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**A GROUNDED THEORY OF THE IMPACT OF TEACHNJ ON THE  
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP OF SUPERINTENDENTS**

by

Russell M. Lazovick

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
Rowan University  
June 30, 2018

Dissertation Chair: JoAnn B. Manning, Ed.D.

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## **Abstract**

Russell M. Lazovick

### **A GROUNDED THEORY OF THE IMPACT OF TEACHNJ ON THE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP OF SUPERINTENDENTS**

2019-2020

JoAnn B. Manning, Ed.D.

Doctor of Education

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a theory, grounded in data obtained by interviewing current superintendents on how TEACHNJ has impacted their ability to improve student performance. TEACHNJ is a law enacted by the state of New Jersey to improve teacher quality and raise student performance by changing evaluation and tenure processes in order to create greater transparency, equity, consistency, and accountability across districts. This study examined the law's impact on five specific actions superintendents can take that have been found to enhance student performance. The study found that TEACHNJ served as a punctuating event, sending districts into a revolutionary period. "Enhancing the conversation" was found to be the core phenomenon through this period. Following grounded theory methodology as defined by both Creswell (2007) and Strauss and Corbin (1990), this study discusses the core phenomenon; the causal, contextual and intervening factors; as well as the strategies and consequences of the theory developed in this study.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

William Bennett (1999), Secretary of Education in 1987, wrote that “the public school establishment is one of the most stubbornly intransigent forces on the planet... full of people and organizations dedicated to protecting established program and keeping things just the way they are” (p. 628). There has been an aversion to change within education, more recently conveyed by researchers including Schmoker (2006), Marzano (2003), and Wiggins and McTighe (2007); however with mounting evidence that students in America are losing ground against their international peers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010) more and more stakeholders from a variety of arenas are attempting to influence change within our current system.

It is possible, though, to put forth great effort for little if any result. Murphy, Evertson and Radnofsky (1991) were concerned that “it remains to be seen if restructuring leads to radical changes that deeply affect teachers and students or if changes will stop at the classroom door, leaving the teaching-learning process largely unaltered” (p. 135). That was 1991. The issue, more than twenty-five years later, still exists. Schmoker (2006) argues that “perhaps our chief obstacle is the prevailing perception that because most educators work hard and with dedication, we are within reason doing most of what’s necessary for good schools” (p. 4). Our inability as educators to change the system in which we perform continues to negatively affect students. Marzano (2003) found that the system itself obscures its own ineffectiveness from even the most talented, industrious, and committed (p. 23). From activists to

philanthropists to politicians, much debate has been had and much research has been performed on the leadership needed within education to overcome these realities.

When there has been an examination of leadership in education, it has almost always been focused at the building level, examining the roles of the principal or teacher-leaders. Wiggins and McTighe (2007) argue that our “system” is anything but a system, likening education to shopping mall teaching where each teacher rents space in the “educational mall” acting as an independent franchise, working within a field but under individual thinking. They find this distressing, saying that “the idea of school has no meaning if each teacher, even a hardworking and highly qualified one, is free to teach and assess as he wishes” (p. 27). Limiting our examination of leaders to the building and classroom levels misses the fact that our students progress through multiple levels that need to be connected. Since few districts in New Jersey allow students the benefit of staying in one building from kindergarten through grade 12, any examination of instructional effectiveness that stops at the building or classroom level fails to assess the impact of district leadership. District leadership and the position of the superintendent must be a focus of research if we are to move the entire system.

If the system needs to be changed, researchers have to examine the leadership at the top, as there is a detrimental lack of consistent practice between educators, even in the same district. It is the job of the superintendent to ensure a seamless system within his or her district. In New Jersey, the role of the superintendent has come under intense scrutiny as everyone from state officials to boards of education members and taxpayers across the state debate the value of the position. While the debate focuses on the issue of compensation, the constant questions regarding the job itself highlight the lack of

understanding within the general public regarding the importance of the position. Who are the people that serve in the role? What do they contribute to the education of the state's students? How can we know which are effective and which are not? Most importantly, how can superintendents serve as the instructional leaders that are needed?

The reality of the superintendent position varies from district to district. Each district serves communities made up of complex varieties of demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural groupings. As well, the support structure for a superintendent varies from one district to the next. Many times, while the chief executive officer, a superintendent is rarely the chief financial officer, the chief instructional officer, or even the chief communications officer. The superintendent though, still has to oversee and lead the work in each of these departments. Without a firm grasp of these aspects, how can a superintendent create the consistency of vision and reliability of assessment that allows the institution to find success? Further, as public education is being forced to reinvent itself in order to meet the demands of a flat world (Freidman, 2007), what is the measurement of success for the modern superintendent?

Adding further complexity, the superintendent must lead within the legal context set out by legislators and politicians. Donlevey (2007) found that "with all the energy directed to raising academic standards and performance levels in schools throughout the United States, one would expect to be seeing a rising trend line... one would think that after all this multi-year blustering, strong academic results would be at hand. But they are not" (p. 117). Specifically, he found that "the most recent NAEP results for the assessments of 12th grade reading and math are very sobering. They show that reading and math scores are not rising; in fact, they are declining" (p. 118). He argued that "the

U.S. is not failing. It is ill-conceived educational policies that are failing” (p. 120). This has not dissuaded legislators and politicians in every state from continuing to change the reality within which superintendents work.

In New Jersey in 2012, this was the case with the passage of TEACHNJ. Called “historic tenure reform” by the U.S. Federal News Service (2013), TEACHNJ brought significant change to how teachers and principals are evaluated, effectively ending the age-old concept of tenure for public school educators in the state. Then Education Commissioner Christopher Cerf stated:

By developing this new system in partnership with educators across the state, by moving towards full implementation over the course of several years, and by learning together through a multi-year pilot program, we are confident that we are putting the pieces in place to fully launch a system that helps all educators improve their practice by next school year. Though we have certainly met some challenges along the way, we thank the educators in our pilot districts for helping to identify and work through these to help all educators in the state implement a more meaningful evaluation system.

(<http://www.state.nj.us/education/news/2013/0205eval.htm>)

Central to the implementation of this system are the superintendents who manage the more than 600 local districts across the state.

TEACHNJ changes the way teachers are evaluated and how tenure is earned and maintained. Radically different from existing systems, TEACHNJ gives authority back to districts, allowing them to remove the tenure of the staff members whose practice is not demonstrating positive impact on students. In the past, once a teacher received tenure,

barring an egregious offense, that teacher could not be held accountable for the learning of his or her students. That is not the case under TEACHNJ. In doing this though, there is a great amount of work to stay compliant with the expectations of the law.

While it is clear that superintendents in New Jersey have to serve as instructional leaders that foster change to meet the demands of students, parents, boards of education, and local communities, superintendents now have to do this under the requirements of TEACHNJ. How this legislation does or does not support this work is unknown. It is critical, early on, that we understand the perspective of current superintendents on the benefits and drawbacks of the new law.

### **Statement of Problem**

Current research has found a distinct inability as a profession to meet the shifting needs of modern students (Wiggins, 2007; Marzano, 2009; Wagner, 2007; Freidman, 2007). If education has not evolved to meet the needs of modern learners (Wagner, 2003) it is the responsibility of the superintendent, as an instructional leader, to promote necessary change. The central premise of this study is that the ability of the superintendent to lead this change has been dramatically impacted by TEACHNJ. As this legislation is recent, it is critical to assess how TEACHNJ has impacted the instructional leadership of the superintendent.

To understand how TEACHNJ has changed the instructional leadership of the superintendent, it is important to understand the entire scope of the superintendency and how instructional leadership fits into that scope. There must be an examination of the superintendent as instructional leader from the perspective of current superintendents who are being impacted by TEACHNJ. The state department of education, state

legislature and state board of education have changed fundamental processes that superintendents leverage in order to foster improved student performance. Therefore, it is critical to understand the perceived impact of these changes on practicing superintendents.

### **Purpose of Research**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the critical influence that TEACHNJ has had on the ability of the superintendent to act as an effective instructional leader. Marzano and Waters (2009) found that there were five specific actions that superintendents can take to positively influence student performance. These include: ensuring collaborative goals setting; establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction; creating board alignment with and support of district goals; monitoring achievement and instructional goals; and allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction. This study will examine the implications of TEACHNJ on the ability of superintendents to carry out each of these five actions.

### **Research Questions**

In order to determine the impact that TEACHNJ has had on the ability of superintendents to lead instructional change, based on the five specific actions defined by Marzano and Waters (2009), this study uses their findings to address the following central questions:

- How has TEACHNJ impacted a superintendent's ability to function as a district's instructional leader?
- What do superintendents consider the strengths and limitations of TEACHNJ as it impacts their ability to:



- What improvements could be made to TEACHNJ to support the superintendent's ability to:
- Under TEACHNJ, what resources would support the superintendent's ability to:

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are of key terms that are used throughout this study. They have separate meetings in various contexts and as such, are defined here for clarity.

*Superintendent* – While most chief school administrators in districts in New Jersey are referred to as superintendent, this is not always the case. For the purposes of this study, the term superintendent will be used to describe the individual designated by a school district's Board of Education to manage all aspects of that district's operations. The superintendent possesses executive oversight and administration rights for the entire district.

*TEACHNJ* – Legislation passed in 2011 that redefines licensure and tenure for teachers and principals/assistant principals in New Jersey.

*ACHIEVENJ* – Regulations passed by the New Jersey State School Board in 2013, required by TEACHNJ, that define the specific requirements for evaluation of teachers and principals/assistant principals in New Jersey. For the purposes of this study, the regulations in ACHIEVENJ will be referred to as part of the larger whole:

TEACHNJ.

*21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners* – Refers to the type of learner now in American public schools, different from the learners of the past in that they access and process information differently (Wagner, 2003; Wagner, 2008) and that they are going to face a world that

will require a different skill set than the one the current industrial model of education is developing in them (Robinson, 2007; Friedman, 2007).

*Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)* – consortium of states that moved to a consistent assessment of student performance. Also refers to the assessment itself, used by New Jersey, to assess student performance, student growth, and teacher performance under TEACHNJ.

*Student Growth Objective (SGO)* – is a calculation developed by the NJ Department of Education that measures student progress on state assessments as compared with expectations for performance against standard.

*Student Growth Percentile (SGP)* – is a calculation developed by the NJ Department of Education that measures student progress on state assessments as compared with their peers.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this research project is guided by two separate schools of thought: punctuated equilibrium and social constructivism. As the context of superintendents, of public education as a whole in New Jersey, is being impacted by this legislation, Punctuated Equilibrium provides a lens through which to view the impact of TEACHNJ. Punctuated Equilibrium, originally a theory to describe biological evolution has emerged, as per Romanelli and Tushman (1994) “as a prominent theoretical framework for characterizing and investigating fundamental organizational change” (p. 1141). They state that:

As described: by its proponents, punctuated equilibrium theory depicts organizations as evolving through relatively long periods of stability (equilibrium

periods) in their basic patterns of activity that are punctuated by relatively short bursts of fundamental change (revolutionary periods).

In keeping with this process, TEACHNJ has the potential to be the catalyst for one of these revolutionary periods in public education. As such, this organizational theory is explored in Chapter 2 as a theoretical model that describes the impact of TEACHNJ.

As I am a superintendent currently working under TEACHNJ, social constructivism provides a second, as important, lens through which I will view this study. As a guide, this view of meaning states that social context and interaction with individuals and groups define our reality, that our examination of fact is inductive and emergent, and that our values and the values of our context shape fact and a researcher's construction and interpretation of data (Vygosky, 1930; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). Social constructivism is a constant reminder that not only is the data I gather from participants influenced by the specific individuals and groups with which they have interacted, but my interpretation and analysis of that data is influenced by the specific individuals and groups with which I have interacted.

Further, Maxwell (2009) argues that a full conceptual framework includes the assumptions and beliefs of the researcher. Having not only gone through the public school system in New Jersey K-12 as a student, I have 20 years of experience, both in and out of state, as a professional educator. I began as a teacher of language arts, social studies, and theater and have served in various district-level administrative capacities. This includes 8 years teaching (6 in New Jersey), 2 years as a district administrator, and 10 as a central office administrator, 7 of which have been as superintendent.

As a superintendent working under TEACHNJ, I have a number of beliefs, the most pertinent to this study are:

- Regarding the support of student performance, as a system, public schools in New Jersey can be more successful than they are;
- The difference between the current level of student success of New Jersey students and the unrealized potential success schools is due, in large part, to issues with the educational system itself;
- The educational system in New Jersey has evolved into a system that is built to resist change;
- There are aspects of the current system, necessary in the past, that have not evolved, and as such, now hinder supporting students rather than helping;
- TEACHNJ is right in its vision and spirit, but I am not certain if it is effective with the reality of New Jersey schools.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

As a current superintendent, I operate as an instructional leader under the new requirements set out by TEACHNJ. Of course, this has led me to my own conclusions regarding the benefits and drawbacks of the legislation in supporting me as an instructional leader. I have my own preconceptions and beliefs about the challenges of a superintendent as an instructional leader. These have certainly been impacted by TEACHNJ. I have therefore developed my own ideas about the law's impact on superintendent as instructional leader. Further limitations of this study rest with the sample population and its accuracy in representing all superintendents impacted by TEACHNJ. As will be explored in Chapter 3, the selection of Grounded Theory as the

research method takes these limitations into account and minimizes their impact on the conclusions of this study. Further, I have been a superintendent throughout the implementation of TEACHNJ, I bring my own ideas regarding its impact on my ability to improve student performance. For this reason, I have consistently applied the ideas Miles and Huberman (1994) who instructed that dependability is built when the qualitative researcher adheres to specific criteria. These criteria include: a) alignment of design with my research questions; b) explicit detailing of the researcher's role along the observer-participant continuum; c) triangulation of data; d) clear statement of study as grounded study and adherence to the precepts of the construct; e) collection of the necessary data across settings and respondents; f) and constant seeking out and use of feedback from my committee and my peers. Strict adherence to these ideas has guided the research process throughout. As well, the careful use of coding has ensured that the theory developed comes directly from the data produced by the participants and not from my personal opinions or experiences.

### **Significance of Study**

The entire country is trying to find an answer to stagnant student performance. The New Jersey Department of Education's attempt to legislate changes, through TEACHNJ, has received a great deal of attention. Other states are watching closely to see how this legislation impacts student performance. The legislation will only have impact though, if those leading school districts can and choose to leverage the changes inherent in it to foster positive change. Therefore, it is meaningful to all who are looking at the role of legislation in promoting needed change in education to understand the impact of TEACHNJ on the superintendent as instructional leader.

Practicing superintendents will find this research study valuable, as they will benefit from the insight of the combined whole and will be able to reflect on their practice as instructional leaders compared with others around the state (NJASA, 2015). The reflective process enables superintendents to continue to improve their use of TEACHNJ to improve instruction and thereby student performance. Second, the focus of the study on instructional practice allows sitting superintendents to evaluate their current district's use of best practice and learn from the examples of other districts who have found different ways to address the requirements of TEACHNJ. Finally, the study enables superintendents to speak to this new reality. In many ways, sitting superintendents have not had a voice in this policy work. This research allows them to provide feedback on TEACHNJ and how it impacts their ability to be instructional leaders.

For these same reasons, the leaders of the state's associations will be interested in the results of this study. Impacted by TEACHNJ, the leaders and members of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators (2015), the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association (2015), the New Jersey Education Association (2013), and the New Jersey Association of School Business Officers will find the results of this study critical to their work. Each of these associations has a different perspective on the legislation in question and each will want to better understand its impact.

For similar reasons, these research findings will be valuable to local boards of education who seek to manage instructional change under TEACHNJ. The findings of this study provide for school board members a point of comparison from which they can examine their own district's actions. This includes assessing evaluation and professional

development processes against the requirements and what other districts have done. Boards can also use this information to evaluate the current performance of their superintendents in new ways, focusing on instructional leadership.

This research has implications for those aspiring to be superintendents. The study is a glimpse into the realities of the job and offers those with aspirations to the position information clarifying if, in fact, the reality of the job is what they perceive it to be. Should they still be determined to pursue candidacy, this study provides vital information, based on the experiences of those currently working, as to the realities of the job under TEACHNJ. Students of this research can judge whether the legislation creates a system within which they want to work. Based on the perspectives provided by working superintendents, should candidates desire to pursue a post as superintendent in New Jersey, they can better determine what preparation they should seek out for their own benefit.

This research will prove valuable for those academics responsible for developing and managing development programs in educational leadership. Specifically in New Jersey, but certainly more broadly as well, this study gives these professionals practical insights into the current reality of the superintendent position and how legislation impacts that reality. This information will allow those in charge of developing programs to better prepare teachers and administrators to develop more effective academic preparation programs.

This study should inform current legislators as they continue to influence education systems. In the same way, these research findings will benefit the New Jersey Department of Education and other governmental agencies. Understanding how specific

legislation impacts superintendents as instructional leaders is critical to those writing the legislation. Given the variations in legislative approaches across the country, the findings of this study will inform members of these agencies as well as legislators on the impact of similar legislation on the educators charged with implementing the mandated changes. The value is not limited to legislators in New Jersey, but will be meaningful to any legislator at the state or federal level who is attempting to support meaningful change in the current systems of education.

This study brings valuable insights to teachers and the larger public. There is greater and greater outcry for a change in our approach to education. The findings of this study will shed light on what value TEACHNJ, or similar legislation, may have in fostering that change. Teachers and principals are directly impacted by these changes. It is important for them to know how these changes impact their superintendent as well.

Finally, given the current state of public debate centered on education and, particularly, the role of the superintendent as instructional leader, this study will provide critical insight into the realities of the position as impacted by TEACHNJ for anyone concerned with instruction and student performance. If the ultimate goal is to improve how we support our students, and we measure that improvement by student performance, we need to understand what, if any, impact TEACHNJ has on the leaders of individual districts.

The findings of this study could impel a number of follow-up studies. As this legislation is new, a look at its impact on the superintendent as instructional leader may evolve, necessitating continued study. Also, it will be important to examine how the



actions of various superintendents, serving as instructional leaders influenced by TEACHNJ, impacted student performance in their respective districts.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the critical need to examine the role of superintendent as instructional leader. This role has been impacted by the recent legislative changes that have reshaped the way teachers and principals in New Jersey are evaluated, supported, and renewed. If education is to evolve as a system, it will only be under the leadership of superintendents who are equipped to succeed in the role and who can leverage the law to support meaningful change. Therefore, an exploration of current superintendents and their ability to function as instructional leaders within the construct of the new legislation is timely and important.

I stated the purpose, RQs and conceptual framework of the study, and detailed the limitations and delimitations that will affect its outcome. The findings from the study will impact the examination and possible evolution of TEACHNJ as well as highlight for current superintendents, boards of education, future superintendent candidates, leaders in higher education, teachers, policy makers, and the general public the impact of such legislation. Chapter 2 will provide a deeper exploration of the current research regarding the superintendent as instructional leader and the specific changes in New Jersey law under which superintendents must operate.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

The American education system has been unable to restructure itself to meet new goals that address the changing context of education. What is worse, far from ignoring these new goals, the current design of our education system is actually reducing our students' capacity to meet with success (Robinson, 2007; Pink, 2005). Standardized tests create in students the belief that there is a singular "right answer" and a desire to find that right answer rather than create an answer of their own. In describing what our system does to young minds, Robinson (2007) states that, "If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original." It the challenge of the superintendent to ensure the system he or she oversees meets the goals of today's students.

In the American system of education, the standardized test is king (Wagner, 2003, p. 72). Arnold Dodge (2009) argues that "standardized tests seem to satisfy the public thirst for the simple and the chartable" and he compares the American system of public education to realities of global warming, saying that while global warming may be an inconvenient truth, our reliance on standardized tests is "a convenient lie" (p. 2). Vivien Stewart, in her 2010 article "A Classroom as Wide as the World", agreed that rather than opening up classrooms to possibility, "standardized tests of basic skills do not measure the thinking and complex communication skills that spell success in college or the global skills needed for the knowledge-driven global economy" (p. 101). Therefore, teachers are focusing their effort toward goals that are incomplete in preparing students for future success. By extension, this means that within the current context, superintendents are leading districts toward the wrong outcomes.

Friedman (2005) opened his book, *The World is Flat*, by describing an epiphany he experienced while on a research trip to India. He compared his trip to Columbus's voyage more than 500 years before. While Columbus discovered that the world was round, Friedman, on the other hand, found it to be flat, or flattening (p. 4). He challenges all educators:

If the jobs of the new middle require you to be a good collaborator, leverager, adapter, explainer, synthesizer, model builder, localizer, or personalizer, and these approaches require you, among other things, to be able to learn how to learn, to bring curiosity and passion to your work, to play well with others, and to nurture your right brain skills, what does that mean specifically for education? (p. 324)

How do we shift our education system from one that teaches students to know to one that teaches students to think? Instructional leaders, including superintendents, must shift what and how we assess, both of students and of the educators who teach them. If what is needed is a new version of the American public school system, it is unclear how superintendents can foster this evolution and how current legislation will support them in doing this. First, we must confirm whether or not our schools, and the superintendents that lead them, are supporting the highest levels of student achievement.

### **Current Student Performance**

Through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card, student achievement has been measured since the early 1970's. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) released a report in 2008 that examined student achievement from then to now. The *NAEP 2008 Trends in Academic Progress* determined that the performance of students as they prepare to finish

high school was no different in reading than it was in 1971 (p. 2). In math, performance is relatively unchanged since 1973 (p. 2).

The study by the NCES did find, however, that greater percentages of students were taking higher levels of math through high school (p. 45). In 2008, 71% of high school students were taking courses beyond a first year of algebra as compared with 43% in 1978. Lee (2010) explores this puzzle while examining academic progress in the United States. Lee's conclusion is that "given the past two decades of standards-based education reform and test-driven school accountability policy, American educational policymakers are left with a puzzle: Standardized achievement test scores have not risen, while more high school students have taken advanced courses in math and sciences and also more high-stakes tests for promotion and/or graduation" (p. 801). How effective then, have superintendents been and how much has legislation supported them.

Lee's findings speak even more to the role of the whole system and therefore to the importance of the person leading the system as a whole: the superintendent. Lee (2010) finds that the greatest growth in performance occurs in the primary grades and diminishes as students progress through a K-12 system (p. 825). Most disturbing, and yet in line with the findings of NCES, is that:

if one looks only at high school achievement trends based on the 12th-grade results, one would get the impression that the current generation of high school students performs as well as the earlier generation 30 years ago. On the other hand, if one examines the entire growth pattern from elementary through high school, one will realize that American high schools take academically better-

prepared students than the earlier generation but fail to help them flourish much further. (p. 826)

Lee's findings speak to the importance of instructional leadership not at the classroom or building level, but rather at the district level. This again focuses the role of the superintendent and legislation that supports district systems.

Since 2010, the NCES has continued to assess student performance. They release an annual report on the condition of education in the United States. In their report (2014), they found that on the NAEP:

the average reading and mathematics achievement of 9- and 13-year-olds improved between the early 1970s and 2012; however, only 13-year-olds made score gains from 2008 to 2012, and they did so in both subject areas. Average reading and mathematics achievement for 17-year-olds did not change significantly between the early 1970s and 2012 or between 2008 and 2012. (p. 112)

The trend outlined by Lee continues.

There is a second aspect to our current context: while internal findings are showing our student performance to be stagnant if not declining over time, the comparison of our students' performance against the performance of students in other countries is even more concerning. Based on the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results () the United States continues to be average in comparison to other countries, with a mean student performance equal to the mean of the participating countries in reading (p. 50) and below the mean of the participating countries in mathematics (p. 154).

This report compares results from 2000 with results from 2009. In each year, 15-year-olds in the United States performed below the average of all 15-year-olds in the study. In 2000, American students averaged a score of 496, 8 points below the aggregate mean of 504. In 2009, American students average score was 495, 5 points below the aggregate mean of 500 (NCES, 2010, p. 21). In mathematics, the years of comparison are 2003 and 2009. In each year, 15-year-olds in the United States performed below the average of all 15-year-olds in the study. In 2003, American students averaged a score of 483, 17 points below the aggregate mean of 500. In 2009, American students average score was 487, 12 points below the aggregate mean of 499 (NCES, 2010, p. 21). In each case, minimal improvement in comparison to the mean is found which demonstrates that over the period examined, American students have remained solidly in the middle.

Further, the NCES (2014), in its report on the condition of our schools, found that:

Among 15-year-old students, 29 education systems had higher average scores than the United States in mathematics literacy, 22 had higher average scores in science literacy, and 19 had higher average scores in reading literacy, according to the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). (p. 116)

These findings support the findings of the OECD through the most recent assessments.

The level of performance exhibited here by students in the United States on the PISA assessment reinforces the need for systematic change in school districts to meet the needs of current students. Exploration of internal data suggest that school-based change is not enough; district-based instructional change is necessary and this change is led by the superintendent.

## **Best Practices Necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

In his book *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach the New Survival Skills Our Children Need – and What We Can Do About It*, Wagner (2008) states:

The rigor that matters most for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is demonstrated mastery of the core competencies for work, citizenship, and lifelong learning. Studying academic content is the means for developing competencies, instead of being the goal, as it has been traditionally. In today's world, it's no longer how much you know that matters; it's what you can do with what you know. (p. 111)

His call to educators, specifically in the United States, to respond to this global shift and to redesign the system they manage falls directly upon the superintendent. In order to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner, there are fundamental best practices that districts must employ in the classroom. While some have only been highlighted recently, research has shown the value in others consistently for decades. Still, they have not become the dominant practice in districts (Wagner, 2003, p. 12). This is the direct result of leadership. How can superintendents lead the changes necessary for current students within the context set for them by legislation?

Cloud (2010) argues that our system of education is unsustainable and we are reaching a critical point. Having examined numerous school districts, Cloud has determined that schools have reached a point where either they will evolve to meet the changing requirements of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners as described by Wagner and by Friedman, or they will be replaced (p. 165). It is imperative that superintendents work to avoid this, and they must do so within the context created by these overarching forces. To meet these

needs, Wagner (2008) determines that educational leaders need to be prepared differently. He applauds the work across the country to find new ways of doing this but states that “it remains to be seen if these programs will influence the development of entirely new institutional approaches to preparing future leaders – new approaches that completely re-envision both what educators should be taught and how” (p. 146-147). What changes do superintendents need to ensure occur?

Schmoker (2006), in *Results Now*, speaks to the specific practices that schools will need in order to successfully prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He summarized these practices into four areas: Literacy; Curriculum; Instructional Supervision; and Professional Learning Communities (PLC). Each of these areas is complex and a school leader must understand each. The teaching of literacy is changing as technology changes the way we, and our students, create, receive, and share information. The ability to read and write is no longer enough for students. The curriculum that our students receive, what we want students to know and be able to do, must evolve to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners (p. 17). Furthermore, when it comes to supervision, Schmoker (2006) says that “there is very little oversight of instruction that affects its quality” (p. 17) and this is mostly due to a lack of understanding by administrators of what is needed. Finally, the emergence of PLCs has required educators to hold collaborative conversations focusing on student achievement and reflecting on their instruction. In order for PLCs to be effective, school leaders must understand and manage them (p. 18).

Lemov (2010) highlights specific techniques that are critical to effective teaching and learning. Each technique supports one or more of the four areas highlighted by Schmoker. Lemov argues that “great art relies on the mastery and application of



foundational skills, learned individually through diligent study” (p. 1) and that instructional supervision must provide “concrete, specific, actionable advice” (p. 3) if teachers are going to become excellent practitioners. Lemov’s techniques fall into three categories: Using Data; Higher-Level Lesson Planning; and Content and Rigor (p. 11-13). The superintendent must be aware of the techniques in these categories in order to set appropriate expectations for teachers.

The need for this shift in outcome predicates a need for a shift in practice. In her book, *Curriculum 21*, Heidi Hayes Jacobs (2010) argues that schools need to rethink what they do and how they do it. She urges a radical shift in how educators approach curriculum. Jacobs argues that “curriculum should not only focus on the tools necessary to develop reasoned logical construction of new knowledge in our various fields of study, but also should aggressively cultivate a culture that nurtures creativity in all of our learners” (p. 17). Jacobs goes on to say, “It is not only the children we need to cultivate, but also the responsible adults in our midst who have bold ideas and new directions to consider. In our work to improve education, we need to be bold advocates for creative ideas that are actionable, rational, and constructive” (p. 17). Superintendents must find ways to motivate, develop, and support the educators in their districts to creatively refocus their work in order to improve student performance.

Before we explore how the specific changes needed to address and improve this performance, we must examine the job of the superintendent as a whole and determine what, if any, portion of the superintendency has been and can be focused on instructional leadership.

## **The Role of the Superintendent**

In 1925, Strayer (1925) stated that “the superintendent of schools has the largest responsibility placed upon any governmental officer in our modern society” (p. 815). Over the past 90 years the responsibility has only grown. The demands of the job and the stress that these demands create have been well documented (Strayer, 1925; Petersen, 2002; Huber, 2004; Petersen, 2004). Given the accepted complexity of the job, researchers continually attempt to categorize its various aspects.

Annunziato (2008) interviewed twelve superintendents from districts in Suffolk County, New York. While his qualitative research focused on the political requirements of the job, his subjects evidenced both extreme stress and extreme fulfillment. His participants reported that they felt that the stress resulted from always having to make recommendations and then “try not to get hit in the crossfire” (p. 59). The fulfillment comes from the ability to enact change where “the nature of the change was in the best interests of students” (p. 72). Nevertheless, while the potential for success is evident, the job proves to be stressful. Orr (2009) states that “in outlining a comprehensive list of superintendent competencies and responsibilities [Konnert and Augenstein (1990)] concluded that these competencies, the working knowledge needed, and the number and complexity of task areas are staggering” (p. 1365).

The role is further complicated by the lack of understanding by the public of exactly what the job is. Brunner (2002) says:

Superintendents of schools often relate that very few people in schools or in the broader public are aware of the nature of their position. Furthermore, in development sessions and graduate coursework, superintendents articulate the

concern that traditional literature does not address the complexities of the role.

Thus, it appears that the traditional discourse needs to be reconsidered, expanded, and changed. (p. 402)

The scope of the superintendency has been difficult to clearly define.

Some researchers have attempted to define the scope of the position by using large categories such as these three: education, management, and politics (Carter and Cunningham, 1997; Cuban, 1985; Johnson, 1996). Others have been more specific. McAdams (1995) delineated the challenges of the superintendent into five areas: (a) school finance and business operations; (b) school board relations; (c) instructional leadership; (d) community relations; and (e) human resource management. Strayer (1925), built the following nine categories: (1) the subject matter and method of teaching; (2) the organization of schools; (3) the financing of the educational program; (4) the business management of schools; (5) the personnel management; (6) plant management; (7) planning the school building program; (8) cooperation with other social agencies; and (9) educational publicity. Most interesting, beyond the general commonality, is how little the categories have shifted since 1925. Through all, though, there is a constant shifting of these roles based on the varieties of context in which superintendents work.

Orr (2009) examined the 2000 American Association of School Superintendents (AASA) survey to find that the most pressing issues as highlighted by superintendents were financing schools (97%), assessing learner outcomes (93%), accountability/credibility (88%), and demands for new teaching or educational programs (86%) (p. 1366). Two of the four highest rated issues, the second and the fourth are teaching and learning issues. Orr (2009) found that most states require an advanced

academic degree, so one of the most common features of any state's official preparation program is a graduate-level leadership program. She also found that graduates stressed three areas that programs should focus on are integrating theory and practice, a specific focus on the job of the superintendent, and more selective admission requirements. Most were content with their preparation, but she found this in contrast to the fact that superintendents felt that there was a two-year learning curve in the job, which in Orr's determination "suggests that existing preparatory experiences generally are insufficient" (p. 1398). This would confirm that the role of the superintendent is evolving, but also that superintendents, at a district level, contend with issues of teaching and learning.

Interesting though, Orr (2009) found that superintendents highlighted three major areas of knowledge and skills necessary for the job: knowledge of and skills for management and leadership; knowledge of the district's/community's culture and expectations; and the ability to define one's leadership vision. These findings glaringly omit current teaching and learning practices. In fact, the three aspects of the job highlighted in this study may be so overwhelming to superintendents that they never are able to turn their focus to teaching and learning. It seems that superintendents are making the determination that other aspects of the job are more important and their lack of seeing curriculum and instruction as a critical piece leaves school districts with able leaders who are never focused effectively on the core mission: teaching students. In fact, Orr (2009) found that despite the prevalence of formal preparation and training programs, superintendents primarily learn their role informally through on-the-job training. If superintendents are left to learn on their own, their learning will be directed by what is

most pressing: the immediate (budget, planning, personnel) versus the important (teaching and learning).

While student learning may be the core mission of a district and therefore should be the central focus of a superintendent, the other aspects of the role usually involve more pressing issues and can take precedence if not all of a superintendent's energy and focus. Hoyle (2007) found that most programs sought to improve the knowledge and skill levels in the political and interpersonal domains of district-wide leadership and by providing future leaders with greater insights into school board-superintendent relations and evaluation procedures. This was a change in practice because the designers of these programs felt that it was their responsibility to ensure that superintendent candidates would be able to keep their jobs. This change in preparation programs was in response to the high turnover rate in the position. With this there was a shift within preparation programs away from ISLLC Standard One to Standards Two through Six (school culture; management; collaboration; ethics; and context) . This may have resulted in more candidates keeping their jobs, but leaves in question how many were able to do their jobs with a lack of preparation for creating and stewarding a vision of learning for their districts.

With so many researchers and organizations devising their own systems, states have been moving toward agreed upon standards to define the role of the superintendent. In 1994, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), under the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), began work on what would become, two years later, the ISLLC Standards for School Leaders. The group followed seven principles:

- Standards should reflect the centrality of student learning.

- Standards should acknowledge the changing role of the school leader.
- Standards should recognize the collaborative nature of school leadership.
- Standards should be high, upgrading the quality of the profession.
- Standards should inform performance-based systems of assessment and evaluation for school leaders.
- Standards should be integrated and coherent. (CCSSO, 1996, p. 7)

The result was a six-standard system for classifying the role of the superintendent, supported by 44 knowledge indicators, 43 dispositions, and 96 performance benchmarks.

The standards were to “present a common core of knowledge, dispositions, and performances that will help linking leadership more forcefully to productive schools to enhance educational outcomes” (CCSSO, 1996, p. iii) and they have become the basis for a number of licensing and evaluation systems for educational leaders, including New Jersey’s which will be discussed later. The six standards are as follows:

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by:

Standard 1: Facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

Standard 2: Advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Standard 3: Ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Standard 4: Collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Standard 5: Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Standard 6: Understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context. (CCSSO, 1996, p. 7)

While the job is divided into six standards, it is important to note that the entire list is defined by stating that the superintendent “is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students.” Student performance, in all of its forms, is the singular outcome of the superintendent’s work.

In 2008, the CCSSO published updated standards approved by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA). The standards are an updated version of the 1996 ISLLC Standards and their focus was on using the original six standards to influence policy across numerous states and that these changes define that a “leaders’ primary responsibility is to improve teaching and learning for all children” (CCSSO, 2008, p. i). This evolution continued in 2015, when the National Policy Board for Educational Administration released the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (CCSSO, 2015). Citing a need for change, the organization cited its work in 1996 and 2008, and then stated: “Both versions provided frameworks for policy on education leadership in 45 states and the District of Columbia. But the world in which schools operate today is very different from the one of just a few years ago—and all signs point to more change ahead” (p. 1).

The 2015 redesign of these standards saw a move from the original six standards to ten. Most importantly, the “2015 Standards have been recast with a stronger, clearer

emphasis on students and student learning, outlining foundational principles of leadership to help ensure that each child is well-educated and prepared for the 21st century” (NBPEA, 2015, p. 2). Each iteration of these standards has placed greater and greater importance on “the central importance of human relationships” (p. 3) and a focus on student performance. Finally, they are designed to “challenge the profession, professional associations, policy makers, institutions of higher education, and other organizations that support educational leaders and their development to move beyond established practices and systems and to strive for a better future” (p. 3). These standards reinforce the link between the superintendent and legislators influencing them.

The 2015 Standards now define the work of educational administrators with 10 separate but interconnected standards. These include:

1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values
2. Ethics and Professional Norms
3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
5. Community of Care and Support for Students
6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel
7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
9. Operations and Management
10. School Improvement

Standard 4 placed a clear responsibility of superintendents to “develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student’s academic success and well-being” (p. 12), bringing to the forefront the importance of a superintendent to have a deep mastery of instructional practice. Further, not only is it critical to have this understanding, but Standard 6 requires superintendents to “develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student’s academic success” (p. 14). This standard directly connects a



superintendent's understanding of best teaching practices with his or her ability to ensure staff are implementing them.

In this way, this evolution of the standards that underpin the work of the superintendent only reinforces the need for the superintendent to be instructional leaders. Further, it emphasizes the importance that legislation like TEACHNJ has in either supporting or hindering the central work of the superintendent. This supports the idea that defining the role of a superintendent is not enough; we must also examine the context within which individual superintendents work.

### **Punctuated Equilibrium**

Context is directly connected to producing change. Introduced in 1985 by Tushman and Romanelli, Punctuated Equilibrium describes two periods of possible change: “long periods of relatively stable equilibrium punctuated by short periods of intense, deep change” (2005, p. 449). During the long periods of stability, change is only possible when aligned with deep structure, defined in five parts as “(1) core values and beliefs, (2) strategy covering basic organizational priorities, (3) distribution of power, (4) organisational structure, (5) control systems” (2005, p. 449). While change is possible during these periods, since that change must be in line with the deep structure, it therefore, can only be first order change. These changes deal with a restructuring or reallocation of resources.

For an organization to go through needed radical change that reshapes its core, Punctuated Equilibrium states that it must be acted on by an outside force (Tushman and Romanelli, 2005). The following diagram displays the central idea.

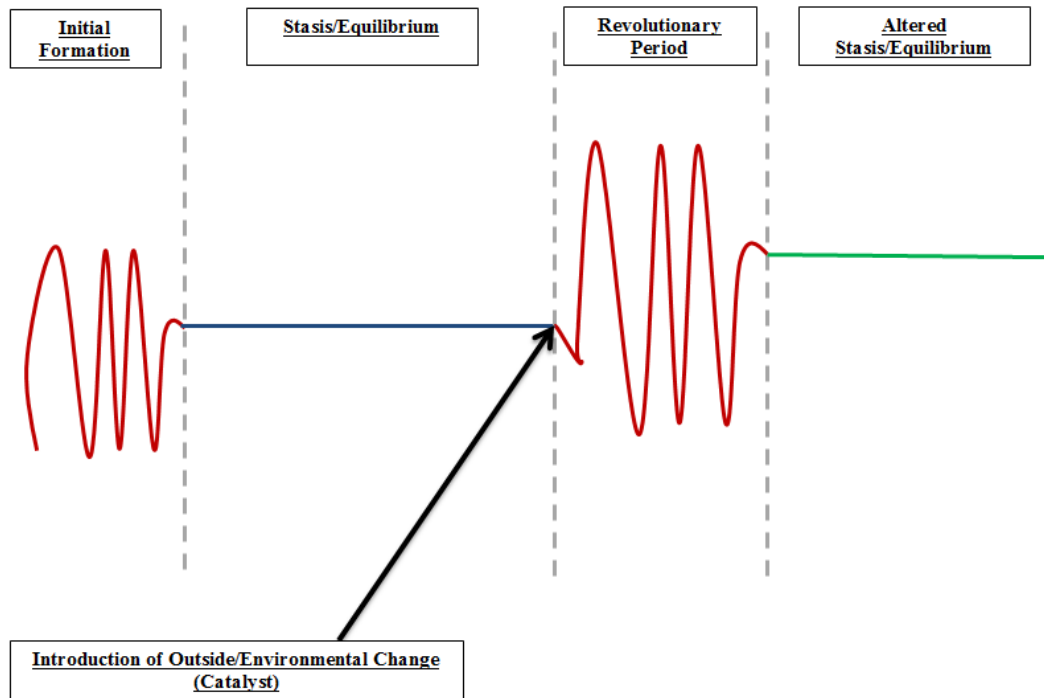


Figure 1. Punctuated Equilibrium

The longer periods of equilibrium must be broken, or punctuated, by an outside force to cause deep change. Since this change must defy the organization’s deep structure in order to result in an altered state, there is a need for an external catalyst. These changes, whether initiated internally or externally, always connect to a force beyond the organization. As an internal example that leads to punctuation, Parsons and Fidler (2005) found that “this latter type was illustrated by an innovative teaching programme that provoked parental concern, leading to confrontation between the organisation and its clients” (p. 451). Externally, punctuated periods can be a reaction to a new chief officer or some type of legislative or public pressure on an organization.

Either way, deep change shakes the structure of an organization and to do so, the theory states, an external force must be present. Parsons and Fidler refer to Gersick (1991) who describes the two types of changes in this way:

The difference between the incremental changes of equilibrium periods and revolutionary changes is like the difference between changing the game of basketball by moving the hoops higher and changing it by taking the hoops away. The first kind of change leaves the game's deep structure intact. The second dismantles it (2005, p. 450).

In all instances studied by Parsons and Fidler, these game-altering changes were attached to the influence of an external force. TEACHNJ has the potential to be this type of catalyst, altering the context within which the superintendent acts as the instructional leader.

### **Social Constructivism**

Again, context is directly related to producing changes. Connected to Punctuated Equilibrium, Social Constructivism impacts our ability to lead change in that it states that our understanding of our world is influenced by our situation. Fleury and Garrison (2014) state that Social Constructivism “involves the rejection of an atomistic mind and self that is born with such crucial attributes as free will, innate rationality, and innate natural rights” (p. 39). The impact of any punctuated event can only be understood within a specific context. Social Constructivism supports connects with the ideas of Punctuated Equilibrium in that context influences who we are and what we can do. As Fleury and Garrison state “we will become what we and the rest of the universe makes of us” (p. 39).

Social constructivism also highlights the importance and the challenge of a superintendent's role in leading needed educational change. Alexander Asmolov (2010), found that educational leaders "either become stewards of the culture of utility and use education to form and "mold" personality" ... "or they must undertake the task of organizing life within education in such a way as to help all people find themselves" (p, 86). Superintendents, as educational leaders must choose how they lead within specific contexts. "in the first case, education trails behind society and in the second case, it promotes society's development. This choice also determines the direction of educational reform" (p. 86). To understand the impact of a punctuating event, the social context must be understood, before, during, and after. Asmolov states that "Real reform of education is a reform of the entire life of the growing and learning child, rather than a reform of a certain pedagogical method or a particular teaching style" (p. 86). The social context is a driving and changing force throughout a punctuated event.

Most importantly, social constructivism highlights the idea the context within which a superintendent works actually shape fact and the construction and interpretation of data (Vygosky,1930; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, a punctuated event the impacts multiple and varying contexts, as well as how individuals react to such an event, must be understood within varying realities. We must understand a superintendent's context, how he or she works within it, and how the context is changed by the work.

### **Superintendent in Context**

Johnson (1996) and Owen and Ovando (2000) found that the role of the superintendent cannot be defined without taking into account the specific context in

which that superintendent performs. Elmore (2005) argues that the evolving expectations of school leaders in the current age of accountability have dramatically changed the realities of the job for modern school leadership (p. 134). Superintendents need to constantly adapt to changing context. The more we understand the shifts, the better prepared superintendents can be. Bredeson and Kose (2007) determined that “The role of the school superintendent has undergone significant changes over the past century... the work has become increasingly defined by the complexities and challenges of political pressure and competing interests (local, state, and national) ... and greater demand of accountability of increased student performance through state and federal legislation. “In particular, superintendents have been expected to create the district and school conditions to improve curricular, instructional and assessment practices toward improved student learning and outcomes” (p. 2). The context within which superintendents work influences what a superintendent can accomplish and how he or she must approach the work.

The context of public education is frequently modified or completely redefined by public policy. If policymakers can puncture the static operation and culture of a district, the leaders of districts must respond to the challenges brought about by each new mandate. Bredeson and Kose (2007) determined that “policymakers are not blameless for creating mandates which require time, resource and energy that in some ways detracts from superintendents’ instructional leadership capacity” (p. 19). Policy can have a punctuating, even confining impact; however, it can also support superintendents in making the changes they need.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has raised the stakes for the superintendent by setting standards, making information and performance public, and continually imposing

upon a superintendent's decision-making ability. Petersen (2004) states that "the current climate and emphasis on accountability, and in particular NCLB, has placed an enormous amount of political pressure on schools" and "has readjusted the lens of accountability and focused it directly on school district leaders" (p. 344). He gives as an example how "increased parental choice, whether utilized or not, impacts their ability to lead. At a minimum, increased efforts and resources will have to be reallocated toward parental outreach and education" (p.352). Petersen highlights that NCLB's controlling of resource allocation and changing requirements that define teacher quality to reflect 20<sup>th</sup> century assessments make it increasingly difficult for superintendents to lead with a vision of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

Furhman and Elmore (1990) found that, "Treating district influence over schools as the residual of state influence is not an accurate way to portray state-local relationships. Districts often leverage state policies by using local influence networks to reinforce local political agendas and to engage in local policy entrepreneurship. The result is often that the local effects of state policy are greater than those one would predict on the basis of state capacity and that localities often gain influence as a result of state policymaking rather than lose it" (p. 94). Bredeson and Kose (2007) found a similar reality, that superintendents are able "to use external accountability as a lever to move the internal system to support improved teaching and learning" (p. 16). Therefore, as superintendents struggle to lead necessary change to support student performance they can be positively or negatively impacted by the context in which they work and that context is often defined by legislation.

Legislation, as an influence emanating from outside of districts, can provide this type of punctuation. Petersen (2004) has found that the NCLB legislation directly influences the superintendent's ability to act as a 21<sup>st</sup> century instructional leader. In reviewing the legislation, he found that the superintendent's ability to be the instructional leader is more important than ever. The legislation has "increased philosophical and technical expertise in curriculum scope, sequence and alignment" and increased the need for strong data management and analysis skills as testing requirements tighten and data-driven decision-making has become the expectation. In all, these changes, have moved the superintendent "from the sideline to the frontline" (p. 350) in instructional leadership. Hoyle (2007) found that "the pressures to improve leadership education have never been greater due to widespread calls for reform of public education" (p. 148). Petersen (2004) highlighted the effect of NCLB on preparation programs for the superintendent as well. First, he calls on educational leadership programs to "actively recruit experienced educators with proven classroom success into their programs" (p. 357) and "work with local school districts to identify potential leadership candidates" (p. 357). Second, he cited four main areas of focus for preparation programs (accountability, teacher quality, resource flexibility, and parental choice); however, NCLB "in essence, is about preparing leaders to support achievement of all children" (p. 358). Petersen does highlight the importance of instructional leadership, including knowledge of instructional strategy and how to interpret and communicate assessment data, as well as use it to drive instructional decisions (p. 358). These influences did not arise from superintendents and did not form within their districts, but they are nonetheless influencing the ability of superintendents to be instructional leaders.

Bredeson and Kose (2007) found that the superintendency has shifted “from a role that has historically been defined by management/community/public relations to one that focuses on improving student learning” (p. 16). They determined that “there are higher expectations for superintendents to take action in the areas of instructional leadership, curriculum development, and student learning” than there has been in the past (p. 16). They also conclude that from “a policy perspective, it appears that external accountability mechanisms such as state mandates have helped legitimize superintendent efforts to pay greater attention to improving areas of teaching and learning” (p. 16). So as the importance of superintendent to be an instructional leader increases, how has policy in New Jersey impacted the ability of superintendents to fulfill that role?

### **The Superintendent in New Jersey**

If context is critical in shaping the performance of a superintendent (Johnson, 1996; Owen and Ovando, 2000) it is important to understand the specific context within which the superintendents studied work. In New Jersey, a candidate cannot serve as a superintendent without holding a School Administrator Endorsement. The New Jersey Department of Education (2009) defines the role of those who hold this endorsement in this way:

Holders of this endorsement are authorized to provide educational leadership by directing the formulation of district-wide goals, plans, policies and budgets, by recommending their approval by the district board of education and by directing their district-wide implementation. Holders of this endorsement are authorized to recommend all staff appointments and other personnel actions, such as terminations, suspensions and compensation, including the appointment of school



business administrators, for approval by the district board of education. Holders of this endorsement are authorized to direct district operations and programs, and to supervise and evaluate building administrators and central office staff, including school business administrators. They are also authorized to oversee the administration and supervision of school-level operations, staff and programs. (p. 212)

In order to earn the School Administrator Endorsement a candidate must complete one of three options.

Option 1 includes earning an advanced degree in one of the recognized fields of leadership or management, or in curriculum and instruction, including study area requirements. It requires the completion a 150-hour internship in work relating to the state standards. They must also pass the School Superintendent Assessment issued by the Educational Testing Service (New Jersey Department of Education website). It is interesting to note that the assessment is entirely open-ended and while scored against rubrics developed from the ISLLC Standards, they are scored by retired superintendents (ETS, 2010, p.1-2 ), those who helped build the current system.

The other two options are more direct. Option 2 allows anyone who holds a school administrative certificate from another state to transfer that certificate to New Jersey. Option three allows anyone who holds a New Jersey principal certificate and can prove five years' work experience under this certificate to automatically qualify for the school administrator certificate. As well, current applicants must pass the state-approved School Superintendents Assessment.

Once these requirements are fulfilled, a candidate is issued a Certificate of Eligibility and can seek employment as a superintendent. Once hired, though, in order to obtain a Standard Certificate the candidate must complete a one- or two-year mentoring program. Because of this design, in New Jersey candidates will often have no central office position between being a building administrator and becoming a superintendent. Therefore, they will have had no additional training as they move directly from the role of principal to the role of superintendent and yet “the instructional leadership responsibilities of a superintendent are markedly different in nature from the instructional leadership roles undertaken by principal” (Petersen, 2002, p. 159).

Not only is the test used for licensing based on the ISLLC Standards, but practicing superintendents are evaluated using them as well. New Jersey State Code 6A:9-3.4 - Professional standards for school leaders, which defines the standards for superintendent evaluation, uses the ISLLC Standards directly as displayed and discussed previously in this chapter (New Jersey Department of Education, 2009, p. 35). To support growth during these annual evaluation periods, the New Jersey Department of Education defines the professional development process that all superintendents must follow. The process includes two steps: the development of a personal professional development plan and a peer review of the progress made by the superintendent during a given year toward the goals stated in that plan (New Jersey Department of Education, 2009, p. 333). In reality, the only ongoing, official preparation is to document the creation of a plan and a review. There is no official substance defined in the code to measure a superintendent’s growth, therefore, all growth from this point on is based on unofficial preparation.

Harttraft (2009) performed a qualitative study, interviewing twelve active superintendents in New Jersey to determine their beliefs regarding the realities of the job and what preparation, official and unofficial, was beneficial in preparing them for success. She states in her conclusion that her participants “provide more to the field because of who they are, then what they know as skills are continually developed while in the position” (p.108). She determines that it is the person and not the preparation, that defines success as superintendent. The question remains then: In New Jersey are there systemic actions a superintendent can take to positively influence student performance?

### **Superintendent as Instructional Leader**

Often when the superintendent is included in research of instructional leadership it is only as a supporting role to the principal (Desimone, 2002, p. 453-454). Sanzo, *et. al.* (2010) found that “although classroom instruction has the greatest school level impact on student achievement, leadership has the second greatest effect” (p. 33) and Gurr, *et al.* (2005) found that “the principal remains an important and significant figure in determining the success of a school” (p. 548). Much of the research on instructional leadership examines the principal, not the superintendent.

Kowalski and Bjork (2005) found of the superintendency that “from the time the position was created until the first decade of the twentieth century, the primary foci of district superintendents were implementing a state curriculum and supervising teachers” (p. 80). In fact, they stated that “nearly half of the nation’s superintendents indicate that educational leadership is their primary role” (p. 85). In defining the role of the superintendent, though, they concluded that “faculty and administrators associated with

under-funded and under-staffed programs continue to resist any policy initiative that is politically disadvantageous to them” (p. 90).

Rorrer, *et. al.* (2008) found that "researchers and practitioners alike seem to have been more content with recommendations for isolated practices within discrete reform areas (*e.g.*, mathematics) or roles (*e.g.*, instructional leadership) than eager to seek a coherent model for how a district is likely to have the greatest influence and impact on increasing achievement for all students and advancing equity through systemic reform" (p. 340-341). They end with a call for further research on the district's ability to lead systemic change.

Petersen (2002) examined the perceptions of principals and school board members regarding the role of the superintendent as an instructional leader. He states that “in spite of the consistency of research findings, instructional leadership remains one of the more controversial characteristics associated with the examination of the district superintendent” (p. 158). Examining preparation programs to see how they are dealing with this, Petersen finds that “in the training of school leaders, the bulk of these reforms rarely focus on issues of instructional leadership” (p. 158). His study found that “there exists a significant relationship between the articulated vision of the district superintendent and the district’s ability to become academically successful” (p. 166). Examining the perceptions of principals and school board members, he found that they believe that “superintendent vision has a significant, dynamic effect on the organizational mission and goals and involvement of community members in leading an organization focused on the academic achievement of students” (p. 159).

Darling-Hammond, *et. al.* (2010), found that "limited research has been done to evaluate the effectiveness of university-based leadership preparation programs, and even less on the effectiveness of district-level leadership" (p. 18). These findings reinforce the need to examine where current superintendents are in their understanding of teaching and learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Wagner (2003) finds that superintendents must have an understanding of instructional techniques; however, in their role, they are only indirectly involved in their use. What the superintendent must do, says Wagner in *Making the Grade: Reinventing America's Schools* (2003), is create the conditions that will lead to these practices becoming culture. What actions can a superintendent take to create these conditions?

Wagner defined the "design elements of the school" (p. 100) as: time to work together; team-driven professional development; localized authority; and a culture of "face-to-face" and "data-driven" accountability (p. 100-106). For a district to be successful, a superintendent must create these conditions and set and monitor expectations for learning across all schools; however, Darling-Hammond (2010) has found an inability of instructional leaders to achieve this environment systemically. Wagner states that "although there are some great teachers in every community, and some strong professional preparation and development programs sprinkled across the country, the landscape of supports for quality teaching looks like Swiss cheese" (p. 194). Can, and if so how, a superintendent lead his or her district through these needed changes?

Chingos, Whitehurst, and Lindquist (2014) report that "there is almost no quantitative research that addresses the impact of superintendents on student

achievement” (p. 1). Their quantitative study had numerous findings. First, they determined that “with three different approaches to estimating the impact of the longevity of superintendent service within a district on student achievement: there is no association” (p. 9). They also “conclude that superintendent turnover has little or no meaningful impact on student achievement” and “is not associated with improvements in student test scores” (p. 10). Finally, “schools district superintendents have very little influence on student achievement in the districts in which they serve” (p. 13). In fact, they find that “the percentage of the variance in student achievement (a measure of the differences among individual students in test scores) that is associated with superintendents is smaller than that associated with any and all other major components of the educational system” (p. 10). They conclude that “it is the system that promotes or hinders student achievement” and that superintendents “are largely indistinguishable creatures of that system” (p. 14). This research demonstrates that either the impact of the superintendent on student achievement is at best difficult to define and at worst, insignificant.

Other researchers have produced findings that suggest the superintendent both needs to be and can be an instructional leader. Desimone (2002) found that the superintendent is critical in that changing of superintendents can halt even the most successful change efforts (p. 454). Petersen (2011), exploring the views of principals and school board members, found that they “perceive the importance of the articulated and modeled instructional vision of the superintendent in the academic success of their district” (p. 167). Further, “individuals critical to the formation of district policy and the

implementation of curricular programs see the systemic relationship of superintendent behaviors and their influence on district outcomes” (p. 168).

Rorrer, *et. al.* (2008), in a phenomenological, grounded theory study, explored the role of the district in guiding systematic change that improves student performance. Their findings included four roles that the district must play in order to successfully achieve systemic change. These include: "(a) providing instructional leadership, (b) reorienting the organization, (c) establishing policy coherence, and (d) maintaining an equity focus" (p. 313-314).

Brown and Chai (2012) found that “the term instructional, or learning-focused leadership, embraces a number of leadership practices, including setting and communicating clear instructional goals and expectations; strategic resourcing of priority goals; overseeing and evaluating teaching and teachers; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development and creating an orderly environment that is safe for and supportive of both staff and students” (p. 753). Superintendents must understand that “the more leaders focus their relationships, their work, and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes” (p. 753).

Marzano and Waters (2009) found that district-level leadership does impact student performance when that leadership follows specific behaviors. The pair used a meta-analysis of 27 studies of district-level leadership focused on answering the following two research questions:

1. What is the strength of relationship between district-level administrative action and average student achievement?

2. What are the specific district leadership behaviors that are associated with student achievement? (p. 2)

They found that that there is a direct correlation between a superintendent's actions and student performance and to positively impact student performance a superintendent must:

1. ensure collaborative goals setting
2. establish nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction
3. create board alignment with and support of district goals
4. monitor achievement and instructional goals
5. allocate resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.

(p. 6)

There have been consistent findings in other research to support these areas of action.

Regarding setting goals collaboratively, Darling-Hammond, *et al* (2010) found that the role of the superintendent must support the development of effective principals (p. 128). Focusing on Irma Zargoya, regional superintendent for New York City's Region 1 in 2005, they found that a consistent district leader who focuses on the development of his or her principals can have a significant, positive effect on instructional practice (p. 128-129). They also found that “developing and maintaining shared norms and expectations with students, staff, and families in school” was critical (p.14). Further Leithwood et al. (2006) found the need for superintendents to set direction and Sanzo, *et. al.* (2010) found “shared leadership” was key (p. 36).

Regarding setting goals specific for achievement and instruction Marzano and Waters (2009) determined that superintendents must be adept at changing instruction itself for “fostering high levels of pedagogical knowledge can also dramatically enhance



the quality of teaching in a district” (p. 55). Sanzo, *et. al.* (2010) found that instructional leaders have to lead toward specific instructional outcomes (p. 38), while Leithwood *et al.* (2006) found that superintendents have to manage the instructional (teaching and learning) program. Petersen (1999) found that the articulation of an instructional vision is a key responsibility of the superintendent. Finally, Darling Hammond, *et. al.* (2010) found that working directly with classroom teachers to improve effectiveness in the classroom through evaluation, supervision, modeling and support was vital.

Supporting the need to monitor established goals, McCollum, Kajs, and Minter (2006) found that “since school administrators as instructional leaders are responsible for student achievement, they need to participate in meaningful assessment practices to address their professional growth” (p. 114). Also, Sanzo, *et. al.* (2010) found that leaders must facilitate appropriate professional development (p. 37) while Valentine and Prater (2011) found that “three transformational leadership factors most frequently explained the variance in student achievement scores” (p. 20). Specifically, “when the principal modified leadership behaviors, established a collaborative direction, and generated support to move forward in new directions, student achievement was higher” (p. 20). Finally, Petersen (1999) found that superintendents must be involved in the assessment and evaluation of personnel and instructional programs (p. 160). Darling-Hammond, *et. al.* (2010) also found that “regularly monitoring teaching and student progress” was key (p. 14).

Finally, superintendents must align the allocation of resources with the previous areas. Orr (2009) found that:

Superintendents identified only a few problems that were work-related challenges for which they lacked technical skills and knowledge- budgeting and finance, management of facilities, personnel and information, and curriculum and assessment-and did not raise them frequently, with one exception: budgetary problems. (p. 1379)

Resources, or lack of them, were a key to successful change leadership. Leithwood *et al.* (2006) found that superintendents need to redesign their organization; and Petersen (1999) found that superintendents must lead organizational adaptation (p. 160). Darling-Hammond *et. al.* (2010) also determined that “providing resources and professional development to improve instruction” (p. 14) was imperative.

Marzano and Waters (2009) found that effective instructional leaders do these things, and the components of these are in line with the findings of others regarding best instructional practice (Wagner, 2003; Schmoker, 2006; Lemov, 2010); however, while a superintendent can support student performance by leveraging these five areas of action [ensuring collaborative goals setting; establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction; creating board alignment with and support of district goals; monitoring achievement and instructional goals; and allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction] he or she must still do so within a specific context. In New Jersey, that context has recently shifted.

## **TEACHNJ**

On March 1, 2011, the NJDOE released the 2010-2011 Educator Effectiveness Task Force (NJDOE, 2011) The report presented “recommendations for improving student achievement in New Jersey by revamping our educator evaluation system” (p. 3).

It made recommendations in four areas: “teacher evaluations, principal evaluations, conditions for success, and next steps” (p. 3). This report was the work of a nine-member committee selected as a result of a 2010 Executive Order from the governor, with members selected for their “experience in and knowledge of education policy, administration, and teaching” (p. 10). The committee “with the support of staff from the Department of Education, reviewed the latest research on educator evaluations, examined systems in use both in-state and nationally, and studied a range of issues related to the development of high-quality evaluation systems, such as observation protocols, growth measures, and special education considerations” (p. 10). The report ended by recommending three next steps. These were:

- Solicit feedback on the report’s recommendations from the State Board of Education and other stakeholder groups in order to make revisions and refinements.
- Convene sub-groups to develop recommendations for student achievement measures for teachers of special populations and non-tested subjects and grades.
- Develop detailed recommendations for piloting the evaluation system in selected districts. (p. 39)

Based on this report, the state legislature passed the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey (TEACHNJ) Act, P.L. 2012, c. 26 (“Act”). The TEACHNJ Act (TEACHNJ) is a bipartisan tenure reform approved unanimously by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Christie on August 6, 2012. As stated by the NJDOE (2013) in *A Guide to the TeachNJ Act*: “The goal of the law is to ‘raise

student achievement by improving instruction through the adoption of evaluations that provide specific feedback to educators, inform the provision of aligned professional development, and inform personnel decisions” (p. 1). The guide (2013) goes on to state that:

at its core, TEACHNJ reforms the processes of earning and maintaining tenure by improving evaluations and opportunities for professional growth. Specifically: Tenure decisions are now based on multiple measures of student achievement and teacher practice as measured by new evaluation procedures; Lengthy and costly tenure hearings are shorter, focused on process only, and less expensive; Educator feedback and development is more individualized and focused on students. (p. 1)

The law also changed the process for the acquisition of tenure (p. 4). With the passing of the law, all new teachers “must complete a district mentorship program during his/her first year of employment. After completion of this program, the teacher must be rated either effective or highly effective in two of the three subsequent years.” All new principals, assistant principals, and vice principals “must be rated either effective or highly effective in two annual summative evaluations within the first three years of employment, with the first effective rating on or after completion of the second year.”

As, if not more importantly, the law makes it possible for teachers and principals to lose tenure, stating [[http://www.state.nj.us/education/genfo/faq/faq\\_eval.shtml](http://www.state.nj.us/education/genfo/faq/faq_eval.shtml)]:

If any tenured teacher, principal, assistant principal, or vice principal is rated ineffective or partially effective in two consecutive years according to the chart below, that employee may be charged with inefficiency. Tenure charges must be filed for teachers who earn consecutive ineffective ratings. The charges are filed

by the superintendent with the local board of education. Within 30 days of the filing, the board of education shall forward the written charges to the Commissioner, unless the board determines that the evaluation process has not been followed. After permitting the employee an opportunity to submit a written response to the charges, the Commissioner shall refer the case to an arbitrator to determine potential loss of tenure. The table below outlines these rating combinations and the related actions.

Table 1

*Evaluation Ratings*

Year A Rating	Year B (Consecutive) Rating	Action
Ineffective	Ineffective	The superintendent <b>shall</b> file a charge of inefficiency
Partially Effective	Ineffective	The superintendent <b>shall</b> file a charge of inefficiency
Ineffective	Partially Effective	The superintendent may file a charge of inefficiency or may defer the filing until the next year; in the following year (i.e., the third consecutive year), the superintendent shall file a charge of inefficiency if the annual rating is ineffective or partially effective
Partially Effective	Partially Effective	The superintendent may file a charge of inefficiency or may defer the filing until the next year; in the following year (i.e., the third consecutive year), the superintendent shall file a charge of inefficiency if the annual rating is ineffective or partially effective

Overall, the law requires a longer period for members to earn tenure, more specific mentoring during this time, and allows for tenured staff members to be removed if they do not perform effectively over multiple years. The specific requirements of the evaluation system would be determined later.

**District requirements.** Among the requirements of TEACHNJ were included the formation of two types of in-district committees, the District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC) and the School Improvement Panel (ScIP). the DEAC is “required by AchieveNJ through at least SY16-17” (NJDOE, <http://www.state.nj.us/education/AchieveNJ/deac/>). The functions of the DEAC include:

- Coordinate efforts to plan and implement educator evaluation;
- Maintain open lines of communication and provide a consistent message about evaluation throughout the district;
- Provide an integrated vision connecting multiple initiatives that districts are implementing; and
- Provide a coherent professional development plan for the district based on evaluation data.

The DEAC “must include:

- the superintendent
- a special education administrator
- a parent
- a member of the district board of education
- one or more central office administrators overseeing the teacher evaluation process

- one or more administrators conducting evaluations
- representatives of teachers from each school level in the district”

According to the NJDOE, the superintendent is responsible for the formation and operation of the DEAC. The superintendent must decide how to use the advice provided by this committee and which DEAC decisions should be adopted by the district. The superintendent should clearly communicate the DEAC role in providing feedback. Therefore, the DEAC, a requirement of TEACHNJ has become a primary responsibility of the district superintendent.

In “Recommendations for the District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC)” [<http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/deac/Recommendations.pdf>], the DEAC should:

- form a bridge between administrators and teachers and provide effective two-way communication.
- provide a consistent message for training and implementation.
- provide useful “think tanks” to address complex problems.
- be a clearinghouse for frequently asked questions.

The other required committee is the ScIP. The NJDOE states in “AchieveNJ: The School Improvement Panel and Strengthening Evaluation at the Building Level” that:

Every school must establish a School Improvement Panel (ScIP) whose role is to ensure, oversee, and support the implementation of the district's evaluation, professional development (PD), and mentoring policies at the school level. The ScIP also ensures that teachers have a strong voice and significant opportunity to help shape evaluation procedures within each school.

These committees, in each building “must include the school principal, an assistant/vice principal or a designee if the school does not have one, and a teacher” (same). The SciPs are responsible for:

- Ensuring that evaluation procedures are implemented;
- Ensuring that procedures for Corrective Action Plans are implemented;
- Identifying PD opportunities for staff members; and
- Overseeing the mentorship of new teachers at the building level.

Based on these requirements, the DOE sponsored two rounds of pilot programs in the 2011-2012 and the 2012-2013 school years (p.1) in preparation for statewide implementation. In January of 2013, the Graduate School of Education from Rutgers University released New Jersey Teacher Evaluation, RU-GSE External Assessment, Year 1 Report (2013). The study included surveys, site, visits and analysis of gathered observational data (p. 49). The team surveyed:

the superintendent, the key instructional leader in charge of curriculum and instruction, the district Teacher Evaluation project director, the director of professional development, the director of student data, the president of the local teachers' association, and two principals (elementary and secondary). (p. 9)

The conclusions of the report focused on “implementation activities, participants’ perceptions, and issues affecting implementation” (p. 49).

**AchieveNJ.** With all of this information, the NJDOE proposed an improved educator evaluation and support system, named AchieveNJ, to the State Board of Education on March 6, 2013. As defined by the NJDOE [[http://www.state.nj.us/education/genfo/faq/faq\\_eval.shtml](http://www.state.nj.us/education/genfo/faq/faq_eval.shtml)]:



The TEACHNJ Act is the tenure reform law that was enacted in August 2012. This law defines certain requirements and structures for the new evaluation system in New Jersey, and requires that tenure decisions be linked to evaluation outcomes. AchieveNJ provides the details and support structures necessary to allow districts to implement the law effectively.

According to the New Jersey Department of Education's update memo (2014) [<http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/intro/guide.pdf>], there are five guiding principles supporting the specific recommendations of AchieveNJ:

1. Educator effectiveness can and should be measured to ensure our students have the best teachers in the classroom. A three-year study by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation recently affirmed the impact of evaluations and showed that huge variations exist between the most and least effective teachers — in some cases, up to an 11-month difference in student learning.
2. Evaluations should always be based on multiple measures that include both learning outcomes and effective practice. No teacher or principal should ever be assessed based on test scores alone, much less a single test. Therefore, AchieveNJ includes a combination of student growth on objective measures and observations of a teacher's classroom practices and a principal's leadership practices conducted by appropriately trained observers.
3. Timely feedback and high-quality professional development, tied to evaluations, are essential to help educators improve. Evaluations provide educators with more opportunities to engage in high-quality professional conversations and nuanced data that can be used to tailor professional

development to staff needs. Evaluations that do not contribute to these types of growth and development offer limited value.

4. Evaluation and support systems should be developed with significant input from educators. We have been working every step of the way over the past two years with those most affected: teachers and principals.

5. Tenure and other forms of recognition should be based on effectiveness. As codified in the new tenure law passed in 2012, educators should be recognized and rewarded based on the outcome of meaningful evaluations rather than simply time served. (p. 1)

Based on these guiding principles, within AchieveNJ the NJDOE outlined the specific expectations for all evaluations systems that would support the tenure requirements of TEACHNJ. In the NJDOE's AchieveNJ: Educator Evaluation and Support document, the department outlines that all teachers "will receive an annual summative evaluation rating of Highly Effective, Effective, Partially Effective, or Ineffective" (p.2); however, the document also states that the components used to determine these ratings vary, depending on the grades and subjects that educators teach" (p. 2).

The document goes on to define the potential components for teachers, to which teachers each may be applicable, and the weight of each within the overall summative rating (p. 2). These include Teacher Practice; Student Growth Outcomes; and Student Growth Percentiles. The document also specifies the observation requirements for different types of teachers (p. 3) and requires that "superintendents or chief school administrators (superintendents) must certify each year that all observers have been trained" (p.3).

The document also defines the requirements for the evaluation of principals/assistant principals. These included the categories for teachers, with the addition of “Evaluation Leadership” and “Administration Goals” (p. 4). Principals fall into one of three types depending on the type of school the principal leads and the availability of SGP data (p. 4). Finally, superintendent is specified as the principal’s primary evaluator and is therefore responsible for defining and measuring all five components (p. 4).

### **Purpose of Research**

If a superintendent most effectively supports student achievement by leveraging specific, research supported activities (ensuring collaborative goal setting; establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction; creating board alignment with and support of district goals; monitoring achievement and instructional goals; allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction), how has TEACHNJ impacted his or her ability to do that?

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of how TEACHNJ impacts a superintendent's ability to positively influence student performance. This chapter will reintroduce the research questions, define the rationale for qualitative methodology, define the methods for data collection including definition of participants, process of interviews, and the timeline for the collection of data, discuss data analysis procedures, explore the issues of trustworthiness and the role of the researcher, and examine the narrative structure for reporting.

#### **Research Questions**

The overarching purpose of this study is to explore the implications of TEACHNJ on the ability of superintendents to perform the five, researched-based actions that most positively influence student achievement. As defined in Chapter 2, these include ensuring collaborative goal setting; establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction; creating board alignment with and support of district goals; monitoring achievement and instructional goals; and allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction. I frame the inquiry with the following central question and the subsequent supporting questions:

Central Question: How has TEACHNJ impacted a superintendent's ability to function as a district's instructional leader?

1. Supporting Question 1: Based on the past two years, what do superintendents consider the strengths and limitations of TEACHNJ as it impacts their ability to realize success in the five areas.

2. Supporting Question 2: Based on the past two years, what improvements do superintendents feel, moving forward, could be made to TEACHNJ to support the five areas.
3. Supporting Question 3: Based on the past two years, what resources do superintendents feel, moving forward, would support their ability to realize success in the five areas.

These questions form the basis for my exploration. The next section defines grounded theory as the most effective approach to answering these questions.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Methodology**

For this study I will employ a qualitative approach to understand the perception of superintendents of how TEACHNJ has influenced their ability to positively impact student performance. I will collect first-person narrative data by conducting 15-20 separate interviews of current superintendents in New Jersey.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) outline five major features of a qualitative study (p. 4). The first is that the research is naturalistic (p. 4). The second involves the qualitative researcher's use of descriptive data. The third feature in a qualitative study is a commitment to process. The fourth feature is the inductive nature of qualitative research. The fifth is the definition of an "essential concern" to the qualitative researcher (p.5).

Within qualitative research, there are a number of approaches from which researchers may choose to focus their studies. For this study, I have formed a grounded theory research approach. Elliott and Jordan (2010) state the overall aim in grounded theory "is to generate theory inductively by gathering data about a phenomenon,

identifying the key elements and then categorizing the relationships of those elements to each other” (p. 30). In order to do this, the researcher must avoid bias and form the theory empirically from the data gathered.

This study will use a grounded theory approach because the goal is to discover, not prove. Creswell (2003) states that grounded theory “attempts to derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study” (p. 15). The research questions are just that, questions with no predefined answers. Goldkuhl (2010) points out that “one of the most important strengths in GT [Grounded Theory] is that building theory from data ‘automatically’; grounds the theory in empirical data” (p. 190). The goal of the study is to gather data that may inform an understanding of how TEACHNJ impacts the ability of a superintendent to positively influence student achievement.

Charmaz (2014), states “grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves” (p. 1). Reiterating that the goal is to discover, not to prove, Charmaz states “grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analyses” (p. 1). This approach allows for the formation of a clear theory on the impact of TEACHNJ.

Finally, using a qualitative approach allows me to focus on a small number of superintendents and question them deeply to determine themes or patterns within the impact of TEACHNJ on superintendents across the state. Accomplishing this, a sampling of 15-20 superintendents out of the more than 600 in the state is appropriate as “the

validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size” (Patton, 2002, p. 245).

Based on the widespread locations of participants in districts across New Jersey, I will employ a modified analytic induction approach. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the approach is applied when “some specific problem, question, or issue becomes the focus of research” (p.7). The approach is effective in that it “has been used extensively in open-ended interviewing” (p. 7). This study will employ each of these through the interview process to “develop a descriptive model that encompasses all cases of the phenomena” (p. 7). The approach is ideally suited to the research design.

### **Data Collection**

My research questions will explore the beliefs of current superintendents in New Jersey on how TEACHNJ has impacted their ability to improve student performance. To explore these questions and determine a grounded theory, I will interview selected superintendents one-on-one. Charmaz (2014) states: “intensive qualitative interviewing fit grounded theory methods particularly well... Both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted” (p. 85). In this section, I detail the specific strategies for determining the participants and gathering data for analysis.

**Participants.** Purposeful sampling strategy is defined by Maxwell (2005) as “allowing a researcher to select specific settings and people to gather information not discoverable elsewhere” (p.70). This study investigates the impact of TEACHNJ on superintendents and will therefore focus on the superintendents themselves. Patton (2002)

defines maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling as “aiming at capturing and describing the central themes that cut across a great deal of variation” (p. 235). To do this, “one begins by defining diverse characteristics or criteria” (p. 235) across a large population and balancing them within a much smaller sampling. The strength in this approach is that “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central shared dimensions of a setting or a phenomenon” (p.235). As this study focuses on the impact of TEACHNJ on superintendents, it will focus on a representative subset of superintendents: The NJASA Committee of County Affiliates. This group includes a representative from each of New Jersey’s 21 counties. Each representative is a current superintendent with a variety of backgrounds and current contexts.

For the purpose of this study and in line with social constructivism, the following characteristics of the superintendents to be interviewed will be recorded: gender; race/ethnicity; years as a superintendent; years in current position; age, District Factor Grouping of district, size in student population, and type of district. While not the focus of the study, it will provide data that could provide further insight into this study or inform a follow-up study. The characteristics will be balanced as follows.



Table 2

*Characteristics of Superintendents*

Gender	Male Female
Race/Ethnicity	Caucasian African American Hispanic
Years as a superintendent	0-5 5-10 10-15 15-
# of different districts in which superintendent has served as superintendent	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, >5
Years in current position	1-3 4-5 6-8 8-
Age	30-35 35-40 40-45 45 or older
Size (# of students)	0 - 250 251 - 750 751 - 1,500 1,501 - 3,000 3,001 - 10,000 10,001 or more
District Factor Group	AB CDE FGH IJ
Type	Urban Suburban Rural

I will examine districts across the state of New Jersey for specific reasons. Charmaz (2014) states that a grounded theorist brings “an open mind to what is happening, so that we can learn about the worlds and people we study” (p. 3). As a resident and educator in the state, I am intimately concerned with the progress of its schools. As a parent of two children, I am even more so. New Jersey is separated into 21 counties and for the 2012-2013 school year, these counties together held 603 school districts all with a superintendent. The settings vary greatly across these districts ranging from urban, through suburban, to rural. These districts serve a total enrollment of 1.36 million students (New Jersey Public Schools Fact Sheet, 2014). Focusing on the Committee of Affiliates will ensure a diverse sample group.

To maximize receptivity of superintendents in the affiliate group I reached out to Dr. Richard Bozza, Executive Director of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators. In his role, Dr. Bozza represents all superintendents in the state and receiving his endorsement will only promote participation in this study. I will work with Dr. Bozza to present to the committee and establish willing participants from the group. The data generated through these interviews, analyzed through the conceptual framework and the components of qualitative grounded theory research, will produce the necessary empirical data to support a grounded theory.

**Sample size.** According to Mason (2010), in qualitative research “the guiding principle should be the concept of saturation” (p. 1). The concept of saturation ensures that samples are “large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered,” but at the same time not too large so that interviews “become repetitive and, eventually, superfluous” (p. 2). Thompson (2011) as well, analyzing one-

hundred grounded theory articles, found “that sample size for grounded theory relies on the point of theoretical saturation” (p. 49). His research found that the researcher “cannot make a judgment regarding sample size until they are involved in data collection and analysis. During the process, a researcher must “allow the data to dictate the sample size; therefore, it is important to undertake data analysis during the data collection process”. By analyzing data throughout the process, the researcher can “identify the point of theoretical saturation” (p. 49). Therefore, while a researcher must present a sample range, the necessary sample size may not be known until well into the process.

Regarding the specific sample sizes, Thompson (2011) found that, regarding the number of interviews in a grounded theory study, the “average of all one hundred studies was 25; the range was 5 to 114. Thirty-three of the studies used sample sizes between 20 and 30, thirty-two used between 10 and 19, twenty-two used more than 31, twelve used under 10 and one used more than one hundred (114)” (p. 49). Creswell (1998) found successful grounded theory studies used 20-30 interviews (p. 64). Thompson found “that saturation normally occurs between 10 and 30 interviews”. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2005), reviewing recommendations for sample size, found that examples of successful grounded theory studies use anywhere from six to fifty interviews (p. 61). Charmaz (2014) states, “A very small sample can produce an in-depth interview study of lasting significance” (p. 108). The key is “to conduct as many interviews as needed to achieve it” with the it being saturation (p. 108).

Mason (2010) returns to the idea that it is the data, and not the number of interviews that is ultimately important stating of a study that “the sample size becomes irrelevant as the quality of data is the measurement of its value” (p. 11). Further, he

found that “new data (especially if theoretically sampled) will always add something new, but there are diminishing returns” (p. 11). Further, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2005) found that “small samples can be quite sufficient in providing complete and accurate information within a particular cultural context, as long as the participants possess a certain degree of expertise about the domain of inquiry” (p. 74). They find that smaller samples are more effective when the subjects share “cultural competence” (p. 74).

Given the ranges of successful grounded theory studies, that the research goals of this study are narrow, that the subjects are of a group that share cultural competence and are part of a committee of 21 that represents all areas of the state, and that the effective number of interviews will be determined during the process based on saturation of data, the recommended range for superintendent interviews is 10-20 superintendents.

**Instruments.** As described above, this study will use individual interviews supported by a specific, consistent protocol.

***Individual interviews.*** Working with Dr. Bozza, I presented at a monthly meeting of the NJASA county affiliates, introducing the study and informing how members may volunteer to participate in interviews. Defining the pool of superintendents in this way, I will conduct interviews with each. These interviews will follow a set protocol where each research questions will be addressed in order, with participants asked to comment on each of the five areas of action. Following these identical questions, participants will be asked to add generally any other perspectives they have on the current research question prior to moving to the next. I will ask specific questions regarding the impact of TEACHNJ on their ability to positively impact the performance of students in their districts. These

questions will be asked in an open-ended manner and probe for detail as appropriate (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p. 104).

***Instrumentation.*** The interviews will follow an interview guide, “to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The use of a guide makes “interviewing a number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored” (p. 343). The interview guide (Appendix A) was researcher-developed. It pursues the core research questions, which were designed based on feedback from current and past superintendents, including Dr. Bozza, as well as members of the team from the NJDOE who were looking for information on the results of their work. All interviews will be recorded with an iPad using Dragon Dictation which allows for the collection of data for transcription and analysis. Based on location, some of these interviews will occur over the phone.

Prior to meeting with the committee members, Dr. Bozza commented on the structure of the interview guide. He concurred that the open-ended focus on the five areas highlighted by Marzano was appropriate and allowed for participants to share their personal views on the topic. The interview guide will move through each of the five core areas of a superintendent’s practice that influence instructional leadership:

1. ensuring collaborative goals setting
2. establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction
3. creating board alignment with and support of district goals
4. monitoring achievement and instructional goals
5. allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.

In each section the superintendent will be asked the following questions:

1. How critical is this area of your practice to improving student performance?
2. How has TEACHNJ impacted this area of your practice?
3. How could TEACHNJ be revised or amended that would improve its support of your work in this area?
4. What resources would support your work in this area under TEACHNJ?

After moving through each of the five core areas, superintendents will be asked:

1. Are there other ways that TEACHNJ has impacted your ability to positively impact student performance?
2. Overall, how has TEACHNJ impacted your role as superintendent?

Charmaz (2014) states that “your first question may suffice for the whole interview” (p. 91). She has found that “asking a few interview questions allows the research participant to tell his or her story without the researcher preconceiving the content, or for that matter, the direction the interview will take (p. 93). Using these consistent, open-ended questions will ensure that interviews explore the focus area of this study and still allow the participants to guide the conversation. Echoing the grounded theorists cited earlier in this section, Charmaz (2014) states that “grounded theory aims to make patterns visible and understandable. Gathering data with broad and deep coverage of your emerging categories strengthens both the precision and theoretical plausibility of your analysis” (p. 89). In this way, as categories are discovered and saturated from one interview to the next, questions will evolve.

***Timeline.*** The data will be collected in stages, outlined in the following table.

Table 3

*Data Collection Timeline*

Phase	Timeline
Presentation to NJASA Committee of Affiliates	December 2016
Individual Interviews – superintendent	March 2017 through August, 2017

**Data Analysis Procedures**

In general, qualitative approaches follow the same basic process of gathering data and reviewing it, coding the data into meaningful groups, identifying and describing categories for analysis, determine how categories and description will be narrated, and then taking the data in its final form and interpreting it (Creswell, 2003, p. 191-195). These activities are often imbedded in the other activities of the study. According to Creswell (1997), in a grounded theory study analysis follows a more prescribed and standard format as follows:

- open coding – including the formation of initial categories
- axial coding – including the assembling of data in new ways to determine central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, context and intervening conditions, and consequences
- selective coding – where a story line is identified and the story is created using the categories from the axial coding stage. (Creswell, 1997, p. 57) In grounded theory, Creswell (1997) states that during the selective coding stage of data, categories need to be saturated and a storyline created and filled in. The narrative

that follows details the collection of data and its analysis into themes. I continue to speak in the first person, using quotations of varying and appropriate length to anchor the story. The story follows the research design, moving from largest scope at county meetings to actual classroom visits in districts where the superintendent's vision for teaching and learning was congruent with current best practice and validated by document, artifacts, and interviews with district and building administrators. The narrative ends with a summary of findings and recommendations for further work.

In following these steps, data analysis will occur concurrently with various phases of data collection, and the cycle will inform the creation and refinement of categories and highlight the need for more data collection until categories are saturated.

### **Trustworthiness**

Toma (2005) argues that qualitative researchers have a different set of traditions that give their work credence and that "these are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability" (p. 406). The study is being conducted with current superintendents to provide authenticity and is entirely based on the firsthand accounts to create trustworthiness. As an administrator, I certainly bring my own ideas regarding TEACHNJ; however, the design determines its own direction based on the data collected, rather than leaving the direction open to my discretion. Decisions will be made by triangulating data for congruency, between the characteristics of the superintendents.

Miles and Huberman (1994) defined dependability with specific criteria, and I meet their definition by: a) aligning my design with my research questions; b) explicitly detailing my role along the observer-participant continuum; c) triangulating data; d)



clearly stating my study as grounded study and adhering to the precepts of the construct; e) collecting the necessary data across settings and respondents; and f) constantly seeking out and using feedback from my committee and my peers.

Regarding descriptive validity, all interviews will be recorded and transcribed. From this data, only themes based on data that meet the above process of triangulation will be developed and explored. In order to ensure a factual statement of data, language in quotations was not altered, and was presented to participants as part of the member checking process (Creswell, 2003, p. 196.) Regarding theoretical validity, as mentioned earlier grounded practice brings with it the benefit that theories come directly from the data gathered during the study and this adds transparency and credibility to the study (Goldkuhl, 2010, p. 190); however, Goldkuhl also cautions that “if one ignores existing theory, there is a risk of reinventing the wheel” (p. 191). In working regularly with my doctoral committee, they will be able to focus on errant decision regarding category and theme support.

Finally, through a letter to individual subjects and subsequent consent form, I will ensure that each is well-informed about the purpose of the research in which they are being asked to participate, that they understand the risks they may face as a result of being part of the research as well how they may benefit through their participation, and that they have the ability to decide independently whether or not to participate without any fear of negative consequence. Further, I will protect the identity of each subject by refraining from referring to them by name or from using the name of district or any of the criteria used for selection of participants. This will include presenting data so as not to

allow for the identification of participants through the connection their specific characteristics.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

As a researcher, I conducted open-ended interviews with individuals, interacting only through the questions I asked, designed to support the overarching questions listed above. Along the participant-observer continuum (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p. 91), I was entirely observer, acting only as interviewer. Having gone through the public school system in New Jersey K-12 as a student, I also have 16 years of experience, both in and out of state, as an educator. I began as a teacher of language arts, social studies, and theater and have served in various district-level administrative capacities.

Again, as an administrator in New Jersey, I have numerous professional connections to districts and superintendents across the state. I have experience training teachers and administrators on instruction and assessment, the generation and use of data, and the use of technology as a tool for teaching and professional performance. I have also presented on these topics at local and state-level conferences.

As a current superintendent, I and my leadership have been impacted by TEACHNJ, but am participating only as an interviewer. Using a grounded theory approach, I am not trying to prove but rather discover. Grounded theory “emphasizes steps and procedures for connecting induction and deduction through constant comparative method” (Patton, 2002, p. 125).

### **Ethical Assurances**

This research study was based solely on data gathered from one-on-one interviews with existing superintendents. Further, as the sample group was confined to

representative districts from each county as determined by participation in the NJASA Committee of County Affiliates, it was crucial to ensure the anonymity of the participants. All participants signed Informed Consent forms prior to participation. Responses were only quoted directly when doing so ensured that anonymity was maintained. Specific districts were never mentioned, and quotations referring to the specifics of a district were only included when there were multiple districts that shared that characteristics. Further, as quotations were attributed to participants, pronouns were used randomly to ensure there was no recognizable pattern attributable to any specific participant. At all times, all records maintained only refer to participant number. At no time were the identities of those from the Committee who did and did not participate in the study released, maintaining the safety of the participants.

Finally, as a current superintendent myself, I made certain to work through the NJASA leadership. At no point were any participants pressured into participating, I never commented on their responses, and our only interaction regarding the topics here were during the interviews themselves.

## **Summary**

To summarize, I will conduct a qualitative, grounded theory study to explore the impact of TEACHNJ on the ability of a superintendent to positively influence student performance. The research design will produce data through face-to-face interviews. The theory developed can be tested by other researchers, but more importantly by superintendents. Also, legislators, responsible for setting requirements such as TEACHNJ can use this theory to anchor decisions about how to best support public school districts. Finally, the study provided the participating superintendents with the opportunity to

reflect on their practice and the success of their districts in meeting the needs their students under the guidance of TEACHNJ.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the critical influence that TEACHNJ has had on the ability of the superintendent to act as an effective instructional leader. Specifically, I set out to explore the impact of the law on the five specific actions Marzano and Waters (2009) found that superintendents can take to positively influence student performance. To get a comprehensive view of superintendents across the state, the research leverages purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2005) and focuses on a representative subset of superintendents from across the state: The NJASA Committee of County Affiliates. This group includes a representative from each of New Jersey's 21 counties. Each representative is a current superintendent with a unique background and current context and each was interviewed using a specific protocol. The protocol provided standard questions on the law's impact within each of the five areas (ensuring collaborative goals setting; establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction; creating board alignment with and support of district goals; monitoring achievement and instructional goals; and allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction) and then provided overarching questions on the general impact of the law to close the interviews. In this way, the protocol was designed to gather information that would help to answer the core research questions of this study. These included the overarching question:

- How has TEACHNJ impacted a superintendent's ability to function as a district's instructional leader?

These also included the supporting research questions, which were based on the five actions superintendents can take that have been found to positively impact student performance (Marzano and Waters, 2009). The supporting questions were:

- What do superintendents consider the strengths and limitations of TEACHNJ as it impacts their ability to leverage each of the five actions.
- What improvements could be made to TEACHNJ to support the superintendent's ability to leverage each of the five actions.
- Under TEACHNJ, what resources would support the superintendent's ability to leverage each of the five actions.

Within this chapter, I will describe the participant sampling and the various settings within which these participants work. I will also describe the participant response rate and any potential contextual influences on their answers given the timing of the research. Further, I will describe the data collection process including response rates and the collection of measured characteristics. I will describe the coding process that was used to analyze the qualitative data that was gathered and then present the findings of that process. Finally, I will transition to Chapter 5 and the discussion, implications and conclusions of my research.

### **Participant Sampling and Setting**

As discussed, I leveraged Maxwell's (2005) process of purposeful sampling by focusing on the NJASA Committee of County Affiliates, which is representative of each of the 21 counties across the state. Superintendents are selected by their peers within each county to serve and, within their positions, represent the needs of their county's superintendents. Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1930; Glaser and Strauss, 1967;

Charmaz, 2014), part of the theoretical framework that guided this research, requires that I examine specific characteristics of the superintendents and their districts to best understand the context of their responses. 15 of the 21 districts participated in the interviews.

Regarding the districts represented, I catalogued three characteristics: Size, District Factor Grouping (a classification of socioeconomic status established by the State), and type. These characteristics of districts were selected as they provide an understanding of each superintendent's context, which as per social constructivism, influences their responses. The following description establishes the context of districts within the overall committee.

Regarding size, the committee demonstrates a balance of size representative of the larger state except that those districts with the overall smallest and largest populations were not represented. Regarding District Factor Groupings, the committee represented all levels within the range presented by the state. As well, all three types of district (Urban, Suburban, and Rural) were represented. Overall, the Committee of County Affiliates provides a representative sampling of the contexts found across the state.

Regarding the characteristics of the superintendents themselves, the only characteristic data able to be determined prior to interviews was that of gender, and this characteristic was fairly balanced. The other characteristics (years as a superintendent; number of different districts in which superintendent has served as superintendent; years in current position; and age) were only able to be accurately captured through the interviews themselves and as such are not summarized here.

I worked through NJASA and its executive officer, Mr. Richard Bozza, to speak directly with the committee members and then contact them by email and by phone. I followed up with each superintendent in order to collect enough data to reach saturation (Mason, 2010; Thompson, 2011). Superintendents from 15 of the 21 districts participated in the interview process. The interviews themselves took place between March and August of 2017. Each progressed through the interview protocol as designed without deviation from the proposed research planned.

At the time of the interviews, superintendents had completed the budget process and were dealing with the end-of-year summative evaluations. This may impact their responses as they had recently had to deal with the planning of resources and they were in the midst of the observation and staffing processes that TEACHNJ impacts. As well, the budget and evaluation processes are directly connected to the five levers of change identified by Marzano and Waters (2009), so the importance of these would be timely and on their minds.

### **Data Collection**

This study focused on the members of the NJASA Committee of County Affiliates, a group of superintendents representing each of the 21 counties in the state. The choice of this group, supported by Maxwell's (2005) idea of purposeful sampling and Mason's concept of saturation ensured that the sample was "large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered," but at the same time not too large so that interviews "become repetitive and, eventually, superfluous" (Mason, p. 2).



As planned, I met with the full group at one of their monthly meetings and then followed up with email and phone contact. I conducted interviews and continually analyzed data until both a substantial number of interviews had been conducted (Thompson, 2011) and appropriate data had been collected (Mason, 2010) to demonstrate “diminishing returns” (p. 11). Given this research and the size of the selected population the recommended range was between 10 and 20 interviews. In the end, 15 interviews were conducted.

The interviews were conducted using a consistent and specific, researcher-designed instrument of questions which were asked in an open-ended manner to probe for detail as appropriate as prescribed by Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p. 104). The data derived from these interviews was transcribed and analyzing using a prescribed approach that included open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell, 1997, p. 57). During open coding the researcher forms initial categories, which is followed by axial coding where the data is analyzed to determine central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, context and intervening conditions, and consequences (Creswell, 1997, 2007).

All 15 interviews directly followed the designed protocol and all were recorded as planned and then transcribed for analysis. Interviews lasted anywhere from 45 to 100 minutes, with most lasting approximately 60 minutes. There were no variations or unexpected occurrences and the interviews provided data that allowed for “broad and deep coverage of” the “emerging categories” strengthening “both the precision and theoretical plausibility of” the analysis (Charmaz, 2014, p. 89). Of the 15 interviews that were performed, seven of them took place face-to-face and eight were performed by

phone. To better understand the contexts represented by the participants, the next sections details the characteristics of the superintendents that participated.

**District characteristics.** The characteristics of the responding superintendents’ districts were analyzed and compared to the overall representative subset. I have also compared them to the data from the entire state where possible to allow for generalization of theory across the state and not just the representative group. The results are provided in the following tables.

Table 4

*District Size*

Size	# of districts interviewed	% of total interviewed	% of total Committee	% of the State
0-250	0	0	0	12
251-750	4	27	29	25
751-1,500	2	13	10	20
1,501-3,000	6	40	33	21
3,001-10,000	3	20	29	20
10,001-	0	0	0	3
Total	15	100	100	100

\* NJDOE Numbers are rounded

Comparing the respondent population to the representative subset and to the state percentages (NJDOE 2017, [http://www.nj.gov/education/data/enr/enr17/stat\\_doc.htm](http://www.nj.gov/education/data/enr/enr17/stat_doc.htm)) the interviewed population is representative of both the subset and the larger state with one

significant exception: districts with populations 1,501-3000. This population level has a significantly higher representation in the interviewed population when compared to both the subset and the state. Further, there is no representation in the subset and therefore in the respondent group for the 12% of districts in the state with less than 251 students or the 3% of districts in the state over 10,000 students. This does not impact data collection or analysis as this is a grounded theory study, but will can be used for future study as the grounded theory is generalized.

Table 5

*District Factor Groupings*

DFG	# of districts interviewed	% of total interviewed	% of total Committee	% of the State
AB	0	0	16	19
CDE	5	33	37	28
FGH	4	27	21	30
IJ	6	40	26	23
Total	15	100	100	100

\* None of the interviewed superintendents were from Vocation/Technical Schools that represent the entire county.

With this characteristic, the committee and the larger state (NJDOE, <http://www.nj.gov/education/finance/rda/dfg.shtml>) are similar in breakdown of DFG, however, the respondent group is overrepresented in the DFG IJ and underrepresented in the DFG AB. Differences in DFG impact districts in a variety of ways, most specifically from where they receive funding. Districts with lower DFGs generally rely more heavily on sources outside the district for resources. Also, students in districts with lower DFGs

tend to bring fewer resources with them from home to school. The representation of DFG as compared to the state does not impact data collection or analysis as this is a grounded theory study, but will can be used for future study as the grounded theory is generalized.

Table 6

*District Type*

Type	# of districts interviewed	% of total interviewed	% of total Committee
Urban	0	0	5
Suburban	11	73	58
Rural	4	27	37
Total	14	100	100

\* None of the interviewed superintendents were from Vocation/Technical Schools that represent the entire county.

Within this characteristic, the respondent group is representative of the committee, except that there is no representation from urban districts and over representation of suburban districts. While the percentage of urban districts is small, it is still significant to note. This does not impact data collection or analysis as this is a grounded theory study, but can be used for future study as the grounded theory is generalized.

**Superintendent characteristics.** As mentioned before, characteristics were taken from each of the responding superintendents and that data is presented, by characteristic, in the Tables 4-10. Again, only gender was able to be recorded for the larger representative subset, and no state data was available for any of these categories. Overall, the respondent group was representative of the larger committee.

Table 7

*Superintendent Gender*

Gender	# of districts interviewed	% of total interviewed	% of total Committee
Male	9	60	62
Female	6	40	38
Total	15	100	100

Table 8 presents the data using the age spans as conceived prior to data collection; however, it appears that the planned age spans were of less use in understanding the ages of the superintendents interviewed because of the resulting data. To better understand this data, I am presenting the same data in Table 9 with new age spans.

There were no respondents younger than 42 and the majority were older than 46. Table 6 gives a more insightful breakdown of the respondents ages as they turned out to skew older than expected. This is important when considering the context of the respondents. They are older and more experienced. As a result, they have had more time to understand both their role and the context within which they are working. Both may have an impact on their perspective.

Table 8

*Superintendent Age (Original Age Spans)*

Age	# of districts interviewed	% of total interviewed
Up to 35	0	0
36-40	0	0
41-45	4	27
46+	11	73
Total	15	100

Table 9

*Superintendent Age (Modified Age Spans)*

Age	# of districts interviewed	% of total interviewed
40 and Below	0	0
41-45	4	27
46-50	4	27
51-55	2	13
56-60	3	20
Above 60	2	13
Total	15	100

It is important to note that the responding group represented no race other than Caucasian.

Table 10

*Superintendent Race*

Race	# of districts interviewed	% of total interviewed
African American	0	0
Caucasian	15	100
Hispanic	0	0
Total	15	100

Four-fifths of the superintendents interviewed had more than six years of superintendent experience, meaning that they were superintendents prior to the implementation of TEACHNJ and have transitioned under the law.

Table 11

*Years as a Superintendent*

Year Spans	# of districts interviewed	% of total interviewed
0-5	3	20
6-10	10	53
11-15	2	13
16+	0	0
Total	15	100

Table 12

*Number of Districts as a Superintendent*

Number of Districts	# of districts interviewed	% of total interviewed
1	11	73
2	4	27
3	0	0
4	0	0
5	0	0
6+	0	0
Total	15	100

All but four of the respondents have only been superintendent in their current districts. Combined with the information in Table 10, that means that they saw the impact of TEACHNJ as it was implemented in their current district. Coupled with Table 11 and Table 12, most of the respondents (14 out of 15) have been in their current districts for more than three years.

Table 13

*Years in Current District*

Years	# of districts interviewed	% of total interviewed
1-3	1	7
4-5	5	33
6-8	6	40
8+	3	20
Total	15	100



In this section, I have reviewed the participants from whom each type of data was collected, including their numbers, characteristics, and comparison to the overall representative subset and the larger state of New Jersey. I described the aspects of the data collection as well as how the data were recorded in comparison to the planned process. In the next section, I describe the iterative process of data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The data generated from these interviews was transcribed and then analyzed both through open coding and axial coding. As per Creswell (1997), grounded theory follows a prescribed format. It begins with open coding where initial categories are formed. It then moves to axial coding where central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, context and intervening conditions, and consequences are determined. Finally, during selective coding, the initial categories formed during the axial stage are combined to form a “story line” (p. 57). This storyline, which speaks to the guiding research questions, is created in the form of a theory that is automatically grounded in the emergent data (Goldkuhl, 2010, p. 190).

**Open coding.** The open coding stage of analysis occurred immediately following the gathering of data from one interview and that data’s transcription. Open coding led to the formation of many categories based on specific responses. Examples of these codes and the language that led to their generation include: ‘consistency’ was formed from language like “this didn’t exist before TEACHNJ” and “it’s pretty uniform”; ‘level of importance’ was formed from language including “very important”, “critical”, and “can certainly be motivating”; ‘change/impact’ was formed from language including “There

has been no impact”, “I think the law should be changed” and “it has complicated it to an extent”; and ‘quality’ from language which included “it has improved the overall process” and “it provides reliable data.”

This process continued after each of the interviews was completed, separately and based solely on the data from that interview. Where existing initial codes applied they were used and where data necessitated a new code, one was developed. These codes, and the terms that led to their generation, are detailed in Table 14.

Table 14

*Code List*

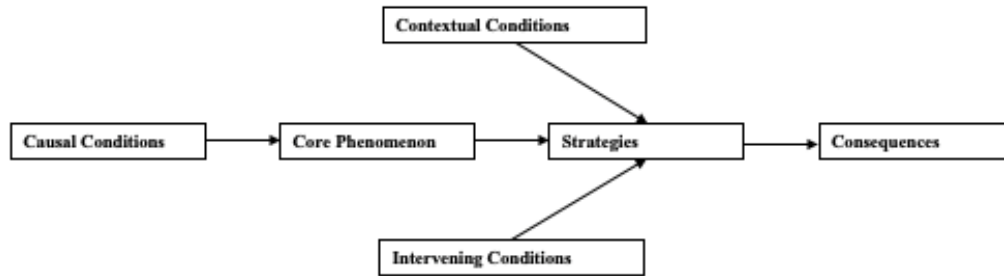
<b>Codes</b>	<b>Synonyms/other qualifying terms</b>
Assessment	SGO, SGP, PARCC, testing, scores, reliability, validity, weight, scoring, levels of performance, raised, lowered, rubric
Board of Education	Members, communication, goals, decisions
Budget	Money, resources, funding, cap, costs
Clarity	Understanding, communication, framework, rubric, training
Common Language	Framework, SGO, SGP, Marzano, Danielson, rubric, training, evaluation, observation
Consistency	Exist, common, lack of, didn't exist, exists now, help, credibility, scoring, norming, within district/across districts, framework
Data	Scores, testing, plans, professional development, database, system
Goals	SGO, SGP, collaboration, setting, vision, where we are going,

Table 14 (continued)

Codes	Synonyms/other qualifying terms
Impact/Change	Low, none, huge, stress, compliance, better, worse, not following, urgency, data, understanding, anxiety, time, costly, accuracy, positive, negative, change, animosity, frustration, morale, distraction, energy, paperwork, raised
Importance	High, critical, none, difficult, less, most challenging, data,
Input	Community, stakeholder, feedback, opinion, data, union, NJASA, NJEA, NJPSA, parents, students
Professional Development	Resources, understanding, data, technology, time, trainers, training, support
Reflection	Framework, practice, Danielson, Marzano, rubric, training
Reliability	Data, goals, testing, PARCC, SGO, SGP, decisions, framework
Resources	None, more, waste, training, professional development, technology, framework
Size	Population, number, quantity, small, large, many, few
Stress	Compliance, urgency, anxiety, time, costly, accuracy, negative, change, animosity, frustration, morale, distraction, energy
Time	Waste, shortage, drain, is money, timeline, costs, schedule

**Axial coding.** After each interview had been completed, the data had been transcribed, and open coding had been completed, the codes were reviewed in connection to those from each prior interview. As per Elliott and Jordan (2010), I worked to identify the key elements and then categorize the relationships of those elements to each other (p. 30). Most specifically, I examined each code and its underlying elements within the

framework laid out by Creswell (1997) and detailed by Morrow and Smith (1995) which moves from central phenomena to consequences. See Figure 2.



*Figure 2.* Axial Coding

As the goal is to discover and not to prove, I followed Charmaz’s (2014) process, moving back and forth between data from all interviews, continually interacting with the data and the emerging analysis (p. 1). This helped to create a storyline grounded in the emerging data (Creswell, 1998; Goldkuhl, 2010).

**Selective coding.** Following the axial coding stage, where connections were derived between the specific codes found through the open stage, I moved to understand the storyline emerging from the data. This led to the creation of themes based on the information produced within the more specific codes and the connection of information between interviews. The emerging themes and the codes that supported them are listed here in Table 15.

Table 15

*Themes*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Code Occurrences</b>	<b>Transcript Excerpts</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Previous state of teacher evaluation	30	<p>“People were confused what was an observation and what was an evaluation before TEACHNJ.”</p> <p>“It created a vehicle to hold our tenured staff accountable in a way that they never have been before.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Board of Education, Budget, Clarity, Common Language, Consistency, Data, Goals, Impact/Change, Professional Development, Reflection, Reliability, Resources, Size, Time</p>

Table 15 (continued)

Themes	Code Occurrences	Transcript Excerpts	Codes
Use of student performance data	84	<p>“It has allowed us to have data that we would not necessarily have had through the use of student growth objectives that the vast majority of our teachers probably did not exist before.”</p> <p>“I think it’s a more valid measurement when you are looking at kids with their peers the year before then and what kind of growth that teacher for all of those students provide.”</p> <p>“TEACHNJ has forced data into the hands of the administrators, and therefore as they have looked at that data, it has inspired them to ask some questions and it has added another data point to the mix.”</p> <p>“Looking at baseline data and following up with summative that supports the growth that we want to predict along the way. I think that is important. I don’t think that was ever done before this. “</p>	<p>Assessment, Board of Education, Budget, Clarity, Common Language, Data, Goals, Impact/Change, Importance, Professional Development, Reflection, Reliability, Resources, Stress, Time</p>

Table 15 (continued)

Themes	Code Occurrences	Transcript Excerpts	Codes
Elevating the Discussion	45	<p>“I have had more conversations about what is effective teaching, and we can argue about my feelings about what people think is effective teaching, but more conversations, philosophically than ever before in my career and that’s not a bad thing.”</p> <p>“The fact is that I’m having conversations more so since TNJ about the effectiveness of teaching and more teachers coming to me and saying how can I improve than I ever before in my career and I don’t think it’s a bad thing.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Board of Education, Clarity, Common Language, Consistency, Data, Goals, Impact/Change, Importance, Input, Professional Development, Reflection, Reliability, Resources, Size, Stress, Time</p>
Use of Frameworks	27	<p>“All teachers have received professional development in and there is a consistent language around that framework, and therefore there’s more, there’s a greater credibility.”</p> <p>“We’ve been very faithful to the Danielson Framework and even though the Danielson Framework was never intended to be an evaluation instrument, it has been useful ensuring that there has been consistency through our district and across our teachers.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Clarity, Common Language, Consistency, Data, Goals, Impact/Change, Importance, Professional Development, Reflection, Reliability, Resources, Size, Stress, Time</p>

Table 15 (continued)

Themes	Code Occurrences	Transcript Excerpts	Codes
District Size	8	<p>“And like I said earlier, in my sized district we don’t have, like I don’t have a data analysis person.”</p> <p>“Because there are differences, if you’re small you might want to do this one in comparison to if you’re big because NJ has a lot of small districts and if you’re a one school district and you only have one administrator one of the requirements is having more than one person do the evaluations.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Board of Education, Budget, Clarity, Common Language, Consistency, Data, Goals, Impact/Change, Importance, Professional Development, , Reliability, Resources, Size, Stress, Time</p>
Community Pressure	17	<p>“It’s not going to work, not unless you go to a model which in my community will just be completely unacceptable.”</p> <p>“The Board is a reflection of the community, and the value of the testing program is hated by the community, the Board has a tendency to fall into that belief.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Board of Education, Budget, Clarity, Common Language, Consistency, Data, Goals, Impact/Change, Importance, Input, Reliability, Resources, Size, Stress, Time</p>



Table 15 (continued)

Themes	Code Occurrences	Transcript Excerpts	Codes
Data Plans	35	<p>“It would be great if there was a free database type of system that teachers could put in their goals, and monitor it themselves. That would be wonderful.”</p> <p>“The data are there, the resources are available, the technologies are available to enable staff to do that.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Clarity, Common Language, Consistency, Data, Goals, Impact/Change, Importance, Professional Development, Reflection, Reliability, Resources, Size, Stress, Time</p>
Goal Setting	76	<p>“I think it is important to set these in-house, personal goals for our kids, we try to do some stretch goals because we don’t want to make them so easy that it’s easy to achieve them. But once again it keeps the focus on where we’re going.”</p> <p>“We obviously need goal setting to help us focus where we’re going in terms of the school.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Clarity, Common Language, Consistency, Data, Goals, Impact/Change, Importance, Professional Development, Reflection, Reliability, Resources, Size, Stress, Time</p>

Table 15 (continued)

Themes	Code Occurrences	Transcript Excerpts	Codes
Tenure Process	13	<p>“They’ve kind of refined the tenure process, so that definitely helps the education piece.”</p> <p>“It created a vehicle to hold our tenured staff accountable in a way that they never have been before.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Board of Education, Clarity, Common Language, Consistency, Data, Goals, Impact/Change, Importance, Professional Development, Reflection, Reliability, Resources, Size, Stress, Time</p>
Budget/Resources	77	<p>“I am not sure that collecting more good data to motivate work is a way to save money.”</p> <p>“We always say that we make magic with pennies because the budget is so small, but to have the funding to support our goals is imperative.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Board of Education, Budget, Impact/Change, Importance, Input, Professional Development, Resources, Size, Stress, Time</p>

Table 15 (continued)

Themes	Code Occurrences	Transcript Excerpts	Codes
Union Pressures	12	<p>“I think that’s forces outside of TNJ I think that’s meetings that are being held with the NJEA, and school boards, the conversation about, we need to think differently about time and that we can’t pay teachers nor administrators for every ounce of time they give. So we need to have those expectations and afford them a way to do that. But have the understanding that, you make great salaries and within those salaries, you have to give some time. I don’t know that is a pie in the sky type of dream.”</p> <p>“And the NJEA and ASA and NJASA, they all got into the mix with the legislators and they watered it down to where it is basically a waste of time.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Board of Education, Budget, Clarity, Common Language, Consistency, Data, Goals, Impact/Change, Importance, Input, Professional Development, Reflection, Reliability, Resources, Size, Stress, Time</p>
Time	56	<p>“So time is a huge resource and sometimes, you know the connection, time is money, money time, so it is linked.”</p> <p>“It’s been expensive, very expensive in terms of people’s time, time is money, if you were to add up the amount of time involved in being a district testing coordinator right now... never mind the mental health impact of that title, it is overwhelming.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Clarity, Common Language, Consistency, Data, Goals, Impact/Change, Importance, Professional Development, Reflection, Resources, Size, Stress, Time</p>

Table 15 (continued)

Themes	Code Occurrences	Transcript Excerpts	Codes
Professional Practice	68	<p>“It has absolutely impacted creating a universal vision of what is effective instruction.”</p> <p>“I would say the biggest impact has been forcing the district to look in a more detailed, standardized way of looking at good instruction.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Clarity, Common Language, Consistency, Data, Goals, Impact/Change, Importance, Professional Development, Reflection, Reliability, Resources, Size, Stress, Time</p>
Consistency	75	<p>“I have literally zero respect for and belief in test scores. They mean nothing to me. They don’t show anything other than the size of the houses next to my district.”</p> <p>“I think that what TEACHNJ hoped to do was ensure consistency across the districts and I don’t think it solved that.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Board of Education, Clarity, Common Language, Consistency, Data, Goals, Impact/Change, Input, Professional Development, Reliability, Size, Time</p>
Stress	58	<p>“I get frustrated when any part of any accountability system focuses on test scores.”</p> <p>“It would become all-consuming during parts of the year, because you don’t want to be doing observations while PARCC testing is going on and just to be able to get them all in was very stressful.”</p>	<p>Assessment, Data, Impact/Change, Importance, Input, Size, Stress</p>

Table 15 (continued)

Themes	Code Occurrences	Transcript Excerpts	Codes
Student Performance	32	<p>“The goal of TNJ is to raise student achievement by adopting evaluations and all that and giving teachers feedback.”</p> <p>“I don’t know how much it has impacted student performance.”</p> <p>“It has helped instruction. But I don’t think test scores have gone up.”</p>	Assessment, Data, Impact/change, Reliability

## Findings

Elliott and Jordan (2010) state the overall aim in grounded theory “is to generate theory inductively by gathering data about a phenomenon, identifying the key elements and then categorizing the relationships of those elements to each other” (p. 30). Central to this theory are my findings related to the overarching question, “What critical influence has TEACHNJ had on the ability of the superintendent to act as an effective instructional leader?” In presenting the analysis of the collected data and the development of the grounded theory, I will quote participants directly to present their perspective of the impact of TEACHNJ on them and their ability to act as instructional leaders. Sandelosky and Barroso (2003) state the importance of qualitative research in that it offers “more penetrating or nuanced descriptions of experience, using either *in vivo* or everyday language” (p. 912). For this reason, I will use the words of the participants as the underpinnings of the theory. Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006) found that supporting a coherent grounded theory poses specific challenges, stating “it is a delicate balancing act,

enabling participants accounts to retain a degree of visibility in the text so that the reader can make the connections between analytical findings and the data from which they were derived” (p. 7). Again, for this reason, I will regularly use the responses of those interviewed; however, I have often selected one example of language that demonstrates a specific theme across many or all of the respondents’ answers. As a matter of confidentiality, none of these statements will be attributed to a specific respondent.

Analysis of participant descriptions of their perceptions, understandings, and practices related to TEACHNJ facilitated a deeper understanding of what district superintendents believe about the impactful nature of TEACHNJ and their current practice. A summary of findings by question follows here:

Central Research Question – How has TEACHNJ impacted a superintendent’s ability to function as a district’s instructional leader? The participants stated that TEACHNJ has allowed their district to have more effective conversations about teaching and learning, with frameworks and data supporting more specific examinations of the work that teachers do; however, they also stated that the law has created unnecessary stress on them, their staff members, their students, and the community supporting their districts. The law has further exacerbated the lack of resources (time, technology, budget). Most importantly, while the superintendents have seen improvement in professional practice, they state that they do not see an improvement in student performance.

Supporting Research Question 1 – Based on their experiences, what do superintendents consider the strengths and limitations of TEACHNJ as it impacts their ability to realize success in the five areas? Superintendents have stated that

he law has reinforced their existing process of setting goals and provided more data with which they can establish nonnegotiable goals for individual student achievement, it has reduced the flexibility a superintendent has regarding the resources, requiring more time, money, staff and technology be spent on compliance rather than improvement. Many superintends state that they do not want the state interfering with the superintendent's ability to work within the five areas ad that aspect of the law has made working with their board of education more difficult.

Supporting Research Question 2 – Based on their experiences, what improvements do superintendents feel, moving forward, could be made to TEACHNJ to support their ability to realize success in the five areas? All superintendents stated that more resources and more training are necessary and could be provided by the state under the law. They also requested more autonomy to make certain about process within their districts. At the same time, they recommended less choice in certain areas of the law (single, acceptable framework, single data too, single training plan) so that there was more consistency from district to district. Finally, superintendents feel that the use of state assessment data needs to be ore structure and that the tests must be required in order for the data produced to be useful.

Supporting Research Question 3 – Based on their experiences, what resources do superintendents feel, moving forward, could TEACHNJ provide to support their ability to realize success in the five areas? Superintendents state that more funding to support professional development would allow them to be successful under the

law. The stated that state-led professional development, a state-mandated framework, and a state-provided data system would all prove valuable in maximizing a positive impact for students.

## **Summary**

In this chapter I reviewed the purpose and construct of this grounded theory research. I discussed the representative sample that was selected and described the process of data collection and analysis. The description of data analysis included each of the three stages of coding (open, axial, and selective). I used specific examples to demonstrate how codes were built, broadened into themes, and then connected within the two components of the theoretical framework (Punctuated Equilibrium and Social Constructivism) to form a storyline. The results were presented to answer the central research question according to the framework that Creswell (2007) designed. This included central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, context and intervening conditions, and consequences. Within each category, I told the story of the data, using direct quotations whenever possible to illustrate findings.

This work has resulted in data that support a grounded theory in answer to the central research question: How has TEACHNJ impacted the instructional leadership of superintendents? The data show that the law has improved conversations regarding teaching and learning by creating greater consistency within individual districts of the use of a common language to support observation and reflective practice as a means of improving instruction. At the same time though, the data was clear that the law has also, through the creation of new requirements (SGOs; mSGPs) created even more inconsistency and highlighted continuing inconsistency between different districts across



the state. Finally, the law has weakened district budgets, stretched district resources, created stress across stakeholder groups, and has not, as of yet, improved student performance.

In the final chapter, I will discuss what is learned from this theory, as well as its implications, limitations, and provide recommendations for its use moving forward.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to find a grounded theory of the impact of TEACHNJ on the instructional leadership of superintendents. It has found that the law has fostered a greater attention to professional practice, elevating conversations about teaching and learning and providing more data on which to base decisions. The study also found that the law has created stress on people, on resources, and on communities. Finally, the study found that with all for the work that has gone into complying with the law since its inception, superintendents do not believe it has resulted in improved levels of student performance. This final chapter presents a discussion of the interviews, implications of the researcher's findings, and recommendations for future examination.

### **Interpretation and Findings**

Charmaz (2014) states that a grounded theorist brings “an open mind to what is happening, so that we can learn about the worlds and people we study” (p. 3). As a superintendent in New Jersey also impacted by TEACHNJ, I followed closely the process of developing grounded theory so as to remove any potential bias on the part of the researcher, relying completely on the responses of the participants rather than my own ideas. Charmaz (2014) also stated: “intensive qualitative interviewing fit grounded theory methods particularly well... Both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted” (p. 85). This is why I chose interviewing current superintendents as the primary means of obtaining data from which to develop a grounded theory.

This process relied on a theoretical framework that rested on two important ideas: Punctuated Equilibrium and Social Constructivism. Punctuated Equilibrium “depicts organizations as evolving through relatively long periods of stability (equilibrium periods) ... that are punctuated by relatively short bursts of fundamental change (revolutionary periods)” (Romanelli and Tushman, 1994, p. 1141). In the state of New Jersey, the formal systems for evaluation of teachers had been relatively consistent for a long period of time (State 2 - Stasis/Equilibrium). The use of this theory allowed for the examination of the impact of TEACHNJ as a catalyst, puncturing that stasis. Social Constructivism frames the study within the understanding, that anyone’s examination of fact is inductive and emergent, and that our values and the values of our context shape fact and a researcher’s construction and interpretation of data (Vygotsky, 1930; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). Together, these two theories framed the use of the grounded theory process.

This research resulted in the development of a theory that can be used to explain the impact of TEACHNJ on the instructional leadership of superintendents in the state of New Jersey. Key to the formation of this theory is that the data produced provided “perspectival knowledge based on the lived experience of participants: (O’Connor, Netting, and Thomas, 2008, p. 30). This theory represents a focus on how this specific legislation impacted the ability of superintendents in the state of New Jersey to act as instructional leaders within their districts. It is not a generalizable, formal theory and it is not statistically significant; however, the research design is not meant to create this. As per Creswell (2007), grounded theory produces “a theory that might be viewed as a substantive, low-level theory rather than an abstract, grand theory” (p.65). Further

research into this area in the future could produce a theory that would be generalizable if guided by the characteristics previously presented.

### **Substantive Theory**

The substantive theory derived from this research demonstrated that superintendents implementing TEACHNJ perceive and/or experience greater success working with teachers about instructional practice; however, they also perceive and/or experience higher levels of stress, both their own and those in their district, that have been detrimental to the law's intention: improving student performance. The superintendents recognized improvements that created more concrete, documented conversations about teaching and learning by imposing specific structural requirements on public school districts. TEACHNJ legislation exacerbated the stress felt by superintendents, and their staffs, due to a lack of time, resources, and understanding. As a result, superintendents acknowledged barriers to implementation including the inconsistency that exists between districts regarding the definition of effective practice, weaknesses of districts in the use of data to ascertain how students are progressing and the need for support in providing continued professional development on instructional techniques and the use of data to drive instruction effectively. The study confirms that the superintendents consider Marzano and Water's five levers of leadership action to be critical to inducing higher levels of student performance.

While coding, the researcher identified a central phenomenon or category (Creswell, 1997, p. 57). From here:

the researcher begins exploring the interrelationship of categories... causal conditions that influence the central phenomenon, the strategies for addressing the

phenomenon, the context and intervening conditions that shape the strategies, and the consequences of undertaking the strategies.

(p. 151)

Three categories emerged as causal conditions leading to the core phenomenon: the law and its specific pieces; the current state of teacher evaluation; and the current state of the understanding and use of student performance data. The development of strategies to *elevate the conversation* included the use of an approved framework, the use of data plans, the development of goals, and the leveraging of tenure charges against less than proficient teachers. Impacting the implementation of these strategies were contextual conditions, including a district's size, type and current budget and resources, and intervening conditions, which included time, community, and union pressures. The combination of these led to specific consequences which included improved conversations, stress, inconsistency, and varying impact on student performance.

### **Discussion of Emergent Conditions**

The narrative addressing the emergent conditions will highlight the connections between them, as Charmaz (2014) states that “insights are intertwined in such emergent conditions and take form through the shared bonds” (p.99). Figure 2, below, is a visual model that presents the relationships between the categories and their specific elements using a theoretical paradigm developed by Morrow and Smith (1995, p. 27).

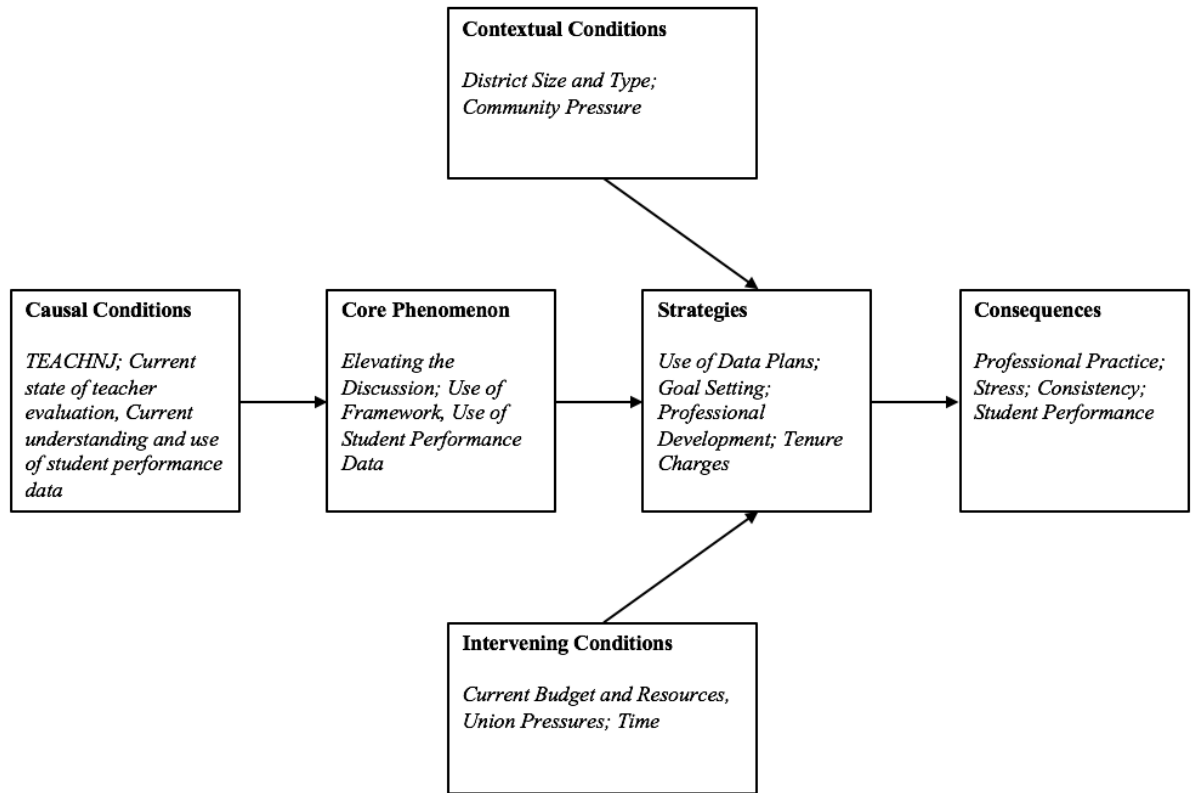


Figure 3. Elements of Categories

### Causal Conditions

Creswell (2003) states that grounded theory “attempts to derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study” (p. 15). I explored the responses of those interviewed for a core phenomenon. Stated previously, Punctuated Equilibrium provided an overarching theoretical framework for the derivation of the theory. The theory states that systems evolve “through relatively long periods of stability (equilibrium periods)” (Romanelli and Tushman, 1994, p. 1141). Every participant spoke to the differences in their evaluation of

staff and their use of student performance data prior to and since the inception of TEACHNJ.

**The previous state of teacher evaluation.** The responses support a unified vision by superintendents of the state of teacher evaluation prior to TEACHNJ. Emerging from the data is a belief that there was a lack of clarity regarding what good teaching looks like, a lack of consistency of process, and less accountability from the teachers themselves and within the process. Given that the goal of the law, according to the New Jersey Department of Education, was to “raise student achievement by improving instruction through the adoption of evaluations that provide specific feedback to educators, inform the provision of aligned professional development, and inform personnel decisions” (NJDOE, 2013, p. 1) there was clearly a belief that change in the evaluation process was necessary. Participants showed this when describing what had changed as a result of TEACHNJ. This aligns with the causal conditions that emerged from the data and reinforces the potential for TEACHNJ to serve as an external catalyst as described within the theoretical framework.

Regarding the lack of clarity of what good teaching looks like, one participant stated, “I have had more conversations about what is effective teaching, and we can argue about my feelings about what people think is effective teaching, but more conversations, philosophically than ever before in my career and that’s not a bad thing.” A second stated, “The fact is that I’m having conversations more so since TEACHNJ about the effectiveness of teaching.” Across the interviews, there was a clear dissatisfaction with the understanding of the art of teaching within districts previous to TEACHNJ. The previous lack of clarity in observing and analyzing teaching surfaced through comments

that highlighted change. One superintendent stated that TEACHNJ's requirement that an approved framework be used "helps provide a consistent language and a consistent focus that all teachers and administrators and supervisors are working with."

Clarity and consistency of process were separate concerns raised by the participants, even at the most basic level. One superintendent stated, "People were confused what was an observation and what was an evaluation before." A second superintendent stated:

Whether we agree with it or not, we definitely have a set of standards as an administrative team that we've been reviewing. We have been going over examples and making sure that we are ensuring that we're consistent in terms of our vision of what we are seeing in the classroom. So, for an example, as an aside, we watch videos over the summer and we grade the lesson together, together but separately. We text in our answers of the domains because we use Danielson. So, it really helped us create a unified vision and direction to move forward with what we see.

Participants expressed how this work was not going on in a focused and consistent way within and across districts prior to TEACHNJ. One superintendent said it this way: "I think that what TEACHNJ hoped to do was ensure consistency across the districts." These data define the conditions that existed prior to its implementation.

The superintendents also felt that both teachers and administrators could be giving more effort to the development of improved professional practice. One superintendent stated "that administrators are putting more time and energy in to their teachers than they ever have before." A separate participant, discussing how teachers could have been



taking a more active role stated “more teachers coming to me and saying how can I improve than ever before in my career and I don’t think it’s a bad thing.” Connected to this, the data show a new level of accountability that did not exist prior to TEACHNJ. One participant stated, “What it did do, it created a vehicle to hold our tenured staff accountable in a way that they never have been before.” Separately, one superintendent described the previous process as ineffective, saying that “tenure seems to be to me such an antiquated need” and another stated that “I think that has opened up a lot of opportunities in the tenure process.” There was a clearly a lack of consistency that negatively impacted the process of teacher evaluation, with one participant stating “there has been more consistency and credibility in the evaluation process,” highlighting the lack of these prior to TEACHNJ.

**The use of student performance data.** The data also describe the use of student performance data. Based on the responses, it is evident that student performance data prior to TEACHNJ is more available and useful. Superintendents state that student performance data was not as available and not consistently used in the evaluation process. Expressed succinctly, one participant stated “it has really given access to a lot of people, more access to information than ever before.” Separately, a different superintendent stated “My teachers are incorporating the use of data in their SGOs very effectively, and that’s not something that they were as focused on prior to the use of SGOs.” A separate participant stated that TEACHNJ “has allowed us to have data that we would not necessarily have had through the use of student growth objectives that did not exist before AchieveNJ and it allows us to collect the data that we believe is important.”

This idea, that data was not present or used, was echoed by each participant. One superintendent stated that “TEACHNJ has allowed us to have data that we would not necessarily have and now across the board, we have data.” There were many responses that spoke of TEACHNJ requiring “too much” in the way of data, which still reinforces the reality that data did not exist or was not used within the process of teacher evaluation. Superintendents expressed a need to limit the data, with one stating “getting rid of any data that is unimportant and unusable would be good.” These data detail the causal conditions existing prior to the implementation of TEACHNJ.

### **Core Phenomenon**

Charmaz (2014) states that in vivo codes “help us to preserve participants’ meanings of their views and actions” and that they are “statements that crystallize participants’ actions or concerns” (p. 134). Coding the responses of the participants, superintendents constantly repeated that TEACHNJ has changed the conversations around teaching and learning and that change has been positive. The core phenomenon discovered during this research is that TEACHNJ “enhanced the conversations” around teaching and learning.

**Elevating the discussion.** *Elevating the discussion* was an in vivo idea that repeatedly emerged from the superintendents interviewed and it illustrates the core phenomenon while it connects to the other aspects of the theory. Whether referring to measuring professional practice or teacher growth or using data to inform instruction, superintendents spoke to the legislation’s impact on the conversations had in districts between teachers and administrators. Superintendents also remarked that, while there was more of a consistent format for these conversations and consistent timelines for

them, and while referring to frameworks and high-stakes tests regularly, there was both a clear lack of time to have these conversations and a continued inconsistency of the substance of these conversations.

Every participant referred to the idea that enhancing the conversations around teaching and learning was the core phenomenon. One of the less experienced superintendents stated, “Certain conversations have been easier and been improved because of the direction of TEACHNJ.” A more veteran superintendent echoed this sentiment stating, “The fact is that I’m having conversations much more so since TEACHNJ about the effectiveness of teaching and more teachers coming to me and saying how can I improve than I ever before in my career and I don’t think it’s a bad thing.” A third superintendent stated “it has made for richer conversations and I think brought us into a professional learning community for all educators where we speak more of the same language because we are looking at the same things and we are looking to do the same things in the classroom.” Within these comments, participants spoke to two specific aspects of TEACHNJ: the requirement of each district to use of a common framework and the required use of student performance data.

**Use of a common framework.** The responses of the participants referenced the use of a common framework as a core phenomenon and a key to enhancing the conversations around teaching and learning. One superintendent said that his conversations “began evolving into a better conversation and a more professional conversation that we all kind of understand now because we don’t all have our own evaluation system, our own evaluation tool. We use and I think we are all on the same page because we are speaking a better language as educators.” Beyond being common,

superintendents credited frameworks with also making conversations more specific and more valuable. One stated, “We don’t spend time checking boxes, we are actually spending time having the conversations with the teacher.” A different participant stated that teachers, initially recalcitrant to the changes, were forced by TEACHNJ to leverage the framework and improve their conversation. One superintendent stated “I know when I say it people say that has been around for years, but my folks were just not ready to engage in these conversations. We are now having these constant conversations.” Superintendents consistently credited the requirement to use an approved framework for enhancing the conversations. One superintendent connected this enhancement with improved credibility, stating about TEACHNJ:

I really do believe that it has forced us, and I mean that in a good sense, it has brought us to the point where we have an established evaluation framework that all teachers have received professional development in and there is a consistent language around that framework, and therefore there’s more, there’s a greater credibility in what an observer records as evidence when they are evaluating staff and therefore, there has been more consistency and credibility in the evaluation process.

Connected to this, a separate superintendent spoke to the importance of a framework to her own growth, stating, “I do feel absolutely, that I am a better evaluator now, that I have a framework.” And a third participant stated the importance of a framework to new administrators, as well as himself. He stated: “I think having a framework is absolutely beneficial and for a new supervisor or a new superintendent there is value within that, and

that I would still believe in. Even all that I said, part of this process leaves me thinking about this in a new way.”

**Use of student performance data.** Superintendent’s responded that the use of student performance data has enhanced their conversations on professional practice. One participant spoke to the focus that student performance data has provided, stating, “It has helped us sit down and have conversations about student performance and growth, and the importance of that in reference to the teacher side of it, it’s given us the ability to say we need help here, we need to work on this. I think it has been a positive.”

Superintendents were clearly more focused on data and its use when working with teachers. One superintendent shared that TEACHNJ “has allowed us to have data that we would not necessarily have had.” There is a clear trend in the data that, prior to TEACHNJ, data was used sporadically if at all and that now, because of the law’s requirements, it is a more regular part of the conversations educators are having about students. One participant was more forceful, saying that TEACHNJ “has forced data into the hands of the administrators, and therefore as they have looked at that data, it has inspired them to ask some questions.” It is clear that TEACHNJ has forced data into the conversation, enhancing focus and impact on students.

There was also clear evidence that many participants felt that the focus on student performance data made the conversations more difficult. One superintendent stated:

We had a lot of focus on the data, data, data, and on test scores and I think that it hindered my ability as a superintendent to have conversations about social emotional health and about good classroom environment. I would argue that 90% of my conversations with our Board committees over the last three years have

been tied to, in a negative way, to PARCC results, TEACHNJ, evaluations, testing time, all of that has taken our conversation, has taken up time from our conversations.

Many participants echoed that the level to which data was required to be used was a drain on valuable resources. A separate superintendent stated:

TEACHNJ has created work by creating data, by virtue of trying to get something out the data, you're thinking... Ok I need a district testing coordinator, I need a district data office, I need someone to aggregate, distill, and figure out what the heck all this stuff means and try to make it digestible for the staff in a way they can use it, collecting all this data, testing all these students, we want to get something out of it and that creates the need for more resources.

Respondent data highlighted the struggle for resources and a desire to make meaningful use of student performance data that did not exist prior to TEACHNJ.

Enhancing the conversation was the singular, core phenomenon across each participant's responses. It was clear that, to the participants, the core requirements of TEACHNJ have converged to focus the conversations on teaching and learning and make them more meaningful and positively impactful to student performance. One superintendent's statement summarizes the core phenomenon and its two central aspects when she said:

I would say the biggest impact has been forcing the district to look at a more detailed, standardized way of looking at good instruction. Not only good instruction but also other professional practices outside of regular classroom roles and as it forced us to also kind of collect the data in a more electronic fashion, it

facilitated us to be able to look at strengths and weaknesses more easily, you know when you look at various aspects of for example the Danielson Rubric.”

The next section will describe the strategies used by superintendents in response to this core phenomenon.

### **Strategies**

Participants worked to enhance the conversations around teaching learning by focusing on four strategies: using data plans; setting goals; professional development; and leveraging the new tenure system.

**Using data plans.** Data from respondents highlighted the use data in new and more consistent ways. As described by one participant:

I think there is a lot to be gained in focusing on technological systems for student information that are really talking to each other in a way that helps present data that are easy to use and that goes in to capture not just TEACHNJ and PARCC, which are just one data set, but also all the other data points that are being collected in a way that are easily digested by the people working with the students. Patterns, are easily presented and we all have so much data now about students.

Respondents spoke to the systematic generation, collection and analysis of this type of data. A separate superintendent talked about the power of this data to motivate teachers.

He stated:

I think that you know data is motivating and collecting data and using the data, responding to the data, is something that needs to be done with caution based on

the quality of the data you are looking at. The data can certainly be motivating and if you look at TEACHNJ over the past few years.”

A separate participant stated that this strategy has called into question the leadership of principals and superintendents. TEACHNJ has provided the opportunity to leverage data plans and he stated “the data are there, the resources are available, the technologies are available to enable staff to do that. I think what is really needed is the strong and appropriate leadership at the building level and the district level to make it happen.” The superintendent crystallizes the comments of other participants, stating that TEACHNJ has opened new strategic opportunities for leveraging data and data plans to support student growth.

**Setting goals.** Superintendents provided responses that highlight how TEACHNJ goes beyond just providing data and requiring its collection and use; they spoke to how it specifically requires the establishment of individual goals for every teacher. These goals, called Student Growth Objectives (SGOs), require that every teacher use data to set longer-term, standards-based targets for the students they teach and then measure the progress of those students toward those targets (NJDOE, 2014).

One superintendent described the change in this strategy stating, “The concept of looking at data and looking at baseline data and following up with summative that supports the growth that we want to predict along the way. I think that is important. I don’t think that was ever done before this.” Building off the first strategy of data plans, setting goals is clearly a strategy that the participants felt was critical to supporting improved student performance. One participant described the impact of TEACHNJ on this strategy, stating, “It all ties together. It is a high priority to make sure that we have



very clear measurable goals in the area of achievement. Well, through the use of student SGOs and whatever the technical terms are for the principals and supervisors, that is how I do it.” Across interviews, the data confirmed the idea that TEACHNJ’s requirement of goal setting has greatly enhanced the conversation.

The data also confirmed that this strategy has benefitted from and provided benefit to the first strategy. As one participant spoke to how there is so much more data because of TEACHNJ, he stated, “Perhaps, the data which might have been the easiest to put your hands on, standardized tests, for an example. Now that we’ve created SGO based on our inner circle, we now have that data that may or may not have been there depending on the grade level and the subject matter. Now across the board, we have that data. I think SGOs are fantastic.” The resulting data focused on goal setting in this way.

**Professional development.** Every participant referred to professional development as a critical strategy needed to accomplish improving practice. One stated she needed to provide “more professional development for supervisors and administrators” and another shared that because of the increased use of data plans and goals “we see what areas we need to work on as far as professional development for our teachers to then impact student learning.” The first two strategies have highlighted a clear need for more, targeted professional learning opportunities. In all, every response transcends the five levers and repeated the need for more overarching professional development.

The participants stressed this strategy as critical because of the demand on teachers created by the first two strategies. One superintendent stated the:

They need to do a much better job providing professional development, across the state, intense professional development ... How do you close that achievement gap? How do you work with children of poverty? ... Whatever they see as the subgroups... How do you help those students? How do you, if you are in a district who has not had to wrestle with that until of late? How do you make that changeover? How do you get everyone's attention? How do you change that practice? I think they need to do a much, much better job of professional development.

Responses centered on how enhancing conversations about teaching learning has highlighted the deficiencies in the current practice of teachers and the participants have focused on providing meaningful professional development that target these areas of need. Stressing the need for this strategy as a result of the first two strategies, one participant stated, "I think professional development would be a big plus in helping people looking at what constitutes valuable data. I think that is a big flaw we have now is that we are not really sure what constitutes valuable data, how to collect it and how to assess it."

Respondent data highlighted how TEACHNJ has helped districts target the use of this strategy. One participant stated they are now "using our observations in the classroom to come up with commonalities in performance, strengths and weaknesses that we see in performance that end up being tied into professional development and end up helping us all in the long run. Very much so, it has been positive." The data highlighted how, as a strategy, professional development is one that superintendents have leveraged specifically as a result of the gaps that TEACHNJ has unearthed.

**Tenure process.** Finally, superintendents have leveraged the expedited tenure process as a strategy to move the ones not improving out of their districts. One superintendent stated:

The number one resource that we have as superintendents, that we have, is staffing and through TEACHNJ, it has allowed me to make sure I have the right people and so having the ability to put someone on a corrective action plan or the two years, I actually don't think that two years is all that much time to go after someone, and to really ensure that the right people are involved in the organization and I think that has opened up a lot of opportunities to make sure that if it is not the right person, they don't stay.

Participants voiced their desire to work with staff, as evidenced by the first three strategies; however, they also spoke to the benefit of being able to move staff who are not improving out of the district. Superintendents shared their use of this strategy. As one stated regarding the changes "there is flexibility there and I have gotten rid of people who are tenured." Some superintendents do not feel that the strategy has been leveraged enough. One stated that, under TEACHNJ, the law:

was changed to give us an opportunity to increase the performance of tenured staff that aren't performing the way they should be. Either put them on a corrective action plan and get them to improve or show them the door and yet we fail to do that and I think that is probably consistent with most districts. I can't speak for anywhere else, but most of my colleagues. We have been provided a vehicle to address the deficits in instruction with tenured staff and yet so few people actually use it and that's disappointing.

All superintendents responded that this was a critical strategy allowed under TEACHNJ.

One superintendent suggested that the law go further than it currently does to improve this strategy: he recommended that TEACHNJ do away with tenure altogether.

He stated:

Get rid of tenure, other than that. You know, all the times we talk, seriously, your staff is your number one resource, and tenure seems to be to me such an antiquated need because people who work hard and the people who don't need tenure are already working beyond the TNJ act, and they are not even concerned with tenure. It is a frustration. You make decisions sometimes on tenure and where you can put people and not based on what it is you want to do.

TEACHNJ's impact on tenure as a strategy for enhancing the conversation, whether it could be taken further or not, was clearly in the minds of the participants.

While all participants referred to these strategies, they each also spoke to contextual and intervening conditions that have impacted their implementation. These conditions will be discussed in the next sections.

### **Contextual Conditions**

According to Creswell (2007), contextual conditions are the "particular set of conditions within which the strategies occur. These are specific in nature and close to the actions and interactions" (p. 238). Two areas of contextual conditions emerged from the data that significantly influenced the approach of superintendents to the strategies: size and type of district and community pressures.

**Size and type of district.** The interview data demonstrated that the size and performance of the student population prior to TEACHNJ's implementation impacted the four strategies. Superintendents spoke to size as either a benefit or a challenge within their specific context. One participant stated:

I'm a small one-school district, so when you talk district wide, so unlike [other districts] where you have many schools, and you try to have a common goal across all schools, we have one school, one goal, so it's beneficial that it is on a small scale and I'm able to implement it easily here within my school.

While this superintendent found a smaller district to be a benefit to communication, another superintendent found the same contextual condition to be a detriment to planning under the law. He stated:

We are a small district and I have two administrators and I have 75 or so teachers. Prior to this year, we were each doing more than 100 observations, it becomes a matter of compliance. You are kind of pulled away from strategizing, from what resources are needed, what professional development is needed because you are doing that kind of planning you're too busy trying to get in and get your observations done. Especially from a superintendent's point of view, where you're looking at planning for the future and programs and things like that when I'm out doing half the observations to get them done, it takes away from that ability to have the vision and do the extensive work on data and trends and continue to push the goals forward that you're trying to work on.

A third superintendent spoke to the challenges that size posed to providing professional development stating, "We are a very small district, so for us to provide professional

development we have to rely on each other and send just one person out and have them teach others.” In all, superintendents demonstrated that either way, the specific size of the district impacted the implementation of strategy. While smaller districts found communication easier, they struggled with work load and insufficient resources. Larger districts, still struggling with workload, had more resources and could create more opportunities, but found consistency and communication challenging because of the number of staff involved. The data demonstrated how the size of a district had a significant effect on varying aspects of each of the strategies described prior; however, the level of student performance impacted the specific context as well.

Respondent data highlighted how district type, specifically, whether students overall were higher or lower performing, impacted TEACHNJ’s impact. Data highlighted that, prior to TEACHNJ, superintendents in high-performing districts could look at student performance differently. One stated:

So student achievement we kind of leave in the hands of supervisors and principals. And we try to create more broad, holistic goals at the district level. And I recognize that we are somewhat of an anomaly in this district in that we have very, very high achievement, academic achievement and some of this is an overemphasis on academic achievement so stressed and overwhelmed by academic expectations.”

The data showed that while the high achievement that existed prior to TEACHNJ allowed this superintendent to worry less about test scores, this was not the case as performance levels varied. A participant from a different district stated “taking test scores down to the granular level, which is great for our administrators, but it also gives our Board and our

community the ability to look at. It now kind of sidetracks us from other more important questions.” The data showed that superintendents with lower performing students found they had to spend even more time explaining these results. They stated that this need took more time away from the four strategies.

The data also showed that districts with overall high performance were faced with a challenge that those with overall low performance were not. The interview data showed that teachers in districts with overall high performance were less prepared than teachers in districts with lower performance to have conversations around the low performance of individual students. The data also demonstrated that teachers in high performing districts, according to the responses of the superintendents, were less prepared to do something about it. One superintendent stated that while TEACHNJ has forced a focus on low performing students, for his teachers “I still think it’s difficult for teachers to look at what needs to be done for an individual student.” He stated that he wished:

there was extra training through the state for teachers so that they could really understand how to interpret the data and what the data was saying and if there was more specific data on each student to help design a more individualized program for that student moving forward.

A different participant stated the difficulty, within an overall high-performing district, to get everyone on board with the work of meeting individual student need. She stated “we do have pockets of poverty, and its, so it’s working too for those students and making sure we are pulling them up. But that has to be a collaborative goal, it is a collaborative goal. It is a hard goal for us because we have the haves and have-nots, and there is a clear line and it is getting not only our own staff to understand that, but also our community at

large.” The data showed that the contextual influence of individual communities is not limited to only student performance, as I explore in the next section.

**Community pressure.** Interview responses demonstrated that the implementation of the four strategies was also impacted by the third contextual reality of each district when it came to the beliefs of the community the district supports. Because of the increased and often times public use of data, communities reacted differently. In one participant’s experience, he wanted to “give our seasoned administrators and educators a little more power back to define that good teaching is in their schools. Which is hard to do because people, community, politicians, everybody wants a concrete number or a letter to say your school is this.” In his case, the community wanted more say in practice because of how they viewed the data. In a separate participant’s case, he was unable to implement procedures he felt would support student growth because the “model, which in my community, will just be completely unacceptable.”

Separately, data showed that the community’s view impacted the validity and reliability of the data itself. In one district, because of the community’s negative response to the PARCC exams the superintendent commented that, due to lack of community support for TEACHNJ and PARCC and the lack of testing as a graduation requirement in the first years of the law’s implementation, many students were either not taking the test or not trying to do well if they did. A separate participant described a similar reality, stating “The Board is a reflection of the community, and the value of the testing program is hated by the community, the Board has a tendency to fall into that belief.”

Superintendents stated that this makes leveraging the four strategies more difficult because action is based on data that the larger community does not trust.



These data demonstrated impact that varied by district context; however, in the next section, the resulting data speaks to intervening conditions that, based on the interview data, impacted every district.

### **Intervening Conditions**

Separate from contextual conditions, Creswell (2007) defines intervening conditions as the “broader conditions— broader than the context—within which the strategies occur. They might be social, economic, and political forces, for example, that influence the strategies in response to the central phenomena” (p. 239). Based on interview data, there were three intervening conditions discovered in this study: Budget and Resources, Union Pressures, and Time.

**Budget and resources.** The interview data demonstrated that every superintendent found that TEACHNJ placed a great deal of strain on his or her district’s budget and resources. One participant stated, “There was frustrations there as these programs grew there was a lot of expense to bring in a program so it was taxing for the budget.” A second said it simply: “There is only so much money.” The data demonstrated how a lack of funding directly impacted the implementation of the four strategies.

Respondents spoke to how budget and resources have impacted the strategies individually. Regarding data and goals, one superintendent stated that when you “really have an area down, what the source of the poor performance is, you generally want to put resources toward it and if you don’t have a budget to do so, often times a realignment is the only way but you are robbing Peter to pay Paul.” Speaking to professional development, one participant stated, “Where am I going to scrape \$1,000 to do some PD

for my teachers this summer? I have to cut this to get that. So financial support at this point is paramount.”

Budget was also found to impact the strategies collectively. Because items in the budget are interconnected, the overall size of the budget restricts decision making in regards to all of the strategies. As one participant stated:

We need to remove any type of cap on budgets, an expansion of the two percent cap so that we can align resources, financial resources into the areas where instruction is key. Where we can look at expanding professional development. We can look at the latest and greatest things in technology that will help our kids grow. I think that our hands are tied with the two percent cap and I think that the two percent cap that is out there currently really thwarts us in achieving the goals that we've set up through TNJ.

In the words of a different superintendent, “Without the money nothing can happen. We always say that we make magic with pennies because the budget is so small, but to have the funding to support our goals is imperative.” Though the size of a budget impacts the strategy, that is not the entire story according to the data.

Respondents also shared that TEACHNJ is not simply limited by budget realities; it is making those realities worse for superintendents. The requirements of managing evaluations and student performance data have forced districts to bring in new technologies and systems. One superintendent stated TEACHNJ “has been an additional cost for the district. We also have the mandatory annual trainings that we have to stay up to date with that evaluation model, so those are additional costs that have been put on the district that we didn't have prior.” Shifting resources to these areas has impacted other

aspects of the district as well as the community. One superintendent stated that compliance with TEACHNJ has “cost a lot of money. For example: I would love to increase the arts in the district and it costs a lot of money and we are trying to do it little by little, but if we had more funding, we could probably have a good fine arts program that we wouldn’t be waiting for years to implement.” Data highlighted two further intervening conditions.

**Union pressures.** The second intervening condition that emerged from the data produced through these interviews was the pressure put on superintendents by unions, either the state level associations or the district’s local affiliates. One superintendent detailed how her struggle to leverage the strategies required that she “maximize the contract” and that “I mean is there a cost to that, I mean there might have been a cost to that but not in actual dollars on the Board’s behalf, but some lost social capital as far as my reputation’s concerned.” This conflict, at the state and local level, was seen across districts.

Respondents stated that there was a need to change culture and expectations in order to leverage the four strategies; however, they commented that there was consistent pushback from local associations to do this. One stated that TEACHNJ required accuracy and he didn’t feel that was being achieved with “93% of our staff on our last process in this year were deemed effective or highly effective. I don’t know any organization that has an effective rate that is accurate and is that high, and that’s what I’m working on now with our administrators to get them to see that’s just not accurate.” He continued though, that beyond a need for professional development and culture change, the associations

“are blaming me, saying, it’s the weighting. Really, it’s the NJEA, and I’m like, no, it’s you. I am not going to take that as an answer.”

Data demonstrated that superintendents saw the unions as a way to bring people together within TEACHNJ, but this will take a willingness to reexamine the existing culture. One, describing the need for unions to cooperate, stated “we need to think differently about time and that we can’t pay teachers nor administrators for every ounce of time they give. So we need to have those expectations and afford them a way to do that. But have the understanding that, you make great salaries and within those salaries, you have to give some time. I don’t know that is a pie in the sky type of dream. That would help.”

According to the superintendents interviewed, union pressure was not limited to districts. They felt that union pressure had altered the ability of superintendents to maximize the impact within TEACHNJ. One stated “I really feel when this first came out there was an opportunity to really change the dynamic in education. And the NJEA and ASA and NJASA, they all got into the mix with the legislators and they watered it down to where it is basically a waste of time.” A separate superintendent stated, “There is an opportunity there for us as administrators as I have repeatedly said to hold people accountable. We’ve just got to make sure we use it in such a way. I wish it didn’t get watered down but that is the legislative process. That is NJ. That’s government, I get that. Even so, it still has weight, enough merit for us to really change what goes on in the classrooms.” This statement represents the recurring data that the union’s influence “lessened” the impact of TEACHNJ and created fear within administrators to be accurate

with their assessment of teacher practice because of the pushback that resulted from unions.

In all, as with budget and resources, these unions pressures emerged as intervening conditions across all districts regardless of context. There was a final intervening condition: time.

**Time.** The final intervening condition that emerged from the data collected in these interviews was time. It was omnipresent, with superintendents referring to it, or the lack of it, as an intervening condition impacting every strategy and, in many ways, being most responsible for the consequence that will be described in the next section of this chapter. One superintendent, initially speaking about data, stated:

you know, we have two days before the kids show up and with everything else you have to do, it is just a whirlwind and if we don't put in the time do I really know all I can about my kids, and where they are right from day one, then the teachers in a catch up and the principals in a catch up and you get all bogged down with the mundane stuff of doing our jobs. So, it's really the resource of time.

Regardless of the lever or strategy being discussed, time was continually raised as an intervening condition. One superintendent simply ended mid-sentence, shook her head, and stated, "We still don't have enough time."

The data highlighted that even before TEACHNJ, time was a critical and much lacked resource. The change in law, according to superintendents, exacerbated this. One superintendent stated "leading districts in this hard work, how do you make sure you keep student achievement as part of our focus when there are so many other demands on

our time?” A second stated, “In a 180-day school year from September to June there isn’t a lot of time to spend on that. If we had three years to work on that, then I would have implemented SGOs, again huge fan, I’ve been using them since 1999 as a principal.” Another stated simply, “I do about 80 to 90 observations a year, and it is time-consuming.” The data consistently illustrated that time was at a premium and while superintendents found aspects of the law valuable to improve conversations, the law also further limited the time they had.

All superintendents interviewed spoke to a dramatic impact on time. Direct responses included “It’s been expensive, very expensive in terms of people’s time, time is money” and referenced the law’s impact specifically, as when one superintendent stated, “We already talked about the fact that administrators are putting more time and energy in to their teachers than they ever have before.” Along similar lines, a separate respondent stated, “Certainly the amount of time and the number of observations that it is necessary to do are tough. So, give people a little more time overall, if we have more time we are able to do other things.” The data showed that time consistently challenged superintendents regardless of context.

While data presented that there were negative pressures from unions, superintendents also spoke of many staff buying in to the changes inherent in TEACHNJ; however, time, again, emerged in the data as a significant intervening condition. Referring to teachers who were working hard to leverage the strategies, one superintendent stated, “The other piece is, I mentioned already, is that under the evaluation rules, maybe we need to give people more time to focus on student performance.” There was a clear and consistent message from superintendents

interviewed that TEACHNJ was forcing positive change, but that change would need time to evolve.

Superintendents connected these types of challenges with time to the previous two intervening conditions. As one superintendent stated, “So time is a huge resource and sometimes, you know the connection, time is money, money time, so it is linked and you hate to say it comes back to money, but you know, resources in one way, shape or form, are often going to have a dollar sign associated with time.” Superintendents interviewed described how, in this way, the reality of time worsened the impact of the other two intervening conditions: it further sapped budget and resources and created discontent within staff that fueled union pressures.

Finally, one superintendent highlighted yet another way time was an intervening condition: it takes time for students to learn. Discussing her ability to positively impact student performance under TEACHNJ, she highlighted that measurable progress, along with everything else outlined here, takes time to realize. She stated, “Measurable growth is fantastic. But that takes time. Teachers don’t necessarily think that way. And know how to write a really useful tiered SGO, that takes time.” In this way, time was a challenge because it takes time for the impacts of improved practice to become measurable within student performance. As a separate superintendent stated, “We just tried to focus on what good instruction would look like and hope that test scores would follow on their own.” In all, the data demonstrated a clear focus on time as an intervening condition.

Whether on its own or in connection with the others, the data showed that each of these intervening conditions continue to impact a superintendent’s ability to leverage the

strategies resulting from TEACHNJ regardless of the superintendent's unique context. Together with the contextual realities that varied from district to district, the data highlighted specific consequences.

### **Consequences**

As the codes evolved from the open and axial stages into the selective stage, strategies and conditions interacted to produce clear consequences. Superintendents spoke to the resulting changes due to the introduction of TEACHNJ as work still in progress ("needing more time"). The data showed a clear impact on four distinct areas of consequence. They are each explored here.

**Professional practice.** While superintendents stated consistently that the conversations about instruction have improved, the data told varying stories when focusing on the instruction itself. There were superintendents who felt that these conversations were improving teacher practice. One superintendent stated, "I know it has helped students, not directly for me but in changes for teaching style and things my staff are doing in the classrooms." A second stated that teachers "are able to use data and provide for better instruction for students." Regardless of the challenges of contextual and intervening conditions, most superintendents spoke to an improvement in practice due to an improvement in conversations about instruction.

Data like these included that some superintendents are seeing improvement; however, others were not. One stated, "We have been provided a vehicle to address the deficits in instruction with tenured staff and yet so few people actually use it and that's disappointing." A separate respondent stated, "I mean nothing got better from [TEACHNJ], it's just that the teachers spent so much time coming up with their SGOs



and trying to come up with their pre-tests and post-tests it really kind of failed the whole evaluation process.” When it came to improving practice, one superintendent stated, “I haven’t seen any improvement in my ability to mentor teachers or to make them better in the classroom.” Responses focused more on staff trying to live to the letter of the law and not the intent. One superintendent stated, “I really wouldn’t say that it has an influence on [practice]. It’s a compliance thing.” The data spoke to an underlying theme that many staff were compliant, but not improving.

Overall, though, the emerging data were that superintendents found that the improvement in conversations were positively impacting teacher performance. As one superintendent stated TEACHNJ has “raised the level of instruction for the teachers.” The law changed practice because teachers now know “they are evaluated on growth.” The comprehensive focus, using frameworks and student performance data together have held a higher standard and teachers are working to reach that standard. In the words of a separate superintendent, “Teachers demonstrate proficiency through growth. They say let me show you about the growth of my kids. Where I got them, look where I’ve got them now. Rather than some arbitrary cutoff as this defines success.” Data emerged that conversations have become more specific and superintendents are beginning to see a change in professional practice through these more rigorous processes; however, the data also spoke to whether or not change has been consistent.

**Consistency.** At its core, TEACHNJ was meant to improve student performance by establishing a standard of expectation for teacher practice for the state (NJDOE, 2011, p. 3). It sought to create consistency of practice and of evaluation across the state and the superintendents interviewed expressed two specific views on consistency as a

consequence of TEACHNJ. The first focused on consistency within each individual district's use of the required framework and the second on consistency of the remainder of the law and its implementation from district to district across the state.

Superintendents spoke constantly of the consistency that TEACHNJ fostered within their own districts in respect to the use of a framework. One superintendent crystallized this when she said that in regard to improving teacher practice, the consistency of "having a framework is absolutely beneficial." A separate superintendent stated that "having a framework, and we use On Course systems, but having a system has made an impact on the organization and workflow and also is a good training to understand what it is you're looking for in the classroom." Overall, the data demonstrated that frameworks have created consistency.

Superintendents commented that prior to TEACHNJ, there was a lack of clear understanding of what 'good teaching' looked like. They spoke often of how the selected frameworks provided consistency in this area. Data consistently returned to this theme, with one respondent stating:

I really do believe that it has forced us, and I mean that in a good sense, it has brought us to the point where we have an established evaluation framework that all teachers have received professional development in and there is a consistent language around that framework, and therefore there's more, there's a greater credibility in what an observer records as evidence when they are evaluating staff and therefore, there has been more consistency and credibility in the evaluation process.

A separate superintendent said specifically that “while the Danielson Framework was never intended to be an evaluation instrument, it has been useful ensuring that there has been consistency through our district and across our teachers.” Within his or her own district, each superintendent regularly spoke to the consistency that the chosen framework provided. A separate respondent, speaking to the positive change in consistency the law has fostered, stated, “The instrument, our case Danielson, helps provide a consistent language and a consistent focus that all teachers and administrators and supervisors are working with. I don’t think it existed to the extent that it exists now in this district.” Beyond this positive, as expressed by the superintendents, impact to consistency, respondents also highlighted a lack of consistency from district to district.

Superintendents expressed a clear lack of faith that, beyond the framework, other aspects of the law had created consistency. One superintendent stated, “There has been more consistency and credibility in the evaluation process, as least as it relates to the evaluation instrument, but not the other stuff, not the SGOs and SGPs.” This statement belies the underlying view shared by many of the respondents that other aspects of the law have not fostered the consistency intended. This is supported through the axial coding stage as I compared the description by different superintendents of how they implemented other aspects of the law. One superintendent, talking about SGOs which are required by the law, stated that “as compared to some of our peers who spend a lot of time on SGOs in isolation, we do it within the context of our professional framework. I know this is different.” A second superintendent described SGOs saying, “To speak candidly, the SGOs, is a waste of time” while a third stated “My teachers are incorporating the use of data in their SGOs very effectively.” Yet another returned to the

idea of their lack of usefulness saying, “I think at this point SGOs are ridiculous. In theory they are great but in practice I don’t think they are that great.” As these examples demonstrate, the resulting data connected across interviews clearly demonstrate a lack of consistency in approach, application, and value of this part of the law. At the same time, the data demonstrate that there was unanimity regarding the consistency produced by frameworks.

The consistency attributed to the use of framework though was limited. Superintendents spoke specifically about their concern that the law had not created consistency across districts. One stated, “I think collaboration with other districts is needed. We still have an issue that what I see as an effective teacher in our district is different from what [a separate district] sees. I think they still need to address that.” That superintendent further clarified the lack of consistency by stating, “Well I just think that everybody got the directive from the state and then developed their own definition. I think that there were more districts that were inaccurate. Well, based on my readings of the numbers, I think that there are more inaccuracies than accuracies.” Other superintendents commented on the lack of consistency as well. One respondent went directly to the intent of the law, saying, “I think that what TEACHNJ hoped to do was ensure consistency across the districts and I don’t think it solved that.” These data demonstrate the idea of consistency as a consequence; they also lead to the next consequence: stress.

**Stress.** The third consequence, following professional practice and consistency, emerged during the analysis of the first interview and was present in each subsequent initial coding stage, as well as across the axial stage. In the selective stage, every

participant's data spoke to a single consequence: Stress. As expressed by one superintendent, "TEACHNJ has helped to refocus certainly veteran teachers on getting results, but it has definitely put stress on a lot of people." The transition through the law, the number of new components, and the contextual and intervening conditions have created stress for stakeholders throughout the education system. One superintendent stated that her entire job has been to "relieve some of the stress the law has caused."

According to the data, the stress emanates from a number of aspects of the law. One superintendent stated:

There was frustration there as these programs grew. There was a lot of expense to bring in a program so it was taxing for the budget, and the big thing was the burden of getting all of the observations done. It would become all-consuming during parts of the year. Because you don't want to be doing observations while PARCC testing is going on and just to be able to get them all in was very stressful.

Yet another stated there was "frustration with the process and the time it takes you to implement something and it generates lots of questions and the answers to those questions have been vague or elusive." A third shared that "doing observations while PARCC testing is going on and just to be able to get them all in was very stressful." In all, the data show that the consistent consequence of stress was created by a variety of conditions.

Superintendents were often speaking to their own stress and the stress of their staffs; however, the data showed that these were not the only groups stressed by the law. One superintendent stated that aspects of the law that required student test scores be used

as part of a teacher's evaluation "makes more mistrust of the whole process and nobody has ever fully bought into the process, especially at the high school level." He went on to say that everyone, staff, students, and parents have been "driving ourselves crazy" attempting to meet the requirements of the law. A separate superintendent stated that "the state's standardized testing system as a means of informing you know, teacher practice at least, has caused time and resources in district to be allocated in the direction of managing parents who are angry." In all, the transition into the law has, according to the respondents, created stress at each level of the system. As one respondent summed it up, TEACHNJ "sidetracked many good people from the real focus of the job, so it was a financial burden, it was a stress, emotional, climate issue, it was a needless work distraction." As the third consequence, stress was present in each interview's data. The final consequence found within the data speaks to the core of the research questions: How has TEACHNJ impacted the superintendent's ability to improve student performance?

**Student performance.** Increasing student performance was the ultimate, intended outcome of TEACHNJ as it was designed (NJDOE, 2013, p. 1). It is the final consequence that emerged from the data as codes interacted and found their places within the altered stasis. As mentioned before in the section on Time, one superintendent commented that "Measurable growth is fantastic. But that takes time." The data on this consequence refer to the need for more time to assess the impact of TEACHNJ on student performance; however, the initial evaluation by the respondents was clear: performance has not improved dramatically through this point in time. One superintendent stated, "It will take time for this to become apparent, it is not necessarily a reallocation of resources, it may just be the right people, doing better work, helping students improve, or it may be

necessary that good people are doing good work but the student performance still isn't where it should be." A separate respondent stated "I don't see any major impact on how it has helped the students."

The law focuses on specific data (PARCC; SGOs) and superintendents spoke of little change in trends of student performance before and after the implementation of the law. One superintendent stated, "When they started counting the teacher's test scores, it just dragged everything down. It did not increase test scores. It's made it a lot more difficult because of the administration of it. It is time consuming and it hasn't improved test scores." Superintendent responses did not speak to a lowering of student performance; however, there was a clear theme that "scores have not gone up."

Not only were the data clear that superintendents believe student performance has not improved, they stated that measuring student performance and growth has become more difficult because of the reaction in some communities to the process itself. A separate superintendent stated, "I would say for my district we can throw out all the high school tests scores, because we can't take action on data that is very sketchy or we believe is going to be combative." His statements were echoed by superintendents in other districts where state test performance was already high prior to the implementation of TEACHNJ. He continued:

We have half or more of the students who should be taking this test are not taking the test and we struggle then what we can do with this data. Also, half the kids are taking the assessment and you aren't even convinced that they are giving any effort because they see 50% of their peers aren't even in the room."

Data expressed that this reaction, connected to the consequence of stress, has led to the generation of less reliable performance data than was available prior to the law's inception. As that superintendent concluded, "We just don't put a lot of stock into it. So when it comes to the student assessments generated by PARCC, TEACHNJ, at the high school level, in my district you almost have to table that conversation until you feel you are looking at data that are at least credible, reliable." Overall, the data was clear that superintendents feel that more time is necessary and that to this point student performance has not increased due to TEACHNJ.

### **Implications**

There is a great deal that was learned from this study. First, it is interesting to note the consistency with which current superintendents characterized the context prior to TEACHNJ's inception as lacking in a formal definition of effective teaching practice. Second is the apparent lack of effort or success in improving this area of district operation. Third was the consistent finding that TEACHNJ's requiring of frameworks in districts punctuated current practice and resulted in improved conversations. Most interesting was the interplay of consistency and mandate. The research showed clearly the existence of inconsistencies in understanding, language, and practice, whether between districts in the state or within a single district, and that these inconsistencies have and continue to negatively impact student performance. At the same time, there was an underlying pushback to many of the mandates within TEACHNJ even though superintendents credited some of the mandates as helping reduce the inconsistency that existed.



As the state, and the larger country continue seek an answer to stagnant student performance, TEACHNJ has provided the opportunity to study one specific attempt by legislators to find that answer. This research provides insight to legislators and superintendents alike, informing how best to move forward as to how better to approach an effort. This includes the use of common language, but also the need to support districts with resources and training. Further, this study's reinforcement of Marzano's and Water's (2009) findings will hopefully convince future efforts to focus on leveraging the five actions. More specifically, this study found that the superintendents interviewed believed them to be a set of interrelated actions that must be taken together, rather than five separate actions that could be taken alone or in parts. This finding can help current superintendents immediately and inform future changes to legislation, including TEACHNJ, as they are developed.

For these same reasons, the leaders of the state's associations can leverage the findings of this study as they work to influence future legislation. As well, the findings can be used to inform the programs they run that train current and future administrators. The same is true for local boards of education who partner with their superintendents to manage instructional change under TEACHNJ. The findings of this study should provide for school board members a point of comparison from which they can examine their own district's actions.

Finally, these findings can bring valuable insights to teachers and the larger public. Understanding the perspective of superintendents on student performance data may help inform collaboration in individual communities. These findings may also help define for these groups, the true work of the superintendent and how complicated it is.

Returning to the theoretical framework, the finding that TEACHNJ was a punctuating event should reinforce for all groups that districts, and states, need to constantly look beyond our own institutions to ensure that we are growing.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that further research should be done. This research could include a similar examination of the impact of TEACHNJ on urban districts. As well, a similar study could be performed to gather the incites of superintendents who are not Caucasian. Finally, a quantitative study could be performed to examine the actual performance of students since the implementation of TEACHNJ. These results can be compared t the perceptions of the superintendents found in this study.

Regarding practice, this study has found that a clear definition of desired practice is necessary and still lacking, but that the use of a single framework makes the conversations necessary to improve practice more successful. Further, the five actions, as defined by Marzano and Waters (2009), were found to be critical to superintendents. Therefore, superintendents should work to focus on these more specifically. Training and preparation programs for superintendents should focus on these as well. Also, as connected to other roles (board members, administrators, teachers, community members) training should be developed so that members of each role play a more successful part in leveraging each area. Finally, it is important to note that the participants felt that the five cannot and should not be leveraged separately. They felt that anything less than full coordination of the five actions under one plan would not prove successful; however, when leveraging them as a collective group they would.

Finally, when it comes to policy recommendation, the findings represent a need for the state to plan more professional development when implementing this type of change. While there may have been a desire to leave more decision-making to the districts, the participants shared that this created stress and inconsistency as the law was applied. Further, participants evidenced a need for the state to provide more specific requirements in terms of common language. Superintendents preferred the state mandating one set language for all (frameworks); however, they then preferred more flexibility when it came to using that language (number of observations, timelines, use of data to inform evaluation scores). This finding supports a need to ensure that policy focuses on the desired outcome, providing as clear a statement of the end result rather than mandating specific aspects of process. TEACHNJ, according to participants, gave too much freedom in defining the end result and not enough freedom in how district would choose to reach that outcome. It would be interesting for the state to get districts that have chosen similar frameworks together to determine the impact of the choice and its support of improved practice.

## **Conclusion**

This study has found that TEACHNJ has impacted the ability of the superintendent to function as a district's instructional leader. Superintendents have been able to foster improved conversations regarding teaching and learning by creating greater consistency within their districts of the use of a common language to support observation and reflective practice as a means of improving instruction. At the same time though, they are challenged by new legal requirements (SGOs; SGPs) that have created even more inconsistency within districts and highlighted continuing inconsistency between

different districts across the state. They continue to struggle as the law has weakened their budgets, stretched their resources, and created stress across the stakeholder groups they seek to lead. Finally, they have not seen, as of yet, improved student performance because of the law's implementation.

As a current superintendent in the state of New Jersey, I am deeply committed to the work of improving student performance in all ways possible and I currently work under the law as I do. Following a grounded theory approach and the framework designed by Creswell (2007) allowed me to approach the topic without bias. This required that I detail the central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, context and intervening conditions, and consequences that lead to the formation of a theory grounded in data, that speaks to the central question.

Looking at the causal conditions and at the current literature, across recent decades student performance has stagnated (Robinson, 2007; Pink, 2005; OECD, 2010), stakeholder participation in public education has changed greatly (Hoyle, 2007; Petersen, 2004), and teaching practices have evolved (Schmoker, 2006). TEACHNJ is an example of the attempts of legislators across the country to intervene. This research found that the law's implementation has, within individual districts, fostered more specific conversations about individual teacher practice which have helped improve reflection and the delivery of instruction; however, there have been negative consequences as well. These have included increasing stress on district budgets and resources and a perceived increase in personal stress to members across all stakeholder groups connected to school districts. Most important is that the superintendents interviewed do not believe that these changes have positively impacted student performance.

Examining the law through my specific theoretical framework, it is clear that TEACHNJ has served as a punctuating event, and that it has impacted and been impacted by the social constructs that exist in public education in New Jersey. The theoretical framework, most specifically the application of punctuated equilibrium, was crucial in the emergence of the grounded theory. Using punctuated equilibrium as a lens through which I could view and connect the emerging codes, the data fell into the components of grounded theory (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 1998; Morrow and Smith, 1995). Punctuated equilibrium establishes an initial formation period and a period of stasis/equilibrium which equate to the causal conditions. A catalyst (TEACHNJ) is introduced from outside the environment and that catalyst defines the core phenomenon. The catalyst impacts the stasis and moves the organization into a revolutionary period which is comprised of strategies and contextual and intervening conditions. Finally, the organization reaches a new or altered state of equilibrium which can also be defined as consequences.

In this way, punctuated equilibrium and grounded theory aligned to guide the data analysis forward. The theoretical framework and the requirements of the selected form of research, qualitative grounded theory, provided the lenses through which the codes could be connected. Whether the codes described an existing reality prior to TEACHNJ, the law itself, the initial shifts due to the impact of the law, or the final evolution of superintendent practice within the five actions for change (Marzano and Waters, 2009), the supporting data and each code emerged connected to one aspect of this story.

Most unexpected was the connectedness of the codes beyond the delineation of the five actions themselves. Again, these were actions that superintendents can take that prior research had found to be connected to improvement in student performance. This

research originally planned to study these actions one at a time as if they were autonomous. This guided the formation of the interview protocol. Each action (ensuring collaborative goals setting; establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction; creating board alignment with and support of district goals; monitoring achievement and instructional goals; allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction) was explored separately, but the responses from the superintendents interviewed blurred the lines between actions and the analysis of the resulting data spoke to initial codes and then larger themes that transcended the actions themselves. Superintendents constantly used phrases including “as I said before”; “I’m repeating myself”; and “it keeps coming back to the same thing.” In all, the responses demonstrate the importance of the actions as a set that must be leveraged together, rather than on an individual basis.

As the overall aim in grounded theory “is to generate theory inductively by gathering data about a phenomenon, identifying the key elements and then categorizing the relationships of those elements to each other” (Elliott and Jordan, 2010, p. 30), it is reasonable to want to generalize the developed theory as proof of something. As Creswell (2007) states, though, the goal is to discover, not to prove. The hope is that in that discovery lessons can be learned to make future decisions, as described above, more efficient and effective. Reiterating that the goal is to discover, not to prove, Charmaz states “grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analyses” (p. 1). This approach

allows for the formation of a clear theory on the impact of TEACHNJ; however, this approach focused on a small number of superintendents.

Examining the research population, the data on district characteristics demonstrates that the respondent group is an accurate representation of the selected subset. In grounded theory, as Creswell (2003) states, the researcher “attempts to derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study” (p. 15). Evidence of saturation (Mason, 2010) and the subsequent theory itself only represent the sample interviewed (Creswell, 2003); however, understanding the relation of these characteristics may help, within social constructivism, comprehend the relation of the interviewed group of superintendents to the representative subset and even larger whole across the state. Also, while the characteristics themselves do not impact the analysis of the data generated through the interviews (Charmaz, 2014; Maxwell, 2005; Thompson, 2011), they do impact potential future studies should the grounded theory be generalized. For this reason, for the findings of this research to be understood and leveraged by others moving forward, a clear understanding of their own context must exist.

Ultimately, this work has broadened my understanding of institutional change. First, it was instructive on how to influence large institutions, breaking through current culture with a punctuating event and controlling the resulting chaos. Second, it reinforced how consistency of language and process are key to successful change. Third, it highlighted for me how important it is to take time to understand and respect the current culture. Finally, it demonstrated two key aspects of the work I and other superintendents undertake each and every day. The first key aspect is that it expanded my understanding

of how incredibly complicated the process of improving education across an entire district, let alone an entire state, is. Second, it reinforced how important it is that we try.

This study and its resulting theory have only strengthened my understanding that change in our educational system is dauntingly complex. With the combined perspectives of social constructivism and punctuated equilibrium, it is as if we are unable or unwilling (or both) to see the strengths and weaknesses of our current system for what they are then improve. As a superintendent this is a frustrating reality because our sole reason for existing within the system is to ensure that it functions at its optimum level. Charged with ensuring that each student gets what he or she needs, the superintendent must work with all stakeholders so that each aspect of the district functions well and that each area of the district functions in a way that supports every other area. This is similar to how the participants of this study stated that the five action areas examined cannot be taken separately or they will produce no results. In order for school district to reach their fullest potential the entire system must be integrated.

This becomes the central challenge for superintendents: balancing the needs of individuals and individual departments, areas, or groups with the true needs of the overall system. It is for this reason that this research process has strengthened my understanding the district leadership must be based on and guided by a comprehensive strategic plan. Without a clear, overarching vision to guide decision-making, the decisions that are made may support one area or another, but not fully support the singular end result that the district exists to achieve: providing the most conducive atmosphere to support the self-actualization of students.



This study highlights that even a punctuating event, such as TEACHNJ, is not enough. This study reinforces that it is leadership's response to such an event that determines whether or not that event's impact is positive and lasting. In this case, and individual superintendent must use the impact of TEACHNJ to bring the various aspects together within his or her district. TEACHNJ has highlighted the incredibly difficult job that superintendents have bringing people and processes together to support our students. They deserve no less than our complete commitment to this end.

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## Appendix

### Interview Schedule

#### The Implications of TEACHNJ on the Instructional Leadership of Superintendents in NJ

*My name is Russell Lazovick (shake hands). Thank you for participating in this interview today. I am going to ask you a series of questions regarding your experiences working as a superintendent under TEACHNJ. Specifically, we will explore to what extent the law has impacted five aspects of your practice.*

*The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. Your honest and open feedback when participating in this interview is crucial to our study. Are you comfortable responding to questions at this time?*

*Let's begin with some information about you?*

#### **Participant Information**

Participant Number: 18

Age: 42

Race/Ethnicity: Caucasian

# of years as a superintendent in New Jersey: 10

# of different districts in which you have served as a superintendent: 2

# of years in current position: 7

# of students in current district: 350

District Factor Group of the current district: FG

Type of current district (Urban; Suburban; Rural): Rural

#### **Aspects of Practice**

*Now I am going to ask you a series of questions about how TEACHNJ has impacted five specific areas of your practice as a superintendent. We will cover each area separately, one at a time. You will be asked the same questions for each aspect. The five aspects are: ensuring collaborative goals setting; establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction; creating board alignment with and support of district goals; monitoring achievement and instructional goals; and allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.*

#### Aspect #1: Ensuring Collaborative Goal Setting

*I am first going to ask about Ensuring Collaborative Goal Setting.*

1. How is this area of your practice critical to improving student performance?
2. How has TEACHNJ impacted this area of your practice?
3. How could TEACHNJ be revised or amended that would improve its support of your work in this area?
4. What resources would support your work in this area under TEACHNJ?

Aspect #2: Establishing Nonnegotiable Goals for Achievement and Instruction

*I am now going to ask about Establishing Nonnegotiable Goals for Achievement and Instruction.*

5. How is this area of your practice critical to improving student performance?
6. How has TEACHNJ impacted this area of your practice?
7. How could TEACHNJ be revised or amended that would improve its support of your work in this area?
8. What resources would support your work in this area under TEACHNJ?

Aspect #3: Creating Board Alignment with and Support of District Goals

*I am now going to ask about Creating Board Alignment with and Support of District Goals.*

9. How is this area of your practice critical to improving student performance?
10. How has TEACHNJ impacted this area of your practice?
11. How could TEACHNJ be revised or amended that would improve its support of your work in this area?
12. What resources would support your work in this area under TEACHNJ?

Aspect #4: Monitoring Achievement and Instructional Goals

*I am now going to ask about Monitoring Achievement and Instructional Goals.*

13. How is this area of your practice critical to improving student performance?
14. How has TEACHNJ impacted this area of your practice?
15. How could TEACHNJ be revised or amended that would improve its support of your work in this area?
16. What resources would support your work in this area under TEACHNJ?

Aspect #5: Allocating Resources to Support the Goals for Achievement and Instruction

*Finally, I am going to ask about Allocating Resources to Support the Goals for Achievement and Instruction*

17. How is this area of your practice critical to improving student performance?
18. How has TEACHNJ impacted this area of your practice?
19. How could TEACHNJ be revised or amended that would improve its support of your work in this area?
20. What resources would support your work in this area under TEACHNJ?

**Overall**

*Now that we have discussed the five specific areas, I am going to ask you a few concluding questions regarding TEACHNJ and its overall impact on your practice.*

21. Are there other ways that TEACHNJ has impacted your ability to positively impact student performance?
22. As a whole, how could TEACHNJ be revised or amended to improve its impact on your practice?

23. Beyond these five areas, how has TEACHNJ impacted your role as superintendent?

*This concludes the interview. Thank you for your participation and the time you gave today.*