the presence of early retirement and normal retirement, many superintendents either entered the field or retired at the same time. AASA reported tenure in the nation had stayed the same over the last decade.

The same study in 1992 found the average length of tenure to be 6.4 years and in 1982, average tenure was 5.6 years. The 2000 study estimated tenure to be between five and six years, but a specific question used to report average tenure was not used in their study (AASA, 2000).

When examining tenure, urban superintendencies, particularly, are increasingly tough jobs and subject to even more intense scrutiny—by the media, the state accountability system, and by political stakeholders. The tensions that face urban leaders are now moving to the suburban and rural areas also. These areas are increasingly facing issues that have concerned cities for years, including poverty, racial tension, and school violence (AASA, 1999). Benton (2000) referred to Dr. Mike Moses' remarks regarding the success of Houston ISD. He said that one of the main reasons for Houston ISD's success was the fact that Dr. Rod Paige had been the superintendent in Houston for six years and before that had served on the school board. Moses said the districts that have had success, like Fort Worth and Houston, have had people with six-or seven-year tenures. He stated that having long tenure makes a difference, because it gives someone a chance to succeed.

In looking at the media outlets and newspapers, it would seem that many boards and superintendents are at odds with each other (Cummings, 1994; Chionn-Kenney, 1994; Glass, 2000). That is not the case according to a national survey. AASA (2000) noted 89 % of all superintendents reported having excellent or good relationships with their boards. Certainly politics has its place in the superintendency. According to Chionn-Kenney (1994), reasons cited by superintendents for shying away from potential new jobs are: (a) the fear that the job will outlast the sitting school board, (b) the

increasingly political nature of the job, (c) the rising incidents of one-issue board members, (d) the tendency of boards to micro-manage the district, and (e) the seemingly endless news reports of board-superintendent hostilities.

Cummings (1994) reported that poor superintendent/board relations were responsible for a superintendent not establishing a long tenure. He further explained this caused many school boards to buy out or terminate the superintendent's contract. Glass (2000) suggested superintendents would be wise to schedule considerably more time in direct communication with their board members. He noted that most superintendents reported spending three or fewer hours a week in direct board communication.

Considering that the board president probably receives most of that time, individual board members probably have little direct communication with the superintendent.

Caster (1994) noted that finding the "right" superintendent is one of the most critical jobs of a school board. They are under the gun to find someone to meet all the needs of the district, community, and school board. Unfortunately, oftentimes board members' needs differ from the needs of the district, and many times the members' needs come first. The superintendency has become like the role of a baseball manager. If the team loses, people say fire the manager (AASA, 1999).

Communication with the community is an extremely important key to long tenure, according to superintendents. About half the superintendents in a national study reported they had to deal with "pressure groups" in their communities. The types of pressure groups identified were mostly community-based, but there was also evidence of religious and political pressures (AASA, 2000). In his study on rural superintendents, Chance (1992) found superintendents credited their community with their success. They reported

that public relations were an identified key when asked why they were able to maintain a long tenure. Superintendents responded that community members knew them and knew what to expect from them. One of the respondents in Chance's study gave advice to aspiring superintendents. He said, "Find the right situation in the right community and stay put" (p. 6).

Moses (2000) surmised the pipeline for future administrators is being choked off due to salary. He noted that many teachers are refusing to assume the responsibilities of an administrator because those in the classroom exceed daily rates of pay for administrative positions. Glass (2000) found salaries for superintendents varied widely. They are greatly affected by size of district and location, as well as the history of the district and surrounding districts. Also, he noted that since the superintendent's package might include significant fringe benefits, the true value of the contract might not be evident by looking solely at the salary reported to the public. Newell found the most common correlate of tenured superintendents in Missouri was salary (1997). Recently, smaller districts have seen larger districts attempt to attract their superintendent to the city through financial inducements. This has caused some school boards to try to counter this approach by paying top dollar to their superintendent. AASA (1999) reported some people aren't interested in becoming superintendents or even athletic directors because the high-profile positions come with too many expectations and too little pay.

Statement of the Problem

There are many researchers who believe the length of tenure for school superintendents is nearing a crisis level (AASA, 1999; Cooper, Fusarelli & Carella, 2000; Moses, 2000). The shortage of qualified candidates, concerns over community and

school board politics, and the uncertainty of moving to a new position have left many schools desperately searching for the perfect candidate. Unfortunately, the job has become so unstable that in many cases quality applicants are simply unwilling to move into uncharted waters (AASA, 1999).

There is a need, therefore, to study characteristics and perceptions of superintendents, characteristics of school districts, school boards, and communities. The problem involves the need to examine these characteristics and see if they have a significant effect on the length of tenure of a superintendent.

This study was designed to determine the significance of personal characteristics, demographics, and descriptive variables in the length of tenure of superintendents in Texas. Exploring the relationships of these variables may provide insight to future superintendents, school boards, and search consultants to help in the selection process of superintendents. Combining variables relating to superintendents, school boards, communities, and school districts, adds depth to this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors, if any, affect a Texas superintendent's ability to remain in a school district, as superintendent of schools, for a period over 10 years. The researcher was also interested in determining if there are significant differences in superintendents who stay more than 10 years in a district, and those who move several times in that period of time. A degree of job stability is a key concern for a leader who must move to a new community, and this importance is certainly magnified if the move involves relocating an entire family.

This study compares personal characteristics of the superintendent, demographic data of school districts, and information about the school board and community as perceived by the superintendent. For this study, comparisons were made between superintendents who had been in the same position at the same school district for an extended period of time, to those superintendents who had at least three superintendencies in the past 10 years. Similarities and differences are compared to identify significant findings.

Research Questions

The major research questions are:

1. What is the relationship between superintendent tenure and the following personal variables:
 - a. Highest degree earned
 - b. Salary
 - c. Career path
 - d. Search process when hired
2. What is the relationship between tenure and the following school district variables:
 - a. Type of community (Rural, suburban, urban)
 - b. Size of school district
 - c. Characterization of school board as perceived by the superintendent
3. What are the differences between short tenured and long tenured superintendents with regard to age, degree held, average salary, search process, size of school, type of community, and TEA rating of the district?

Significance of the Study

Positive or negative variables identified through this study could become a valuable tool in determining if a “match” exists between a school district and a prospective superintendent. Current research has not answered questions as to what significance these variables may have on a superintendent’s tenure in a given school district. This information could be valuable to school district selection committees, school boards, superintendent search consultants, as well as superintendents seeking a new position.

This research provided information to better understand if personal characteristics of superintendents, as well as characteristics of school districts, school boards, and communities can be analyzed for significance. This information could be used to help ensure that a match exists between the superintendent and the school district that would enhance the successful tenure of a school superintendent. In this way, selection committees, search consultants, school boards, and superintendents could assess these identifiers to find if a match may exist between the candidate and a particular school district which would provide an excellent opportunity for a long tenure with the district.

This study differed from the AASA (2000) study in several ways. First, it focused entirely on Texas superintendents. In the national study, only 11.8% of respondents were from the southwestern part of the United States. Texans comprised a very small number of the responses. Secondly, the AASA study did not try to determine an average length of tenure from its respondents. This study established an average length of tenure for Texas superintendents. This data will allow researchers to compare tenure for superintendents in Texas with the lengths of tenure reported in other studies and from

other states. This research will attempt to identify and report significant variables. These findings will add to the body of knowledge in the area of superintendent tenure and will give definitive conclusions regarding the current status of tenure in Texas.

Definition of Terms

An understanding of key terms is important to this study. The operational definitions used in this study are defined as follows:

1. AASA. The American Association of School Administrators. A national organization that supports and promotes administrators throughout the country.
2. Career Path. The distinctive set of sequential educational job positions held by an individual prior to achieving superintendent status.
3. Characteristics. A quality or feature of a person that is typical or serves to distinguish a person, group, or thing from others.
4. Long-tenured superintendent. A superintendent who remains in the same school district, as superintendent, for 10 years or more.
5. Personal Characteristics. For the purpose of this study, personal characteristics are those traits, demographics, and perceptions that are indicative of the person being surveyed.
6. Rural district. A district serving students in communities of less than 10,000 residents or those in remote areas beyond the geographical boundaries of an specific community.
7. School Community. For the purpose of this study, characteristics that describe the school district, school board, and the community in which the school district is located.

8. Short-tenured superintendent. A superintendent who has had the position of superintendent in at least three school districts in the previous 10 years.
9. Suburban school district. A district servicing an area with a distinct identity within a larger urban community.
10. Superintendent. Superintendents are the leaders and managers of the educational systems within a district. In this study, the term refers to individuals who hold the title of superintendent in the public school districts of Texas.
11. TASA. Texas Association of School Administrators. An organization in Texas that supports and promotes school administration.
12. TASB. Texas Association of School Boards. An organization in Texas that supports and promotes school districts and their school boards.
13. TEA. Texas Education Agency. The agency in Texas that oversees education in the state.
14. TEA Accountability Rating. This system integrates district accreditation status, campus ratings, district and campus recognition, campus and district level reports. The system features four accountability ratings for districts and campuses. These ratings are based on performance levels on three base indicators: student performance on TAAS, attendance rates and dropout rates (Wooderson-Perzan, 2000). The four ratings are as follows:
 - a. Exemplary-90% passing rate in each area of TAAS (all students and student subgroups), 1% or less dropout rate, 94% or better attendance rate;
 - b. Recognized-at least 80% passing rate in each area of TAAS (all students and student subgroups), 3.5% or less dropout rate, 94% or better attendance rate;

- c. Academically Acceptable—at least 45 percent passing rate in each area of TAAS (all students and student subgroups), 6% or less dropout rate, 94% or better attendance rate;
 - d. Academically Unacceptable
15. TAAS. Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. The instrument used to assess a student in Texas schools as part of TEA accountability.
 16. Tenure. Tenure, as referenced throughout this study, is defined as the amount of time a superintendent spends in a single school district as superintendent of schools.
 17. Urban school district. A district located within all or part of the boundaries of a major metropolitan area.
 18. Variable. A measured characteristic that can assume different values or levels.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made regarding this study:

1. The personal characteristics relating to the superintendent are identifiable and can be measured.
2. Factors related to tenure can be analyzed and compared with one another.
3. Some characteristics of a school district and superintendent will have a negative impact on tenure and others will have a positive impact.
4. Participants answered the survey instrument honestly and as objectively as possible.

Limitations

1. Participation in this study was limited to 740 of the 1,057 superintendents in the State of Texas who returned the survey instrument.
2. This study was limited by the validity and reliability of the survey instrument.
3. This study was limited to the variables that made up the survey instrument.
4. When asked questions related to urban, suburban, or rural communities, no criteria were given to respondents to distinguish between the three. Therefore, the answers they gave were based on their perception of the type of community in which they work.
5. Only 5% of respondents reported being from urban districts. While this percentage was representative of schools in Texas, findings from this study may not compare closely to studies done exclusively on urban districts in Texas.
6. Only 11.5% of respondents were female. While this percentage was representative of schools in Texas, findings from this study may not compare closely to studies done exclusively on women superintendents in Texas.
7. For research question two, the characterization of the school board is based on the perception of the superintendent questioned. It is understood that individual board members may be characterized differently.

8._____Every attempt has been made to limit researcher bias, but researcher bias may be a concern since the researcher is a superintendent in the State of Texas.

Organization of the Study

The study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I includes the setting, background information, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, significance of the study, assumptions, and limitations.

Chapter II is a review of related literature in the area of superintendent tenure. Specifically, the present state of tenure in our country, as well as theories related to tenure. The chapter will also review several factors that may affect tenure and the advantages and disadvantages of long tenure.

Chapter III includes the methodology for this study. Included in this chapter is the type of research conducted, population and sample information, instrumentation, data collection, and the procedures used for analyzing the data. Chapter IV provides a comprehensive presentation of the data analysis.

Chapter V presents the conclusions and summary of findings from this research. It also contains implications of the study and recommendations for future studies in the area of superintendent tenure.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The following review of literature is divided into two major sections. The first section will examine superintendent tenure and its present state in education throughout our country. It will also look at some of the theories regarding superintendent tenure and reasons for mobility. The second section will examine different factors affecting tenure. These factors include characteristics of the superintendent such as: (a) prior education, (b) salary, (c) career path, and (d) the search process used when hired as superintendent. In addition, school-related variables will be examined such as: (a) type of community, (b) size of school district, and (c) characterization of school board as perceived by the superintendent. In addition, the researcher will examine the research on advantages and disadvantages of long tenure.

Superintendent Tenure

The idea of massive superintendent turnover is a major concern to those close to the superintendency (Walter & Supley, 1999). Superintendents, school boards, and search consultants are noticing the short tenures reported and the apparent lack of candidates for these jobs. There are fewer educators aspiring to be superintendents, and because of the fragile relationships between the school board and the superintendent, there are more vacancies now than ever before. Unfortunately, there are even fewer applicants who are willing to risk moving themselves and a family to accept the risky position as the chief executive officer of a school district (Walter & Sepley, 1999). Cooper (2000) reported superintendents as saying the shortage of applicants for

superintendent jobs is a crisis in American education. He said while the current superintendents are hanging in there, they are also greatly concerned about the future of the role. Many are worried about where the next generation of superintendents will come from, whom they will be, and what kinds of jobs they will have. Cooper (2000) further noted the current superintendents are aging, looking forward to retirement, and see a real crisis on the horizon.

Superintendents generally work for two or three districts during their 14 to 17 year careers, and most spend twice as long in one school district (Dunne, 2000). The average tenure for superintendents is less than five years, yet there are those who manage to effectively handle the pressures and have survived much longer than this average (Chance, 1992). Many school administrators, like other professionals, move frequently in the course of their careers. In the past, it was common for administrators to progress to the top of the school district by working in only one organization. Today, many administrators have worked in several organizations before reaching the top (Dlugosh, 1994). Experts say the current annual turnover rate in Texas is 20 to 25 percent. For the 1998-1999 school year, for example, there were 272 superintendent vacancies throughout the state's 1,050 school districts (Moses, 2000 & Hewitt, 2000).

Tenure in this study was defined as the length of time an individual spends as superintendent in a single school district. There seems to have been some debate about the state of tenure in the superintendency as evidenced by the following findings over the past two decades:

1. Lyons (1983) stated despite the prospects of six-figure salaries and considerable benefits, the tenure of superintendents has dwindled in recent

years, particularly in large urban districts, where it averages a little more than two and one-half years.

2. AASA (1999) noted that School Administrators of Iowa has predicted a 60% turnover in superintendents during a 10-year period that began in 1993.
3. Cummings (1994) confirmed superintendents are not staying long in their district. He noted the stay in an urban district is averaging 18 months. In May 1993, 33 of the largest 45 school districts in the United States had superintendencies that were either vacant or filled by superintendents who had been there less than three years.
4. Superintendent tenure in Colorado is less than four years on average for all districts (McCurdy & Hymes, 1992).
5. The average tenure for superintendents is about 2.5 years in urban school districts. This is not a sudden drop but the continuation of a decrease in tenure that has been occurring over the last 30 years (Goldstein, 1992).
6. Young (1998) argued tenure in the superintendency is much longer than the often-quoted three years.
7. Spiropulos (1996) reported the average length tenure of superintendents in Idaho school districts was 3.55 years.
8. In his study, Deary (1989) found the national length of tenure for school superintendents was 5.6 years, while the average in Connecticut was 4.3 years. He further noted 33% of the turnover in Connecticut was involuntary, which was more than twice the national average.

9. AASA (2000) in a study which surveyed superintendents across the nation, observed the average tenure was 6.5 years.

While discussing tenure, one may ask, “What is the ideal tenure for a superintendent?” Eleven years ago, Yock, Keogh, Underwood, and Fortune (1990), surveyed 12,000 school board members about their perception of the ideal tenure of a school superintendent. Their results were varied. The majority (63%) of board members who responded reported they wanted to hire a superintendent who would want to stay in the district for the rest of their career. In the same survey, many board members said they felt the ideal tenure of a school superintendent to be six to ten years.

As superintendent positions become harder to fill, school boards are turning to search consultants to help locate and hire quality superintendents. In his study on superintendent search consultants, Floyd (1995) found almost 95% of search consultants felt their business would continue to grow. They attributed this projected growth to two factors: (a) a perceived decrease in the number of quality candidates interested in becoming superintendents and (b) the increasing turnover rates of both board members and superintendents.

Theories Regarding Tenure

Several theorists have tried to explain the concern of short superintendent tenure. Perhaps the most common theory is Callahan’s vulnerability theory (1962). Over the years, this theory has been widely accepted as the major cause of the very high mobility experienced by superintendents (Lutz, 1996). Callahan’s theory suggests the superintendent alienating a majority of the school board, who then demands his resignation or refuses to extend his contract, causes this mobility. Callahan saw the

vulnerability of superintendents as a product of local support and local control. He surmised that most educators' decisions are survival decisions. When pressure is applied to superintendents as the result of public criticism, they have to respond in a way that will appease the critics. Callahan described the pattern of vulnerability in the following steps: (a) school board holds a strong business orientation, (b) superintendents are trained to be school executives, (c) board becomes dissatisfied with the superintendent over business decisions or a political shift of the board, (d) school board fires the superintendent (Callahan, 1962).

One of Callahan's goals was to free the superintendent from the job threat that requires deference and submission, and replace it with leadership and creativity. He also hoped the political circumstances of the superintendent would change, so that more creative leadership may take place without the likelihood of being fired. He thought creating better graduate schools for leaders would be a waste of time if we could not remove this fear-factor from the superintendent's position (Callahan, 1962). Lutz (1996) explained while this theory does not account for every superintendent move, when it does it is probably very painful for the superintendent involved and is a disruption to the education in a district. Superintendent mobility is frequent enough to encourage a particular type of paranoia that has developed within the superintendency. This paranoia often results in a reflex action that does not always serve education well (Lutz, 1996).

In testing Callahan's theory in Texas, Parker (1996) concluded the vulnerability thesis did not seem to account for the superintendent mobility in Texas. In fact, most of the respondents in her study said they moved or got out of the business because they wanted to retire and be happy. Others, who had moved to a different job, listed moving

to a “better” superintendency as the reason. Only about 11% of the respondents reflected traits of the vulnerability theory as a reason for their move.

Lutz and Iannaccone (1978) asserted that school board incumbent defeat is closely related to superintendent turnover. They believed most superintendent turnover was a direct result of public discontent and incumbent defeat in school board elections. Lutz added to Callahan’s theory with his own “dissatisfaction theory” (1990). In his theory, Lutz says superintendents are often pushed out or fired because they fail to see changes in community values and ignore community demands, not because they make poor business choices. Unlike Callahan, Lutz viewed the pattern of change as this: (a) community becomes dissatisfied with school policies, (b) incumbents on the board lose in the election, (c) new board fires the superintendent, (d) new policies and programs are established and the district returns to stability (Lutz, 1996).

Eaton (1990) said the nature of the superintendency makes the superintendent vulnerable. This vulnerability is cumulative and leads to rapid turnover of the position. He particularly found this vulnerability came during the fourth to sixth year of the contract cycle. At the peak of vulnerability, the superintendent’s contract is not renewed and over time the continued increase in vulnerability results in a change. The different forces that can add to this vulnerability are several and cumulative. They range from school board members to teacher organizations, community groups and other constituents who may become frustrated. The superintendent is held accountable for all decisions made both past and present, and even for those decisions in which he did not agree, but is forced to follow because of board policy. This continual pattern ultimately leads to destruction (Eaton, 1990).

Given the nature of power and of all mankind, humans are vulnerable. The closer one is to the top of the power structure, the more vulnerable they may be to the attacks of those below who seek that power. In some way or another, this is true in many human relationships and is certainly not found exclusively between school boards and superintendents. Superintendents are members of the human race and they make decisions with self-interest high among the decision-making criteria. Superintendents sometimes take a stand and lose their jobs because they decide to stand on principle. Survival is not the only road, and sometimes having the courage to take a risk and take a stance based on principle may be the right thing to do (Lutz, 1996).

Factors Affecting Tenure

This study focused on characteristics of superintendents, size of school districts, type of community, and characterization of the school board as perceived by the superintendent, that may affect the ability of a superintendent to remain in the same district for an extended period of time. The literature has noted several factors that may have some affect on tenure. This research attempted to examine two main factors—personal characteristics of the superintendent, and characteristics of the school community, which includes the district, the school board, and the community in which the school is located.

Personal Characteristics

Ramsey (1999) reported that just a few decades ago, the superintendency was one of prestige and desirability. In those times, she reports, it was common to have a life appointment or at least a long tenure. The superintendent was a cornerstone of the community, well known around town, lived in the community, raised his family there,

and retired there. While controversies certainly arose, they were generally viewed as a minor nuisance. The superintendent today is not an authority figure with the unilateral control of yesterday. Many superintendents live in the community in which they serve, but with far greater mobility than ever before, many are still viewed as outsiders.

Czaja and Harman (1997) noted superintendents who had exited the position reported hurt, anger, and disappointment that sometimes resulted in health problems. Especially when their school boards did not support their personal decisions, this had a very negative personal impact. Dlugosh (1994) linked superintendent turnover to multiple variables including the desire for increased pay, opportunities for promotion, job dissatisfaction, and other personal reasons for moving. Maginnis (1993) found most superintendents began contemplating moving in their fourth year in a district. Their final decision to relocate was based on intuitiveness and followed no set timetable. Additionally, Maginnis found that superintendents considered serving in multiple districts as just part of the job.

Johnson (1996) asserted there were several characteristics of superintendents who won broad support for their initiatives. She concluded these successful and popular superintendents shared the following: (a) they learned about the district's past and current practices, (b) did not enter with fixed visions but used a collaborative approach, (c) promoted open exchange of ideas, (d) encouraged others to act in concert, not in a cross direction, (e) furthered purposeful approaches to change, (f) stood for important values, (g) were realistic about the pace of change, (h) took a backseat to the limelight and gave others credit, and (i) provided support to those who took risks.

Today, the position can be as political as an elected office, equally controversial and more visible. Superintendents often feel as though they live in a glass box, with their salaries, past performances, social interactions, spending habits, and family lives under scrutiny (Ramsey 1999). In addition, Kowalski (1999) reported superintendents as saying their jobs were hectic, exciting, demanding, and political. Many superintendents are seen as slightly sinister, shuffling things under the table and having less than the public good at heart. There are few moments of praise and Thank-You cards are one of the few things that do not pile up on their desks (Ramsey, 1999). Boards must remember superintendents are human beings with families who need to be respected and treated fairly. They should also be provided the tools and support to do the job expected of them (Glass, 2000).

Prior Education

Strong preparation programs are essential for superintendents if the profession is to address the shortage of well-qualified candidates for future job openings. Harvard University has instituted a specialized program to train urban superintendents in an attempt to address this need (Johnson, 1996). Burnham (1989) found superintendents identified as effective in their roles were more likely to have more advanced degrees, such as the doctorate, than their colleagues. The reason seems to be that normally included in achieving these advanced degrees is a large amount of additional experiences and preparation at the university level and specialty areas (Holliman, 1996).

Even though researchers have addressed the need for advanced degrees and specialized training for superintendents, apparently the perception by communities is somewhat different. A superintendent's advanced degrees seem to have a minimal effect

on their abilities, especially as perceived by community members and school boards. In a report on the Midland, Texas superintendent search, Benton (2000) found that board members did not feel that a doctorate in education was important. They felt common sense and professional experience were more important. In his study on rural school superintendents, Chance (1992) reported some school board members were concerned when candidates with doctorates applied for their position. They wondered why someone with a doctorate would desire to be a superintendent in a small, rural school.

Contrary to the perception of some community members and school boards, it is quite possible that superintendents who hold a doctoral degree will also have an increased length of tenure (Glass, 2000). He found the majority of superintendents with doctoral degrees were in schools with enrollments between 300 and 25,000. The districts of that size also had the longest average superintendent tenure. The doctoral degrees held by the superintendents were predominantly in educational administration. Glass (1982) found the number of superintendents who possessed doctoral degrees increased from 28% in 1982 to 36% in 1992, and 45% in 2000. This shows many superintendents are pursuing advanced degrees while concurrently serving as chief executive officers. He also found the larger the district the more likely the superintendent is to have a doctoral degree.

When discussing prior education, it is important to look at the training programs for administrators. Chance & Capps (1992) concluded universities who train administrators should accept some of the blame for ineffective administrators. They asserted educational requirements should be more relevant and focus not just on managing and organizing but also on issues such as integrity, communication, and morality. Chance (1992) further asserted institutions of higher education should focus on

the human relations and group processes part of leading and not focus so much on the theory part of the process. He also noted these institutions should look at individuals being admitted to their programs and not just at their checkbook. He asserted the importance of ethical behavior necessitates that programs admit not only the very best intellectually, but also those with impeccable character.

A general dissatisfaction with traditional programs has been increasing nationwide. AASA (1982) had proposed a separate kind of certification program for practicing school administrators. They recommended this program be grounded in skills necessary for the every day operation of school districts. They proposed graduates be required to not only pass all portions of the mid-management certificate program, but also have a passing score of 80% or higher on each part of a proposed AASA Associate exam. Even though there has been much debate over certification programs, no solid research findings at this time can document their inadequacy.

Salary

Superintendent salary appears to have an affect on tenure. In a study of Missouri superintendents, Newell (1997) found the highest correlate to long tenure in the superintendency is salary. Dlugosh (1994) reported the higher the level of satisfaction with pay, the less likely a person was to leave their position. Over half of the superintendents in the Dlugosh study reported that salary was a factor in their movement. Since compensation packages are public information, school boards generally try to keep superintendents' salaries in line with what they perceive as the community's acceptance level. Often, this is one of the reasons good candidates either don't apply for a position, or they leave for another more attractive position (Glass, 2000).

Clearly, school systems are finding themselves in rigorous competition to hire qualified superintendents. Often, districts are offering higher salaries, and some cases, cars, houses, and hearty bonuses to find new leaders (Hewitt, 2000). Glass (1992) explained while most superintendents are well paid within their communities, they still do not have the benefits of executives in the private sector. In addition to the lack of benefits, they are on call 24 hours per day and have very long workdays. In some districts, superintendents do not make in salary what the teachers do on a daily or hourly basis. This fact has probably had a negative affect on the prospect of higher salaries in administration and the ambition of classroom teachers to become administrators (Moses, 2000).

The “daily rate” comparisons between superintendent and teacher salaries have probably further affected the number of quality administrators entering the job market. Moses (2000) noted many quality teachers are not willing to take on the extra days and hours to become an administrator when they may actually take a cut in daily pay. Cunningham and Sperry (2001) said while there are many ways to recruit and retain quality people, salary is heads above any other factor. They asserted education must increase pay levels to approximate those in business or suffer the consequences such as worker shortages and a decline in employee quality. AASA (1999) mentioned smaller districts were now paying higher salaries in order to retain qualified and successful superintendents. The pressures and instability in the urban districts, combined with the higher paying jobs in smaller districts, do not make the urban jobs as attractive as they once were. In a report on the Midland, Texas superintendent search, Belton (2000) noted money would not be an issue in their search. The community was willing to pay top

dollar to hire and retain a top superintendent. In contrast to that, a report on rural school districts noted it was difficult to hire good superintendents unless the boards were able to increase the salaries offered. This was often difficult to do in a small district with limited resources (Chance & Capps, 1992).

Hiring a high quality superintendent has become a bidding war among some districts. In the year 2000, in Texas alone, nine school districts are paying at least \$200,000. In 1997, no superintendent made that much. According to search consultants and school board members, several factors contribute to the increasing pay of superintendents. They are (a) a shrinking applicant pool, (b) the increasing pressures on superintendents, and (c) the pressure to produce measurable gains in student achievement. And the increasing salaries can be attributed to a domino effect. As one district ante's up, others must follow suit or risk losing their superintendent. When school board members in Beaumont learned their superintendent was a finalist for the position in Dallas, they gave him a \$9,000 raise, a car allowance, additional vacation time, and a \$100,000 bonus if he remains in the district for another three years. This is just one example of what school districts across the nation are willing to do to keep their superintendent, and not allow them to seek more compensation elsewhere. It is difficult to really compare superintendent salaries, because they are constantly being updated and renegotiated. Most contracts today also include a wide range of added benefits such as car allowances, housing allowance, annuities and performance-based incentives. Experts in the field say that this is only the beginning of what will become super-sized salaries in the coming years (McCain, 2000).

Career Path

The career path experience of a school superintendent is an important predictor of his or her success. Most educators have filled a number of positions in education before they attain the position of superintendent (Smith, 1990). Historically, the superintendent position is not the one educators typically pursue as they begin their careers in education. In most cases, a person will go through a variety of positions before deciding they want to be a superintendent. It seems the dream of “starting at the bottom” (e.g., small-school superintendency) and working up to “the top” (e.g., large school superintendency) is only a dream. Very few exceptional individuals ever realize this path to the top position in a large district (Carlson, 1972). However, those individuals who attain the position of superintendent tend to remain in the position until the end of their career, though possibly serving in several different districts (ERS, 1990).

Burnham (1989) analyzed the career paths of respondents to the AASA annual superintendent’s study. She determined superintendents generally fit into one of the following four career path groups:

1. Path A-the short path, during which superintendents begin teaching, then assume an assistant principal or principal role, then move to the superintendency.
2. Path B-the intermediate path which includes teaching, campus administration, and central office or other administration positions prior to moving into the superintendency.

3. Path C-the long path, with a step between teaching and campus administration (usually counseling or program administration) and a central office position before the superintendency.
4. Path D-the alternative path, which includes teaching and other alternatives to campus administration before entering the superintendency.

The career path of a superintendent also seems to have a role in tenure among superintendents. According to Glass (1992), the younger a person assumes his or her first superintendency, the greater the likelihood of a long tenure. Additionally, it was found that the larger the district, the more likely it was for an administrator to move up the ranks at an earlier age. Newell (1997) noted short tenure superintendents spent more time as an assistant principal and in the central office than those long tenured superintendents did. Young (1998) also concluded those who began their careers at an earlier age attained a longer tenure. Those who took the most time in preparation for the superintendency had the shortest tenure.

Career paths of female superintendents seem to deviate from those of males. Female superintendents in Texas were more likely to have served as assistant superintendents and less likely to serve as principals prior to their first superintendency. Among all superintendents in Texas, 55.5% were principals and 21.6% were assistant superintendents prior to their first superintendency. In Texas, 23.1% of females were principals and 38.5% were assistant superintendents (Peters, 1986). Radich (1992) noted 71.4% of women superintendents in his study had been assistant superintendents compared to only 14% of their male counterparts. Additionally, Glass (1992) noted

women generally spend more time than men as classroom teachers before acquiring their first administrative position.

In a study of California superintendents, Young (1998) found superintendents followed career paths that were uniquely different to the districts in which they served. This contrasted Newell's study, which concluded superintendents who followed short career paths most likely secured positions in smaller, rural districts. Those with longer career paths were more likely to serve larger suburban or urban districts. He also noted those with the longest time in preparation for the superintendency had the shortest tenure (Newell, 1997).

The Search Process

One of the greatest challenges a school board faces is the selection of a superintendent. It is the most important and most crucial decision a board is called on to make (AASA, 1983). Few studies have focused on the search process as impacting superintendent tenure. However, Glass (2000) asserts this often unpleasant, time-consuming experience can be professionally dangerous for employed superintendents. Johnson (1996) states repeated superintendent turnover is, in large part, because of the school board's futile search for heroic leaders. Local officials often regard the end of one superintendent's tenure as the end of bad times, and the arrival of the new leader as the beginning of a new age. She noted that the turnover scenario begins with the search process when school boards convince themselves that a heroic individual can single-handedly solve all their problems. She also placed some of the blame on the superintendent candidates who made promises in the interview process that were unrealistic and ultimately led to disappointment.

Wilson (1981) contended that school boards don't always say what they mean when listing qualities for a superintendent search, and candidates often are less than candid in their statements as well. This can set up a sense of false expectations on the part of both parties. Boards should also realize that a candidate is selecting them as well, and school administrators usually shy away from school boards who are divided, close-minded, or who do not adhere to the line between school policy and administering that policy.

In their study on rural districts that had experienced several short tenured superintendents, Chance and Capps (1992) found 92% of these troubled districts had performed the search for the superintendent themselves. Most of the board members surveyed expressed concern about the hiring process.

In searches conducted by firms, and board associations, applicants must fill out volumes of forms, submit lengthy statements, and provide numerous testimonials, transcripts, and resumes. Lyons (1993) noted in his study that performance during the interview, evidence of leadership skills, and success in communicating with constituency groups were among the top five variables that school boards considered the most important when selecting a superintendent. Also, it seems that if the departing superintendent is well liked, the board will want a carbon copy as his replacement. If he was thought to be a failure, they will want an opposite in nearly all characteristics (AASA, 1983).

Typically, a consultant will select about a dozen applicants to be contacted for a preliminary interview, and perhaps six of these will be called for an in-district interview. The local media almost always gets hold of these names and the word almost always gets

back to the candidate's home district. This often times upsets board members, and can do irreversible damage to the working relationships between the school board, staff, and community members (Glass, 2000).

The current system of using search consultants is probably reducing the number of qualified candidates for many jobs. This system has the appearance of headhunting games where one board is trying to steal away another superintendent. The declining number of fresh faces in the applicant pool is a core problem of attracting a new superintendent. Many superintendents are content to sit tight or being very selective about what type jobs they may consider. Less desirable districts are often being filled by rookies with the best of intentions, but little experience (Glass, 2000).

The School Community

When speaking of the school community, there is some evidence that variables in the community, the school district, and the school board may have an effect on tenure of school superintendents.

Community relations

Current superintendents are concerned about quality-of-life factors of a community (Glass, 2000). While school boards do not have much influence over the quality of life in the district, they should be sensitive to the concern. Seldom, do these less attractive districts offer incentives to attract quality applicants. Walter and Supley (1999) asserted we should all agree that a job with such impact on a community requires a quality educational leader. They also believe these leaders should be allowed the stability to enjoy the results from their accomplishments in the district. It is becoming commonplace for search consultants to survey and meet with community leaders when

building a profile for a superintendent in a community. In Midland, community members, leaders, and teachers were asked their opinions, with mixed results. Some say they wanted someone with business experience and others wanted a strong educational background. Others like the idea of a superintendent who would remain with the district a long time and others wanted “new blood.” They all agreed they wanted someone who was strong, an honest person, and a role model (Belton, 2000).

In relationships with the community, studies indicate superintendents think open communication is a key to longevity. Superintendents have reported that with longevity, the community gets to know them and knows what to expect from them. When asked for advice for new superintendents, the most frequent responses included finding the right situation in the right community and striving to communicate with the board, the staff, and the community (Chance, 1999). It was found that the larger the district, the unhappier the superintendents felt about their relations with the community. This is probably the case because in these large communities, superintendents may feel they cannot reach their communities as well as those in smaller districts (Sharp & Walter, 1995). A strong community can entice applicants to make a move. Dlugosh (1994) noted the single most common reason for a superintendent to relocate voluntarily was the opportunity to return home or to a community they liked. This factor even outweighed salary or benefit considerations.

Size of the District

The size of a district seems to have an impact on superintendent tenure. McCurdy and Hymes (1992) found tenure of superintendents was shortest in urban districts while it was longest in districts with between 300 to 3000 students. They stated urban district

superintendents now have an average tenure of 2.5 years. Cummings (1994) reported the stay for urban districts was only 18 months. Of the 25 largest districts in the nation, only one other district has had a superintendent longer than Houston, where Dr. Rod Paige had been at the helm for six and one-half years (Hewitt, 2000).

Benton (2000) noted one of the keys to success in urban schools is the tenure of the superintendent. Urban districts who have had success have had superintendents who stay on the job for an extended period of time. He further explained five of the eight largest districts in Texas were without superintendents at some point in 1999. These urban school superintendents must be given a chance to succeed by allowing them to stay in a district long enough to make meaningful changes and watch them come to fruition. When urban school superintendents lose their jobs or quit, all levels of the district's educational system feel the consequences. In the best of circumstances, students, teachers, and others have to weather a transitional period while a new superintendent with new ideas and new policies demonstrates the ability to oversee a system that has thousands of personnel and often budgets in excess of \$500 million (Renchler, 1992).

AASA (1999) quoted a major newspaper in describing the city's superintendent opening. It stated "candidates who are smart enough to survey the chaos may not want to take the rudder on a ship of fools." In the same article, a noted consultant said, "Who wants to go into a hornet's nest, where the last two superintendents lasted a year and got fired? It's like saying, 'here, take this bomb I'm handing you.'"

The study further noted urban superintendencies are increasingly difficult jobs to keep because of the intense media pressure, public scrutiny, state accountability systems, and

pressure from political stakeholders. A Seattle school board member summed this thought up by saying:

You end up having a six-day-a-week, 18-hour-a-day job, where you're appointed by demanding people with competing demands, and everyone from the mayor to religious leaders take an interest in what you are doing because it makes good politics whether they are really concerned about it or not. When you are the guy or gal at the helm, you're under the most intense scrutiny. Everything you do is under such a microscope that you're better off having Ken Starr investigate you (p.10).

In their report on rural superintendents, Chance and Capps (1992) reported school boards fired superintendents for a variety of issues. Some were related to a lack of communication with the school board and community, but others involved a severe lack of judgment on the superintendent's part. They reported of superintendents who had affairs with teachers, principals, and even students, to those who set up fake businesses and funneled school moneys to them to be deposited in their own accounts. Such moral issues seemed be a major concern for these rural school boards.

Chance (1991) conducted a study of 24 rural Oklahoma superintendents who had achieved tenures of at least 12 years. In it, they assert the most important key to longevity in the superintendent's position is open communication. Chance and Capps (1992) further explored the reasons for high turnover among rural superintendents. They researched 41 districts in southwestern states where there had been three or more superintendents in a five-year period. When surveying board presidents of these districts, the leading reasons for superintendents leaving included financial mismanagement,

communication issues, and immorality. Of the 63 superintendents who left the districts, 27 of them were fired.

The School Board

Thirty years ago, most superintendents and the vast majority of education administration literature stated politics had no place in education. Today, the politics of education has assumed an important part in the literature and the practices of educational administration (Lutz, 1996). Giles and Giles (1990) stated unequivocally school board/superintendent disharmony is the major cause of superintendent vacancies.

In studies of superintendents of varying lengths of tenure, Chance (1992) found long-term superintendents' school boards were noticeably different from the districts with excessive superintendent turnover. Long-term superintendents had much more stable boards than their short-term counterparts. Superintendents in these districts pointed to open communication and school boards who let them run the district as contributing factors to their longevity.

Bennett (1991) suggested the politicization of the urban school board is one of the main factors affecting the tenure of superintendents. He said that most urban school board members of the 1990's are purely political animals who are answering to a small constituency. Because of this politicization, many qualified candidates are not interested in these urban positions, which further diminishes the pool of potential superintendents. He also mentioned several other reasons for the decline in tenure of the urban superintendent:

1. The perception that the job is impossible. New superintendents are expected to make immediate changes, and when it does not happen, the superintendent is to blame.
2. The urban school superintendency is not as financially attractive as it was in the past.
3. There is a lack of positive mentorship in the urban schools. Superintendents move or are removed so frequently that the movement from assistant superintendent to superintendent seldom happens.
4. Ethnicity has become a major factor in the urban school districts. Almost 75% of the urban district populations are minority. The politics of the board and community require a superintendent of color or gender in many cases.

The problems faced by urban superintendents seem to be spreading to the suburbs and rural districts. In large suburban districts where problems such as poverty, racial tension, and school violence are becoming more commonplace, this is especially noted. A recent move by local districts has been to pay top dollar to retain their current superintendent, with salaries now approaching, and even exceeding, \$200,000 (AASA, 1999). In their study on rural superintendents, Czaja and Harman (1999) found exiting superintendents had a variety of feelings about their experience in rural districts. These included the feeling of being manipulated by the school board, hurt and angry over being victimized, and being forced to neglect activities that gave them strength and spend more time doing unpleasant activities such as dealing with the school board.

Grady and Bryant (1990) found rural superintendents get fired, and seldom are they fired for “mismanagement.” In many cases, the reason given by board members was not fitting in with the community. In 37% of the cases, the reason given for a termination of a superintendent was negative incidents with communication and human relations problems. The next closest area of concern was staffing issues, which came up 15% of the time. Some evidence is apparent that rural school boards seem to want to thwart any type of change, thus reducing the pool of applicants of potential superintendents (Czaja & Harman, 1999).

Board/Superintendent relations. The probability of board conflict is perhaps the biggest deterrent today to attracting qualified superintendents. Currently, board conflict has taken over career advancement as the biggest reason superintendents leave their position (Glass, 2000). Many people claim burnout and retirement are reasons for most of the turnover, but there are other factors. Some turnover is created by poor superintendent/school board relations, resulting in terminations and contract buyouts (Cummings, 1994). Chance (1992) reported superintendents who had achieved a long tenure felt that one of the keys to longevity was open communication. They said they had congenial, understanding board members who let them run the school.

Allen (1997) reported in a case study of a non-renewed superintendent that being a “district superintendent” and not a “board superintendent” was a key factor in his non-renewal. The board increasingly micro-managed the district, but the superintendent maintained focus on the district, further straining the relationship with the board. Spiropulos (1996) added political implications were associated with superintendents leaving their jobs. He said politics played a part in job performance and the

decision-making process of the superintendent, which affected the superintendent turnover rate. If a district has a history of board conflict, superintendent turnover, buyouts, etc., it is unlikely that they will have a large applicant pool for their next vacancy (Glass, 2000).

One potential key to success noted by Walter and Supley (1999) was the strong suggestion that boards and the superintendent establish a positive working relationship by understanding their roles and responsibilities. They suggest boards need to realize their role is policy making; it is not micromanaging the day-to-day operations of the school district. They further suggest the board should maintain positive communications with the superintendent, cooperate with other board members, and support the superintendent's effective plans. In sum, they suggest boards should set realistic expectations, hire the best person for the job, and then let the superintendent lead the district without worrying about his or her longevity.

Advantages of Long Tenure

The reform decade of the 1980's reinforced the assertion that schools must have effective, proactive administrators to achieve educational goals. In order to be effective, leaders must be provided the opportunity to remain in a position long enough to see their initiatives take shape (Chance & Capps, 1992). Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) asserted schools could not be effective and progress without a culture of stability of at least ten years. If there is a constant turnover of superintendents, the task will become impossible. It takes a leading superintendent with a term of five to seven years, followed by another successful superintendent for the same amount of time in order for a school district to be successful. The effect of rapid change results in a constant change of direction, priorities,

and new direction. Johnson (1996) sums this up by saying, “Teachers and principals who fear being left behind by ambitious leaders will wait warily before entertaining their superintendent’s ideas for change...Superintendents who think they can install programs and leave a district without harming it, and school board members who believe that firing a superintendent will open the way for better leadership, may be mistaken. When school leaders suddenly depart, or there is repeated turnover, teachers close their classroom doors” (p. 283).

The overall position on long tenure is favorable. Hundley (2000) said he believed that ideally a school superintendency is a five-to-ten year job. He asserted by staying a while, a superintendent is forced to take ownership and responsibility for decisions made and results produced. Walter and Supley (1999) stated bluntly without longevity of a superintendent, there is no stability and little can be done to move the school district. Some of the most frequently reported advantages of long tenure include the establishment of credibility, trust, a higher potential salary, an ability to make long term changes in the academic program, and the potential for longer school board tenure (Garcia, 1999).

Disadvantages of Long Tenure

Very few studies report negative aspects of long tenure. In one recent study, Garcia (1999) reported some potential disadvantages to long tenure. He determined potential problems with long tenure are complacency, stagnation, an increase in the number of adversaries, a minimal impact on students, lack of motivation, the disappearance of the challenge, and an increased involvement in local politics. Hundley (2000) believes a superintendent can stay too long. He said that as time passes, one

begins to spend too much time defending the status quo, and it is very difficult to stay fresh and effective for the long haul.

Summary

Literature related to superintendent tenure has been discussed in this chapter. The literature revealed many studies have been done regarding tenure in various states around the country. Whatever the actual numbers, it is apparent that the length of tenure of a superintendent is between 18 months and 6.5 years (Cummings, 1994, Glass, 2000).

Tenure of superintendents is clearly a concern for all involved. Superintendent search consultants are saying the tenure of superintendents has reached a crisis situation (AASA, 1999). Others are noticing the lack of qualified candidates for jobs in which they are serving as consultants (Zakariya, 1987). School board members are reporting they want to hire superintendents who will remain with the district for many years; while others say an ideal tenure is six to ten years (Yock, et. al., 1990). The size of the district is certainly a factor in superintendent tenure, with urban districts having a much higher turnover rate than smaller ones (McCurdy & Hymes, 1992).

The make up of the school board, and the politics of that body, is a key factor in superintendent longevity. Other issues in the community such as poverty, racial tension, and school violence have their affects (Bennett, 1991). Salary consideration shows a strong correlation to the length of time a superintendent stays in the district (Newell, 1997). As the pay in smaller districts continues to rise, many superintendents will shy away from the urban schools, further complicating their problems (McCurdy & Hymes, 1992).

School boards, communities, and superintendents must begin to better cooperate and have an understanding of the factors that affect tenure. By examining superintendents in Texas, this research will find similarities and differences in those who have beaten the odds and remained in a district for a lengthy tenure and those who move frequently. This study hopes to gain insight into what characteristics may be most important in establishing a long relationship with a school district and community. The following chapter provides information on the sample, the research instrument used for the study, and the procedures for collecting and analyzing the data.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to describe the procedures used to conduct this study. It includes a description of: (a) the selection of the participants, (b) the process used for developing the instrument for the collection of data, (c) the method used for collecting the data, and (d) the methods used to analyze the data.

Selection of Participants

The population for this study included all public school superintendents in the state of Texas. The entire population was surveyed by contacting all 1,057 public school superintendents in Texas (TEA, 2000). This sample included superintendents who were presently employed by the districts contacted. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) determined that for a population of 1,100, a researcher would need 278 participants to have a representative sample. Initially, the researcher hoped for a 50% return rate of the surveys, which would substantially exceed the number of participants needed.

Instrumentation

Data regarding the number of public school superintendents in the state and a database of addresses were obtained from the Texas Education Agency. The remainder of the data for this study was collected through the use of a survey instrument.

A survey instrument that would collect the information needed for this study was not available. Numerous descriptions of instruments were reviewed on the American Educational Research Association's database, but none asked the specific questions the researcher needed to address the research questions. Using an existing instrument as a

model, and from examining the review of literature, a survey instrument was developed for the study. The researcher relied on an instrument used by Glass, Bjork, and Brunner in The Study of the American School Superintendent (2000). Variations of this original instrument were also used in 1990 and 1980 for similar studies. Questions from the instrument were used with permission from Dr. Thomas Glass (personal communication, November 17, 2000), the lead researcher for the project (See Appendix B).

Six experts from Sam Houston State University examined the instrument for face validity. Four of the experts were faculty from the Center for Research in Educational Leadership, one was a faculty member in the College of Education, and one was a statistician in the Department of Mathematics. Two were Caucasian females, three were Caucasian males, and one was an African American female. These experts provided many suggestions for modifying the instrument to better address the research questions for this study. For the final survey instrument, questions 1, 17, 19, 23, 28, 30, and 31 were identical to those used in the AASA study. Questions 2, 3, 4, 6, 21, 22, and 25 were modified slightly from the AASA questions for use in this survey. Modifications were made by changing some of the categorical questions to open-ended or response questions or by changing the wording slightly. Questions 5, 7-16, 18, 20, 24, 26, 27, 29, 32, 33, and 34 were researcher-developed questions added to provide additional information to answer the research questions for this study or provide additional descriptive data of the respondents.

The instrument was field tested in January 2001, using eight practicing superintendents. Four of them had long tenure as superintendent in their district and four were considered to have short tenure. All the superintendents in this field test were

Caucasian males. These superintendents were encouraged to be critical of the instrument and offer suggestions for improvement. Several offered minor suggestions about how to better word a question and they also found two questions in which the answer choices were not clear. These two questions were modified to be more clearly understood.

The final instrument contained 34 questions. Eleven questions required a brief written response and 21 questions were categorical and required the respondent to check one of several choices. Two questions were open-ended and asked for brief comments. Of the 34 questions on the final survey, the data from 23 questions were used to address the research questions or provide descriptive data for this study.

After modifying the instrument based on input from the initial field test, the researcher field-tested the instrument a second time using 12 doctoral fellows at Sam Houston State University. All of the doctoral fellows held leadership positions in education and evaluated the instrument for face validity. Of the 12 doctoral fellows, one was a Hispanic male, three were Caucasian males, two were Hispanic females, and six were Caucasian females. After this field test, and after corresponding with the dissertation chair, a few minor corrections and changes in wording were made to the instrument until a final version was produced. The final version of the instrument was approved by the SHSU Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. See Appendix B for a copy of the final version of the survey instrument.

Data Collection

Address labels for all public school superintendents in the State of Texas were purchased from the Texas Education Agency. The survey, a cover letter, and a

self-addressed stamped envelope were sent to each of the 1,057 public school superintendents in the State of Texas. The initial mailing was on February 23, 2001.

The surveys were numbered and coded for identification. Each survey was numbered and matched to a master list so that follow-up mailings could be sent to those who did not respond to the first survey. A reminder letter was sent two weeks after the initial mailing to encourage participation. The superintendents were encouraged to participate and respondents were assured their anonymity would be protected and the list of codes would be destroyed as soon as the data were collected.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to determine which factors, if any, affect a superintendent's ability to remain in a school district, as superintendent of schools, for a period over 10 years. By analyzing the data collected using both quantitative and qualitative means, the researcher determined which of these factors would be most reliable in identifying positive characteristics to extend superintendent tenure, and those that may affect tenure negatively.

Data analysis included both quantitative and qualitative measures. It was determined that much of the data could be analyzed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics seek to classify, organize, and summarize data about a particular group of observations (Ravid, 1994). Descriptive analysis was used for reporting demographic data about superintendents, school districts, communities, and school boards. This data is presented in the form of percentages, charts, and graphs to show patterns and profiles of short tenured and long tenured superintendents.

Statistical analysis was conducted using the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The researcher used the response variable of “Years as Superintendent in your current school district” as the dependent variable. Independent variables were indicators of personal characteristics, school demographics, and superintendent perceptions of their school board. The ANCOVA and ANOVA were used since they permit analyses of quantitative data in the same model. In essence, the researcher wanted to know if there were clear, statistical differences in superintendents who achieve long tenure and those who only stay a short time in a district, and what underlying reasons are attributable to such.

Considerable emphasis was given to qualitative research since it seeks to enrich a study by giving descriptions of people and conversations that are not easily handled by a statistical approach. Written results and quotations from the data are used to substantiate the presentation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The researcher examined comments respondents made on the two open-ended questions of the survey. These comments were grouped by category, and the most common themes of the respondents were reported as they related to each research question. The researcher used this reporting method to add depth to the statistical data being reported.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to determine what characteristics of superintendents, school districts, communities, and school boards may affect the tenure of superintendents. All data collected was subjected to descriptive, statistical, and qualitative analysis to analyze differences, determine significance, and find common themes. Analyses are presented in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the analysis of the data collected and the applied statistical techniques. The first section will give descriptive data characterizing the respondents to the survey. The second section presents findings of the study in respect to each of the research questions. The third section presents a summary of the chapter.

Description of the Sample

The sample for this study included all 1,057 public school superintendents in the State of Texas (TEA, 2000) who were sent a survey. After six weeks, 740 or 70% of the surveys were returned. Data from the surveys were entered into a database compatible with the JMP statistical package. This package was used to run means of all items as well as the ANCOVA and ANOVA required of the study. Because not all respondents answered all questions on the survey, some statistics reported may show more respondents for some questions than others. The researcher must note that while attempting to run the ANCOVA and ANOVA on JMP, it was found that it could not handle the information provided and perform the tests necessary for the statistical analysis. For this reason, the database was transferred to the SAS statistical package where the ANCOVA and ANOVA were run successfully.

Personal Characteristics of the Respondents

The demographic data showed that 655 or 88.5% of superintendents were male, and 85 or 11.5% were female. Six hundred eighty-one or 92% of respondents were

Caucasian. Additional respondents indicated 34 or 5% Hispanic, 16 or 2% African American, 5 or .006% marked “other” on their survey, and 3 or .004% were Native American.

As shown in Figure 1, the mean age of all respondents was 51.6 years of age. The oldest respondent was 75 years old and the youngest respondent was 27 years old. This

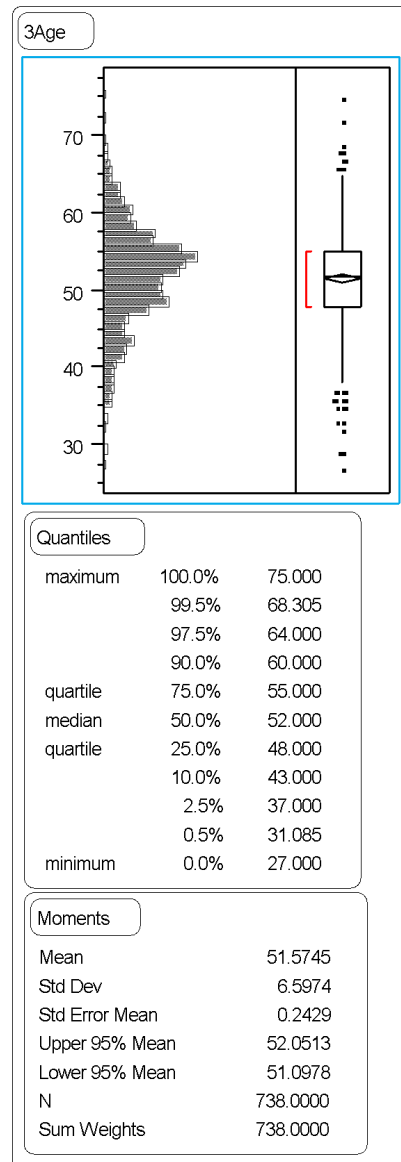


Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents by Age

provided conclusive data to show the majority of superintendents in Texas are nearing retirement age.

The data further illustrated there were 559 or 76% who indicated an earned Master's degree as their highest degree, and 181 or 24% who had earned a Doctorate. The salaries for superintendents who responded ranged from a high of \$240,000 to a low of \$46,000. The average salary for the respondents was \$83,225.

When analyzing the tenure in Texas, the researcher found the average tenure of responding superintendents was 5.2 years. This number is higher than most of the lengths of tenure reported in Chapter II. The maximum number of years a superintendent reported being in the same school district as superintendent was 39 years while the shortest and most often reported length of time was 1 year. Several respondents listed lengths of tenure as being less than a year, but for the purposes of this research, a one year tenure was the shortest number reported. The research also shows the average number of superintendent positions held is 1.75. The highest number of superintendencies held was 8, and the lowest, and most frequent answer was 1.

Eighty-four percent of responding superintendents believe there will be "increasing turnover" of the superintendent position in Texas, 108 or 15% believe turnover will remain "about the same," and 11 or 1% believe we will see "decreasing turnover" in the future. In addition, 645 or 89% of current superintendents believe they will "continue until retirement," 39 or 5% indicate they will "leave the superintendency," 26 or 4% will "leave for a university position," and 17 or 2% will "leave for a position outside education."

Further analysis found 364 or 50% of superintendents indicated they believe they were chosen for their current position for “personal characteristics,” 154 or 21% indicated “instructional leader,” 154 or 21% indicated “change agent,” 30 or 4% indicated “maintain status quo,” 17 or 3% indicated “not sure,” and 8 or 1% indicated “no particular reason.”

Characteristics of the Community

Respondents were asked several questions about their communities. Five hundred ninety-two, or 80% of superintendents reported their school district was located in a “rural community,” 109 or 15% indicated a “suburban community,” and 39 or 5% indicated an “urban community.” When asked why they chose to work in their community 345 or 48% of superintendents indicated they “liked the Area,” 157 or 22% indicated they had “family ties in the area,” 130 or 18% indicated the “position was more important than the community,” 86 or 12% indicated “salary,” and 6 or less than 1% indicated “other.” When asked if groups had ever pressured the school board, 416 or 57% of superintendents responded “no,” and 309 or 43% responded “yes.” When asked where these pressure groups came from, 241 or 75% reported these pressure groups were from the “community,” 52 or 16% were from “political groups,” 25 or 8% were from “religious groups,” and 5 or 1% were from the “private sector.”

Characteristics of the School District

Respondents were asked several questions about their school district. Four hundred thirty-nine or 60% of respondents reported their school district had between 300 and 2,999 students, 138 or 19% reported having between 3,000 and 24,999 students, 132 or 18% reported having fewer than 300 students, and 18 or 2% reported having 25,000 or

more students. When asked the current TEA rating for their district, 332 or 46% of respondents indicated their district was “recognized,” 265 or 36% indicated their district was “academically acceptable,” 127 or 17% indicated their district was “exemplary,” and 3 or less than 1% indicated their district was “low performing.”

Characteristics of the School Board

Most superintendents who responded felt their school boards were representative of the community interests. When asked that question, 543 or 75% of superintendents indicated their school board was “aligned with community interests,” 134 or 18% indicated their school board “represented distinct factions,” 30 or 4% indicated “not active,” and 20 or 3% indicated “dominated by elite.” When asked about the qualifications of their board members, 407 or 56% of superintendents felt their school board members were “qualified,” 254 or 35% indicated “very well qualified,” 58 or 8% indicated “not qualified,” 6 or less than 1% indicated “incompetent,” and 1 or less than 1% indicated “other.”

When asked what percent of the time their school board accepted their policy recommendations, 658 or 91% of superintendents felt their school board accepted their policy recommendations 90-100% of the time, 48 or 7% indicated 80-89%, 13 or 2% indicated 70-79%, 3 or less than 1% indicated 50-59%, 3 or less than 1% indicated less than 50%, and 1 or less than 1% indicated 60-69%. When asked if they had school board members who were elected and “had an agenda,” 408 or 56% of superintendents answered “no,” and 318 or 44% indicated “yes.”

Testing the Research Questions

For research question one, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was the statistical method employed to compare the amount of variance between personal characteristics (degree earned, salary, career path, search process), and the number of years a superintendent had spent in their current position. For research question two, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was the method employed to compare school community characteristics (type of community, size of district, superintendent perception of school board), and the number of years a superintendent had in their current position. The researcher was aware of Bonferroni's inequality and set a significance level of .025 when testing the variables. When combined with research question two, the overall significance level of the statistical model would be .05 when taking Bonferroni's inequality into effect. Research question three used means and standard deviation to analyze the difference between short tenured and long tenured superintendents.

In Chapter II a rationale was presented to support the belief that a relationship existed between characteristics of the superintendent, school district, community, and school board, and the length of tenure of a superintendent. In a research design such as this, ANCOVA and ANOVA are used because they can handle data that includes both continuous and categorical responses. In the design for research question one, continuous data were used in both the dependent variable and as the covariate. This required the use of an ANCOVA to handle the covariate used as one of the independent variables. ANOVA was used for research question two, because the design included continuous data as the dependent variable, but only used categorical data for the independent variables.

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between superintendent tenure and the following personal variables: (a) highest degree earned, (b) salary, (c) career path, and (d) search process when hired.

The first research question examined the personal characteristics of superintendents and their length of tenure. Survey questions 4, 5, 16, 17, and 19 were used to provide the data to answer this research question. Specifically, the statistical analysis included an analysis of covariance or ANCOVA to determine whether the difference between mean scores of these characteristics were significantly different based on the number of years of tenure achieved. The ANCOVA tables and figure (see Tables I-IV and Figure 2) indicated there is a statistical significance in two of the four characteristics. The interactions test revealed there was no significant relationship between the interactions of variables.

Degree and Prior Training

Table II indicates the distribution of respondents by the highest degree earned. When focusing on the highest degree earned, the research showed no statistical significance related to degree and length of tenure. However, many respondents made comments on their lack of a doctorate and the fact that they wish they had pursued a doctorate earlier in their career. One respondent simply stated, “If I were starting over, I would obtain a doctorate.” One superintendent said, “As a female, I wish I would have gotten my Ph.D. It would have opened doors more easily.” Another female stated, “I should have finished my Ph.D dissertation. It would have made it a little easier to get in—maybe—being female does make it harder to get a superintendents job, especially the

Table I

ANCOVA Summary Table for Personal Characteristics and their Effect on Tenure

Levels	df	SS	MS	F Ratio	P-value
Degree	1	12.2654	12.2654	0.54	0.4637
Salary	1	857.2010	857.2010	37.56	<.0001
Career Path	4	58.9928	14.7482	0.65	0.6297
Search Process	3	500.0835	166.6945	7.30	<.0001
Degree*C-Path	4	23.230	5.8075	0.25	0.9070
Degree*Search	3	15.8481	5.2827	0.23	0.8745
C-Path*Search	12	242.5572	20.2131	0.89	0.5614
Degree*Search*Path	7	146.7108	20.9586	0.92	0.4914

first one.” The most common responses echoed one who said, “I believe that a doctorate is becoming more and more important and the key to moving up.”

Salary

Salary was one of the two variables found to be statistically significant. This closely reflects the findings of Newell (1997) in his study of Missouri superintendents. Figure 2 indicates the distribution of salaries of all respondents. When commenting on salary, many superintendents wished they had gotten into the superintendency earlier in their career in order to get their salary higher for retirement. One flatly stated, “I would move every 3-5 years to increase my salary for retirement.”

Table II

Distribution of Respondents by Highest Degree Earned

Category	Frequency	Percent
Master's Degree	559	75.5
Doctorate	181	24.5
Total	724	100

A common theme noted by the researcher was salaries and benefits are the reason there is so much turnover in the superintendency now. One respondent said, "They must raise the salary of all superintendents and there needs to be a more clear definition of the responsibilities of the superintendent to promote long tenure." Tying salary to small district troubles, one respondent said, "Small districts are going to have to pay larger salaries if they hope to slow the swinging door. They must pay more to soften the political problems and offer extended contracts." Another superintendent simply stated, "Underpaid, under-appreciated, over-worked, over-stressed, more vacancies to come."

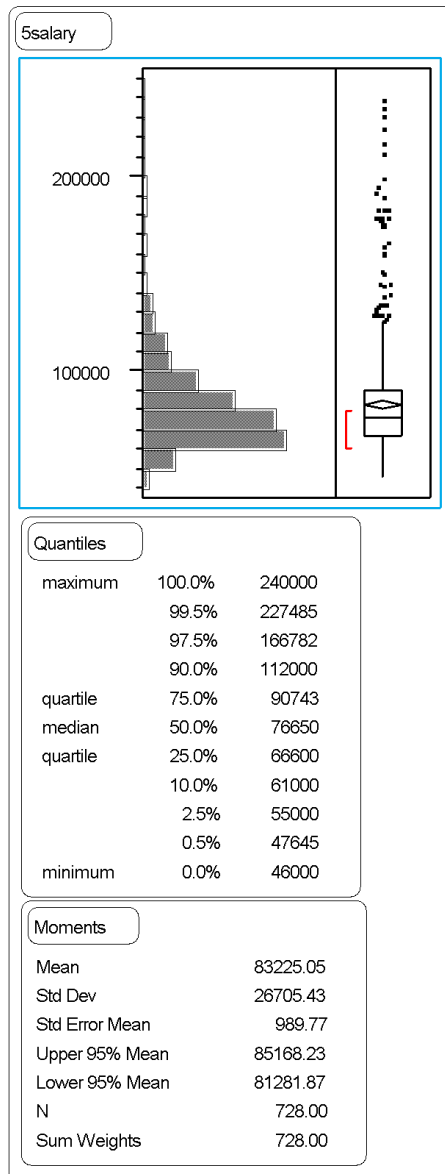


Figure 2. Distribution of Respondents by Salary

One superintendent thought salaries would eventually stabilize the tenure concern. He said, “I believe the high turnover will continue another 2-4 years, then stabilize somewhat as salaries become more competitive.” Another respondent noted, “I see a very large turnover with qualified replacements becoming a problem. It will be a superintendent quality market. Salaries will rise because of supply and demand.”

Another echoed those comments when he said, “I see many superintendents retiring soon and few administrators seeking certification. I believe there will be many openings and new superintendents will be at a premium, treated well, and asked to stay longer periods of time.”

Career Path

Career Path was not shown to have a statistically significant impact on superintendent tenure. Table III indicates the career paths respondents took on the way to the superintendency. They were asked if they were happy with their path or if they

Table III

Distribution of Respondents by Career Path

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher, AP, Principal, Central Office	303	41
Teacher, Central Office	49	7
Teacher, Principal	318	43
Teacher Only	12	2
Other	58	6
Total	740	100

would have changed anything. The overwhelming majority of respondents said they would not change a thing. One said, “I wouldn’t change a thing. I enjoy the position

very much and I would encourage young administrators to pursue the superintendency. It has been fantastic!”

The most common theme of those who would have done something different with their career path was many respondents wish they had gotten into the superintendency earlier. Some seemed almost frustrated they took so long to get into the superintendency. One former coach stated, “If I had to do it over again, I would not have coached for 23 years.” Another said, “I would not spend as much time as I did being an Assistant Principal.” One said, “I have never been a high school principal and that is lacking from my complete rounding education.” Another said, “I would not have stayed in an Assistant Superintendent job for over 5 years.” A suburban school superintendent added, “I believe it is preferable to obtain a superintendent position as soon as possible no matter the size of the district, and don’t get sidetracked by a central office job in a large district.” One respondent countered that statement by saying, “I would work as an assistant superintendent, learning as much as possible from an experienced person.” Finally, one said, “I have enjoyed it, but I would not do it again. I would remain as an assistant superintendent with less pressure and politics.”

A small number of respondents placed the current crisis with tenure squarely on the shoulders of superintendents. One said, “I am appalled at the turnover and it is we, as superintendents, fault. We need to commit ourselves to a district for 6-10 years. We need to stay long enough to make a difference. I know of superintendents who start looking for their next job as soon as they get to the new one.” Another echoed those comments by saying, “I believe that a superintendent can control the tenure through positive and

open communication. Most superintendents get in trouble by not keeping their board informed. Tenure will lengthen for good superintendents.”

Another final theme from superintendents was the immense pride that many have in their jobs. One simply stated, “I love my job and hope to be here in the superintendency for a long time.” Another said, “The position continues to be a challenging position with no possible changes in the near future. I do appreciate the opportunity to serve as a superintendent and accept the challenges.” Another said, “I see an exciting, challenging future. What a great time to be in education!” Finally, one respondent said, “If it were easy everybody would do it. The superintendency has always been a challenging job and always will be. It’s the best job anywhere!”

Search Process

The search process proved to be a statistically significant indicator of tenure. Table IV indicates the search process school boards used when hiring the superintendent for their current position. Figure 3 indicates the average length of tenure of superintendents based on the search process used to hire them. As illustrated in the figure, the average tenure for superintendents who were selected by their local school board was almost two years longer than superintendents who were selected using other search methods.

Many superintendents were concerned about where future superintendents would come from. A typical response was, “ It appears that tenured superintendents are disappearing. Unfortunately, teachers are not willing to move into administrative positions. Therefore, the pool of qualified applicants for administrative positions general is decreasing.” One said, “Because of retirement, experienced superintendent applicants

Table IV

Distribution of Respondents by the Search Process the District Used for Selecting Superintendent

Category	Frequency	Percent
Professional Search Firm	136	18
State School Board Association	102	14
Local School Board	479	65
Other	23	3
Total	740	100

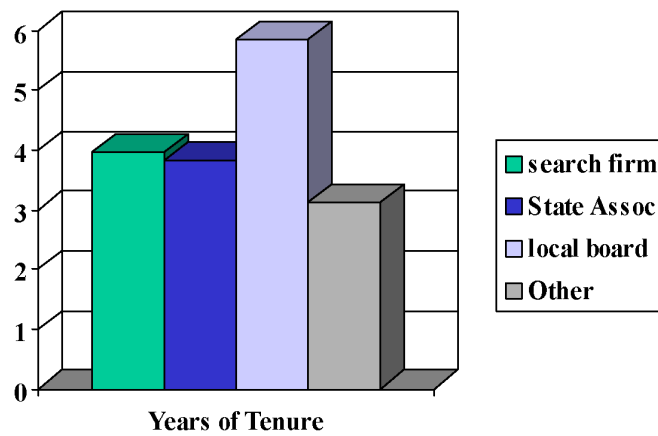


Figure 3. Tenure of Superintendents Based on Search Process Used

are going to be hard to find.” Another said, “I am worried that the superintendent pool of very qualified superintendents is going dry. I do not know what the answer will be. I will continue to pray.” Another continued that tone by saying, “We, as a group, are an aging population. In 3-5 years, most of the superintendents I stay in contact with will retire.”

Research Question II. What is the relationship between superintendent tenure and the following school district variables: (a) type of community, (b) size of school district, (c) characterization of school board as perceived by the superintendent.

The second research question examined factor effects of the characteristics of the community, the school district, and the superintendent perceptions’ of their school boards, on the superintendent’s length of tenure. Research questions 8, 16, 25, and 28 were used to provide the data to answer this research question. Specifically, the statistical analysis included an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine whether the difference between mean scores of these characteristics were significantly different based on the number of years of tenure achieved. The ANOVA tables (see Tables V-VIII) indicated no statistical significance for any of the above factors.

Type of Community

Table VI indicates the type of communities in which the respondents were currently working. In Chapter II the research noted the days of a superintendent going to a community and staying their entire career is over. Several respondents echoed those feelings and one said, “The day of superintendents coming into a community and learning the system and staying for years is over for now. The concept of superintendents now seems to be spend big, make things happen, and leave districts hurting for money

after a short tenure. The philosophy of many is to build a personal portfolio to help self and move on to help career—not kids!” One advised, “Future young superintendents need to have a stronger sense of commitment to a community—beyond the salary.”

Table V

ANOVA Summary Table for School Community Characteristics and their Effect on Tenure

Levels	df	ss	ms	F Ratio	P-value
Type of Community	2	1.6475	0.8237	0.03	0.9683
Size of District	3	38.4985	12.8328	0.50	0.6810
School Board	3	24.0417	8.0139	0.31	0.8156
Community*Size	6	205.9557	34.3259	1.34	0.2357
Community*Board	5	4.1615	0.8323	0.03	0.9995
Size*Board	7	67.8403	9.6914	0.38	0.9147
Comm*Size*Board	3	54.6483	18.2161	0.71	0.5446

Another superintendent said, “I am hopeful that boards and communities will begin to realize that stability in the superintendency is imperative to district success.” Another respondent offered this advice, “I was born and raised in this community and know this area and the people better than most. School districts should look within for their new administrators.”

Another area of the community that was emphasized in the responses was that of special interest groups. One superintendent said, “The superintendency is a high stress job and we will continue to see shorter years of tenure as more factions and interest groups become involved.” Another wrote, “Once traditions such as circumventing the

Table VI

Distribution of Respondents by Type of Community in Which School District is Located

Category	Frequency	Percent
Rural	592	80
Urban	39	5
Suburban	109	15
Total	740	100

chain of command become established, the situation seldom changes. Districts that are historically unstable through two or more superintendents will continue to be unstable.”

Size of School District

The size of the school district had no statistically significant impact on superintendent tenure. Table VII indicates the size of the school districts in which the respondents were currently working. Most respondents that mentioned the size of district in their comments, gave responses such as, “I predict a severe shortage of candidates who possess the characteristics necessary to be successful school leaders. Turnover in small districts will increase due to lack of concern for living in the community and the

ridiculous low salary for the work that is performed by the superintendent.” Another respondent said, “It will still be volatile for urban districts and fast changing districts; but relatively stable for districts that are politically stable.”

One respondent gave his views on both large and small districts by saying, “If you are white, male, and conservative, your chances of getting a superintendent position in a suburban setting are diminishing. Also, a doctorate hurts your chances of being hired in most small districts.”

Table VII

Distribution of Respondents by the Size of Their Current School District

Category	Frequency	Percent
25,000 or more	18	2
3,000-24,999	138	19
300-2,999	439	60
Fewer than 300	132	18
Total	727	100

Most negative comments about size of school came from rural superintendents. One said, “I was hired as a change agent in my first superintendency. I would not be a change agent until I gained board and community support. It cost me my first job!” Another took this further by saying, “Small school superintendents and NFL coaches seem to be in the same league—unrealistic expectations with inadequate support

systems.” Another rural superintendent said, “Every time the legislature meets there are more things we are mandated to do. A small-school superintendent has no one to delegate these responsibilities to. For these reasons, I can’t wait until I make it to retirement.” Another respondent noted, “It is an impossible task load for small to medium districts with too few staff members.” One said, “Small school superintendents are retiring at an alarming rate. Small districts will become revolving doors for those superintendents looking for larger districts where there is more help.” Finally, another claimed, “This is a rewarding but tough job, especially on small school superintendents who have to do it all.”

Characterization of School Board

How superintendents characterized their school board had no statistically significant affect on tenure. Table VIII indicates how superintendents perceived their

Table VIII

Distribution of Respondents by Superintendents Characterization of Their School Board

Category	Frequency	Percent
Dominated by Elite	20	3
Represents Distinct Factions	134	18
Aligned With Community Interests	543	75
Not Active	30	4
Total	727	100

school board. In the qualitative portion of the data analysis the researcher noted several respondents were very negative toward their school board. This contradicted the statistical analysis, which indicated that most superintendents felt their school boards were aligned with the community's interests.

Several respondents were very bitter about their school board and made comments like one superintendent who said, "TEA does little to monitor boards with problems. The 'I got you' attitude is returning after a long absence. Too many boards do not rely on the professionalism of educators. They are quick to substitute their own judgment." Another said, "The problem is too much friction from boards. Control is the problem. Power is the problem." Another said, "Board politics are a major stumbling block to maintaining balance in the school. However, one can work through this. The greatest difficulty lies in the area of the boards involvement in hiring, firing, and accepting resignations." Finally, one superintendent said, "If school board members are not held accountable, in some ways it looks bleak for a lot of our superintendents. My school board president went to the third grade and wants to run the school."

Another common theme was the political influence of the board. One respondent said, "Changes in the board membership due to politics increases the risk of superintendent turnover." One superintendent said, "As the pool of qualified candidates for school board members decreases, the superintendency will become less of an educational leader and more political in nature." Echoing those claims, one superintendent said, "I worry about the mass exodus from the superintendency due to board and superintendent relationships that 'go bad.' Board turnover is always a concern

for every superintendent every year.” When commenting on extending tenure, one superintendent jokingly stated, “Make board meetings annual events!”

Research Question III. What are the differences between short tenured and long tenured superintendents with regard to age, degree held, average salary, search process, size of school, type of community, and TEA rating of the district?

To analyze the data for Research Question III, the researcher identified respondents who were long tenured and those who were short tenured. Long tenured superintendents were those who had been in the same school district as superintendent for over 10 years. Short tenured superintendents were those who had been a superintendent in at least three school districts in the past 10 years. From the 740 total respondents, 120 superintendents were identified as being long tenured superintendents and 54 were identified as being short tenured. The data for these two groups were analyzed by testing for means and comparing the two groups for differences. Questions 4, 5, 8, 16, 17, 19, 25, and 28 were used to provide the data to answer this research question. Several key differences were noted.

Table IX illustrates the differences in personal characteristics between short tenured and long tenured superintendents. When analyzing personal characteristics, the researcher found the average age of short tenured superintendents to be 51.1 years of age compared to 55.4 years of age for long tenured superintendents. The gender of the two groups was almost identical with 92.59% of short tenured superintendents being male and 7.41% being female, as opposed to 91.67% of long tenured superintendents being male and 8.33% being female.

Table IX

Distribution of Personal Characteristics Between Short Tenured and Long TenuredSuperintendents

Category		Short Tenured Supt.	Long Tenured Supt.
Age		51.13	55.43
Highest Degree	Masters	68.5%	80.0%
	Doctorate	31.5%	20.0%
Salary		\$87,752	\$85,750
Search Process	Search Firm	27.78%	10.0%
	State Board Assoc.	24.07%	6.67%
	Local Board	40.74%	82.50%
	Other	7.41%	0.83%

When analyzing the highest degree earned, it was found that fewer long tenured superintendents had doctorates. Thirty-one percent of short tenured superintendents had doctorate degrees while only 20% of long tenured superintendents reported having a doctorate. It was also interesting to note that short tenured superintendents had a higher average salary than their long tenured counterparts. Short tenured superintendents had an

average salary of \$87,752, while long tenured superintendents had an average salary of \$85,750. The career paths of the two groups were also considerably different. Long tenured superintendents were much more likely to have only been a teacher and principal before becoming a superintendent (52.5%). Their short tenured counterparts only took that path 42.59% of the time. Short tenured superintendents were much more likely to have been a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and central office administrator before becoming a superintendent (42.59%). Long tenured superintendents only took that path 30% of the time.

When asked why they had left their previous position, short tenured superintendents cited they had moved for a higher salary 38.89% of the time, compared with only 8.4% of long tenured superintendents. In fact, 74.79% of long tenured superintendents listed “not applicable” to this question because they were still in their first superintendency. Moving to a larger district was the reason given by 20.37% of short tenured superintendents as opposed to only 8.4% of long tenured superintendents.

The next area of key differences between the two groups had to do with the search process when hired. Over eighty-two percent (82.5%) of long tenured superintendents were hired by local school boards. Only 40.7% of short tenured superintendents were hired using this method. Short tenured superintendents said they were hired by a professional search consultant 27.78% of the time, as opposed to only 10% of long tenured superintendents. Finally, 24% of short tenured superintendents were hired using a state school board association, while only 6.6% of long tenured superintendents were hired this way. When asked why they felt they were hired, almost twice as many (27.8%) short tenured superintendents listed “change agent” as compared to 14.2% of long

tenured superintendents. Slightly higher percentages were reported as reasons for being hired by long tenured superintendents for “personal characteristics” and “instructional leader.”

Tables X and XI illustrate differences in school district characteristics between short tenured and long tenured superintendents. When comparing the community of the two groups, there were two key differences identified. There were a larger number (20.3%) of short tenured superintendents in suburban communities than long tenured superintendents (11.6%). Long tenured superintendents were more likely to serve in rural communities (85.8%) compared to their counterparts (75.9%). The size of school district also had two key differences. Short tenured superintendents were almost twice as likely (25.9%) to be in districts with 3,000-24,999 students as were long tenured superintendents (13.4%). The numbers were almost reversed in districts with less than 300 students as 22.7% of long tenured superintendents reported working in schools of this size, as opposed to 12.9% of short tenured superintendents. In addition, long tenured superintendents were more likely to be in an exemplary district (30.3%) as their short tenured colleagues (11.1%). Forty percent of short tenured superintendents were in schools rated academically acceptable, as opposed to 28.5% of long tenured superintendents.

When asked about their school board, long tenured superintendents were more likely to have a favorable impression of their board than short tenured superintendents. Almost twice as many (25.93%) of short tenured superintendents felt their school board was aligned with distinct factions while only 14.2% of long tenured superintendent felt this way. In addition, 75.6% of long tenured superintendents felt their board was aligned

Table X

Distribution of School District Characteristics Between Short Tenured and Long Tenured Superintendents

Category		Short Tenured Supt.	Long Tenured Supt.
Type Community	Rural	75.93%	85.83%
	Urban	3.70%	2.50%
	Suburban	20.37%	11.67%
Size of District	25,000 or more	3.70%	3.36%
	3,000-24,999	25.93%	13.45%
	300-2,999	57.41%	60.50%
	less than 300	12.96%	22.69%
District Rating	Exemplary	11.11%	30.25%
	Recognized	48.15%	41.18%
	Acceptable	40.74%	28.57%
Characterization of School Board			
	Dominated by Elite	3.70%	1.68%
	Represents Distinct Factions	25.93%	14.29%
	Aligned with Community	66.67%	75.63%
	Not Active	3.70%	8.40%

Table XI

Demographic Findings of Superintendents in Texas and Their Comparison to AASA(2000) Study Findings

Category		Texas Study	AASA Study
Gender	Male	88.5%	86.8%
	Female	11.5%	13.2%
Ethnicity	Caucasian	92%	94.9%
	Hispanic	5%	1.4%
	African American	2%	2.2%
	Other	1%	1.5%
Age		51.6	52.5
Doctorate		24%	45.3%
Average Salary		\$83,225	Not Reported
Length of Tenure		5.2 years	Not Reported

with community interests as opposed to 66.6% of short tenured superintendents.

Respondents were asked about the abilities and preparedness of their school boards.

Long tenured superintendents reported 40.6% of their boards were “very well qualified” compared to only 29.6% of short tenured superintendents. Short tenured superintendents reported their board members were “not qualified” 11.1% of the time, as opposed to only 5.9% of long tenured superintendents.

Summary

The three major research questions for this study were analyzed using statistical models. The analysis found two variables that were highly significant and had an effect on tenure. The salary of a superintendent and the search process used to select the superintendent were shown to have a statistically significant impact on tenure. Qualitative methodology was used to establish and briefly elaborate on several themes that emerged in data analysis.

In addition, when long tenured and short tenured superintendents were compared, several findings emerged to show differences in the groups. Much additional information can be learned from the data collected in this study. These research questions explored the relationship between personal characteristics of a superintendent, size of school district, type of community, the superintendent’s perception of their school board, and their effect on superintendent tenure. These findings were discussed and presented in tables and figures to further illustrate the results. A discussion and interpretation of these findings will be presented in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

In Chapter IV, the presentation and analysis of data were presented. The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of findings, the researcher's interpretation and explanation of the findings, and a discussion of the implications of this study.

The researcher hopes to expand on the data generated, the possible implications and uses of this data, and present suggestions to future researchers and others interested in the area of superintendent tenure.

Superintendent tenure in Texas is a subject that has rarely been examined. Research suggests superintendent tenure in the United States is becoming a crisis (AASA, 1999; Kowalski, 1999). With more job openings and fewer applicants, search consultants and school boards are concerned about finding quality applicants for these positions (Hewitt, 2000; Moses, 2000). Prior research suggested personal characteristics of superintendents, and characteristics of the community, school district, and school board may have an impact of tenure (Newell, 1995; Benton, 2000). Selected characteristics of the superintendent, school district, community, and school board were examined in this study and analyzed for significance.

Summary

The entire population of public school superintendents in Texas was sent a survey and asked to participate in this study. Seven hundred forty of the 1,057 superintendents responded to the survey. The 70% response rate was evidence that superintendents in the state have an interest in the topic of superintendent tenure. In this survey, superintendents

were asked questions about themselves, as well as information about their community, school district, and their perceptions of their school board. The statistical and descriptive data generated by this research yielded powerful information about the status of the superintendency in Texas. Further it identified significant factors for persons to consider who are interested in the superintendency, school boards, search consultants, and superintendents themselves.

The research was designed to give a clear picture of the status of tenure in Texas as well as show statistical relationships between key characteristics of the superintendent, community, school district, and school board. This information was analyzed to identify and report characteristics that may have an impact of the tenure of a superintendent.

Demographic Findings

The demographic data indicated 88.5% of responding superintendents in Texas to be male. This compared favorably to the AASA (2000) study, which reported 86.8% males nationally. The average age of all responding superintendents in Texas was 51.6 years of age. The AASA (2000) study reported the national average age of 52.5, which was the oldest recorded median age of superintendents during the 20th century. This finding certainly lends credence to the “graying of the superintendents” philosophy. The current tenure of all respondents averaged 5.2 years. This number disputes much of the literature completed in other states, which reports two and three year tenures as average (Cummings, 1994; Spiropulos, 1996). In the ethnic breakdown of superintendents in Texas, 92% were Caucasian, 5% Hispanic, 2% African American, and 1% “other” or Native American. This compares almost identically to the AASA (2000) study except for the percentage of Hispanic superintendents is slightly higher in Texas than the 1.4%

found nationally. One difference this study noted when compared to the AASA (2000) study was that only 24% of Texas superintendents reported holding doctorates compared to 45.3% in the national study. Average salary in Texas was noted to be \$83,225, while the AASA (2000) study did not report information regarding salary. Sixteen percent, or 120, of the 740 superintendents responding had tenure of over 10 years in their respective school districts. AASA (2000) did not address the national average length of tenure in their study. While 84% of current superintendents believe there will be increasing turnover, the researcher concluded the crisis of short tenure in Texas is overstated. However, the concern over future administrators and where they will come from seems to have merit considering the average age of current superintendents. Eighty-nine percent of superintendents said they would stay in the superintendency until they retire.

Research Question One

The first research question asked, What is the relationship between superintendent tenure and the following personal variables: (a) highest degree earned, (b) salary, (c) career path, and (d) search process when hired? In the statistical analysis, two variables were found to be highly significant. The two variables were salary and the search process used to hire the superintendent. By examining the statistical and descriptive data of the two, the researcher made these implications.

It was found the longer a person stayed in the same district as superintendent of schools, the higher their salary was likely to be. This finding compared favorably to a study by Newell (1997), which found salary to be the most significant indicator of long tenure for Missouri superintendents. The researcher noted many of the superintendents who responded were in their first job as superintendent and were in rural school districts.

This large number of first year superintendents and the large distribution of small schools in Texas may also account for the significance of this variable. First time superintendents, with most of them being employed in small districts, would generally have a lower salary than more experienced superintendents in larger districts.

The search process was the other variable found to be a significant indicator of tenure. It was found that superintendents who were hired by a local school board had tenures of almost two years longer than those hired through other processes. The findings related to the search process may lend credence to Glass's (2000) assertion that search consultants sometimes prevent many qualified candidates from applying for jobs for fear of their names being released to the public. Search by local school boards produced average tenures of 5.85 years, compared to an average of 3.97 years for those selected with help from a professional search firm, 3.83 years for those selected with help from a school board association, and 3.13 years for those using other methods. With the appearance that there is an increase in the number of search consultants being used today, it would be interesting to know if these numbers remain the same ten years from now.

The highest degree a superintendent had earned had no significant statistical impact on tenure. The researcher noted, however, that a large number of superintendents wished they had pursued their doctorate earlier in their careers. In fact, of all the common themes arising from the open-ended questioning, obtaining a doctorate was the most common. This study provided evidence that a large number of superintendents feel a doctorate is becoming more and more important for moving into the larger jobs in the state.

The last personal characteristic examined in this research was the career path of the superintendent. While this study did not reveal a statistical significance, several key observations were made from the research. First, the overwhelming majority (84%) of respondents took two major paths to the superintendency. The most common path was simply teacher and principal. Forty-three percent of respondents reported taking this short path to the superintendency. The second most common path was teacher, assistant principal, principal, and central office position. This path made up 41% of the respondents. These two paths relate closely to Burnham's (1989) Path A and Path B, which were the most common paths noted in that study. The common conclusion is the majority of superintendents in Texas made a stop as a campus principal before landing a position as superintendent. It was also noted by the researcher that the majority of superintendents were very happy with their career path and would only make minor changes if they had to do it over again.

Research Question Two

The second research question asked, What is the relationship between superintendent tenure and the following school district variables: (a) type of community, (b) size of school district, (c) characterization of school board as perceived by the superintendent? None of these characteristics proved to be statistically significant, but important data was gained from the results.

When speaking of community, many experienced superintendents seemed to urge younger superintendents to stay in a district for an extended period of time. Some seemed appalled at the turnover rate, while others understood the current trend to chase higher salaries. Many called on school boards to raise salaries, especially in smaller

districts, to retain superintendents who were doing a good job. However, most conceded the days of a superintendent moving to a community and staying 20 years is probably going to be even more rare in the future.

Seventy-eight percent of respondents were superintendents in school districts with fewer than 3,000 students. The size of the district had no statistical significance on superintendent tenure. In open-ended responses, however, many respondents were very concerned about the future of urban and small school superintendencies. The concern for urban superintendents focused on the volatility of such positions, while the focus of small schools focused on the lack of support personnel and the low salaries. Overall, the size of the district seemed to have no effect on the length of tenure of Texas superintendents.

The superintendent's perception of their school board had no statistically significant effect on tenure. Fully, 75% of superintendents felt their school board was aligned with the community and had a positive view of their board. In addition, 91% of superintendent felt their board members were either very qualified or qualified to be on the school board. Further, 91% of superintendents reported their school board accepted their policy recommendations 90-100% of the time. Statistically, superintendents appear to be very happy with their school boards. The irony of this area of the study is in the open-ended portion of the survey where many negative comments were made about board members and the authority they have. It is obvious there are a large number of superintendents who have had negative relations with school boards in the past and are carrying this bitterness with them. Although this is a very vocal minority, most superintendents are happy with their school board relationships and feel their board members are qualified to hold their office.

The findings from this study contradict Callahan's (1962) assumptions in his "vulnerability theory" and agree with the findings from Parker (1996). The mobility in Texas does not seem to reflect a general dissatisfaction on behalf of the superintendent or the school board, but more likely a move for advancement. In the qualitative portion of the study, some evidence was noted by the researcher that could support Lutz's (1996) "dissatisfaction theory." In his theory, he asserts that when dissatisfaction is the reason a superintendent leaves, it is very painful for the superintendent and disrupts the educational process.

Research Question Three

The third research question asked, What are the differences between short tenured and long tenured superintendents with regard to age, degree held, average salary, search process, size of school, type of community, and TEA rating of the district?

From the 740 respondents, superintendents who had served in the same district for 10 years or more (long tenured superintendents) were placed in one group. One hundred-twenty superintendents were identified as long tenured superintendents. The other group consisted of superintendents who had been in at least three school districts in the past 10 years (short tenured superintendents). Fifty-four superintendents were identified as short tenured superintendents. These two groups were analyzed by looking at the means and standard deviations of these groups on the same variables used in the first two research questions. From this comparison, powerful data were retrieved that provides insight to the current state of tenure and superintendents.

As could be expected, the average age of long tenured superintendents was about four years older than short tenured superintendents. It was also found that fewer long

tenured superintendents held doctorates than short tenured superintendents. Thirty-one percent of short tenured superintendents held doctorates while only 20% of long tenured superintendents held the degree. This may explain the many comments from superintendents who said they wish they had obtained their doctorate earlier in their career and the importance of a doctorate for career advancement, particularly in the larger school districts.

One statistic the researcher found surprising was the higher salaries reported for short tenured superintendents. They reported average salaries of \$2,000 more than their long tenured colleagues. In fact, 38.89% of short tenured superintendents cited increase in salary as a reason for leaving their previous post, while only 8.4% of long tenured superintendents reported the same. Also, long tenured superintendents were more likely to have been only a teacher and principal before becoming a superintendent, while short tenured superintendents were more likely to have served as an assistant principal and central office administrator in addition to teacher and principal.

One key difference in the two groups was the search process used when hired. Eighty-two percent of long tenured superintendents were hired with the local school board doing the search, while only 40% of short tenured superintendents reported being selected this way.

When comparing communities and school districts, more short tenured superintendents (20.3%) are in suburban communities than long tenured superintendents (11.6%) and more long tenured superintendents (85.8%) are serving rural districts than their short tenured colleagues (75.9%). In addition, more long tenured superintendents were serving in districts rated “exemplary” (30.3%) than short tenured superintendents

(11.1%). Also, long tenured superintendents had a more favorable impression of their school board than short tenured superintendents.

In essence, when comparing the two groups, short tenured superintendents appear to be superintendents attempting to “climb the ladder.” They are younger, more likely to have a doctorate, serving larger districts, making higher salaries, and seem to feel less inclined to stay in a district for an extended period. In contrast, long tenured superintendents are older, more experienced, serve in smaller districts, and have a favorable view of their school board. They also are more likely to be serving in an exemplary district than their short tenured colleagues. Table XII illustrates differences between short tenured and long tenured superintendents.

Implications

Superintendent tenure in our country has been described as in a “state of crisis.” The research from this study shows tenure in Texas is not as grim as the research has noted. The average tenure of superintendents in Texas is currently a little over five years, and the average number of superintendents serving a district in a 10-year period is less than two. The researcher believes the current state of tenure in Texas cannot be called a crisis.

However, with the average age of superintendents in Texas at over 51 years, and the many comments about low numbers and poor quality of applicants, it is not too early to begin to be concerned about where we will find the future generation of superintendents. Experienced superintendents nearing retirement are clearly concerned with where their replacements will be found.

Table XII

Differences Between Short Tenured and Long Tenured Superintendents

Category	Short Tenured	Long Tenured
Age	51.13	55.43
Average Salary	\$87,752	\$85,750
Doctorate	31.5%	20%
Search Process When Hired		
Search Firm	27.78%	10%
School Board Assoc.	24.07%	6.67%
Local School Board	40.74%	82.50%
Other	7.41%	0.83%

Potential superintendents who are worried about their job security should find some solace in the findings of this research. It appears that if one does a good job, their job security is not at jeopardy. However, the importance of the school board is evident from the many respondents who were very critical of school boards they have worked with. The research would suggest to potential superintendents to thoroughly evaluate potential board members and make sure chemistry is there to promote a positive working

relationship. Long tenured superintendents may be interested to know their younger colleagues are demanding a higher salary and are moving into the larger districts. By informing school boards of this information, salary increases should be considered by school boards who feel their superintendent is doing a great job and is willing to stay in the district until retirement.

School boards should hear the call regarding salaries and support personnel. While paying a superintendent in a rural school a salary of \$200,000 is certainly not likely to happen soon, there are many indications that school boards may benefit from significantly increasing the salaries of superintendents who are doing a great job. It may be money well spent in the long run and may lend stability to districts who are constantly experiencing turnover. School boards should also hear the message regarding governance and the role of school board members. Many superintendents report school board members who frequently roam outside their reign of responsibility and infringe on the job of the superintendent. This certainly cannot help cultivate the support a superintendent needs in order to do the best job for the district he is serving. Finally, school boards should know the vast majority of superintendents feel they have school boards that are qualified, aligned with community interests, and are doing a great service for their school district.

Suggestions for Future Research

The goal of this research was to examine the current state of tenure in Texas and those characteristics that may have an impact on tenure. This research produced a large amount of data and the tremendous response rate should give an accurate and representative description of the current state of tenure.

With the relatively low numbers of minorities and female superintendents in Texas, future research may include:

1. What is the current state of female and minority educators preparing for the superintendency?
2. What mechanisms are in place to promote female and minority promotion into the superintendency?
3. What are the lengths of tenure for minorities and females as compared to white, male superintendents?

Research question one examined the personal characteristics of superintendents and their effect on tenure. Salary and the search process were the only two variables found to be statistically significant. Additional research in this area may focus on:

4. Will salary increase in the future for superintendents in rural school district in an effort to promote longer tenure in these districts?
5. Are there other personal characteristics that can be proven to lengthen tenure?

Research question two examined the relationship between community, school district, and superintendent perceptions of their school board and their effect on tenure. None of these characteristics proved to be significant indicators of tenure. Further research may focus on the following:

6. What are school board member's thoughts on superintendent tenure and the board's effect on tenure?
7. What are specific reasons superintendents have negative images of their school boards and what type training is done in these districts to attempt to address these problems?

Research question three focused on comparing long tenured superintendents to short tenured superintendents and find out the differences in the two groups. More research in this area should focus on the following:

8. A qualitative study of both short tenured and long tenured superintendents may add depth to this area and provide an understanding of why the two groups chose their respective paths.
9. Why are long tenured superintendents more likely to be in exemplary districts than short tenured superintendents?

The subject of superintendent tenure in Texas has been examined closely in this study. Several areas of significance were found as well as much additional demographic and descriptive data that gives a clear picture of the current state of tenure in Texas. By addressing the findings of this study and the nine suggestions for future study, the tenure of superintendents in Texas may lengthen and the children of the state will be the beneficiaries.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Human Subjects Application and Approval

APPENDIX B

Letters

APPENDIX C

Survey Instrument

