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# Examining Organizational Change Through a Socio-Cultural Lens: A Case Study of Persistent Educational Inequity in a Rural, Mid-Sized School District in South Carolina

Deborah Hooks-Ward  
*University of South Carolina*

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EXAMINING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE THROUGH A  
SOCIO-CULTURAL LENS:  
A CASE STUDY OF PERSISTENT EDUCATIONAL INEQUITY  
IN A RURAL, MID-SIZED SCHOOL DISTRICT IN SOUTH CAROLINA

by

Deborah Hooks-Ward

Bachelor of Arts  
University of Houston-Clear Lake, 1991

Master of Science  
University of Houston- Clear Lake, 1994

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Accepted by:

Zachary Kelehear, Major Professor

Edward Cox, Committee Member

Rhonda Jeffries, Committee Member

Michelle Vanderburg, Committee Member

Lacy Ford, Senior Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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## DEDICATION

*It is not until much later, as the skin sags and the heart weakens, that children understand; their stories, and all their accomplishments, sit atop the stories of their mothers and fathers, stones upon stones, beneath the waters of their lives.*

— Mitch Albom

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Robert and Martha Hooks. Without their boundless love, courage and sacrifices, none of this work would have been possible. My mother is the strongest and most generous person I have ever known. Her sacrifices and courage are infinite. Over the years, she has become a best friend and a confidante, sharing both struggles and triumphs. My mother has always reassured me and encouraged me relentlessly. She has taught me the value of family, the power of prayer, and how to love unconditionally. She has shown me, by example, the significance and value of ethics and service to others. My father was two days into being 17 when his mother signed permission for him to join the United States Air Force. After a full career in the Air Force, my father rose to the highest possible non-commissioned ranking position in the Air Force, spending over 24 years serving his country. He earned three college degrees and subsequently served 20 years in civil service. He is currently retired and Commander of VFW Post #6183. My father taught me perseverance, leadership, and the power of negotiation.

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*When a person doesn't have gratitude, something is missing in his or her humanity. A person can almost be defined by his or her attitude toward gratitude.*

-Elie Wiesel

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## ABSTRACT

This researcher in this study examined the dynamics of organizational change in a rural, mid-sized school district in South Carolina, with a focus on socio-cultural factors that hindered effective implementation of reforms aimed at reducing educational inequity. The research was conducted through a series of 15 interviews with board members and current and former superintendents from the school district and surrounding school districts. An analysis of the various responses led to the following findings: 1) a deep level of distrust seems to exist between board members and superintendents, 2) there is an ignorance of how income disparities may block educational pathways, and 3) deeply-rooted racial lines still create enormous divides that hinder integration and mutual support. Data analysis revealed that organizational change and innovation aimed at reducing educational inequity cannot be effectively implemented (or implemented at all) if a socio-cultural component that addresses the, often problematic, areas of interpersonal relationships among school leaders and within their communities is not included. The findings of the study will provide much needed guidance to those involved in implementing school reforms and managing innovation.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	vii
LIST OF TABLES .....	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	8
Significance of the Study .....	8
Research Questions .....	8
Assumptions and Limitations .....	9
Definition of Terms .....	9
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	12
Introduction .....	12
History and School Reform .....	12
Organizational Change .....	15
Organizational Capacity .....	18
Educational Inequity .....	19
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	23
Context .....	23
Research Design .....	25

Data Collection .....	25
Interview Questions .....	26
Population and Sample .....	27
Role of the Researcher .....	30
Ethical Considerations .....	31
Limitations of the Study.....	31
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	32
Introduction.....	32
Interview Results .....	33
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	53
Introduction.....	53
Summary of the Study .....	53
Study Design.....	57
Research Questions.....	58
Conclusions.....	62
Recommendations .....	63
REFERENCES .....	68
APPENDIX A: Introductory Sample Email .....	87
APPENDIX B: Sample Interview Transcript .....	89
APPENDIX C: List of Interview Questions .....	91

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Summary of Interview Participants .....	29
Table 4.1	Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 1 .....	33
Table 4.2	Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 2 .....	35
Table 4.3	Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 3 .....	37
Table 4.4	Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 4 .....	38
Table 4.5	Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 5 .....	39
Table 4.6	Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 6 .....	41
Table 4.7	Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 7 .....	42
Table 4.8	Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 8 .....	44
Table 4.9	Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 9 .....	47
Table 4.10	Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 10 .....	49
Table 4.11	Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 11 .....	51

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking. – Albert Einstein*

Education, and the dynamics that surround education, have interested me since my high school days. The influence of my excellent, 10th grade, art teacher led to my decision to become a teacher and a leader in education. My experiences growing up as a military brat overseas also impacted my views of education and, more importantly, the relevance of diversity. A missing link seemed to be getting back to my roots. I think people often wonder where they come from and where they belong. When my husband accepted a job in South Carolina, I was excited and filled with hope to find those roots again. More importantly, I wanted to serve, in some capacity, within the educational system in South Carolina and continue my education at The University of South Carolina.

In 2010, South Carolina was laying off teachers statewide. Having come from a very affluent area in Texas, near NASA, this was an unusual scenario for me. Teaching had always seemed to provide a level of security and many other rewards. South Carolina faced financial shortfalls then, and finances continue to be an issue in the state. My introduction to the depth of the problem occurred when I witnessed the deplorable condition of many of the school buildings in the I-95 corridor school districts. The poverty and lack of opportunity in some areas were shocking and unfamiliar to me. I

remember a school restroom that smelled like sewage, was unclean and dilapidated (like most of the building).

Some initial interactions and experiences began to reinforce the idea that the laws, and the system, were outdated. I began to notice a few things that were foreign to me. A mode of observation became common place as I began to learn more about South Carolina. Blue Laws or “Sunday Laws” were something I had read about but they still existed in this state at that time. The laws discourage certain specified activities on the Sabbath or Sunday (Schultz, & Vile, 2015). I remember a woman telling me that I was in the Bible belt now and things were different. I recall an unusually high number of African American males assigned to special education classes at all levels. I was also introduced to a system in which special education students could receive a certificate of attendance instead of a diploma that would enable them to reach out for other opportunities to improve their lives and advance their education. I recall a candid conversation with a young African-American principal about prejudices, discrimination, and limitations. There was another odd conversation about hiring practices. The conversation was about how when a white male left a position of leadership; another white male would generally replace him. Equally, if a black female left a job, she would be replaced by another black female. I was also privy to a conversation about the long-standing board members who played a highly political role in all of the hiring. There were strong divisions that placed blacks and whites in a contentious situation. I witnessed instructors reading their Bibles in the classroom during instructional periods. All of these are observations, and my intentions are not to judge or be critical. I just found these incidents to be unusual and wanted to learn more about my new surroundings. As trite as it may seem; I wanted to

make a difference for students, all students. Equity has always been a part of my fabric, and I wanted it for my South Carolina students.

When I read the book, *Brick Walls* (Truitt, 2012) for one of my classes, I was intrigued, saddened, and inspired all at once. The book was a driving force behind my academic endeavors and interests. I was lucky enough to meet and have Dr. Truitt sign my copy that is worn from my examination. Inside, his personal message to me is, “Knock down those brick walls!” His book is a valuable resource for those interested in “modern manifestations of the civil rights struggle still ongoing in American public education.” (Gaillard, 2006). It was during this period that I began attending local school board meetings. I felt like the board meetings would shed light on my new community, board and administrative leadership, and the inner workings of a school district in the south. The impressions from Dr. Truitt’s book and first-hand experiences allowed me to see some unexpected circumstances. Arguing, stubbornness, gridlocks, and divisions seemed to be common place. I just wanted to know the history. I wanted to understand so that I might be able to apply that understanding to my own current professional state of affairs. My personal, professional familiarities began to influence my desire to read, study, and write.

### **Statement of the Problem**

School reform efforts continue to be prevalent in the public school system of South Carolina and much of the country. Most of those reforms share the common goals of student achievement and the reduction of educational inequity. The struggles with educational inequity exist throughout the country and is especially noticeable in states of deep racial, ethnic and socio-economic divides. South Carolina, has a population that is

approximately sixty percent white, thirty percent black. Between these two ethnicities, data exists supporting racial and social economic divides, with a prevalence of poverty (Lin, Drake, & Conchas, (2015).

Education is a very powerful tool that offers the promise of a better future for anyone who is able to access it, and most of us recognize the landmark case of Brown v. Board of Education, a case that changed the face of education in 1954 (Ware, 2004). This decision was significant because it transformed education by outlawing segregation and impelled the civil rights movement (Orfield, 2001). Brown clearly underscored the right to education for each and every child in America. Decades later, US courts do not consider education to be a fundamental right. An illustration of this is the court case of San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez (Powell, 1972), which states that funding formulas for public schools based on local property taxes are not unconstitutional. “Few states have equalized funding and access to the key educational resources needed for learning” and public schooling remains “separate and unequal”. (Darling-Hammond, 2004, p. 213). Providing equal educational opportunities is seen as being imperative for promoting social justice and augmenting economic, social and individual development. “Progress in equalizing resources to students will require attention to inequalities at all levels—between states, among districts, among schools within districts, and among students differentially placed in classrooms, courses, and tracks that offer substantially disparate opportunities to learn. (p. 21)” Sciarra and Hunter noted that school funding across the states is “Oft-ignored.” Most everyone that has a vested interest in equity will agree that school funding can no longer be ignored if we actually want what is best for children (Sciarra & Hunter, 2015).

In 1965, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a hallmark of President Johnson, was the first law that provided federal funding for schools with a high proportion of students living in poverty (ESEA, 2015). ESEA, in particular, Title I, was intended to provide instructional materials and other educational resources to low-income families to close student achievement gaps and improve their performance. In 1994, for the first time, the ESEA also required all states to report on the performance of their student population and to evaluate the scores based on race, income levels and other key factors affecting educational inequity (Title I, 2015).

Since its original enactment in 1965, the ESEA has been reauthorized every five years. During both former President George W. Bush and current President Barack Obama's terms, massive pieces of legislation were implemented to assist policy makers dealing with the immense challenges of reforming education aimed at reducing inequities and improving the overall performance of American students. In 2002, Congress reauthorized ESEA, and President George W. Bush gave it a new name: No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (US Department of Education, 2002). NCLB expanded the federal role in public education in the areas of annual testing and teacher qualifications. In 2012, President Barack Obama began overhauling NCLB to ensure that it was "designed to close achievement gaps, increase equity, improve the quality of instruction, and increase outcomes for all students" (p. 219). In 2009, a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics, English arts, and literacy were established under the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI). Those standards were created to ensure that all students acquire sufficient skills and knowledge during high school and establish a strong academic foundation to help them to succeed in their future professional life (Porter, A.,



McMaken, J., Hwang, J., & Yang, R., 2011). As of today, 43 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have adopted and are moving forward with the Common Core (CCSSI, 2015).

Several studies showed that while ESEA assisted in preventing achievement gaps from widening, it did not close them and did not sufficiently alleviate educational inequities among students (Zelizer, 2015). It was also found that in many cases, even though Title I was meant to be a supplemental funding for existing resources, some districts reduced their local spending on education while benefiting from ESEA's additional resources (Center for American Progress, 2015).

Today, for those living in poverty, test scores and the overall educational picture in the US are bleak at best. If we shift our focus to not only the students living in poverty but also examine advancements in education for African-Americans, the gaps in education are still very substantial (Payne, 2008). Historically, it is well-known that during the Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Era, educational advances were notable for African-Americans. However, this progression subsequently "stalled and regressed" (Parsons & Turner, 2014, p. 110).

All the school reforms that have been implemented over the past decades share the ambitious and admirable goal of offering equal educational opportunities to every child in America, independent of their race or social status. However, none of them seem to have achieved those goals. An impressive number of studies continue to document the failed efforts, or meager results, of reform implementation, and an inability to successfully implement organizational change and innovation at the state, district or school level (Payne, 2001; Rothman, 2013).

Implementing reforms and organizational change within institutions is a complex and challenging process. A perfect example of this is the case of the Mapleton public school reforms (McQuillan, 2010). In their book titled *Against the odds: Insights from one District's Small School Reform*, Cuban, Lichtenstein, Evenchik., Tombari, & Pozzoboni (2010) thoroughly explained how despite the original extraordinary enthusiasm of all involved in the process of implementing innovation, and the very substantial financial support from the Gates Foundation, the road to success was paved with extraordinary obstacles that were rarely anticipated.

Putting new policies into practice in schools and classrooms, whether those policies are formulated by the President and Congress, a state legislature, or a local school board...is a process that mocks, rather than mimics the chain-of-command structure so neatly articulated in state and district organizational charts. (Cuban et al., 2010).

Emotions and personalities of the entire spectrum of individuals implementing organizational change, or those directly affected by it, are critical factors that need to be considered and resolved (Vakola, 2004). In fact, “emotions and responses to change can be so intensive that some have compared them with individual responses to traumatic changes such as death and grief” (Vakola, Tsalousis & Nikolaou, 2005). Additionally, cultural and racial divides can add to the complexity of school reform implementation. To quote Milner (2015), “I am Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired of racist, sexist, xenophobic, hegemonic, and inequitable structures and systems both inside and outside of education that prevents us from doing the work” (p.2).

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine organizational change and school reforms with a focus on socio-cultural factors that hindered their effective implementation at the district and school levels. The main goal of the research was to create more awareness and bring a better understanding of the often-overlooked obstacles and dilemmas associated with the implementation of well-meaning reforms aimed at reducing educational inequity. Those include but are not limited to 1) conflicting priorities and value differences among stakeholders, 2) political divisions, 3) psychological impacts associated with change (e.g., job security and social status within the school), 4) racial tensions, and 5) cultural divides (between individuals implementing change and those affected the most by this change).

## **Significance of the Study**

This study will be a valuable addition to the existing literature by identifying and highlighting some of the inevitable, yet often unforeseen or underestimated, dilemmas associated with the implementation of school reforms. According to Kimaliro (2015), “changes in policy should go hand in hand with changes in mind set, which do not necessarily occur concurrently” (p. 253). The research findings presented here will be of particular value to school board members, superintendents, and all stakeholders involved in implementing school reforms, particularly in areas of deep social, cultural, and racial divides.

## **Research Questions**

1. How do leaders impact the climate and effectiveness of a school district?
2. Are schools, in this district of South Carolina, content with status quo?

3. What are superintendents and school boards in this school district in South Carolina doing to facilitate change?
4. What role do socio-cultural factors play in the dynamics of school change in this school district in South Carolina?

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

When conducting the study, the researcher assumed the following:

- 1) All individuals interviewed provided honest and accurate responses to the best level of their knowledge.
- 2) The procedures and methods used to collect responses were appropriate.
- 3) The information gathered was sufficient to provide significant and meaningful information to meet the goal of the study.

The study included the following limitations:

- 1) All individuals interviewed were selected by the researcher. Different responses may have been obtained from different individuals.
- 2) The interview questions were developed by the researcher. A different set of questions may have led to different answers, thus resulting in different qualitative data.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were used and defined as listed below:

**Active learner** is interviewer engagement that involves concentrated listening, participation through discussion, analysis, and synthesis.

**Abbeville v. State** is a court case relative to South Carolina and specific to education for the state. The significance of the case emphasized that each child will receive a “minimally adequate education” in accordance with the state constitution.

**Act 388** was an act passed in 2006 that eliminated property taxes on primary residences as funding for school operations and provided for sales tax to increase by one cent to finance schools.

**Capacity building** is a theoretical approach that is action-based and intended to develop the collective efficacy of a group by promoting understanding and knowledge. In building capacity, a group or organization focuses on attaining quantifiable and viable outcomes to seek improvement.

**Change agents** are people that are catalysts for transformations in schools or organizations.

**Common Core** is a collective collaboration between the National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, which, in 2010, turned out a new set of academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy. Most states came on board (approximately forty-three states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity) to support and implement the standards.

**Culture** is the term that incorporates many aspects of how a school or organization functions including, but not limited to, beliefs, standards, and procedures. The culture can be changed, molded, shaped, or transformed with positive and/or negative significances.

**Flagship** is the term intended to signify outstanding, innovative, geographically superior, and a leader to other surrounding schools.

**Organizational change** is a change that transpires when a school or institution evolves from a perceived status quo to a desired improved version of itself. The change is often the impetus of a change in leadership, an outside regulatory source, or that of invested stakeholders.

**Pedagogy** is the art of best practices related to teaching that includes, and are not limited to, components of leadership, guidance, imparting knowledge, and cultivating the growth of others professorially.

**Reform** is the undertaking or practice of improving a school or an institution. Reform often targets specified areas such as educational dynamics, cultural relationships, or societal norms.

**Socio-cultural** is a combined term that clearly denotes the blending of social and cultural factors. For the purpose of examining organizational change through a socio-cultural lens, it is imperative that the following factors are considered: social propensities, behaviors, emotions, relationships, principles, and biases.

**Stakeholders** are a collection of individuals that have a vested interest and a potential to influence the outcomes of a school or institution.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*As educator leaders we commit to exploring the future with brave hearts and behave as educators curious and unafraid to seek different ideas, expand ideas, discover new ideas, and imaginatively challenge the status-quo of traditional education thought. – Rosemary Papa*

#### **Introduction**

The literature related to the area of organizational change is vast and of interest to public education as well as the private sectors of business. Concurrently, the topic of inequity in public education is, unfortunately, also an infinite subject. Parallel to inequity in public education, research related to racial perspicacity inundates our history and regrettably floods our present pathway of humanity. Naturally, research exists on socio-cultural factors. When we begin to look at all of these sectors of research combined, the scenario becomes a bit more complicated.

#### **History and School Reform**

Public education in the US dates back to the 1600's during the period of the 13 original colonies. Schools in South Carolina can be traced back to the early 1700's. By the late 1800's, students in all states had access to public education. During these periods, access was limited to a select group and was subsidized primarily locally with no state or national support. Horace Mann (1796-1859) is known as the father of education, and it is important to note that he became one of the first reformers in public education (Fife, 2013). During the period of reconstruction, schools became accessible to African-

Americans in a discriminatory, separated fashion. It was not until the Civil Rights Movement (1950's-1960's) and the Supreme Court ruling on Brown v. Board of Education that separate facilities were declared unconstitutional (Bell, 1979).

The Coleman Report was issued during 1966 and brought to light to continued inequalities in education (Coleman, 1966). Congress passed Public Law 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act It extended the act in 1990 to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), but it was not until the 1980's that attempts at genuine reform began to unfold in public education. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued a report titled A Nation at Risk. No Child Left Behind, passed by Congress in 2002 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

President G.W. Bush authorized ESEA–No Child Left Behind from 2001-2008.

Beginning in 2009, President Barack Obama's Blueprint for Reform – Reauthorization of ESEA and Race to the Top, which offered grants to states with innovative ideas that accepted the Common Core Standards. Skeptics remain, along with controversy, but nonetheless it is part of the efforts to reform public education (Burke & Sheffield, 2012).

Today, schools face astounding challenges in the preparation of students to meet the demands of the 21st-century workplace. Many attempts have been made to implement reform over the years. To date, research and evidence indicate that the efforts or initiatives have had little to no impact over the years to make the significant change in schools. It is unfortunate and maybe not as relevant, but public opinion reiterates these findings (Bushaw & Calderon, 2014).



## **South Carolina**

South Carolina adopted the Common Core Standards in 2010, but implementation began in 2013. Today's schools have tried to incorporate changes related to reform as quickly as possible to keep up with technology and provide quality facilities. In rural districts across the country, this can be an unimaginable hardship, and that is the case in South Carolina.

Also in 2010, South Carolina implemented Partnership for Century Skills State Leadership Initiative (South Carolina State Department of Education). This was a national initiative attempting to equip students with the skills needed to compete in a global economy.

The South Carolina School System operates under a system of school districts in which school board members and superintendents are elected to their positions. In 2013, South Carolina had 735,998 students enrolled in a total of 1,239 schools in 103 school districts. On average, South Carolina spends \$9,147 per pupil, which ranked it 37th highest in the nation ([http://ballotpedia.org/Public\\_education\\_in\\_South\\_Carolina](http://ballotpedia.org/Public_education_in_South_Carolina)). According to the Department of Education for South Carolina, their mission is the following:

All students graduate prepared for success in college, careers, and citizenship. By 2018, at least one school in every district will have implemented personalized learning that supports students' meeting the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. The mission of the SC Department of Education is to provide leadership and support so that all public education students graduate prepared for success (South Carolina Department of Education).

In 2012, the Fordham Institute and Education Reform Now assessed the power and influence of state teacher unions in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. South Carolina ranked 49th overall, or "weakest" (ballotpedia.org).

School boards can consist of five, seven, or nine members. Board members serve terms of two, three, or four years (ballotpedia.org). South Carolina does not impose statewide term limits on school board members (ballotpedia.org). However, term limits on school board members can still be imposed on the local level. School board members are elected in either an at-large or trustee area at-large format. In the at-large format, all voters living in the school district may vote for any candidates running, regardless of geographic location. In the trustee area at-large format, all voters residing in the school district may vote for any candidates running, but candidates must live in specific geographic zones within the school district.

### **Organizational Change**

There are many challenges that exist for leaders when examining organizational change. An important facet of many school policy discussions is the role of strong leadership, particularly of principals (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012). According to research and example based models, attracting strong leadership is necessary for implementing change. There are an endless number of articles that represent over three decades of research related to relationships in leadership, student achievement in relationship to leadership (<http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/exploring-the-impact-of-school-leadership-on-s>), and organizational change related to leadership (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998, 2003; Leithwood & Levin, 2005;

Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995). Marks and Printy (2003) analyzed the effects of leadership on academic performance and submitted that ‘transformational leadership’ is needed to implement change and collective school leadership is required to improve the learning performance of the students. Researchers Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, & Slegers (2012) suggested that school leaders have a strong influence on development orientation in schools. Rational goals and open systems behavior seem to have the greatest impact, followed by human relations and internal process. It is important to note the significance of the human relations dynamic about this research.

The model used in change implementation is critical. Leaders might be more successful in processing change “at the individual level, where the emphasis is on employee reaction rather than practical execution of specific steps” (Stragalas, 2012). Individuals through socio-cultural factors must be considered. Stragalas et al. (2012) asserted the necessity of considering the reactions of the individual as change is implemented:

For psychological safety to exist, while sustaining sufficient anxiety to motivate an individual to participate in the organizational change process, two conditions must be met: (1) “Survival anxiety... must be greater than learning anxiety” and (2) “Learning anxiety must be reduced, rather than increasing survival anxiety”. It would be fitting for leaders that are seeking reform to consider frameworks, individuals within those frameworks, and successful models that may or may not be associated with corporate models (Kotter, 2007).

Resistance to change is as common as a cold. It is not easy for organizations of any kind to change, but schools have particular characteristics that mitigate against

significant change (Evans, 1996; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). Generally speaking, it is human nature to avoid change at all costs (Ford, 1996; Jermier, 1994; Jones, 2001; Piderit, 2000). Mullins (2005) emphasizes that people may have many reasons for avoiding change. Some of the reasons may be common ideals such as a loss of control, loss of wages, changes in the working environment, and the possibility of sacrificing job security. People respond to change differently. It is not uncommon for change to be met with an attitude of ambivalence (Arkowitz, 2002; Moyers & Rollnick, 2002). Change can provoke a response based on threats of change and participants may cultivate tactics to protect themselves. All of these efforts are an attempt to prevent an extreme onset of anxiety and other personal ramifications (O'Connor, 1993; Odham & Kleiner, 1990). Olsen & Sexton (2008) stressed the concept that in a setting in which people feel threatened, they become guarded and unwilling to bend.

Leadership practices are imperative to effectively manage organizational change. Personal networking is essential as part of those leadership practices for those who intend to lead effectively. Personal networking allows the opportunity to establish mutual trust and respect. When a principal practices personal networking it can develop a sense of transparency and desire to connect with the community and various other stakeholders (Fullan, 2002; Gammage, 1998; Lester, 2003). Networking is established through visibility, time, and personal effort. This can be done by attending social events, sporting events, etc. to connect with others. Over time, positive relationships can develop through attempts to network. Relationship building can be an antecedent to developing the collaborative atmosphere that schools seek to develop with the community.

## Organizational Capacity

Capacity building is necessary for change to occur. Building capabilities in an organization are necessary to facilitate growth and create a culture for change. Initially, it starts with a shared vision. It is a task that requires skilled leadership, time, trust, focus, and many other critical elements. Toma (2005) explored eight essential elements of the framework: institutional purpose, structure, governance, policies, processes, information, infrastructure, and culture.

For this authentic role in building capacity, school leadership teams such as principals, assistant principals, and lead teachers may be tapped, but superintendents are at the helm for this level of leadership. Bird, Dunaway, Hancock, & Wang, (2013) stated in their study that the “superintendent is the only person with the positional authority to orchestrate these activities [about organizational change]. Therefore, the superintendent’s disposition toward authenticity will facilitate the execution of school improvement practices” (p. 37). No doubt, school boards also play a role in capacity building related to organizational change in school districts. According to Wilson (2015), school board members are the “best donors when they understand and respect the boundaries of good governance and giving principles” (p. 70). Respecting boundaries are critical in leadership clusters. Although many board members traditionally come from business sectors, grasping the concept of good governance is imperative for visionary change.

Motivating people require a certain amount of empathy and an ability to help others achieve self-efficacy. Efficacious people are able to set goals and engage in change (Diseth, 2011). Practicing good listening skills and patience cannot be neglected. When we can listen through engagement at a deeper systematic level, it is possible to motivate

for change (Senge, 2014). Empowering others is essential in making progress with change. Leaders or leader groups that can empower others can find more success with change (MacPhee, Chang, Lee, & Spiri, 2013). Montero, Ibrahim, Loomis, & Newmaster, (2012) supported and emphasized the need for creating a culture for change. Mentoring or coaching is also a necessity. Foundations of support in this manner have been proven time and time again.

### **Educational Inequity**

Rural education has particular characteristics that are associated with the dynamics related specifically to the aforementioned organizational capacity. Educational research has always been substantial and the need for it is interminably paramount (Arnold, 2005; Beeson & Strange, 2000; Eppley, 2009; Gallo, & Beckman, 2016; Khattri, 1997). Furthermore, Myers (2015) emphasized “the experiences of Black families, students, and schools in communities rarely studied—poor, rural Black communities in the southern United States” (p. 437). In contrast to many other countries that have increased funding for those living in poverty; underfunded areas in the United States remain as such (Darling-Hammond, 2015). Bertocchi, & Dimico, (2014), postulated that “educational inequality is an indicator of income inequality and how deeply rooted educational inequality is in the history of the country” (p. 203). Recently, the Peabody Journal of Education (Morris, 2015), published a journal article that upheld the following arguments:

Yet, concerns remain about the education of poor and minority students within and beyond the South, the resegregation of public schools, policies and practices that reproduce educational inequality for recent immigrants and their children,

racial profiling and unfair policing, and the weakening of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (par. 3).

The same article included a reference to research by Dr. Michele Myers of the University of South Carolina. In *Black Families and Schooling in Rural South Carolina: Families' and Educators' Disjunctive Interpretations of Parental Involvement*, Dr. Myers utilized the voices of teachers and Black parents to illuminate their disjunctive arguments about parental involvement in rural South Carolina.

When analyzing distrust as a core factor, poverty contrasted with privilege, the haves, and have-nots, the issue becomes problematical and all-pervading. Distrust pits teachers against other teachers, board members against superintendents, and parents against administrators to name a few. Cultural divides are another component to this case study and the results. Pollack & Zirkel, (2013) asserted that “Educational leaders attempting to enact equity-focused change in their schools are frequently met with fierce opposition by politically able parents whose children are well served by the status quo” (p. 290). The word fierce may be mild in the description of that type of opposition.

Deeply-rooted racial lines can only hinder. Homophily is the tendency for individuals to affiliate socially with similar others (McPherson, 2001). Lichter (2013) emphasized that racial homophily of all kinds is deeply entrenched in American society and is slow to change, for both benign and less-than-benign reasons. Even more significant, Lichter, et al., (2013) made the following argument about schools, inequity, racial and ethnic divisions:

At the same time, per capita funding of public schools (K–12) has declined, disparities in public school funding have grown, and schools have begun to re-

segregate. Public education at all levels is under financial assault at a time when America arguably needs to invest in the future as never before. Current racial and ethnic differences in educational attainment (and the quality of education) portend continuing inequality in the future, particularly since today's historically disadvantaged minority children assume adult roles (p. 378).

Morris (2015) added validity to the concept with five valuable points related to the experience for blacks in mostly white schools: (1) school structures that limit or prevent parents from participating directly in the life of the school; (2) disparate expectations for academic success between teachers (lower expectations) and parents (higher expectations); (3) "cultural disregard;" (4) being labeled as deficient; and (5) one-way cultural exchanges that did little reciprocally to inform the predominant white norms.

Recently, Dr. Doyle Stevick, of the University of South Carolina, led a group of doctoral students, of which I was a member, on a visit to our nation's capital. Unfortunately, the extremity of the political divisions left us feeling hopeless that significant change will be accomplished in the current political climate. The word 'gridlock' was utilized in almost every conversation as we discussed political parties about public education. The education debate is one that dominates politics. Posey-Maddox (2014) suggested "a more feasible strategy for school improvement in our current political and legal climate (p. 6). Thomas (2013), analyzed cases from 11 nations about the relationship between education and politics. He makes a case for education and politics as being symbiotic. Journell, & Buchanan, (2013) summarized the concept of the policy in education succinctly (about new teacher perspectives):



In a political environment that seems to be growing increasingly divisive and partisan, it is essential that teacher education programs better inform preservice teachers of the public perceptions of teaching in the United States and similar issues that are often viewed as controversial by those outside of the field (p. 22).

Not any less significant are the social-cultural components. McDonald (2008) refers to something called soft behaviors and how they should not be undervalued. (Rahman, & Castelli, 2013) found that, “Higher empathy skills lead to higher leadership effectiveness as well as to higher organizational performance (p. 91).” Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997) refers to something called “smog in the air” (p. 126), this smog can be about race as Tatum refers to or “gender, social class, or other human and social differences” (p. 909). A path of empathy might be one of the best options. Through insight, we learn respect and appreciation (Savery, 2015). Empathy can define our relationships with others and formulate our perspectives about everything (Heller, 2014). Through empathy and other socio-cultural components, successional implementation of reforms aimed at reducing educational inequity may create options and possibilities for the future of public education, Potash, Ho, Chick, & Yeung, (2013).

In chapter three, I will explore methods and research design, qualitative content analysis, management of the research data, survey instrument, interview questions, and other components related to the chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

*In a chronically leaking boat, energy devoted to changing vessels is more productive than energy devoted to patching leaks. – Warren Buffett*

Chapter three describes the selected methodology and procedures used in the study. As stated previously, the purpose of the research was to investigate organizational change and innovation in a rural, mid-sized, school district in South Carolina, with a focus on the socio-cultural factors affecting the implementation of innovation and reforms aimed at reducing educational inequity.

#### **Context**

Despite many attempts over the past decades to change the public education system to improve academic performance and reduce educational inequities among students, large educational gaps remain throughout the country. Furthermore, American students still score far below international averages in math, reading and science (Hanushek, Peterson, & Woessmann, 2013). The struggles with educational inequity is especially noticeable in states of deep racial, ethnic and socio-economic divides.

While there is no ‘remedy’ for inequality that is as swift or cheap as eyeglasses, prosperous democratic countries have numerous effective policy levers for shaping inequality’s trajectory and socioeconomic consequences. Policies that appear most effective over the long haul in raising prosperity and reducing inequality are those that cultivate the skills of successive generations: excellent pre-school through high-school education; broad access to post-secondary

education; good nutrition and public health, and high quality home environments (David, 2014, p. 20).

For the most part, poor children attend poor schools (Orfield, 2009). South Carolina has its share of poor schools and poor children. South Carolina is a prime example, with a population divided in almost half Caucasians and half African-Americans. The following is offered in reference to restrictions and challenges (Parker, Barrett, & Bustillos, 2014):

South Carolina maintains some of the most restrictive developmental education policies in the nation, as four-year institutions within South Carolina are not permitted to offer developmental courses. Despite this restriction, racial and economic disparities, as well as inequities in South Carolina's elementary and secondary schools across the state suggests four-year institutions will continue to face challenges to serve students who are underprepared (Matthews, Smith & Robbins, 2013).

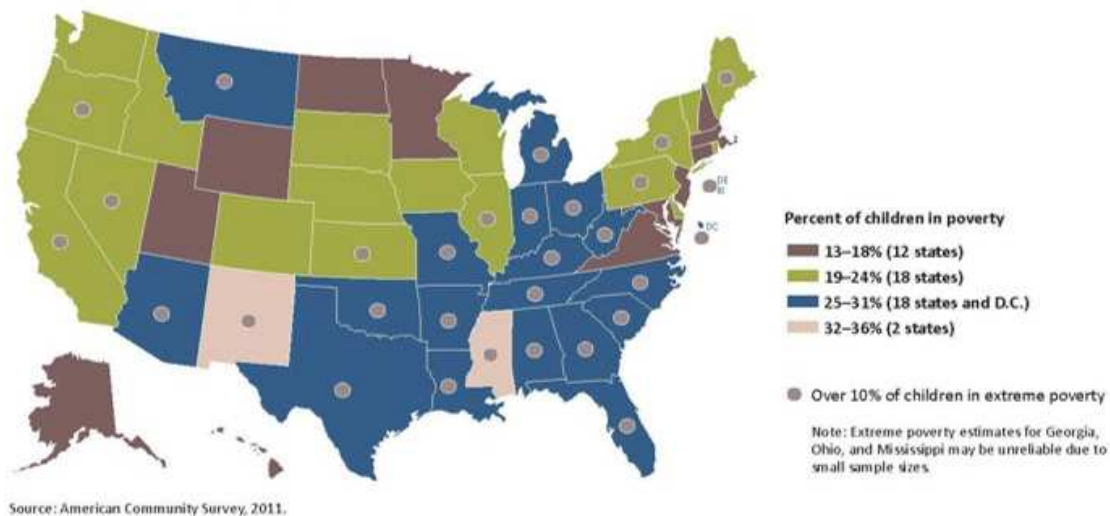


Figure 3.1 Children under age 6 living in poverty and extreme poverty, 2011 (Matthews, Smith & Robbins (2013).

Implementing reforms and organizational change is a complex and challenging process due to a variety of factors. Among those factors are conflicting priorities and value differences among stakeholders (Moss, 2002), political divisions (Apple, M. W., 2014), racial tensions (Rushing, 2001) and natural human resistance to change (van Schoor, A., 2003).

### **Research Design**

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach and designed as an “inquiry process of understanding” where the researcher “analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1998). “In-depth and semi-structured interviews explore the experiences of participants and the meanings they attribute to them” (Tong, 2007). The qualitative approach allowed participants to expand on ideas and express concerns or suggestions related to the questions asked by the researcher during the interview. In contrast, a quantitative approach might have limited the expansion of ideas and prevented the researcher from gaining valuable insights and reflections from the participants.

The research was conducted as a case study, which is generally a good approach when the primary focus of an investigation is to answer “how” and “why,” and to “cover contextual conditions relevant to the phenomenon under study,” or when “the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context” (Yin, 2003).

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through a series of 15 interviews, 13 in person and two via phone. The two phone interviews were conducted as alternative to face-to-face conversations due to geographical and scheduling constraints. The interview protocol

included 12 open-ended questions that were distributed to the participants before the scheduled interviews. Participants were informed in advance that the interviews would be tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Before distribution, the interview questions were reviewed by members of the doctoral committee and the researcher's colleagues. They were subsequently reviewed and approved by the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board.

### **Interview Questions**

Each participant was asked the following 11 questions:

1. How would you characterize your past and present relationship with the district?
2. Consider the following quote, "It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things (Machiavelli, N., 1950)." What are your thoughts about this quote in relation to the district?
3. Do you feel as though this district is the flagship district of the area? Please expand on your thoughts about this question.
4. "The superintendency is often described as an unpleasant, even impossible, job" (Carter, G. R., & Cunningham, W. G., 1997). Would you concur with this quote: why or why not?
5. What are your thoughts on power and service when you consider the positions of the superintendent and school board members? What about when you directly apply these words to members of the district and the superintendent's position in the district?

6. We often hear and read about how building principals and teachers make a difference on student achievement, what kind of impact do you think school boards and superintendents have on student achievement? What if the relationship is one of division and contention between the superintendent and the school board?
7. Do you see evidence of board alignment among members in the district? Please elaborate on this thought.
8. “Schools have been dominated too long by the attitudes, beliefs, and a value system of one race and class of people (Pine, & Hilliard, 1990).” Do you believe this quote to be accurate and does it apply to the district?
9. In respect to education and living in a democratic society, schools seem to be more conservative when it comes to change for improvement. What are your thoughts on this philosophy?
10. When you reference the Abbeville County School District v. State of South Carolina legal case, what thoughts come to your mind about South Carolina schools? The district? In terms of “minimal adequacy,” what message do you feel is being sent to those with genuine concerns about education?
11. Act 388, a controversial piece of property tax reform passed in 2006, has seemingly not changed the landscape of South Carolina’s schools. What impact do you think this legislation has had on the well-being of the district?

### **Population and Sample**

Interviews were conducted with a total of 15 current and prior school board members, assistant superintendents, former superintendents, and superintendents from

adjacent district areas. Sixteen were contacted, but one declined to participate. The researcher attempted to interview as many of the living previous superintendents from the designated district as possible, including the current superintendent. This was for the most part very successful, even though some of the participants resided in different states, and even though the researcher often faced a lot of reluctance from individuals to open up about emotionally-charged issues.

One of the previous superintendents initially agreed to be interviewed but subsequently avoided multiple attempts to set up an interview date and time. Following established protocols, the researcher made a first attempt to reach the individual – unsuccessfully. A second attempt resulted in a scheduled (and rescheduled) appointment which was eventually missed. No further attempt was made after a lack of response from the individual. The researcher was highly disappointed about not being able to include this particular individual in the study. Indeed, according to many reports from other participants, he was a perfect example of someone who had successfully broken through economic, cultural, and racial divides to shine finally as an effective leader and expert in education.

Assistant superintendents were a secondary form of support for the interviews. Additionally, a current board member was interviewed along with several others that had served with prior superintendents. Lastly, several superintendents from adjacent or nearby districts were also interviewed.

Three of the participants were female, and 12 were male. Among the female participants, one was African-American, and two were Caucasian. There were two African-American males and 10 Caucasian males. All of the participants were either

current or former educational leaders in the district or an adjacent district. Slightly over 20% of the participants were superintendents in the district, almost 27% were superintendents in adjacent districts, 40% were former or current board members, and just over 13% were assistant superintendents.

A summary of the sample population used for the interviews is provided in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

*Summary of interview participants*

Participant Number	Gender	Race	Interview mode	Job Title/Role/ Current status related to relationship with the district
Participant 1	Male	Caucasian	Phone	Superintendent of adjacent district, collaborative in nature
Participant 2	Male	Caucasian	Phone	Superintendent of adjacent district, collaborative in nature
Participant 3	Female	Caucasian	Face-to-face	Former board member, citizen, no collaboration
Participant 4	Male	Caucasian	Face-to-face	Former assistant superintendent of district, collaborative in nature, no longer directly employed
Participant 5	Male	Caucasian	Phone	Former superintendent of district, relocated, no longer in collaboration
Participant 6	Female	African-American	Face-to-face	Former board member of district, citizen, no longer in collaboration
Participant 7	Male	African-American	Face-to-face	Former board member, serving in a different capacity (current director/principal in district)
Participant 8	Female	Caucasian	Face-to-face	Former board member of district, serving in a different capacity (lead teacher)



Participant Number	Gender	Race	Interview mode	Job Title/Role/ Current status related to relationship with the district
Participant 9	Male	African-American	Face-to-face	Former superintendent of district (was superintendent at time of interview), no longer in collaboration
Participant 10	Male	Caucasian	Face-to-face	Current board member in district, still in board position
Participant 11	Male	Caucasian	Face-to-face	Consultant, former leader in district, former superintendent in adjacent district, collaborates in a consultant fashion
Participant 12	Male	Caucasian	Phone	Former assistant superintendent of district, collaborative role through new position, no longer employed in the district
Participant 13	Male	Caucasian	Phone	Superintendent in adjacent district, collaborative in nature
Participant 14	Male	Caucasian	Face-to-face	Former board member of district, citizen, no longer in collaboration
Participant 15	Male	Caucasian	Face-to-face	Former superintendent of district, relocated, no longer in collaboration

### Role of the Researcher

The researcher's expertise in the field of education, and 15 years of experience serving populations that fall into the low socio-economic category were, with no doubt, of tremendous value to the study. It might have also increased the ability of the researcher to quickly and closely connect with each participant while performing the interviews. At the same time, the researcher always had to remind herself to put her experience aside to maintain objectivity and preserve neutrality during the interview process. It was essential

for her to perform all investigations and collect the data without injecting any emotional component or subjectivity resulting from her own experience in the field. Remaining objective during all interviews was key to the reliability of the study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The recordings were formatted into transcriptions; both of which were checked multiple times for accuracy and analytical purposes. The anonymity of the transcriptions, and opinions expressed by the participants before, during, or after the interviews were preserved at all times. All participants agreed to this protocol before being recorded by the researcher.

The collected data were always kept secure, with names protected from any outside sources while developing the study or writing the dissertation. Data were collected and placed on a data collection matrix that searched for common core themes, phases, concepts, and ideas that framed the study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are inherent limitations to the study due to the small size of the sample population (Glesne, 2011; Maxwell 2013). Additionally, this type of qualitative study is limited to the experiences, knowledge, and perspectives of the participants. Their responses to the questions asked during the interview reflect their own, unique viewpoints and may not reflect those of other leaders in similar roles. Moreover, the collection and the analysis of the data is limited by the researcher's human intervention and own personal experience, even though objectivity is kept as a top priority throughout the process.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*“Prejudice is the acme of the a priori.” – John Dewey*

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, the researcher investigated organizational change through a sociocultural lens. The investigation commanded an examination of reform as it relates to educational inequity. Likewise, it focused on the areas of distrust, a lack of understanding of inequities, and racial divides. The purpose was to emphasize the relevance of a socio-cultural component. Additionally, the main goal of the research was to create more awareness and bring a better understanding of the often-overlooked obstacles and dilemmas associated with the implementation of well-meaning reforms aimed at reducing educational inequity.

The case study summarizes and discusses the information gathered during the interviews of 15 school leaders within the South Carolina school district. The selected leaders included current and prior school board members, assistant superintendents, former superintendents, and current superintendents from adjacent district areas. In this chapter, we present viewpoints and opinions expressed by each interview participant and offer a methodical analysis of each response from all 15 individuals (see numbers assigned to each participant in table 3.1). A notation of omitted or no direct response was added in the case of a lack of direct response to an asked question or when the person being interviewed chose not to respond. In some cases, the individual just politely sat in

silence until the next question was asked. In some cases, the person being interviewed got distracted, avoided a question, or misunderstood the question. When the interviewee requested it, I provided clarification of the question.

The opinions reported in this chapter relate directly to the study’s main theme: the dynamics of organizational change in a rural, mid-sized school district in South Carolina with a particular focus on socio-cultural factors the hinder the effective implementation of reforms aimed at reducing educational inequity.

### Interview Results

#### Interview Question 1: “What is the nature of your relationship with the district?”

This question investigated the relationships between the various school leaders and their district or adjacent districts. Responses to question one are summarized in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

#### *Compilation of Interview Participants’ Responses to Interview Question 1*

Participant Number	Responses to Question 1
Participant 1A	Superintendent of adjacent district
Participant 2B	Superintendent of adjacent district
Participant 3C	Former board member
Participant 4D	Former assistant superintendent of district
Participant 5E	Former superintendent of district
Participant 6F	Former board member of district
Participant 7G	Former board member (current director in district)
Participant 8H	Former board member of district (current lead teacher in the district)

Participant Number	Responses to Question 1
Participant 9I	Former superintendent of district (was superintendent at time of interview)
Participant 10J	Current board member in district
Participant 11K	Consultant, former leader in district, former superintendent in adjacent district
Participant 12L	Former assistant superintendent of district
Participant 13M	Superintendent in adjacent district
Participant 14N	Former board member of district
Participant 15O	Former superintendent of district

Question one examined the status of the relationship between school leaders and their district at the time of the interview. It is relevant to note time frames of those involved in the study. The pertinent information related to service times are noted below. The superintendents that are in districts adjacent to the district still had a working relationship with the district as well as the obvious geographical connection. All of the former board members, except two, still resided in the geographical area but had no working relationship with the district. One of the board members became a director and the other board member became a lead teacher in the district. Only one current board member was interviewed and that participant was still serving in 2016. One former assistant superintendent no longer served in the district but had a professional relationship with the district in another capacity. The other assistant superintendent no longer served in the district but was employed by another entity that works with the adjacent superintendents of the geographical area and the new superintendent of the district. At the time of the interviews, a transitional period existed in which one of the superintendents

interviewed was leaving and the board was searching for a replacement superintendent. The later assistant superintendent had no professional relationship with the outgoing superintendent but had established a relationship with the newly-hired superintendent.

**Interview Question 2:** “Consider the following quote, ‘It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things.’ (Machiavelli) What are your thoughts about this quote in relation to the district?”

Responses to question two are summarized in table 4.2.

Table 4.2

*Compilation of Interview Participants’ Responses to Interview Question 2*

Participant Number	Responses to Question 2
Participant 1A	“change does not go over well,” “people want change but don’t want to go through it,” “quite unpleasant”
Participant 2B	“change can be good but resistance can be greater”
Participant 3C	“change can be threatening,” “people are resistant to change”
Participant 4D	“micromanagement prevents change”
Participant 5E	“must build capacity for change,” “can’t have an antiquated funding system,” “a distrust about change,” “can’t be short-sighted”
Participant 6F	“most have tunnel vision when it comes to change,” “has to be for the good of someone else other than yourself”
Participant 7G	“needs to be transparency”
Participant 8H	“the district has never been a place that wants change-of any sort,” “it’s just not a place that likes change,” “this is the way we have done it, this is the way it needs to be done,”
Participant 9I	“people react to change in different ways,” “trustworthiness,” “the culture of the organization”

Participant Number	Responses to Question 2
Participant 10J	“change can be gut wrenching”
Participant 11K	“people from other states don’t understand, aren’t familiar with our system”
Participant 12L	“making changes in philosophical beliefs is polarizing,” “changes are along racial lines,” “no trust,” “change is difficult and exhausting”
Participant 13M	“if people are happy, it ain’t change,” “some people won’t follow it,” “change seems to be good for everybody but themselves,” “change can cause alienated compliance,” “people want things to stay the same but be different”
Participant 14N	“change is difficult,” “can’t win,” “extreme frustration”
Participant 15O	“so many different groups fighting for their own interests,” “hurt relationships,” “lying,” “not enough trust”

**Research Interview Question 3:** Do you feel as though this district is the flagship district of the area? Please expand on your thoughts about this question.

The goal of interview question three was to gather information about the school district’s leadership and its role in fostering organizational change and implementing meaningful educational reforms. Can the school district be seen as a flagship for other neighboring districts in South Carolina? How is it performing on improving student’s performance and reducing educational inequities? What is its reputation? Viewpoints from interview participants on this topic are summarized in table 4.3.

**Interview Question 4:** “The superintendency is often described as an unpleasant, even impossible, job”. (Carter, G.R. & Cunningham, W.G., 1997) Would you concur with this quote, why or why not?”

Table 4.3

*Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 3*

Participant Number	Responses to Question 3
Participant 1A	“they are the wealthiest in the immediate area,” “they think they are but they just don’t know”
Participant 2B	“equalization...is where I would like to see the biggest change around here take place,” “largest geographical area”
Participant 3C	“I think it is true but only based on economics”
Participant 4D	“largest and has more clout”
Participant 5E	Omitted or no direct response
Participant 6F	“it touches a lot of communities” “they do not choose consolidation but consolidation in the area would provide everyone the opportunity to a quality education”
Participant 7G	“had the potential,” “easy to look like a flagship because there is really no competition around you,” “settle,” “could push for more,” “if the fairness thing would be more prevalent, it would happen,” “good ol’ boy system,” attitude of “it was always fine before”
Participant 8H	“I don’t know that I could answer that”
Participant 9I	“we have resources,” “conservative community in terms of fiscal responsibilities”
Participant 10J	“hard to please all the people,” “good stewards with the money”
Participant 11K	“never a flagship,” “won’t agree to initiative to help all districts in area”
Participant 12L	“in some areas yes and some areas no,” “no trust factor,” “there is too much fighting”
Participant 13M	“poverty rate that is high”
Participant 14N	“ideal size” “we could accommodate other districts but school board won’t allow,” “not going to give up authority”
Participant 15O	“they are the biggest in the area,” “doesn’t mean it is all that great, the rest of them are really bad off”



Interview question four is particularly important as it tackles one of the main themes of our study, i.e. the often-problematic interpersonal relationships among school leaders and within their communities. Its purpose gain valuable insights into the key social, cultural and emotional factors that affect the effective implementation of organizational change and innovation. Responses to question four are summarized in table 4.4.

Table 4.4

*Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Question 4*

Participant Number	Responses to Question 4
Participant 1A	“very complex,” “constantly dealing with unhappy people,”
Participant 2B	“deal with more problematic areas than instructional”
Participant 3C	“frustrating,” “misconceptions about role of superintendent and board members”
Participant 4D	“you have to be part politician”
Participant 5E	“history of bickering,” “whites and blacks,” “character,” “got to be flexible,”
Participant 6F	“have an awesome task of balancing personalities,” “very political”
Participant 7G	“community lost voice at times,” “problems with chain of command,” “the politics are insulting,” “people get angry”
Participant 8H	“board running the show”
Participant 9I	“highly political,” “dissention,” “conflict,” “most difficult position in America,” “very, very stressful”
Participant 10J	“trust factor”
Participant 11K	“cannot be an island to yourself,” “have a vested interest”
Participant 12L	“polarization in district,” “fighting among board members”
Participant 13M	“not for the faint of heart,” “personal agendas”
Participant 14N	“difficult job,” “no-win job”

Participant Number	Responses to Question 4
Participant 15O	“very, very difficult,” “very often unpleasant,” “didn’t trust PR person,” “I don’t know that I would do it again”

**Interview Question 5:** “What are your thoughts on *power* and *service* when you consider the positions of the superintendent and the school board members? What about when you directly apply these words to members of the district and the superintendent’s position in the district?”

The purpose of this question was to seek evidence of ongoing struggles for power and fractures within the district leadership and the school itself. It was also aimed at furthering the understanding of the dysfunctionality of interpersonal relationships among leaders and within the community. Responses to question five are summarized in table 4.5.

Table 4.5

*Compilation of Interview Participants’ Responses to Question 5*

Participant Number	Responses to Question 5
Participant 1A	“disgruntlement reported in the district”
Participant 2B	“board must understand policy,” “society wants to know every detail about everything”
Participant 3C	“a lack of orientation,” “people don’t understand their boundaries”
Participant 4D	“superintendent is a powerful person and it is a powerful position,” “board should be about service to community and children”
Participant 5E	“got to be a servant leader”
Participant 6F	Omitted or no direct response

Participant Number	Responses to Question 5
Participant 7G	“I think in district, I don’t think the administration really understood their power,” “all the power resides with the board,” “board members need to be trained”
Participant 8H	“superintendent has the power,” “power struggles,” “bad attitudes”
Participant 9I	“should be merchants of hope,” “need dose of humility,” “requires honesty, communication and creating a culture”
Participant 10J	“board members have power only in the boardroom,” “there to provide service”
Participant 11K	“some board members in it strictly for power and influence,” “they like the power,” “board members not trained,” “school board association could do more to train
Participant 12L	Omitted or no direct response
Participant 13M	“more need to check egos at the door,” “need a servant’s heart,” “need to model service,” “a superintendent is a servant,” “superintendents work in pleasure of the board,” “need to be honest, friendly, and equitable to everyone,” “board should act as collective bodies, not as a circle of individuals”
Participant 14N	“serve the children not yourselves”
Participant 15O	“a lot of pot shots happen in the district,” discusses “black/white thing,” “power struggle going on,” “the black community is so fractured,” “arguing”

**Interview Question 6:** “We often hear and read about how building principals and teachers make a difference on student achievement, what kind of impact do you think school boards and superintendents have on student achievement? What if the relationship is one of division and contention between the superintendent and the school board?”

This question focused on student academic achievement, one of the main goals of public education reforms. The interviews investigated the connection between student achievement and interpersonal relationships among school leaders. Is the collaboration

among those leaders responsible for implementing change happening in a smooth, effective manner, or is it rendered ineffective because of conflicts, divisions and poor interpersonal relationships? Responses to question six are summarized in table 4.6.

Table 4.6

*Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Question 6*

Participant Number	Responses to Question 6
Participant 1A	“unpleasant situation,” “a disconnect,” should be about serving kids and not grinding an ax somewhere”
Participant 2B	“should be collaborative,” “must fend off negativity”
Participant 3C	“effects overall effectiveness,” “confrontation,” “unpleasant”
Participant 4D	“I think they can have an adverse effect,”
Participant 5E	“not a whole lot of impact,” “must build culture,” “board members should not meddle”
Participant 6F	“grave impact on all if it is not positive”
Participant 7G	“they need to establish a closer relationship to be able to work as a team”
Participant 8H	“Yes, they can have an impact,” “bitterness and lack of support, hostile”
Participant 9I	“significant impact,” “tension can be created, people pick up on it, lose sight of main focus”
Participant 10J	“yes, there is an impact,” “we do get divided and go off in different directions,”
Participant 11K	“curriculum drives student achievement”
Participant 12L	“there is an impact,” “trust,” “have to build relationships,” “have to bend on some things,” “cause turmoil,” “some irrational thinking”
Participant 13M	“if there is chaos, it renders impotency,” “which decision can we come to that is best for kids”

Participant Number	Responses to Question 6
Participant 14N	“Superintendent and school board has no impact,” “a lot of these kids, no one cares,” “send me a better kid”
Participant 15O	“the further you get away from the classroom, the less impact you have,” “a good board can make a difference,” “the board doesn’t have as much power when they are divided,” “embarrassing,” “controversy and bad behavior by the board,” “bad effect on morale of staff and community,” “single member districts are necessary but not effective,” “if you balance, geographically, and racially, at large is the best system”

**Interview Question 7:** “Do you see evidence of board alignment among members in the district?” Please elaborate on this thought.

Question seven is a complement to question six and further investigates the functioning and cohesion of governing boards. Responses enabled the researcher to better understand the mechanics of interpersonal relationships between leaders and their perceptions of one another. All those factors affected decisions and choices made by those leaders when implementing organizational change within their schools. Responses to question seven are summarized in table 4.7.

Table 4.7

*Compilation of Interview Participants’ Responses to Question 7*

Participant Number	Responses to Question 7
Participant 1A	“board members wanted to be in charge,” “made for not a very good situation,” “superintendent moved on because it just didn’t work”
Participant 2B	Omitted or no direct response
Participant 3C	“we were in federal court twice, one for redistricting and when we only had one African-American on the board, “lot of dissention,” “lot of rumbling”

Participant Number	Responses to Question 7
Participant 4D	“they have their own agendas,” “since single member districts the contentiousness of the board has gone up a thousand fold,” “it used to be black and white members looked out for the good of the district as a whole, now I don’t think that is the case as much”
Participant 5E	describes one of the current board members as an “agitator,” “some of what is going on with black board members is profiling, not attacking superintendent personally but attacking the position,” “ruthless politics,” refers to black ministers as “community activists or leaders,” “black ministers are the voice of some of the parents”
Participant 6F	Omitted or no direct response
Participant 7G	“as far as...a board member going out there trying to be a mini-superintendent, somebody needs to say ‘hey man this isn’t - bottom line is this isn’t an effective way to run a school district...you are not allowing the people we hired to do their job’...just straight up and telling them”
Participant 8H	“...an embarrassment to this community to have a situation like that because I think you need to have a cohesive board,” “wasn’t that hostility that you might see today,” “when the dynamics of the board changes, and it became more of a ‘were in charge now’ attitude,” “many teachers have felt like it was the school board telling the superintendent what to do”
Participant 9I	“there’s no secret now, we’ve had our challenges,” “my appointment was divisive from the beginning,” “adverse effect on civility of (board) meetings,” “not a very healthy situation and it has negatively affected superintendent, staff, and the community,” “it has been in some instances, very toxic,” “in the absence of contentious spirits, imagine how much more we could have accomplished”
Participant 10J	“often we get divided,” talks about ONE issue that the board really came together on in his 30+ years of serving, “power resides in the boardroom,” “associations say you have no power, not true, you do have power,” “you can act up as long as your constituency doesn’t mind,” “when you have only one small, one ninth of a district, you can do that (act up) while not practicing boardmanship”
Participant 11K	“if you went and looked at board minutes (here)...a number of decisions are based on...racial situations”

Participant Number	Responses to Question 7
Participant 12L	“there are more negative things happening because they are so divisive”
Participant 13M	Omitted or no direct response
Participant 14N	Omitted or no direct response
Participant 15O	Omitted or no direct response

**Interview Question 8:** “Schools have been dominated too long by the attitudes, beliefs, and a value system of one race and class of people.” (Gerald J. Pine and Asa G. Hillard III) Do you believe this quote to be accurate and does it apply to the district?”

This question expands on the previous two questions and its purpose is to establish a clearer and more complete picture of the people’s attitudes and beliefs about race, social class and their impact on the school dynamics within their district. With this question, the researcher hoped to also shed light on income gaps and poverty levels considered to be very important factors directly linked to access to education and student performance. Responses to question eight are summarized in table 4.8.

Table 4.8

*Compilation of Interview Participants’ Responses to Interview Question 8*

Participant Number	Responses to Question 8
Participant 1A	“sometimes folks don’t look past their own backgrounds,” “raised in a certain way,” some teachers can’t get past “thinking every kid grew up like them,” “raised in a vacuum,” “it has been a struggle here,” on a recent request for a “gay, lesbian, transgender club” ... “for this community it was major trauma,”
Participant 2B	“there is no problem,” “just as soon as someone doesn’t get what they want in life, then issues arise”

Participant Number	Responses to Question 8
Participant 3C	“integration didn’t faze the students, it fazed some of the parents”
Participant 4D	“the major impediment in the area/district now is race relations,” “whites don’t understand whites and their perspectives, and blacks don’t understand whites and their perspectives,” “creates clash here”
Participant 5E	Speaks of a man who ran and sat on board “to protect wealthy taxpayers”
Participant 6F	“it’s definitely historically been a fact that the school district and the resources went to the predominantly white schools,” “that’s why people need to understand you know, if you don’t pay taxes, you in, a, a, apartment, you do not contribute,” “there was only one black on the board for thirty some years,” “sometimes people don’t think it’s offensive to say things because that’s just the way they do,” talks about a distrust related to kids not getting a diploma but a “certificate” of attendance, “some parents are embarrassed to ask questions,” talks about lack of “manners and a customer service attitude” on the behalf of employees and leadership in the district
Participant 7G	“yeah, the affluent have pretty much...I think it is getting, as bad as it is, it is reducing some”
Participant 8H	“this area has not gotten beyond the 1960’s,” “one race has pretty much controlled everything and the choices that were made,” “I see more middle class running things today”
Participant 9I	“achievement gap,” “curriculum of the home has a lot to do with success of a child in school,” “two out of three of our students are on free or reduced lunch since 2007,” “we have a lot of working poor,” “we have a lot of single parent families,” “less fathers in the home today,” “we still have issue of race in our community” , “some people are still sensitive if there’s only one white student in a class where there are predominantly African-Americans,” “attitudes about gays and lesbians very sensitive...sex education very, very controversial”
Participant 10J	“some people have not been taught certain values,” “if your mother didn’t read to you, you are not likely to read to your children,” “that is something generational we have to work through”
Participant 11K	“if a child is born into rural areas (around here), he or she is already behind,” “no one (in SC) talks about this area,” “we haven’t valued



Participant Number	Responses to Question 8
	education,” “affluent families going to private schools,” “being educated is sort of low on the totem pole (in area),” “racial divide,” “so long as the money keeps going to private schools, it becomes obvious that that the white affluent people have given up on the system,” “around here you still have vestiges of the segregated system”
Participant 12L	“there is a very small percentage of teachers that understand poverty,” “the majority of teachers in SC are white (gives statistic of 80%)...didn’t grow up in poverty”
Participant 13M	“Are there unofficial blockers that discourage kids from accessing what should be available to everybody?” “often times we don’t encourage...those from a difficult home socio-economically...into the most challenging courses,” “advanced placement should not be for the elites, it should be for the prepared,” “we have to do things intentionally in order to expand and increase the number of people of color into these courses lest we’re not serving those populations well”
Participant 14N	“there’s nothing we can do until society changes and parents take responsibility for their children,” “90% of the white children that were expelled were probably from broken homes and poor children too...just like 99% of the black children”
Participant 15O	“I think there is a struggle between the values systems,” “traditional old south attitude that some still cling to,” uses the words “will be going on forever” to refer to acrimonious issues concerning race

**Interview Question 9:** “In respect to education and living in a democratic society, schools seem to be more conservative when it comes to change for improvement. What are your thoughts on this philosophy?”

This question addressed organizational change specifically and was aimed at determining the *actual* level of organizational change vs. the projected one. How effective and profound was this change? Responses to question nine are summarized in table 4.9.

Table 4.9

*Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 9*

Participant Number	Responses to Question 9
Participant 1A	"it's been a struggle here," "schools need to meet their clients where their clients need"
Participant 2B	"you have to be careful of (change)," "people sometimes don't understand and get mad"
Participant 3C	"we live in a very conservative area," "reddest state in the nation," "nobody wants to change"
Participant 4D	"I guess they are conservative," "education is a bureaucracy," "it takes funding to make change and this district has not been privy to the funding"
Participant 5E	Omitted or no direct response
Participant 6F	Omitted or no direct response
Participant 7G	"community would say they want something and then that person never got a chance at a position because they weren't from a certain side," "slow to change," "after you serve a 3-4 times on the board, you start to serve yourself a little bit then, and you don't need that," "let someone else get on there, new ideas," "some take things personally," "a board member sees everything from behind the scenes,"
Participant 8H	"the district is stuck," mentions a chamber of commerce member that said, "they have a plantation mentality, they just aren't ever going anywhere, it is their way or the highway"
Participant 9I	"there is a tremendous amount of distrust," "truth is not everywhere"
Participant 10J	"good description of area, conservative," "giant movement, never been done before"
Participant 11K	"they haven't had a strong superintendent"
Participant 12L	Omitted or no direct response

Participant Number	Responses to Question 9
Participant 13M	“if you look at the history of school and its foundations, how school was structured, we still don’t look very different than we did one hundred years ago”
Participant 14N	Omitted or no direct response
Participant 15O	Omitted or no direct response

**Interview Question 10:** “When you reference the *Abbeville v. State* legal case, what thoughts come to your mind about South Carolina schools? The district? In terms of ‘minimal adequacy,’ what message do you feel is being sent to those with genuine concerns about education?”

This question referred to the legal case *Abbeville v. State of South Carolina*, and the term “minimal adequacy.” Some of the participants had little knowledge of the case and could not respond or elaborate on the topic. The researcher provided a small description of the case to participants with the hope it would at least generate some basic responses that could be used in the research study. Students still remained entitled to “minimal adequacy” in reference to an education. This question targeted organizational change and equity in education. The saddest part of this resolution is that students living in poverty are those that suffer the most from the decision. A somewhat positive side of the coin is the following information. It is important to note:

By June 2008, 45 states had been involved in some type of litigation challenging the constitutionality of K-12 public school funding. The ruling of each state Supreme Court provides the plaintiffs in those states who are currently involved in or planning to challenge the K - 12 public financing system a stronger platform for a better opportunity for success (Costner, 2009).

As Costner (2009) suggested, maybe a stronger platform will lead toward something more positive for students as the years pass. All participants that responded with a reflection on this question presented an attitude that was beyond a level of general frustration as it related to the court case.

Responses to question ten are summarized in table 4.10.

Table 4.10

*Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 10*

Participant Number	Responses to Question 10
Participant 1A	“took them so long to reach a resolution and it really didn’t amount to any real difference as of this point,” “people who can afford... (are able to provide)”
Participant 2B	“we have to fight hard,” “we’ve got to sell ourselves in South Carolina,” “special interest groups want to drive public education down”
Participant 3C	“don’t remember it”
Participant 4D	“the constitution should be changed to something better than minimally adequate,” “I think South Carolina does a disservice to its kids,” “it’s going to get back to public schools will be for the poor, impoverished...and everything else would be for the whites, privileged,” “it would be a disgrace”
Participant 5E	“in South Carolina it is all about the haves and have not’s,” “no flexibility with money,” “unfair funding,” “South Carolina has a high regard for liberty, but it was so much so that it created pockets of, like a <i>Corridor of Shame</i> ”
Participant 6F	“the pupil student ratio of financial support that the state give had been dwindling, dwindling, dwindling,” “the tax base and how they calculate schools receiving funding needs to be revisited,” “doesn’t affect me or my child so who cares,”
Participant 7G	“really, South Carolina doesn’t support schools,” “laws are being passed to really hurt schools,” “if the public school system is operating at full level it would elevate poor people, minorities

Participant Number	Responses to Question 10
	would do a lot better in America probably,” “some people don’t want that,” “got to be fair, do the right thing”
Participant 8H	“after her time”
Participant 9I	“adequate is not synonymous with excellent,” “adequate education, that is just ludicrous”
Participant 10J	“People who make laws are not like you and me, necessarily,” “Civil War type situation still with us,” “we can’t just say I got mine, you get yours”
Participant 11K	Omitted or no direct response
Participant 12L	“I don’t remember the details”
Participant 13M	“I think the problem is the wealthy and the poor”
Participant 14N	“minimally adequate, the most rotten thing I’ve ever heard,” “and the other thing was throwing money at it (public education), South Carolina was one of the lowest on money spent in public education”
Participant 15O	“the trial lasted 102 days,” “it was very weak,” “general assembly ignored it,” “I wanted to go lie down on the steps of the Supreme Court (of South Carolina)”

**Interview Question 11:** “Act 388, a controversial piece of property tax reform passed in 2006 has seemingly not changed the landscape of South Carolina’s schools. What impact do you think this legislation has had on the well-being of the district?”

This last research question directly referred to Act 388 in South Carolina. Again, some applicants had no or little knowledgeable of the Act. In those cases, the researcher tried to provide a brief overview of Act 388 and its purpose. In short, by state law, the only source of revenue a school board has control over is the tax on commercial property, vehicles and second homes. The tax increases are limited by state law. The annual maximum increase is equal to that year’s percentage increase in county population and

inflation plus any unused, allowable, increases in tax millage from the prior three years. Act 388 is the law passed by the state legislature in 2006 that eliminated property taxes on the primary residence for school operations (Schools, L. P., & Louisville, K., 1997). Responses to question 11 are summarized in table 4.11.

Table 4.11

*Compilation of Interview Participants' Responses to Interview Question 11*

Participant Number	Responses to Question 11
Participant 1A	“Act 388 was crippling,” “you can tax small businesses out of businesses,” “put a real hindrance on the districts abilities to raise funds,” “SC has never put a big emphasis on funding education,” “it’s been dismal”
Participant 2B	“people that barked the loudest were able to control the tax dollars, “so may are sending their kids to private schools...but don’t try to deprive others of public education,” “you know if I step up to a Pepsi-Cola machine, I’ve got to put a dollar in it to get something out”
Participant 3C	“people expect a wonderful product without paying for it,” “were so underfunded in this district”
Participant 4D	“as a homeowner, I love it,” “there needs to be a comprehensive tax reform in South Carolina,” “we’ve got a long, long way to go and I don’t think any of it will get cleared up while I’m still around”
Participant 5E	“it depends on where you live”
Participant 6F	Omitted or not direct response
Participant 7G	“a lot of politics involved there”
Participant 8H	People say, “I don’t have children in school, why should I pay,” “we’ve always done it this way instead of looking forward,” “no plan, no vision,” “the powers that be kind of mess things up”
Participant 9I	“Act 388 was disastrous,” “you have a legislature where many of their kids are not in public schools and there isn’t a sensitivity to meet the needs of all of our students,” “demoralizing,” “if we want to drive a Cadillac, then we can’t pay Volkswagen price”

Participant Number	Responses to Question 11
Participant 10J	“388 is about water, expensive beach, top houses,” “it is about 3-4 counties that got together to push that through,” “it really hurt some districts”
Participant 11K	Omitted or no direct response
Participant 12L	“property taxes are more reliable,” “in the south there are dynamics that affect that,” “the difference in the south is the poverty line,” “look at Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, kids in poverty don’t make it far up the list, they don’t have resources”
Participant 13M	“look at a theory called dead counties, it has to do with more people leaving than coming in,” “the county is dying, so taxpaying is less,” “counties don’t generate near the money they need to build state of the art classrooms,” “industry makes a difference, in rural areas it is a problem”
Participant 14N	“I don’t know”
Participant 15O	“It has hurt the district,” “it was done through the thought of helping education,” “A lot of people in South Carolina do not care if we educate poor kids,” “it’s not a priority,” “I don’t trust them (South Carolina politicians)”

Chapter five will summarize the findings, present conclusions and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*“The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line ...”*

– W.E.B. Du Bois

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the research study and conclusions derived from the findings presented in the previous chapter. The chapter also provides some insight into offering actions for consideration, outlines limitations of the case study, and explores additional research that might be examined.

#### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine organizational change and school reforms with a focus on socio-cultural factors that hindered effective implementation at the district and school levels. More specifically, intentions were to emphasize awareness and bring a better understanding of the often-overlooked obstacles and dilemmas associated with the implementation of well-meaning reforms aimed at reducing educational inequity.

One of the key findings from the interviews was that schools in the district of South Carolina selected for the study were not wired to change and that the all area was entrenched in a system that made organizational change virtually impossible. Philosophically, participants agreed that people might say they want change but, in fact, are not willing to be active agents of change. Many of the participants pointed to



historical evidence to support their points-of-view. Questions two and three highlighted the fact that leaders had a desire to foster and facilitate change but economic and socio-cultural divides prevented it. Views expressed showed, among other conditions, evidence of Bandura's theory of a lack of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). The theory of self-efficacy determines potentiality for change in human behaviors. Psychologist Albert Bandura has established that self-efficacy is a person's confidence in their ability to thrive in day-to-day situations in the workplace, or in life. In other words, people generally evade scenarios that impose low self-efficacy (Bolaños-Medina, 2014), but embark on tasks that allow for high self-efficacy. Keen communication, collaboration, Socratic methods of empowering others, providing for "psychological safety" (Cooper, Markus, Team, & Change, 2012), fostering creative thinking, and building an overall mutual culture are just a few strategies that must come into play to "reengineer" for change. Change can be accessed and implemented without traumatizing the people in an organization (Cooper, et al., 2012). Leaders must "fearlessly investigate the mind-sets that underpin behavior" (Gurdjian, Halbeisen, & Lane, 2014) to create the culture and facilitate change.

Ultimately, most would agree, as many participants did in interviews, that change is good for everyone else but us. To sum up, it is easier and less taxing emotionally and physically to keep doing things as they've always been done. These points were emphasized again and again by a vast majority of the participants.

One of the main themes that emerged from the research investigations (in particular with question nine) was the deep level of mistrust existing among school leaders and other individuals within the community. The interviews also showed

evidence of a general lack of appreciation of the impact of income disparities on the ability to educate students. The document, *Reversing the Rising Tide of Inequality: Achieving Educational Equity for Each and Every Child* (Lewis, 2013) adds the following support to this thought:

What is lacking is public and political will: a level of public support for education that would bolster legislators' efforts to provide sufficient funding to ensure equal educational opportunity for all and to resist calls for cutbacks in times of austerity (p. 10).

Many participants expressed concerns over students living in poverty and those coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Most participants seemed to express concerns about being “stuck in time” and indicated that such a scenario was very detrimental to positive growth. Most participants that reflected on Act 388 relayed a response that was filled with disdain for the Act. One participant indicated it was “crippling.” Another indicated that Act 388 was “disastrous” for public education, especially in areas that have a higher poverty rate or are considered to be rural.

The interviews also included a strong indication that status quo was safe and the selected preference for most. For the most part, the overall preference was that the district was a district that “had never been a place for change” and that change “did not go over well.” Change was also viewed as “gut-wrenching” and there was not enough “trust to change.” Status quo was suggested as an acceptable mode of operation for the area and the district. (Tagg, 2012) theorized that “The status quo bias is a pervasive bias against designed change” (p. 5). By remaining in this mode, operations can continue “safely” and no one is forced to question previous decisions or venture out into gray areas that are

unknown. Quite frankly, not changing is more easily accepted than changing. Change is recognized and associated with risks and possible losses (Kahneman, & Tversky, 2000).

Resistance to change seems to be the normal, or acceptable, behavior when individuals are confronted with change. To accept change, or be part of change, can be very frightening for most human beings. Participants reported that “change can cause different reactions,” “change can be difficult and exhausting,” that ultimately it can cause “hurt relationships.” By changing, one might “give up authority,” become “disgruntled,” or lose “power and influence”. Examining emotional capacity and considering this poignant factor when seeking or considering change is very necessary. Roeser, (2012) expressed the following concerning this thinking:

Hence, to let our moral judgments result in motivational states, we have to involve our emotional capacities. This means that deliberation and communication about climate change should integrate moral emotions for two reasons: because moral emotions lead us to more substantiated moral insights about climate change, and because they provide for motivation to adapt our behavior (p. 1033).

It is also necessary, as the main premise, to examine the concept of a lack of appreciation of disparities when examining the results of the study. Participants expressed concerns about “serving kids instead of grinding an ax,” “serve children and not yourselves,” “a lot of these kids, no one cares,” “not for the good of the whole,” “can’t get past thinking every kid grew up like them,” “a small percentage understand poverty,” “often we don’t encourage those from a difficult home or low socio-economic background.” Results indicated grave concerns in this area. Serving those with disparities

is something that is often seen in the media and expressed at national and state levels, but a majority of participants expressed concerns in this specific area.

Additionally, testimonials from interview participants highlighted the fact that deeply-rooted racial divides that still create enormous communication gaps and a lack of understanding between Caucasian and African-American communities. Paralleling this issue of racial divides, the results indicated a hindrance for change or an inability to create a culture for change. Almost all participants in the study made reference to racial divides as being a very severe issue. Participants emphasized the following concerns: “history of bickering between blacks and whites,” “pot shots between blacks and whites,” “decisions made on race,” “major impediment is race,” and a “Civil War type situation still with us.” It is imperative that we consider the following thoughts (Shapiro, Meschede, & Osorio, 2013):

College readiness is greatly dependent on quality K - 12 education. As a result of neighborhood segregation, lower-income students—especially students of color—are too often isolated and concentrated in lower-quality schools. Neighborhoods have grown more segregated, leaving lower-income students—especially students of color—isolated and concentrated in lower-quality schools, and less academically prepared both to enter and complete college (p. 5).

### **Study Design**

This research was a case study. Interviews were conducted with a total of 15 current and prior school board members, assistant superintendents, former superintendents, and superintendents from adjacent district areas. Assistant superintendents were a secondary form of support for the interviews. A current board

member was interviewed along with several others that had served with prior superintendents. Superintendents from adjacent or nearby districts were also interviewed.

Three of the participants were female, and 12 were male. Among the female participants, one was African-American, and two were Caucasian. There were two African-American males and 10 Caucasian males. All of the participants were either current or former educational leaders in the district or an adjacent district.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative research study was based on the researcher's quest to answer the following questions:

*How do leaders impact the climate and effectiveness of a school district?*

It was evident from interview responses that there was an overwhelming distrust in leaders. This distrust appeared to be generational, meaning that it was passed down year after year. The distrust not only impacted the leader's ability to promote a climate of effectiveness, it also infiltrated the community. The following quote is offered in support of leadership related to impacting climate and effectiveness in the district studied in this case study. "It's time to let go of the myth of the charismatic individual leader who has it all figured out. No single person can unilaterally substantive change in an organization" (DuFour, Marzano, 2015). This statement was proven correct by this study. According to the responses and amalgamated research, it will take all stakeholders to make a difference. We cannot just rely on the superintendent or board members. It will begin with a new holistic conversation, genuinely receptive attitudes, and all of those involved including teachers, communities and students. Those conversations will need to be backed with a calculated, hard, desire to leave antiquity behind, an inflexible and

concrete desire to move forward, and a commitment to invest what is needed. It is argued that “the reconstruction of mindscapes” is necessary to respectably begin this process. We cannot forge on together with this new model to impact, reconstruct, support, and lead if we maintain the attitudes we have embraced for such a long period (Sergiovanni, 2015).

In examination of the second research question:

*Are schools, in this district of South Carolina content with status quo?*

Based on the researcher’s findings in this study, the climate is such that it would make it difficult to do anything but remain in a status quo state. If distrust to the extent evidenced by data exists, and the racial lines are drawn in what seems to be permanent ink, it would be challenging to move forward or seek improvement. Distrust, mingled with colossal racial issues, is unarguably paralyzing. Status quo is defined as “trying to preserve the current state of affairs.” In consideration of these factors, we need to consider that that often we masquerade as seeking change, but we are not willing to make the sacrifices that might cause agony, be emotionally painful, or challenging, to gain that change. Most would probably say that change is something they do not appreciate. I recall a time when I sat around a table with other doctoral students and we talked about ideas that really could make a difference. We talked about extending the school year to eliminate the summer months, funding that would make a substantial difference, and increasing mentorship opportunities. With these ideas, we also discussed what we perceived as ramifications and how they could be met with opposition.

Specifically, policymakers and constituents need to understand the value of committing greater resources to this particular issue. This perspective deviates

from the philosophy of many educators, policy makers, and community members. They define equity as ensuring that all students are provided with an equal level of funding, in lieu of providing the greatest resources to the students that have the greatest need. Unfortunately, many see the allocation of resources as a ‘zero sum’ endeavor (Green, 2014, p. 90).

The biggest concern is with “how we might renarrate history in ways that are more useful in helping reconstruct the present and build a more equitable and socially just tomorrow” (Schramm-Pate & Jeffries, 2008). It seems that sometimes we hinder instead of help by the way history is narrated. We cannot lose the pearls in history but we must commit to leaving those historical pieces behind that hamper equality, relationships, divides, and spawn evil.

In further analysis with the third research question:

*What are superintendents and school boards in this district of South Carolina doing to facilitate change?*

Evidence concluded through this case study indicate a paralyzing, frustrating, stalled out state of affairs for superintendents and school boards in the school district of this study. This stalled out condition is related to the findings of distrust, racial tensions, and a lack of consideration for socio-cultural influences, among other factors. This history tells a story of decades of attempts to better public education. The politics often create an atmosphere that is not in the best interest of children. “In short, leadership resides with the whole school community rather than with those who hold formal positions of authority” (King, 2002). A dialogue must take place about the politics of superintendents and school boards in relation to facilitating change. Substructures,

training, and policy reconstruction can support the capacity for implementation of change. A possible option would be to examine the concept of facilitating change through a “re-boot.” This re-boot might promote a refreshing opportunity to collaborate successful improvement that is built on changing outdated paradigms. In setting aside noxious politics, students win. Job contingency related to the relationship between school board and superintendent can contribute to the noxious environment of politics (Kaplan & Owings, 2013). This study presented many examples supporting this scenario.

In looking at the fourth and final research question:

*What role do socio-culture factors play in the dynamics of school change in this district in South Carolina?*

Indications point to a lack of knowledge or understanding about how income disparities may block educational pathways. If we don’t understand others, or the environment of others, it is impossible to progress. When we are saddled with a lack of understanding or knowledge, coupled with racial tension and distrust, problems become unsurmountable. Relationships are vital. When we focus on looking at school change, the socio-cultural factor is critical, and individual “emotions should be taken into account” (Arpiainen, Lackéus, Täks, & Tynjälä, 2013, p.344). “To achieve a balanced emotional repertoire, team leaders and members need to work hard and together to foster high levels of trust and psychological safety by stifling political battles, encouraging high-status members to admit and learn from mistakes, and not blaming or punishing those who come forward for speaking up or being critical” (p. 31).

We can apply this concept of embracing the socio-cultural dynamic to the leadership realm of education within the realm of school change. According to Hajro



(2015), “The formation of interpersonal relationships and trust” (p. 193) are imperative for positive outcomes. According to responses in this qualitative study, ignoring the complexity of the socio-cultural factor will inhibit progress and growth that is necessary for change.

### **Conclusions**

In this study, the 15 participants from top leadership agreed collectively on several things. They all decided that providing the best opportunities for students remains their central and primary focus. They all agreed that severe racial barriers were at the forefront of making change possible in the area. They also decided that change was viewed as tough in the field to the degree of impossible. All of the leaders alluded to or elaborated on, the fact that little to no understanding existed for actually understanding how to serve students from poverty. All leaders agreed that the financial investment in public education was non-existent. They also all agreed unanimously that the state, including all politicians, wanted the state to perform at test levels that indicated excellence. All of the leaders that worked, or had worked, in the rural, mid-sized, district agreed that the district leadership is marred by distrust, a lack of integrity, honesty, and of mutual respect, personal agendas were a driving factor, and a general consideration for others was only superficial. Most all of the leaders pointed to personal agendas as a factor that hindered the progress of any sort. Many of these factors are daunting when you look through the sociocultural lenses to examine factors of inequality that circle back around to the primary focus indicated which is that of the “students” or the success of the pupils.

## Recommendations for Further Research

This research offers many avenues that could lead to further investigation. Many studies deal with the inequities of education. It seems as though more sincere, tangible exchanges between people are needed. Substantial, roll up your sleeves, bring all your tools, a can-do, will-do attitude are necessary for the area of serving children that live in poverty. In other words, just reading about it and discussing it is not enough. Educational stakeholders need to be able to relate and serve this population to the best capacity. This task needs to take place with tremendous commitment in ways that are long term, visible, measurable, and continual. The buy-in must cross all boundaries of race, religion, ethnicities, and last but not least, politics.

Research also exists in the area of change and the title of “change agent” is used frequently and loosely in the system of public education. Change research is also very broad based. When we seek to narrow the area of investigation to the specifics of change in schools, we can laser in on areas that fit the realm of change in schools. There are books, literature, and websites available in this area as well. It seems that it might be fitting for stakeholders to pursue opportunities that apply to scenarios of a state, or of the nation, that might not be exposed. Note that exposed is not used in a negative fashion, it expresses that those areas remain antiquated in a sense or unserved to the level that is unfair. The word unfair is chosen to describe inequitable within the meaning of public education. A child should not be punished for where they are born. There seem to be areas that exist in the shadows that are rarely included or considered because perhaps that “voice” is little, ignored, or cannot be heard by those who are capable of providing the necessary tools for change.

Regarding the barriers that exist racially, we cannot dismiss or negate the seriousness of the issue. It surrounds us through print and also infiltrates every facet of the media. The research available in this area is boundless and could be tweaked to provide more robust tools for people to build relationships that are practical and authentic. These tangibility's need to infiltrate our communities, not leaving out those areas that seem to remain out of the public eye. We need to be cognizant of communities that are becoming homogenous or that are demonstrating a pattern of "People like Us" (or PLU's).

Building healthy relationships benefit students. If educating our children is what we seek, and we name that as the single primary factor for improving public education, our relationships must confirm that mission. We must explore those tools through research that will help us because it is just the right thing to do.

College course work and local professional development could be tailored to incorporate all of these factors. Efforts such as this would provide more opportunities for stakeholders to improve in these areas. Drawing attention to these incongruities may shed the necessary light for improvement. If the possibilities and tools are received, the chances for improvement increases. Additional research in these areas might also be considered on the state and national levels.

The results obtained from this study provide impetus to consider further research. I would argue that looking for more opportunities to embrace the different races, cultures, religions, and embrace pedagogy that is representative of the whole community on a larger scale, rather than certain days or a small scale is needed. Included in this suggestion might be seeking more depth and placing more emphasis in this area. This

might involve a changing of a paradigm about a community or a state. This is not a suggestion of abandonment of history but a broadening and updating of views, seeing outside of one's being, race, culture, or religion.

As I thought about the need for full stakeholder participation, I thought about the echoes of some of the participants about a lack of involvement, or a “not stepping up” approach, a lack of ownership of public education, a lack of desire to get involved, and it made me think about how important it is for us not to abandon any of our children. In the political arena, more voices need to be heard that can offer genuine expertise in education. Also on that note; we cannot always count on someone else to invest time in political arenas, we all need to be responsible for those opportunities. Diversity across the board including race, religion, age, experience, etc. can be very powerful. We cannot say that we are in it for the kids and act as though we are in it for only some children. As parents, when we make a decision to give birth to a child, adopt a child, foster a child we have no choice but to step up as required. With this commitment, must come funding to provide for the necessary improvements in providing education for parents that need that assistance. Those opportunities must be present.

Follow-up studies related to South Carolina, and the rural areas specifically, could provide additional data, add alternative perspectives, and increase awareness. It seems that any geographic area can benefit from reflection. The possibility of a laser focus on particular sectors that do not appear to be central focal points could increase knowledge and awareness. Traditionally, more populated, or urban areas, with more political power, may garner more of the emphasis than some of the other areas. In other words, if we aren't aware of a genuine need we cannot provide the assistance needed financially or

otherwise. On the other side of the coin, if we ignore a need we again fail a segment of our whole.

Many studies indicate that those who can embrace and harness change will have more opportunities for success in serving children (Owen, 2012; Husbands, 2015; Evers, & Kneyber, 2015; Hargreaves, & Ainscow 2015; De Courcy, 2015). They will indeed serve all the children, regardless of their location, in the capacity to which they are so deserving. As the researcher in this study, it would seem that the opposite that would lead to “polarization,” possibly a system of “blaming,” stagnation, the complete detriment of a system that is not serving all children in the manner in which they should be served. If a state constitution supports a system of “minimally adequate” education, why should residents of that state expect to receive more? We might investigate matters to support changes based on cases like Abbeville (as related to interview question).

At the very core of this research is a strong aspiration to conduct research that contributes to exploring ways to improve public schooling related to organizational change, socio-dynamics of such, and inequities that remain. To emphasize, it is imperative that a continuation of robust studies that seek improvement in these areas remain at the forefront of our quest for serving children in the best capacity. As these factors are considered, researchers must look for ways to prioritize and address these harrowing topics. A laser focused exploration into these areas in an accountable manner might contribute more fully to school improvements. “May we have the strength of will and commitment to doing what matters most: attending to the needs of our children” (Kelehear, 2012), and proverbially speaking, shove the horse off the dining room table.

This research is significant not only because it sheds light on sociocultural dynamics and inequity in a specified area, but it challenges the notion that just because of geographical size, more money, a greater budget, or no debt, all may not be ideal. Often things may appear one way superficially but can be unequivocally inept. Based on this research, some core values emerged inconsistent fashion. They begin to tell a story about an area. With further research that is unbiased in nature, more resolutions and reflection may occur in the future, and that may be beneficial for all stakeholders. Utilizing the information obtained from these surveys may provide tools for more insight. The research may inspire others to follow up, build on, investigate, or analyze topics closely related. Replication could be done with a larger sampling, or a longitudinal sampling might provide further insight. Another option might be to conduct the same study in highly performing, or fully-funded schools to determine whether their perceptions are different.

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## APPENDIX A

### INTRODUCTORY SAMPLE EMAIL

April 4, 2014

Dear Superintendent,

I am writing this letter in hopes of gaining an interview with you which will be used for research toward my dissertation/doctoral process. My background consists of about twenty years in the education profession including that of a district level administrative intern recently (to complete certification), department head, team leader, lead district trainer of teachers, inclusion coordinator, and a classroom teacher. My academic experience is with the University of Houston-Clear Lake at the Masters and Bachelor level and now currently with the University of South Carolina at the doctoral level. I am currently working on research in the leadership area related to preparing my doctoral dissertation. The research is concerned with leadership with an emphasis on organizational change in school districts. I will in part focus on one geographical area of the state. I would prefer to interview you in person but can accommodate with a phone interview if that works best for you. I am more than willing to come to your location or meet you at a designated location. Most of my availability will be after 3:30 p.m. during week days but weekend times are available at your discretion. The interview will consist of twelve questions and I estimate that it would take no longer than forty-five minutes. The names of those interviewed and the districts will be protected with anonymity in the study. I will tape the interviews but the tapes will only be used for transcription of notes

for research purposes. If you would be willing to allow me to interview you, please respond....

## APPENDIX B

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Researcher: Hello...I appreciate you helping me, thanks for fitting me in.

Participant: Not a problem. Somebody had to help me years ago, so I don't mind passing it forward.

Researcher: Well, thank you so much. So, really the things that I will be asking you about will have to do with those general things with organizational change, leadership, but also I wanted you to keep in mind that I am focusing in, or a portion of the study has to do specifically with one geographical area nearby. But, my study is going to be, it has to be completely anonymous, everything is voluntary. I am taping things just for note purposes, but that's the only reason.

Participant: Sure, not a problem.

Researcher: Okay, okay. Can you give me a little bit of background about you for basic introductory information and for collection purposes?

Participant: I have been teacher, coach, principal, principal coordinator of schools, I worked at a state department, I was an adjunct instructor for college and universities, so I've done quite a bit. And, well anyway, I've done a lot of research on reflection, change, orientation, I write blogs, and things like that, so I'm fairly active in the arena.

Researcher: Okay. Let's go onto a quote that has to do with change. It says, "It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of

success, nor more dangerous to handle than to initiate a new order of things." What are your thoughts about that quote?

Participant: Well, I think it's true. So, you know, change is very difficult. People, just by the very nature of who they are like stability, like predictability, like structure, so the idea of stepping out of that makes people uncomfortable. Some people, quite frankly, won't follow it.

Anybody says they're willing to do it, but then change seems to be good for everybody else except for themselves. So, that's kind of been my experience, and that change is, you can come in like a -- you've got a couple of choices as a superintendent, you can come in like gangbusters and you can threaten and you can be sort of a bully, or a bull in a china shop, being a bully affect change on a circus, but you also get what I call alienated compliance where you alienate the people around you. And then as soon as that leader leaves it goes back to the way it used to be. So, people want things to stay the same but be different. That's impossible to achieve.

Researcher: Yes, Sir. Okay, the next question has to do with another quote, and it says, "The superintendency is often described as an unpleasant, often impossible job." What are your thoughts on that?

Participant: I don't see it's unpleasant. It's not for the faint of heart, but I don't get particularly stressed over it.

## APPENDIX C

### LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The list of 11 questions asked to each participant is provided below:

1. How would you characterize your past and/or present relationship with the district?
2. Consider the following quote, “It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things (Machiavelli, N., 1950).” What are your thoughts about this quote in relation to the district?
3. Do you feel as though this district is the flagship district of the area? Please expand on your thoughts about this question.
4. “The superintendency is often described as an unpleasant, even impossible, job” (Carter, G. R., & Cunningham, W. G., 1997). Would you concur with this quote, why or why not?
5. What are your thoughts on power and service when you consider the positions of the superintendent and school board members? What about when you directly apply these words to members of the district and the superintendent’s position in the district?
6. We often hear and read about how building principals and teachers make a difference on student achievement, what kind of impact do you think school boards

and superintendents have on student achievement? What if the relationship is one of division and contention between the superintendent and the school board?

7. Do you see evidence of board alignment among members in the district? Please elaborate on this thought.
8. “Schools have been dominated too long by the attitudes, beliefs, and a value system of one race and class of people (Pine, G. J., & Hilliard, A. G., 1990).” Do you believe this quote to be accurate and does it apply to the district?
9. In respect to education and living in a democratic society, schools seem to be more conservative when it comes to change for improvement? What are your thoughts on this philosophy?
10. When you reference the *Abbeville v. State* legal case, what thoughts come to your mind about South Carolina schools? The district? In terms of “minimal adequacy,” what message do you feel is being sent to those with genuine concerns about education?
11. Act 388, a controversial piece of property tax reform passed in 2006 has seemingly not changed the landscape of South Carolina’s schools. What impact do you think this legislation has had on the well-being of the district?