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**SUPERINTENDENTS RECLAIMING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP:  
SHARED PATTERNS AND PRACTICES**

by  
Valerie James Kemp

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
Rowan University  
December 20, 2017

Dissertation Chair: Gloria Hill, Ed. D.

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Valerie James Kemp

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my brother, H. James III.

I hope that I am still shining like a rose in your eyes.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my appreciation to my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Gloria Hill for her guidance, wisdom, patience and unwavering support. The journey spent was not coincidental. Our paths were destined. I will forever take our discussions and thoughts with me where ever I go. I am honored and humbled to have walked this path with you. You have been honest, strong, funny, and sincere throughout this process. I look forward to the next journey that is destined for me.

I would like to thank my committee members for the hours of reading, direction, and support. I have the utmost respect for you. I appreciated Dr. Walpole for knowing the right questions to ask, and for understanding the potential and providing direction when I was unsure. To Dr. Silverstein, who frequently inquired about my progress and agreed to make history with this study.

To my mother and father, who are my first teachers. To my father who instills the epitome of emotional intelligence and wisdom, you are the best father in the world. To my mother, who exemplifies unconditional love regardless of fault, you are supernatural woman, and I hope to be like you one day. To my husband Greg, and girls Kyla and Nina, I appreciate your support, understanding, and flexibility during this process. I worked hard to keep a balanced home and make room for quality time together. Greg, you gave me space and time to complete assignments and papers, and for your encouraging words when things were challenging. Kyla and Nina may this be just one of the many examples for you as you respond when someone ask you, “What are you planning?” All of you make up who I am. For this journey is priceless because of you.

## Abstract

Valerie James Kemp  
SUPERINTENDENTS RECLAIMING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP: SHARED  
PATTERNS AND PRACTICES  
2017-2018  
Gloria Hill, Ed.D.  
Doctor of Education

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand and investigate the shared patterns among current superintendents who wish to reclaim their role as instructional leaders. The role of the superintendent has evolved since its inception two centuries ago. Originally, intended to be a teacher of teachers, the role of the superintendent has developed and changed over time due to school reform movements and varying political climates. Using the Delphi method, consensus was reached and shared patterns and practices were found. In summary, superintendents in this study shared their opinions about their role as chief administrators of a school district, which brings attention to the ever-changing role of the superintendent and the need to examine the role as instructional leader.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **The Origin of the Superintendent**

Few would argue that the school district superintendent has a demanding job. The job description of the superintendent has developed and changed over time due to school reform movements and varying political climates. The role of the superintendent originated in 1812 in the state of New York (Houston, n.d.). Originally, the intent was to elevate a person to the status of a teacher of teachers, manager of schools, statesman, and an applied social scientist (Houston, n.d.). Scholars explained that the role of the superintendent quickly became a visible, respectable, and prominent position, which is now seen as a pivotal and powerful role in education (Houston, n.d.). Many districts in other states began to follow the New York model, so much so, that in 1865 the National Education Association created the Superintendent's Division to help serve the growing profession, which later became the American Association of School Administrators (Houston, n.d.). This organization still serves superintendents today.

#### **Political Climate and School Reform**

The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s brought on a new era of federal laws that impacted the roles of the superintendent. During this era, school districts received mounting pressures to provide all students with equal opportunities to learn. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, signed by President Lyndon Johnson, served as our country's remedy to closing the achievement gap deficit in our nation's public schools (Epstein, 2004). State and local superintendents were entrusted to

implement federally funded programs such as Title I. School districts, under the direction of the superintendent, were required to hire full time principals who would provide leadership in the development of the educational program in the school to which he or she was assigned, including the supervision and administration of the school program, involvement with the selection and retention of staff, professional consultation, direction and assistance to the faculty and students of the school, and fostering effective home/school/community partnerships (USDOE, n.d.). Thus, superintendents moved from a teacher of teachers to a manager of principals and policies. This major shift in the role of the superintendent was emphasized in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, which replaced the ESEA. NCLB added an additional level of teacher accountability and the need for highly qualified teachers with better training (Epstein, 2004).

The historical context focused around the role of the superintendent remains relevant. Superintendents are leaders of a school district. Superintendents are visible and are held as the prominent figure in a school district. Research supports that, historically, superintendents in the earlier stages of their role were required to balance the role of statesperson and the role of lead teacher for those who instruct (Houston, n.d.). These roles required understanding pedagogy and demanded multi-levels of complex decision-making as the lead statesman. The role of lead instructor, manager of school building leaders, and manager of policies remain.

Currently, policies of ensuring that all students learn include an amendment to the No Child Left Behind Act. The demands require superintendents and school districts to reengage in accountability of instruction. Superintendents are learning about the amended version of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (United States

Department of Education [USDOE], n.d.). The United States Department of Education is currently working with the State educational agencies (SEAs) to ensure that every state secures and finalizes its state plan to address criteria associated with the new amended act of ESEA. It is called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (USDOE, n.d.). Currently, superintendents are learning about the necessary components from the Department of Education as it relates to ESSA (USDOE, n.d.).

The Department of Education issued revised templates that correlate to the amended version that was originally distributed. Each state was asked to identify and label accountable measures that will reduce the burden on local school districts as well protect all students with the goal to provide equal opportunity to learn (USDOE, n.d.). Mandating better training for teachers led to the era of professional development for teachers. National Staff Development Council's (2009) new definition of Professional Development is as follows: The term "professional development" means a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to raising student achievement by increasing the effectiveness of teachers and principals in raising student achievement (para. 1). Mizell (2010) contends that professional development is a formal process, such as a conference, seminar, or workshop; collaborative learning by members of a work team; or a course at a college or university. He also explains that professional development can take on the look of colleagues involved in dialogue about reading, research, observation of other colleagues at work, or learning that can occur from insight of peers (Mizell, 2010).

## **The Professional Development Movement**

As mandated by NCLB, superintendents oversaw the implementation of the professional development of teachers, but were not actually involved in the training. In most cases, principals received flyers describing workshop opportunities, and would give the flyers to appropriate teaching staff, and professional development approval would be given to those interested in attending (Lumpe, 2007). In years past, professional development involved the recruitment of an outside expert or consultant who would conduct a staff-development day, short-term monthly workshops, or conferences for teachers as a one-time training on some specific subject or pedagogy topic (Lumpe, 2007). The perception toward professional development implied that the teacher would attend a workshop, receive a stipend, return to the classroom with inadequate support, and at best, apply what was presented (Lumpe, 2007). This kind of one-size-fits-all training was not well received and did not bring the desired outcomes. As a result, critical analysis of professional development and its effectiveness as a whole was scrutinized and questioned (Lumpe, 2007). Teaching is complex process. Decision-making for classroom teachers is dependent on student academic need, development level, and instructional learning goals. Teachers who are effective are required to consistently modify and revise learning opportunities and experiences based on the academic progress of the student and the response of the students. Darling-Hammond and Cobb (1996) contend that simply implementing instructional strategies is not enough and that teachers essentially need to be responsive to the needs of the learner in the moment of instruction on a continual basis. Teachers require diverse competencies. Scholars support the idea that effective teachers apply traditional pedagogical understanding, fluency in understanding content,

and awareness of diversities, as well as handle classroom management and possess skills necessary to review and analyze data to inform instructional decisions (Grossman, Schoenfeld, & Lee 2005). In addition, teacher training mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act led to isolated training with the superintendent as the indirect provider. That is a far cry from the original role as a teacher of teachers.

### **Back to the Future: Superintendents as Instructional Leaders**

Superintendents typically rise from the ranks of successful teachers and effective principals. Success in the public school system is linked to knowledge, skills, and understandings in the business of teaching and learning (Russonello & Stewart, 2005). Anecdotally, many superintendents miss having direct contact with teachers and students. It seems to follow that many of our current superintendents are seeking to reclaim their more active role in how teachers teach and how students learn (Crankshaw, 2011; Hawkins, 2006). When asked who influences student learning, parents ranked superintendents as the least influential in their child's learning (Chingos, Whitehurst, & Lindquist, 2014). Thankfully there are superintendents who would like to change that.

### **Statement of Problem**

There is a need to acknowledge and understand that there has been a notable change in the role of the modern day superintendent. This dissertation will study current superintendents who have sought to reclaim the role as a teacher of teachers. This qualitative Delphi case study is a vital investigation for education. Given the varied issues facing all school leaders, when a superintendent can address all the issues and still find time to be a trainer of teachers, this multifaceted role warrants a study. "Recent research and articles by education experts describe superintendents and district-level leaders

taking a more active role in improving the instruction in their districts” (Russonello & Stewart, 2005, p. 10). Superintendents who hold themselves and others accountable for learning within the district, as well as provide opportunity to share experiences, are inevitably making a difference in learning. District leaders who understand the governing roles associated with learning strategically plan for areas of need and provide challenging support toward professional growth are ultimately engaged in educational reform. In an era of education reform and common core standards, perceptions about superintendents as instructional leaders are limited. Hawkins (2006) explains that superintendents become learners themselves and the structure of learning around curriculum and practice empowers others.

Superintendents have the potential to become change agents in improving the academic outcomes of students. Our school districts need valiant school leaders who believe they play a pivotal and ongoing role in seeking and supporting highly qualified teachers who are engaged in a continuous reflective cycle of learning.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand and investigate the shared patterns among current superintendents who wish to reclaim their role as instructional leaders. The conceptual framework for my study is based on the belief that the opinion of a group is more valid than that of an individual. This Delphi study will seek to find consensus regarding shared patterns and practices. Keeney, Hasson, and McKenna (2011) define qualitative Delphi study as a “multi-staged survey method used to obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts by a series of intensive questionnaires interspersed with controlled feedback” (p. 3-4).

## **Research Question/Sub Questions**

The following questions guided this study:

RQ 1. What do in-service superintendents who consider themselves to be instructional leaders have in common?

This study will also address the following sub questions:

- a. What are the shared beliefs, if any?
- b. What are the shared activities, if any?
- c. What are the shared challenges, if any?
- d. What are the perceived benefits, if any?

RQ 2. What do current in-service superintendents, who take on the role of instructional leader, believe about the future of the evolving role of the superintendent?

## **Delimitations and Limitations**

Credibility and validity in this study include accurate recording of the experience and opinions of participants. Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) argue that in order to assure credibility in a study, the researcher should always demonstrate an accurate interpretation of the data collected. As a researcher, it was important to document, record, and gather field notes to acquire accuracy in the study so that it is reflective of the truth, and that the data are separate from my interpretation as the researcher (Whittemore et al., 2001).

It was imperative to insist on transparency from all participants. Participants understood that what was transcribed would be reviewed for accuracy and clarity. Making an inference is the act of creating meaning from data, and conducting purposeful decision-making about the results (Creswell & Clark, 2011). In order for research to be

considered valid, it must be reliable. This dissertation included an empirical literature review about Superintendents as instructional leaders, received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), answered the research questions from the study, and exemplified research that is conducted with integrity by reliable measures.

### **Assumptions**

The study incorporated triangulated methods, which included collecting multiple data sources used to support the research, planned time collecting data about the shared patterns and practices of superintendents. As a part of analyzing collected data, I shared responses with participants for accuracy. The triangulated method included three rounds of data collection followed by coding the data and analyzing the data (Creswell, 2009).

Additional strategies used for credibility included the use of reflection on field notes and peer examination of data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). “The analysis strategy of double coding where a set of data are coded, and then after a period of time the researcher returns and codes the same set and compares the results helped in the dependability of data” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 556).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is built on the belief that cultivating an organization that can sustain commitment and generate learning at all levels is necessary toward ensuring that all students will learn. Senge (1990) argues that learning organizations consist of leaders who are designers and visionaries of a successful story and teachers that foster learning. Senge (1990) contends that leaders are responsible for building organizations where people continually expand their capabilities and are learning. Senge (1990) defines learning organizations:

Organizations where people continually expand their knowledge capacity to create the results that truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspirations are set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together. (p. 3)

Senge (1990) argues that there are five disciplines that create a learning organization. The five disciplines that can change learning organizations are a) mental models, b) team learning, c) building shared visions, d) team learning, and e) systems thinking. The proposed framework supports the thinking and practice of a learning organization. The first discipline, mental models, encourages conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy within the organization (Senge, 1990). The next discipline, team learning, focuses on members who find commonalities with language and thought patterns (Senge, 1990). The third discipline, personal mastery, suggests that the organization learns when individuals learn (Senge, 1990). The fourth discipline, building a shared vision, translates into commitment and buy-in as opposed to compliance (Senge, 1990). The final discipline, systems thinking, ties all four disciplines together. Systems thinking is the holistic approach that allows leaders to analyze the other disciplines and systems of the organization (Senge, 1990). The collective and powerful change is reform and improvement by both administration and faculty.

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings in this study can be used to make important contributions to the science of education regarding professional development strategies that superintendents use to improve the academics of all students. The results of this study are also intended to revitalize dialogue with superintendents who are focused on professional learning within

the school district that they serve and to specifically address professional development methodology as a means of impacting effective organizational change (Lumpe, 2007). Qualitative research that identifies the characteristics of teaching school leaders is limited. Research has not exhausted its efforts to document and tell the story of a school leader who takes on the role of an instructional leader.

An instructional district leader who engages in a learning model that supports interactive learning at its best contributes to the dialogue of teaching and learning. This model invites and delves into collections of best practices. Within this model, teachers have the opportunity to implement and discuss successes and/or challenges found in lessons in a collaborative forum. Instructional leaders have the opportunity to facilitate the professional development sessions as a way to identify best practices by helping teachers see and discuss experiences as well as how to improve or shift their practice by making informed decisions (Hawkins, 2006). The task within this forum allows the instructional leaders to discern what is understood, what is perceived, and what needs to take place in order for students to experience an equitable education that addresses state and national standards (Hawkins, 2006).

The need to investigate superintendents who wish to reclaim their role as instructional leaders is important because it identifies a structure that speaks to a collective effort to improve the learning of all students. It is essentially a collaborative model, which is focused on a leader who demonstrates passion for the job. DuFour (2011) contends that when a professional learning team engages in relevant inquiry and discussion about what is working and what is not working, they create a safe and professional learning environment. Teachers are able to connect teaching skills and

concepts with their students by implementing and by making connections about the practical instructional applications in real time.

This study may provide an opportunity to expose a current model that is emerging within our local school districts. More importantly, the study contributes to the historical context of describing another role associated with local school district leaders. The study is important because it speaks to a leader who is deliberate in strategic thinking and savvy enough to handle other responsibilities associated with the job. The instructional leader is tapping into meaningful professional development work, while congruently working with policy, political forces, parents, unions, communities, and teachers to establish shared accountability as all work to be a part of the solution. Importantly enough, teaching superintendents have the responsibility to maintain confidence within the local community and better the education system by investing in the instructional staff.

Finally, the importance of investigating superintendents as instructional leaders is that stakeholders are required to think and implement a sense of self-pride and move toward helping all students. More importantly, ethical issues arise when a superintendent neglects opportunities to visit schools and classrooms. Scheurich and Skrla (2015) argue that superintendents' instructional leadership is critical and could very well influence academic access positively within the district instructional practice, as well as implementation of programs and policies.

This chapter introduced a study to investigate shared patterns and practices with superintendents who are interested in reclaiming their role as instructional leaders. In addition, this chapter introduced the research question, significance, and research methodology used in this study. The remaining chapters include the review of the

literature, methodology, findings from the research, and discussion and recommendations for future study.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

#### **Introduction**

This chapter is dedicated to the review of current and past literature on historical and current roles of superintendents. The section specifically outlines professional development models, a theoretical context, and literature around the role of a superintendent as the instructional leader in terms of parallel practices and behaviors of both teacher and superintendent as it relates to professional development.

#### **Historical Perspective of Superintendents**

**Background.** History has presented and offered many varying roles and responsibilities associated with our nation's superintendents. Historically, the position of a superintendent was developed from a statesman to that of a social scientist. The role began in 1812 in the state of New York (Houston, n.d.). Scholars explain that the role of the superintendent quickly became visible, a respectable and prominent position, which is now seen as a pivotal and powerful role in education, (Houston, n.d.). Mounting evidence explains that the role of the superintendent originated in the 1800s and covers three periods of history: the eighteen hundreds to the early twentieth century, the twentieth century to the end of the civil rights period, and the modern day superintendent (Houston, n.d.).

**Superintendent as a manager of schools.** The governing power of superintendents from 1865-1910 included basic managerial responsibilities (Kowalski, 2005). The superintendent position originated and was created by local school boards (Kowalski, 2005). Responsibilities varied and included duties associated with reporting to

local and national constituents. Houston (n.d.) explains that the duties of a superintendent ranged from reporting to the local school community board and legislative members to managing the fiscal end of public funds. The Chief Administrators of Schools were not always known as superintendents. “Local school boards date back to Thomas Jefferson, who in 1779 introduced a proposal in the Virginia Assembly that citizens of each county would elect three aldermen who would have general charge of the schools” (Houston, n.d. History section, para. 8). The positions of the aldermen were designed to govern 10 schools in the county and appoint professional teachers and manage students (Houston, n.d.). The author explains that lawmakers determined and appointed volunteer committees to handle increased state funding, which then transformed into state and local boards’ school communities. Due to added responsibilities, additional superintendents were needed throughout the nation. Many states followed suit in the 1800s.

Houston (n.d.) claims that in 1865, the National Education Association created the Superintendent’s Division to help serve the growing profession, which later became the American Association of School Administrators. This organization still serves superintendents today. Also as presented, Houston (n.d.) explains that more than 30 large cities obtained superintendents during this time frame. Ultimately, if a superintendent was good at handling management issues, then that person was considered successful.

**Superintendent as a statesman.** History recognizes that the superintendent position shifted in the twentieth century. “During the first half of the century the superintendent became the most powerful individual in the school district and one of the most visible members of the local community” (Houston, n.d. Importance of Education, para. 2). Supported by facts from history, the executive function of a superintendent

involved major decisions that would affect the district. By the year 1960, more than 35,000 superintendents were appointed nationally (Houston, n.d.). Superintendents were respected internally, and superintendents faced higher levels of executive power during this time period.

However, during the Civil Rights era, district leaders faced another historical change. Superintendents were no longer trusted to conduct school affairs as they pertained to equity and equal access and many faced criticism and external observation in regard to decision-making and internal affairs. Teacher associations became more aggressive and caused confrontation, which added pressure on local school districts to reflect upon quality for all students (Houston, n.d.). During this era, school districts received mounting pressures to provide all students with equal opportunities to learn. Historically speaking, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was signed by President Lyndon Johnson, who believed that one of our nation's goals was to provide a quality education (Epstein, 2004). President Johnson believed that the ESEA of 1965 would serve as our country's remedy to closing the achievement gap deficit in our nation's public schools (Epstein, 2004).

During the 21st century, the law was revisited to expand opportunity for all students in America to support educators, families, and school district leaders. It was called the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Epstein, 2004). NCLB brought a public awareness to the sense of urgency to ensure that every child receives a quality education with a teacher who is highly qualified. The increased interest of ensuring that teachers are skilled and trained in their professional fields resulted in a closer look at accountability, higher levels of qualified teachers, and better teacher training. Most

recently, the NCLB Act of 2001 was reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). President Barack Obama signed ESSA on December 10, 2015. The aim was established to provide clear goals in preparing the nation's students to be more successful in college and careers with the hope of improving educational opportunities and academic success in school (USDOE, n.d.).

**Superintendent as an applied social scientist.** Due to economic changes within the United States, Houston (n.d.) discusses the shift toward technology systems. Technology information quickly took over the industrial system. Technology information brought about systematic bureaucracies, also referred to as scientific management (Houston, n.d.). Bjork, Kowalski, and Browne-Ferrigno (2014) proclaim scientific management emphasizes the role of the superintendent focused on time management and a top-down administrative position. It is noted that during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the federal government mandated laws related to special needs students, and local school districts were “further exacerbated by the increased immigration of students from all over the world-many arrived without knowledge of English and in many cases, without benefit of formal education in their home country,” (Houston, n.d., New Expectations section, para.1.). Perhaps the most important revelation during this period was that America's schools were not as competitive in comparison to others. Education became a high priority in the political realm and the once prestigious power afforded to the superintendents diminished, and the shortage within the profession began (Bjork et al., 2014). School superintendents found themselves behind the curve of local community needs.

## **Current Perspective of Superintendents**

**Superintendent as teacher of teachers.** Leading a school district is demanding. It is important to know that the complexity of a superintendent role can arguably be labeled challenging (Tripses, Hunt, & Watkins, 2013). Many scholars, including Kowalski (2005), propose that the complex role of a superintendent developed from day-to-day managerial responsibilities. Houston (2001) claims that superintendents currently require skill-sets to solve problems, alter the trajectory of students' lives, and influence organizational decision-making, which ultimately affect an entire local community.

The research and literature portray the complexities of a superintendent as multifaceted (Tripses et al., 2013). According to Lamkin (2006), there is a shortage of superintendents and more specifically, rural superintendents, who face limited resources and support toward change. The call to meet the demands of achievement gaps and create and maintain organizations of teaching and learning is real (Kaufman, 2003). Currently, our nation's school superintendents must govern with skill-sets that are intrapersonal and interpersonal. The leaders of our nation's schools must negotiate demographic, political, economic, and technological challenges (Bjork et al., 2014).

As the key person of a local school district, the superintendent must have competencies and talents that demonstrate a sophisticated level of governance; demonstrate skill in accurately analyzing the breadth and depth of policy; determine and properly prepare for expectations related to local and state education reform; and more importantly, keep in touch with the needs of the local community, families, and all stakeholders within the organization. Also, research provides a collective and convincing

need for superintendents to reinvest in the teacher/mentor role of education (Kowalski & Burner, 2011).

Bjork et al. (2014) contend that because of demographic and economic trends, superintendents find themselves challenged to reshape the teaching and learning experience for all stakeholders in their schools. Lee (2013) contends,

Since 2006, the national high school graduation rate has averaged an uptick of 1.3% a year, with major gains by black and Hispanic students. Over that same time period the Hispanic graduation rate has grown by 15% to 68%. The black rate has grown by 9% since 2006 to 68% overall. The rate for whites is 85%.

(Lee, 2014, p. 1)

It was expressed by Education Secretary Arne Duncan, that the achievement gap remains troubling (Lee, 2014). In spite of the increase in statistical data, the summary of students who are graduating continues to reveal inconsistencies in achievement gaps and unacceptable levels of students who are at a risk of failing. This phenomenon continues to cause a heightened level of urgency with superintendents who are consistently mandated to address failure rates associated with student academic, social, and emotional achievement. “Bureaucratic school structures and rigid state regulatory controls had a numbing effect on schools, discouraged creativity, and contributed to low academic achievement and high student failure rates” (Bjork et al., 2014, p. 6). More importantly, there is a growing need to rethink how to effectively educate students.

The demand to revamp and improve teaching and learning is essential in order to meet the requirements of school reform. Providing families with the assurance that improving education and the learning experience is essential reiterates the need to

embrace professional development for the entire instructional faculty, because many families are not convinced.

### **Professional Learning Communities**

**Context.** Improving student performance is the goal of all schools. Professional learning requires clear understanding of the teachers' needs in order to be effective and relevant to teachers (Gulamhussein, 2013). "Professional development can no longer just be exposing teaching concept or providing basic knowledge about teaching methodology" (Gulamhussein, 2013 p. 6). Professional Development is designed to make real change toward teacher practice and student academic performance. Harwell (2003) maintains:

Contrary to popular thought, student achievement is not tied directly to higher expectations, more accountability, high-stakes tests, more time on task, new curricula and materials, more computers, or sophisticated lab equipment. Rather improved student performance is the result of improved teaching skills focused on average students. (p. 5)

However, the more recent concern is whether current practices in professional development are impacting teacher practice and student learning. The days in which teachers attended a workshop, complied with directions, received a stipend, and returned to the classroom with limited support and accountability are outdated. In more recent years, educators have changed their views regarding professional development (Lumpe, 2007). According to DuFour (2009), the concept of bolstering learning communities is one answer toward making a positive impact with teaching and learning. DuFour (2011)

believes the time has come to stop facilitating workshops that do not support student learning.

**High quality professional development.** As early as 1909, researchers began to look at American classrooms and found that teachers overwhelmingly asked students fact-recall questions. Allison Gulahussein (2013) explains that, “Countless studies throughout the 20th century repeatedly find that teachers are not probing higher order thinking questions. Marzano (2003) identifies factors that demand teachers and administrators increase embedded practice that change teachers’ practice and understanding of student learning. This scholar explains that meaningful feedback, shared collaboration, practice oriented staff development, and a culture that has shared beliefs and relationships is a sustainable model (Lumpe, 2007). Lumpe (2007) insists that professional development involves new approaches toward professional learning.

As stated earlier, the time has come to revamp ineffective workshops. As the demand for rigorous instruction steadily increases, it is necessary to incorporate meaningful pre-service opportunities for teachers. Research supports professional development factors that successfully influence student achievement. Lumpe (2007) insists that professional learning communities (PLCs) can engage both teachers and leaders in a variety of activities associated with restructuring systems associated with teaching and learning. DuFour (2009) defines professional learning communities as a system that ensures that students learn, builds a culture of collaboration, and focuses on results. Hord (n.d.) contends that a professional learning community is a shared model, and professional learning communities and supportive leadership that share values and

vision, participate in collective learning and application, employ supportive conditions, and share personal practice are examples of how a PLC model can work (DuFour, 2009).

Lumpe (2007) explains that professional learning communities exist and can be utilized as a peer coaching-teaching leadership (Powers, Kaniuka, Phillips, & Cain, 2016), such as Japanese Lesson Study (Richardson, 2004), and as Critical Friends (Bakerville & Goldblatt, 2009). Each believes in the act of active inquiry, creating professional learning settings that expand the teaching and learning capacity of all involved. Professional learning communities nurture teachers to become more aligned and increase the organization's ability to target achievement gaps and change instruction.

The United States of America's public school students deserve professionals who focus on impacting student learning. The traditional use of professional development is problematic. Traditionally, the system's one day staff development does not support professional learning communities, especially school communities that require feedback, collegiality, shared beliefs, and cooperation. Therefore, it is equally important to recognize that school districts face problems as it relates to professional learning communities. Money, time, resources, and building a sense of teacher empowerment constitutes additional barriers when proposing professional learning communities in an organization (Bakerville & Goldblatt, 2009).

### **Theoretical Context**

Peter Senge (1990) discusses five disciplines that create a learning organization. The five disciplines involve the following: (1) Mental Models, (2) Team Learning (3) Personal Mastery, (4) Building a Shared Vision, and (5) Systems Thinking. The five

disciplines describe organizations that share the same vision and common goals. Each discipline leads cause and effect behaviors, which involve behaviors and events that change practice and behavior within an organization.

Life-long learning is the essence of the five disciplines. This is important because learning is at the heart of how an organization develops into a high performing team. Each member plays a pivotal part in the overall success of the organization. The leaders are encouraged to look at organizational problems and build inquiry from a holistic perspective. Systems thinking is the principle that brings the other four principles together. Senge (1990) describes systems thinking as a method used to analyze patterns as a whole rather than small increments. The author contends that an organization experiences three levels of explanations when an event occurs. The three levels include: (1) a reactive explanation based on events, (2) a responsive explanation based on behavior, and (3) a more thought-out explanation based on organization systems (Senge). Senge also contends that the best way to change events is to change the behavior within the organization, which will then change the systems within the organization.

Senge's (1990) five disciplines emphasize that teams learn together. The five disciplines focus on the organization as a learning entity with a goal to develop the skills of an entire group to improve the fundamental functions of the organization. Senge's five disciplines refer to the disciplines as important components toward making the organization deal with a whole school approach instead of relying on individual viewpoints.

Learning organizations evolve into organizations that exercise components that align individuals in a group to a function as team. Senge (1990) explains that there is a

need for individuals to ignore bias and assumptions and work toward developing shared visions. However, in the demand to meet expectations prescribed with policy, current superintendents must establish competencies that involve interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (Kaufman, 2003).

Senge (1990) believes the answer lies within learning organizations. Senge understands that leaders who work toward building capacity in a consistent manner could indeed influence and have a lasting impact on others. Senge believes that personal mastery is essential in order to have a valuable contribution to the thinking of a team. It is not about one intelligent thinker, but the capacity to build an organization founded on the work of many thinkers collectively (Senge).

Senge (1990) argues the practice of shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared pictures of the future. The progress of a vision involves all. All stakeholders are accountable for student achievement. Senge discusses shared vision as the third discipline. This discipline involves teams who work together to attain the same goal. He believes that teams who are able to think and work together are more successful.

The fourth discipline involves stakeholders who can work together (Senge, 1990). This building block is essential before stakeholders can move forward. If all four disciplines are established, the organization is ready to function as one cohesive unit. The fifth discipline is called systems thinking. Systems thinking establishes that all stakeholders are collectively able to move goals or action plans forward as well as determine appropriate action steps that assist the organization to be successful. As noted earlier, stakeholders must put all individual thinking aside and work together to accomplish the vision established by the superintendent. As noted, the five disciplines in

this section are cited in the literature review as significant in the study of how learning organizations should function.

### **Superintendent Evaluation Systems**

Nationwide, superintendents are evaluated by their school boards (DiPaola & Stronge, 2001). The American Association of School Administrators created eight professional standards to evaluate the performance competencies of our nations' superintendents (Dipaola & Stronge). The professional national standards address policy and governance of district affairs, organizational and instructional management, communication and community relationship, human resources, and upholding leadership ethics and values. Currently, superintendents are evaluated based on a system that insists on accountability (DiPaola & Stronge).

Literature supports that over the last few decades, school boards and superintendents' relations have become more a topic of discussion (Fusarelli, 2006). This relationship between the school board and the superintendent involves more scrutiny in terms of the role the superintendent plays within the local school district (Danzberger, 1994). Superintendents are aware of their role and how their role can make a difference with the success and academic performance of students within a school district (Hoyle & Skrla, 1999; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

**Evaluation systems of superintendents in the State of New Jersey.** Fursarelli (2006) contends that school districts insist that superintendents are seen as instructional leaders who can handle performance including, statewide assessments and ensuring that all efforts are made to meet goals. According to New Jersey State 2013 Title 18A:17-20.3, superintendents receives an annual evaluation based on his or her performance from

the district's local school board, the responsibilities associated with student (Justia Law, 2013). It states that regulations, responsibilities, and expectations of the school superintendent are approved and recommended by the State Board, which may require additional regulations.

Title 18A also requires that newly appointed Superintendents must complete a training program within six months of his or her term in office. New Jersey Standards for School leaders list seven standards for its leaders. According to the New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA, 2016), newly appointed Superintendents must attend a leadership academy. NJASA defines the academy as, "New Superintendents Academy (NSA), a system of customized, personalized, and structured experiences focused on the common needs and interests of first time school district leaders." (NJASA, 2016, p. 1). NJASA explains that the new Chief of school must select a total of six experiences from a menu choice of nine.

According to the New Jersey New Superintendent of Academy (2016), The system of customized, professional development experiences focused on the common needs and interests of first time school district leaders. Each resident's personalized plan will require active participation in the NSA. NSA content and menu options will evolve over time in response to current policy and practice. Sessions will reflect best practice with opportunities for dialogue around the "so what, now what" questions. (NJASA, 2016, p. 1)

New Jersey created a plan that describes how school administrators should position themselves in school districts. The plan is called Vision Plan 2020. New Jersey "Vision Plan 2020" explains that school administrators will conduct themselves

according to seven standards along those aligned to the national standards that were previously stated (NJASA, 2016). According to NJASA, the standards outline the expectations for school leaders within the organization community. Superintendents in the State of New Jersey are expected to act according to professional standards. Each standard describes the expectations as they pertain to sustaining a viable culture of learning, and protocols to ensure that all are accountable for student academic success (NJASA, 2016).

### **Perceptions of Superintendents**

Based on the historical research of schools superintendents, superintendents were developed over 150 years (Kowalski & Burner, 2011). Currently, superintendents are found in all 50 states (Kowalski & Burner, 2011). While the position was created years ago, the responsibilities have evolved into a complex role. The school board and professional standards regulate the role of the superintendent and responsibilities associated with governing equal access to education (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). The role also involves satisfying taxpayers to educate local school children so that all are successful achievers. Leithwood et al. (2004) define leadership as two entities, “At the core of most definitions of leadership are two functions: ‘providing direction’ and ‘exercising influence’” (p. 22). They explain that today’s superintendents must sort out ways to effectively work with political complexities of school boards and achieve district goals of increasing academic student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Polka and Litchka (2008) describe the do or die scenarios that superintendents have faced in regard to the voting process associated with school boards. More

importantly, the authors highlight the importance of bridging the political and cultural elements within a school district.

According to Polka and Litchka (2008),

Ultimately, the board, not the superintendent, “owns” the district. The board may be uninformed, biased, and misguided. It may want to do things that get in the way of helping children learn. It may respond primarily to self-interest or parochial politics. It may not function as anything resembling a unified team working for the best interests of students. But the superintendent still lives and dies on a one-vote margin. That reality puts an enormous premium on the superintendent’s political sensitivity and skill. The program you want to put in place may be just what the district needs, but it won’t happen unless you can bring the board and community along. (p. viii)

Understanding how to navigate the perspectives and agendas of all constituents, including the board, is a reality for many. Knowing the climate of the school community and district could make or break the stability of the position. Polka and Litchka (2008) contend that successful leaders come with a reserve of principles that include an attitude of perseverance. Collins (2001) argues that the role of a great leader stems around taking the organization to levels of work that are sustainable and great.

#### **Perceptions on impact of superintendents on P-12 academic learning.**

Leithwood et al. (2004) argue that high quality leaders have a significant impact on improving student learning. The scholars argue that leadership is dynamic in regard to teachers’ professional learning community. Leithwood et al. (2004) write,

Different forms of leadership are described in literature using adjectives such as instructional, participative, democratic, transformational, moral, strategic, and the like. But these labels primarily capture different stylistic or methodological approaches to accomplishing the same two essential objectives critical to any organization's effectiveness: helping the organization set a defensible set of directions and influencing members to move in those directions. Leadership is both this simple and this complex. (p. 8)

The authors contend that leaders should have competencies in setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization (Leithwood, et al., 2004). More importantly, the scholars support creating and sustaining networks of professional dialogue about examining instructional practice and the outcomes of student learning.

Instructional guidance is another important aspect of student learning. It takes a secure leader to create a data-driven community that focuses on student learning (DuFour 2011). This culture begins with rigorous and meaningful professional development. It continues with the probing questions and assessing and monitoring the work pertaining to teaching and learning (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). The strategic guidance requires a leader who is grounded in professional leadership practice. It is essential to create schools that are competitive, empower others to make decisions, and hold all accountable to be sustainable (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Bernthal (1996) maintains that professional learning communities are the key to improving student learning. Bernthal contends that students learn by engaging in monitoring the progress of student academic learning. This, in turn, allows for establishing a culture that is collaborative and one that focuses on results (Guskey, 2003).

When a school faculty has supportive leadership, shares a common vision and mission, learns collaboratively, and effectively applies the results to improve teaching and learning, then, and only then, is a professional learning community moving from a traditional style of isolated teaching to a more collectively model (Lumpe, 2007). Many researchers agree that professional development should maintain its focus on the effect of teaching and learning. Grounded in research, it is believed that it is the desire of the school and leadership to incorporate sustainable goals that are attainable and achievable (Danielson, 2002; Marzano et al., 2005).

However, it is extremely important to engage in discourse regarding instructional strategies that support teacher growth, development, and performance. Gusky (2003) contends that building instructional practice supports lifelong learning in highly skilled teachers. Teachers' professional learning communities are highly recommended by many national associations.

## Chapter III

### Methodology

This chapter presents a detailed description of the research design, participants, data collection procedures, instrumentation, and data analysis method. The purpose of this study is to understand and investigate the shared patterns of opinions and beliefs among current in-service superintendents who wish to reclaim their role as instructional leaders. This study will help to generate opinions of current districts superintendents who consider themselves instructional leaders.

#### Rationale and Assumptions of Qualitative Methodology

I have determined that a Modified Delphi Technique will be the best design to delve into a convergence of opinion on a specific real-world issue such as what it means to be an instructional leader (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). The Delphi method encourages debate independent of personalities, and it reduces the potential for one person dominating the process (Cornel & Mirela, 2008). Results represent varying opinions (Gordon, 1994).

These are the research questions,

RQ 1. What do in-service superintendents who consider themselves to be instructional leaders have in common?

This study will also address the following sub questions:

- a. What are the shared beliefs, if any?
- b. What are the shared activities, if any?
- c. What are the shared challenges, if any?
- d. What are the perceived benefits, if any?

RQ 2. What do current in-service superintendents, who take on the role of instructional leader, believe about the future of the evolving role of the superintendent?

The Delphi method reduces pressures associated with in-person focus groups, personalities, and influences, which affect independent thinking, also known as the halo effect (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2003). Somerville (2008) explains that this methodology provides panelists time to consider their responses before replying. Gordon (1994) argues that a Delphi study is formal guided discussion on a problem, which results in a collective opinion of those who participate.

The Delphi Technique involved a series of questionnaires, which included a technique called rounds. Each round included a questionnaire that was emailed and returned by the participants until a consensus was achieved (Keeney et al., 2013). Participants' statements on the questionnaires were the major data source for this study. Fink (1995) argues that, "In order to conduct surveys and become better at understanding what is being collected, the researcher must collect reliable and valid information, and know how to plan and assess expertise" (p. viii).

### **Participants**

As Keeney et al. (2011) discuss, the panel of experts are as good as the study itself. Initially, I expected to have superintendents' recommendations identifying other superintendents who wished to reclaim their role of instructional leadership. However, based on the low responses, all public school superintendents in the State of New Jersey were invited to participate. They self-identified as leaders who were or wished to be instructional leaders. Participants volunteered to serve as expert respondents (Appendix A). I anticipated that participants would remain constant during data collection. Creswell

(2007) explains that a researcher selects participants because they can inform and essentially help others understand the research question.

I had an interest in finding participants who had the best potential in advancing and understanding the research question. Keeney et al. (2011) contend that participants are chosen because of their expertise. The participants who participated were currently serving in their positions as superintendents. For this study, it was determined that the current in-service superintendents from New Jersey who considered themselves or strived to be instructional leaders were respected as experts in the field. University of Washington Center of Educational Leadership (n.d.) defines instructional leaders as individuals who lead for the improvement of the quality of teaching and for the improvement of student learning with the goal to ensure that every student receives the highest quality instruction every day. Each participant had to be a current in-service superintendent with three or more years of experience as superintendent, and self-describe as an instructional leader or someone who aspired to be an instructional leader at the end of the study.

### **Data Collection**

I developed a set of three questionnaires, included in this chapter, that I emailed to the participants to obtain the required data. I analyzed the data using content analysis following the first round (Keeney et al., 2013). In subsequent rounds, I used a spreadsheet and determined frequencies in accordance with the Modified Delphi study (Keeney et al.). I provided feedback to the participants, who then signaled their agreement with the findings. I then repeated the Round 2 processes for Round 3. After Round 3, ideas were analyzed and consensus was determined (Keeney et al.), Upon completion of each round,

I provided participants with the outcome of each round, and asked them to review and reconsider their own responses as well as arrange them in priority order.

**Round 1.** The overall questions that guided this study were as follow: What do in-service superintendents who take on the role of instructional leader have in common? What do current in-service superintendents, who take on the role of instructional leader, believe about the future of the evolving role of the superintendent?

The following sub questions relate to the overall questions, but are more specific to the study.

- a. What are the shared beliefs, if any?
- b. What are the shared activities, if any?
- c. What are the shared challenges, if any?
- d. What are the perceived benefits, if any?

The overall questions include the term *instructional leader*. This is someone who influences academic access, effective instructional practice, and implementation of policy and programs governed within the school district (Hoyle & Skrla, 1999).

Examples of *shared activities* are practices used to facilitate academic access and ensure effective and high quality instruction.

Examples of *perceived benefits* include coordination of mentoring, organizational learning, and setting examples.

The following seven questions were used for the first questionnaire. I was looking for data, specific examples, and opinions from the respondents. This was stated at the beginning of the data collection process.

1. How do you define what it means to be an instructional leader?

2. How do you interpret your role based on your definition of an instructional leader?
3. Has your role evolved during your tenure as a superintendent? If so, how?
4. How do you ensure high quality instruction within your district?
5. Can you provide examples of activities that helped to establish quality instruction that has had a positive impact on student learning? Describe the benefits.
6. Can you provide examples of barriers in maintaining effective instructional practices while following mandated instructional policies? Describe challenges?
7. Do you believe that the current role of a superintendent will evolve into something new? If so, describe.

I utilized content analysis in the analysis of round one (Keeney et al., 2013).

**Round 2.** Responses from Round 1 were categorized by frequency in order to reduce data to a manageable level with the goal of keeping statements as authentic and true to the original response as possible (Keeney et al., 2013). Participants were asked to rate the categorized responses from Round 1 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree.” Frequency of content analysis was examined in Round 2 (Keeney et al.).

**Round 3.** The purpose of this round is to analyze for consensus. Participant responses from Round 2 were analyzed by determining the mode for each response (Hsu & Sanford, 2007). Each participant was asked to review his or her response and the mode

response, respond again using the same rating scale, and add comments regarding the responses on questionnaire three (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

**Final analysis of data.** Responses were analyzed for consensus including the modes and responses of the final questionnaire. Questionnaires for Delphi Rounds 2 and 3 were constructed from participants' responses given during Round 1. I consulted with the dissertation chairperson and methodology resources about the development of instruments.

**Questionnaire.** The questionnaires were sent via electronic email. It was important to spend time analyzing the data from each questionnaire. Mullen (2003) explains that a Delphi study involves a number of rounds, feedback of responses to participants between rounds, opportunity for participants to modify their responses, and anonymity of responses.

**Research journal.** I used a research journal to record inner thoughts. Saldana (2009) describes journaling as a tool used to scribe inner thoughts concerning the qualitative investigation, participants, and any other thoughts concerning data the researcher has collected. Saldana (2009) contends that the researcher must think critically about the data acquired. Recording thoughts evoked reflexivity, which involved rigorous thought about what has occurred, reason for the responses, and challenging assumptions and biases. My thoughts and experiences shaped the investigation and the decisions made toward the process of the study (Saldana, 2009). While analyzing the data, I noted and paid meticulous attention to language and concentrated on emergent patterns and meanings of experiences that unfolded during the rounds (Keeney et al., 2013).

Data were analyzed in a series of rounds throughout the study. Data were coded and placed in a codebook (Ryan & Bernard 2003). Data were organized and combined as a way to identify themes. The process is called thematic analysis (Keeney et al., 2013). Thematic analysis is a process used to identify major themes and requires reading and re-reading of responses in order to interpret, understand, and categorize responses (Keeney et al.). Initial data informed subsequent rounds of questions by creating codes that emerged to refine questions from the previous rounds (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Ryan and Bernard (2003) contend that the first task of the researcher is to discover ways to code and create themes in the effort to discover images that are similar.

**Coding.** As mentioned in the data collection, coding patterns within the data occurred throughout the process of analyzing data. After each round of the Modified Delphi Technique, I recoded and re-categorized data in a systematic orderly process, which required filtering based on my lens as a researcher as recommended by Keeney et al. (2013).

Also, in order to understand patterns and themes that evolved from collected data, I was required to manage the information, which is called data management. Creswell (2007) contends that the researcher must establish a process to easily access and locate materials that are located in a large database while engaging in cycles of analyzing data. I used endnote and the university data base system to hold the large quantities of field notes, transcripts, and articles, which helped to implement the analysis process. I organized data into electronic file folders and hard copy folders. Data management was important and considered an essential component (Saldana, 2014). Data organization

occurred when final concepts and coding were transferred into a data table that consisted of final concepts and categories (Saldana, 2014).

### **Reliability and Validity**

I understood that it was important to document and secure accuracy in the study as well as ensure a quality instrument. Equally important, I wanted to ensure that the research questions were answered. In order for research to be considered valid, it must be reliable. Reliability measures included the construction of a theoretical framework, conducting an empirical literature review about in-service superintendents who consider themselves instructional leaders, answering the research questions, receiving approval from IRB, and conducting research with integrity.

Reliability occurs within this study by the act of decision-making (Keeney et al., 2011). Participants are not required to meet face-to face and, because it avoids the possibility of bias associated with group discussion, the reliability of those who respond and participate increases (Keeney et al.). “During the content analysis phase of the study, the researcher must remain impartial in collapsing statements in having the same meaning; to avoid having the same statements in subsequent rounds that are similar” (Keeney et al., 2011, p. 108-109).

Keeney et al. (2011) contend that the analysis process associated within the rounds of a Delphi Methodology allows respondents to create a reasonable scale based on their knowledge of the research topic, and the rounds allow those who are participating to openly review and determine the appropriateness of the scale (Keeney et al.).

## **Ethical Considerations**

I understood that confidentiality and sharing information with others outside of the group was considered unethical and that IRB permission is needed to use unpublished manuscripts. Transparency was another important component that was exercised and implemented according to ethical guidelines during the entire research. I engaged in open communication with my graduate level advisor and committee chair. To minimize the threat of possible problems, I was guarded and careful to recognize potential problems that surfaced during inquiry. Acting with a discerned awareness for conflict, safety, clarity of the law, and protection of views were essential concerns. Perceived bias was discussed and considered in advanced, and every participant was assured that the work and data collected were done with confidentiality. “Regardless of the type of Delphi, it is impossible to ascertain whether individuals respond with honesty or respond according to their perception of what the researcher expected” (Keeney et al., 2011, p. 105).

## **Respect for Human Dignity and Justice**

Keeney et al. (2011) strongly suggest that participants receive an information sheet at least two weeks prior the study to confirm whether they will participate in the study and allow me, as the researcher, to address any questions pertaining to the study. Keeney et al. contend that complete anonymity is hard to guarantee, therefore, each participant was given and identified by a unique code to address confidentiality as I provided feedback in the form of individual responses to rounds and overall group responses.

## Limitations

Books, databases, Internet search engines, journal articles, and dissertations were included as the variety of sources used to search for research instruments. I considered whether or not the instrument was applicable for the study and I predetermined whether or not the instruments were user friendly and easy to administer by field-testing them. Trustworthiness, transferability, dependability, financial cost, and the amount of time required were necessary elements that I considered throughout this study as well.

Finally, email questionnaires, observations, analytical memos, field notes, university policy, and human factors contributed as the selected qualitative instruments. The results of the Delphi Technique study provided depth and breadth of the various sources. I used rounds to code and identify a consensus of opinion with in-service superintendents who consider themselves as instructional leaders. The purpose of this study was to present different views and opinions of the participants (Keeney et al., 2011). Keeney et al. explain that this type of the study was established to build consensus about an understudied topic. The Delphi Technique model relied on the consistency between the panelists and/or participants. I understood that when consensus was reached using the Delphi Technique, the answer would not render a right or wrong, but rather a sense that the participants have come to an agreement about the explored topic (Keeney et al.). Howze and Dalrymple (2003) explain that the Delphi method incorporates opinions of others based on their interest of the problem generated by the study and their ability to speak to the problem based on their line of work and understanding of their role. "Fewer than three rounds may be sufficient to reach consensus, theoretical

saturation, or uncover sufficient information” (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007, p. 11). The authors contend that additional rounds could result in a lower response rate.

The delimitation of this study included strategic thinking. I could not determine or forecast unforeseen circumstances, but one could predict and plan for intervention when obstacles occurred. I understood that identifying intervention for possible consequences exemplified the act of thinking ahead. The study also suggested that the in-service superintendents who considered themselves instructional leaders were experts in the field.

## Chapter IV

### Study Results

The purpose of this study was to understand and investigate the shared patterns of opinions and beliefs among current in-service superintendents who consider their role to be instructional leaders in their existing school districts. The first step in the process was to solidify a list of superintendents who would be considered expert respondents or expert panel members. The second was to categorize the questions necessary to complete the survey. The third was to examine the evolving role of the superintendent. Expert panel members were chosen by using the following criteria: they had to be current in-service superintendents with three or more years of experience as superintendents, and they self-described as instructional leaders or someone who aspired to be an instructional leader.

By definition, the Delphi technique is a process that involves “a method used to obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts by a series of intensive questionnaires” (Keeney et al., 2011, p. 14). This methodology was chosen because it provides a framework that generates group consensus. This study used the percentage approach as the measure of determining and explaining consensus of the listed items. For the purpose of this study, consensus is defined as 95% or higher in agreement (Stewart, O’Halloran, Harrigan, Spencer, & Stapleton, 1999). “The consensus development activities consist of all the tasks needed to bring together selected, concerned individuals to reach general agreement” (Fink, Kosecoff, Chassin, & Brook, 1984, p. 980). Consensus within this study used 100% agreement on statements that focused on the following domains:

Domain One: Superintendent's Role

Domain Two: Aspects of Governing a School District

Domain Three: Barriers in Maintaining Effective Instructional Practices

RAND invented the Delphi survey methodology in the 1950s, with “the purpose to provide participants’ opinions on the impact of technology as it pertained to the probability, frequency, and intensity of possible enemy attacks and number of atomic bombs needed to destroy a target” (Keeney et al., 2011, p. 3). RAND is a research corporation that develops solutions from which consensus was built. The consensus for this study was developed through inquiry that involved a series of three rounds. For the purpose of this study, the topic was superintendents who are reclaiming their role as instructional leaders.

The participants of this study were superintendents from the State of New Jersey who made up the panel of experts. By definition, an expert is “having, involving, or displaying special skill or knowledge derived from training or experience” (Merriam-Webster, 2017). In addition, consensus was developed through a series of three rounds of content analysis and inquiry.

An initial email was sent to eligible public school superintendents within the State of New Jersey based on the above criteria and who were willing to participate in the study. The email specifically prompted participants to acknowledge consent. In addition, the email stated that the study sought to investigate the shared patterns of opinions and beliefs among current in-service superintendents who wished to reclaim their roles as instructional leaders. The Round 1 email letter also included the purpose of the study, an

overview of the study, as well as an invitation to participate in the questionnaire, and a prompt to consent to participate as an expert panel member (Appendix A).

### **Description of Expert Panel Members**

Five hundred eighty seven public school superintendents within the state of New Jersey were sent an invitation to participate in the study. The introductory email, along with the Delphi instrument (Appendix B), was sent to each superintendent. Initially a panel of 15 expert superintendents were sought to complete the survey, which began March 18, 2017. Twenty-five superintendents, who self-described as 18 years or older, as having worked three or more years as a superintendent, who were currently employed as public school superintendents with the State of New Jersey, who wanted to reclaim their roles as instructional leaders, gave consent to participate in a study that sought to investigate the shared patterns of opinions and beliefs among current in-service superintendents, and agreed to participate in the study by April 17, 2017. Of the 25 superintendents who expressed interest in participating in this study, 11 participated. Once the 11 responses were received, additional candidates were not contacted.

### **Instructional Leadership**

Instructional leadership refers to the governance of instruction and assessment (Marks & Printy, 2003). The respondents to the survey self-identified as being 18 years old or older, working three or more years as a superintendent, and being currently employed as a public school superintendent with the State of New Jersey, and gave consent to take part in a study that sought to investigate the shared patterns of opinions and beliefs among current in-service superintendents. As stated in the above criteria, these respondents acknowledged their intent to reclaim their roles as instructional leaders,

and served as leaders for public school districts who govern quality and decision-making as related to sustaining rigorous and high expectations towards the district goal regarding teaching and student achievement.

### **Round 1**

The first round of the Delphi study included 10 open-ended questions that were designed to get a diverse level of responses (Appendix A). The questions were presented to superintendents who were considered expert panel members.

**Summative content analysis and themes.** I analyzed the data using content analysis following the first round (Keeney et al., 2013). In subsequent rounds, I used a spreadsheet and determined frequencies in accordance with the Modified Delphi study (Keeney et al.). After identifying frequencies of words and phrases on the Wordle system generated by Qualtrics, I separated statements based on the language used by each expert panel member using word frequency counts for each term associated with the question. I coded the terms by question. “Coding is thus a method that enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or ‘families’ because they share some characteristic” (Saldana, 2009, p. 8). A decision was made to use the most frequent word or phrase. Frequency was determined using the Wordle feature on the Rowan University’s survey tool known as Qualtrics and counting the total number of times a word or phrase was used.

The Essential Theme table (Table 1) describes the occurrence of two to three explicit terms used in each question. Table 1 identifies essential themes that occurred with each question in Round 1. The third column represents the frequency of themes.

Table 1

*Essential Themes*

Question	Essential Themes	N
1	Achievement/ Instruction	11
2	Lead Role/Leader/Programs	9
3	Balance of Instruction/Size of District	2
4	Attention/Involvement	10
5	Instruction/PD/ Observation	16
6	Teacher Dev./ Prof. Learning Communities	11
7	Teaching Practice/ Buy In/ Student Achievement	11
8	Time and Resources	6
9	State Mandates/ Demands	10
10	Additional Educational Thoughts/Considerations	4

**Round 1 theme analysis.** Essential themes were generated from the instrument as a Wordle or top key phrases used from all participants, and then I used these themes as the basis of analysis (Saldana, 2009). I began to focus on underlying meanings or words and discovered patterns of words actually used within the study (Table 2).

Table 2

*Overall Themes*

Questions	Themes
Q1: How do you define what it means to be an instructional leader?	Instruction Achievement
Q2: How do you interpret your role based on your definition of instructional leadership?	Leader Activities Role Programs
Q3: Has your role evolved during your tenure as a superintendent?	Balance of Instruction Size of District
Q4: If so, how?	Attention Involvement
Q5: How do you ensure high-quality instruction within your district?	Instruction Professional Development Observation
Q6: Can you provide examples of activities that helped to establish quality instruction that has had a positive impact on student learning?	Teacher Development Professional Learning Communities
Q7: Describe the benefits?	Teaching Practice Buy In Student Achievement
Q8: Can you provide examples of barriers in maintaining effective instructional mandated instruction policies?	Time and Resources Mandates
Q9: Describe challenges within your role.	State Mandates Demands
Q10: Additional thoughts with role.	Additional Educational Considerations

***Question 1: How do you define what it means to be an instructional leader?***

Question 1 invited the expert panel members to describe their role as instructional leaders. Two themes from Question 1 were identified: Instruction and Achievement. These themes formed statement-based Likert scaled questions in Round 2 and 3 (Table 2).

*Theme 1: Instruction.* Several of the expert panel members commented on their role as it related to the improvement of instruction. One expert panel member noted, “Understanding effective instruction and taking intentional steps to promote effective instruction defines what it means to be an instructional leader.” Another wrote, “As superintendent, I lead administrators and teachers in continuous instructional improvement.” A third noted,

To lead at this level involves instructional improvement and innovation as well as program and curriculum. An instructional leader is one who evaluates and observes instruction. They understand what it means to be engaged, understand best practices, and hold teachers accountable who are not using techniques that are best for kids.

*Theme 2: Achievement.* A few expert panel members noted student achievement and success as components associated with their role. One expert wrote that the role of a superintendent involves academic opportunity for students: “To have the capacity to improve the quality of instruction so that opportunities for student achievement can advance.” Another noted the responsibility of enhancing the educational experience for students: “An instructional leader is one who informs, influences and shapes the

pedagogical practices of teachers that enhance the education experiences of students resulting in advanced student learning.”

***Question 2: How do you interpret your role based on your definition of instructional leadership?*** Question 2 invited the expert panel members to identify how each interprets his role based on his own definition of instructional leadership. Three themes were identified: Leader Role Activities, Role, and Programs. These themes formed statement-based Likert scale questions in Rounds 2 and 3.

***Theme 1: Leader activities.*** Several experts responded to Question 2 with comments regarding the importance of leading a school district. One panel member wrote, “I lead and develop goals in partnership with the administration and instructional staff.” Another commented that the holds those “Accountable who are not using techniques that are best for kids.” One expert noted the role of an instructional leader involves vision, and wrote, “Initiate, implement and institutionalize the vision for innovative, personalized and individualized instruction.” Another commented, “I lead through example and deployment of professionals that report to me.” One noted that notion of monitoring: “As a superintendent, I monitor school leaders and their progress in supporting student achievement.”

***Theme 2: Role.*** Several experts noted the role of a leader. One commented, “My role is to lead by example, support my followers, and to remove roadblocks.” One expert discussed the ability to adjust his or her leadership style based on the need of the followers, and wrote, “I see myself as a situational leader and my role is dependent on the audience to ensure staff, faculty, parents, and students are meeting the expectations.” Another expert wrote, “My role is to provide readings, resources, trainings, experiences

and information to the administrative staff that carry out the principles of instructional leadership.”

*Theme 3: Programs.* Research based instructional programs were mentioned as a component of the role of instructional leader. One expert commented,

Bring in programs that are researched based. Then, hire people to implement these programs. I also have administrators who make sure these programs are used in fidelity. If not, then there are consequences. If a program is not working for a child, I expect the teacher to find another program or another strategy.

Professional development was mentioned as another program support. One wrote, “Three main ways; Setting the tone and making expectations clear; Supporting those who plan professional development and other activities, and actually taking steps myself (e.g., sharing articles, providing workshops).”

***Question 3: Has your role evolved during your tenure as a superintendent?***

Question 3 invited the expert panel members to identify how the role evolved during his or her tenure as a superintendent. Seven answered with a one-word answer. Six of the respondents answered with a simple yes and one answered with a no. Four answered with more words. Based on the brevity of the respondents’ answers a theme was not found. Only two panel members wrote longer responses that were in agreement. Both emphasized balancing instruction and the size of the district were involved in their evolution as superintendents.

***Question 4: If so, how?*** Question Four invited the expert panel members to elaborate on Question 3 by asking the respondents whether or not their roles evolved as tenured superintendents and to explain how they evolved. The following themes were

identified: Attention and Involvement. As with all themes, these themes formed statement-based Likert scale questions in Rounds 2 and 3.

*Theme 1: Attention.* A few experts spoke about attending to important decision-making concerning improvement within the district. One expert panel member commented, “Attention to matters such as PARCC implementation; e.g., transitioning from paper and to pencil to online assessment, providing training for MSGPs, providing administration and teacher training on HIB etc. has overwhelmed the system and the capacity for focus.” Another wrote, “As my experienced staff begins to retire, my new staff requires more support including directions and opportunities to experience a variety of learning.”

*Theme 2: Involvement.* Most commented upon involvement in Question 4 as it related to the need to participate as an instructional leader. One expert panel member wrote,

The district was non-compliant in many areas and the teaching was less than stellar. First, I had to be more reactive and even remove teachers to ensure the vision could be carried out. Now, I can take a more ‘guide on the side’ approach. One expert commented, “I have taken on more of an ‘in process’ role. I work with all level of employees.” A few discussed the process of how they have become involved. One wrote,

As the relational trust has grown, so has my ability to influence change. This strengthens my ability to work with educators to develop strategic plans that make a difference. I also have an influence with the Board Policy and this is critical.

Another expert panel wrote, “When I started, I was more concerned with compliance versus moving people to improvement and expertise.”

***Question 5: How do you ensure high-quality instruction within your district?***

Question 5 invited the expert panel members to identify how they ensure high quality instruction within a district. Two themes were identified: Professional Development and Observation. These themes formed statement-based Likert scale questions in Rounds 2 and 3.

*Theme 1: Professional development.* The first theme discussed the idea that ensuring high-quality instruction involved developing teachers professionally. One expert panel noted, “We provide opportunity that inspires the desire for continued growth one student at a time. We monitor student progress and success, set high expectations and build the culture of trust and support.” Another panel member wrote, “To ensure high-quality instruction, we provide in-district professional development; mentored action research opportunities, and send our staff to out-of-district individualized PD.”

*Theme 2: Observation.* The importance of observation and relevant feedback was emphasized for Question 5. Several noted the need to discuss instructional practice as pertained to emerging issues concerning improvement with practice and pedagogy. One expert wrote,

By providing PLC time for all educators to interact and discuss pedagogical practices, assessment, data analysis, etc. The observation process is critical. The post observation is necessary so that the supervisors have the opportunity to provide specific targeted feedback so as to improve instruction.

Another wrote, “We provide continued PD and conduct regular classroom visits, both administrative and peer.”

***Question 6: Can you provide examples of activities that helped establish quality instruction that has had a positive impact on student learning?*** Question 6 invited the expert panel members to provide examples of activities that helped to establish quality instruction that has had a positive impact on student learning. Two themes were identified: Teacher Development and Professional Learning Community. These themes formed statement-based Likert scale questions in Rounds 2 and 3.

*Theme 1: Teacher development.* A few expert panel members discussed teacher development. One noted, “Each leadership meeting starts with an administrator sharing a redacted observation for critique and input.” Another wrote, “We implement walk-throughs with critical feedback. We also assess the assessments to ensure there is a cognitive demand on the students, that they are able to demonstrate what they know, and that the format is rigorous.”

*Theme 2: Professional learning community.* It was evident that professional development is implemented as a form of providing an opportunity to professional learning. The expert panel members discussed various activities as they related to quality instruction and expressed that quality instruction occurs. One expert wrote about specific activities, “Implementation of PLCs; Providing time for data analysis and vertical articulation; Academic Assistance Program after school; Study skills during the last 35 minutes of the day for students to seek out extra help with work; expand professional development opportunities.” Another noted the importance of learning rounds, “Teachers participate in Teacher Learning Rounds and a vast number of teachers have been trained

to incorporate the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program.” According to one expert panel member, “Embedded PLCs; copious administrative feedback, constant professional development; teacher-centered, initiated and implemented PD; focus on formative assessment,” are activities that assist with making an impact on student learning.

**Question 7: Describe the benefits.** Question 7 invited the expert panel members to describe the benefits of activities that helped to establish quality instruction that has had a positive impact on student learning. Two themes were identified: Teacher Practice and Student Achievement.

*Theme 1: Teacher practice.* Experts discussed teacher practice and the results of implementing professional development activities. One expert panel wrote, “A higher percentage of teachers have implemented successful teaching practice.” Culture was tied into the discussion. Another wrote, “We have changed the culture from educator-centered to student-centered.” A third wrote,

Allowed for training, direct implementation of strategies with videotaping and reflection; staff involved grew in their professional practice, then became turnkey trainers for all other teachers. Our Teaching and Learning facilitators provided follow-up planning, demonstrations, and modeling palpable changes in the overall climate of the building. This has inspired children to begin to believe in themselves and to focus on inspiring children to love themselves and love learning.

*Theme 2: Student achievement.* Student achievement was mentioned as a contributing factor toward professional development activities. An expert panel member

wrote, “We have noted increasing ability of our students to write with grade level proficiency or advanced proficiency at all grade levels, and to respond to writing prompts with more depth and rigor.” Another wrote,

Focus on inspiring children to love themselves and love learning. A culture of risk-taking has inspired our students to pursue a more rigorous curriculum, which has, in turn opened doors of opportunity to the most selective colleagues and universities.

***Question 8: Can you provide examples of barriers in maintaining effective instructional practices while following mandated instructional practices?*** Question 8 invited the expert panel members to identify examples of barriers in maintaining effective instructional practices while following mandated instructional practices. Two themes were identified: Time and Resources and Mandates.

*Theme 1: Time and resources.* Many experts commented on various challenges to maintaining effective instructional practice. One wrote, “Time is the greatest barrier. There is a limitation that results from the student teacher ratio and because of that we limited instructional areas.” Another expert panel member commented, “Time and resources doesn’t always allow for instructional practices to be maintained.” Another noted, “Time and money being spent on non-student items.”

Another expert addressed mandates and wrote, “The main barrier is funding as many of the mandates that are unfunded. It takes a lot of creative financing and flexibility of the staff to manage the practice.” Another commented,

I think the mandated observation system was a step backwards for us. We have worked hard to make it work for us, but it has been a struggle. Each year we

would work on our observation instrument to make it fit our needs. Some barriers include staff absences and lack of qualified substitutes, frequently requiring the combining of classes or cancellation of supports. This interrupts planned instruction. Previously, we had a problem with tardiness which also disrupted core instruction, but that has been largely eliminated due to a target corrective action.

Another wrote, “Mandated policies serve as a barrier in that it appears to the teachers that we’re just ‘checking a box’ with the mandated policies.” A third commented, “Inspiring teachers to change their practices is a profound barrier. Implementing student-centered pedagogical practices is anathema to an educator-centered culture. Changing perception of assessments, grading homework, instruction, etc. is very hard.”

***Question 9: Describe challenges within your role.*** Question 9 invited the expert panel members to identify obstacles associated with the challenges and mandates as related to instructional practice. Once again, the theme of mandates was clear from the data. A second theme was identified: Demands.

***Theme 1: State mandates.*** According to the group, state mandates pose a challenge. One expert noted, “Too many mandates as well as Governor and NJEA are in an open warfare making it challenging to implement state mandates.” Another wrote, “For K-4 teachers, state mandates such as the most recent NGSS deadline doesn’t lend itself to continuity of focus.” One expert commented on policy, and wrote, “Protecting the faculty from negative state policy and initiatives.”

***Theme 2: Demands.*** A few expert panel members discussed time as being a factor in overcoming barriers. One expert panel member wrote, “Getting the time back to help

with important things is crucial.” Another commented, “Remaining challenges are the undue focus on testing and staff entrenchment in old habits that they do not want to give up.” One wrote,

I would say the biggest challenge is often times the monotonous paperwork that is often times redundant that is required by the state. Especially as a district in status, we have a higher level of oversight, which often impedes our ability to roll up our sleeves and work in the trenches.

**Question 10: Additional thoughts with role.** Question 10 invited the expert panel members to provide additional thoughts toward the questionnaire. One theme was identified: Educational Considerations.

*Theme 1: Educational considerations.* A few expert panels provided additional statements. One wrote,

I tried to keep it simple. The bottom line is that every school has its own challenges. Schools are only as good as the faculty that work. In the schools and the leaders are tasked with managing organization. It takes a whole village.

Another commented, “Changing cultures demand energy, commitment, courage, and patience.” A third expert wrote,

While finances and unfunded mandates remain at the forefront, it is difficult to maintain existing programs and almost seems impossible to expand to other programs. However, with some creativity and empowerment of staff, much can be done with little. There is a lot to overcome, but a positive attitude and collaborative effort can help get through hurdles.

## Round 2

The purpose of Rounds 2 and 3 was the process toward consensus (Keeney et al., 2011). After the responses from Round 1 were compiled and analyzed, a total of 33 statements were created for the Round 2 questionnaire, which was loaded into Qualtrics. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with each statement using a four point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Appendix C) on a Likert scale. These 33 statements were sub categorized into three domains:

Domain 1: Superintendent's Role

Domain 2: Aspects of Governing a School District

Domain 3: Barriers in Maintaining Effective Instructional Practices

The first domain contained 20 statements. The second domain included nine statements, and the third domain had four statements (Appendix D). Expert panel members were sent the link to Qualtrics and asked to rate each statement on the 4-point Likert scale and submit them.

Round 2 data were categorized into three domains and were distributed to the panel of experts via the Rowan University's Qualtrics software program. Round 2 results were collected and the percentage of agreement on each statement on the Likert scale was calculated. The statements were placed in three separate domains, which included the description of superintendents, aspects of governing a school district, and barriers in monitoring instructional practice. Expert panel members were given a 10-day time frame to respond to the questionnaire. Seven of the original 11 respondents completed Round 2. Tables 3 and 4 present the statements from the first two domains on which consensus was reached; only one statement from the third domain reached

consensus. Consensus was reached when all seven respondents answered agree or strongly agree or when all seven candidates responded disagree or strongly disagree to a particular statement. In the first domain, as seen in Table 3, consensus was reached on 16 of the 20 statements.

Table 3

*Superintendent's Role: Domain 1*

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Overall Themes

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- Lead administration and teachers in instructional improvement and innovation.
  - Participate and carry out goals of the district by having a thorough understanding of instruction being provided to reach goals.
  - Initiate, implement, and institutionalize the vision for innovative, personalized instruction.
  - Have too many mandates.
  - Make decisions based on what is best for students
  - Have the ability to influence change as relational trust grows within the district.
  - Provide and expand professional development opportunities.
  - Monitor school leaders and their progress in supporting student achievement.
  - Set clear goals for the district.
  - Can influence board policy.
  - Influence a shared vision that faculty and administration can buy into.
  - Develop strong relationships, trust, a sense of direction and a willingness to make policy initiatives successful in practice.
  - Role often is misunderstood and mitigated by a culture ignorance.
  - Develop strategic plans that make a difference in that district.
  - Have people smart, defined as possessing good interpersonal skills as well as good people intuition.
  - Provide reading, resources, trainings, experiences, and information to the administrative staff to carry out the principles of instructional leadership.
-

**Domain 1 results: Superintendents’ roles.** Many of the expert panel members strongly agreed on the description of the role of the superintendent including responsibilities and decision-making within the role. All participants strongly agreed that, “a superintendent makes decisions based on what is best for students” and “superintendents have the ability to influence change as relational trust grows within the district.” The expert panel members established consensus with the statements that the superintendent’s role involves carrying out the goals of the district by having a thorough understanding that instruction is essential in order to reach academic goals. Additionally, expert panel members indicated that superintendents initiate, implement, and institutionalize the vision for innovative, personalized, and individualized instruction. Expert panel members also agreed that there are too many mandates established for their role as a superintendent.

Table 4 contains three statements from Domain 2 on which the participants reached consensus.

Table 4

*Aspects of Governing a School District: Domain 2*

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Overall Themes

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Scholar-practitioner superintendents who are courageous, humble and passionate, change educational paradigms.

Matters such as PARCC implementation, training associated with mSGPs, HIB, etc. has overwhelmed the system and capacity for focus.

Policy and mandates impede individualized school needs and deadlines do not lend itself to continuity.

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The expert panel members agreed that matters such as PARCC implementation, training associated with mSGPs, HIB, etc. have overwhelmed the system and capacity for focus on the district goals. They also believe mandates and state and local policies negatively affect their success. Only one statement from Domain 3 reached consensus, which was agreement that an undue on focus on testing is a barrier.

### **Round 3**

The purpose of Round 3 was to analyze and review for consensus. Participant responses from Round 2 were analyzed by determining consensus for each response (Hsu & Sanford, 2007). Each participant was asked to review his or her response and to make any changes in their levels of agreement and then asked to respond again using the same rating scale. Each expert panel member was also asked to add comments regarding the responses on questionnaire three (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Round 3 required expert panel members to review their individual Round 2 responses (Appendix E).

Those who participated in Round 3 received individual emails (Appendix F). The email provided each expert panel member a link to review his or her individual Round 2 responses and another link that provided data as corresponding to statements that did not receive 95% or higher consensus in Round 2. The purpose of this round was to accept or reject statements that did not receive consensus. Each expert panel member received explicit instructions for Round 3 (Appendix E). Participants read and analyzed the data and no comments were added after the review. Thus, there was no change regarding the consensus reached in Round 2.

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand shared patterns in the role of the superintendents who have reclaimed their roles as instructional leaders and who seek to evolve their roles in history in order to meet the professional learning needs found within their districts. This study focused around shared vision and goals and common systems that implemented deliberate action to ensure that all teachers are effective.

Eleven expert panel members responded to open-ended questions regarding the focus on roles of instructional leaders. The responses from Round 1 were consolidated into 33 statements. The participants then rated their agreement with the importance of the 33 statements presented in domains in Round 2 and Round 3 from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

In Chapter V I present an analysis of the results and discuss the relationship between the results and the literature review. Expert panel members found consensus when describing the role of a superintendent and process of professional development. However, they did not reach consensus regarding their monitoring classroom instruction and coaching teachers.

## Chapter V

### Discussion and Recommendations

#### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand and investigate the shared patterns among current superintendents who wish to reclaim their roles as instructional leaders. The superintendents in this study currently serve in the State of New Jersey. Presently, the research on this topic is scant and does not adequately address the shared beliefs, shared practices, and perceived benefits of instructional leadership. Hopefully, this study will serve to open a discussion of superintendents as instructional leaders.

In this chapter, I will answer the central research questions stated below.

The analysis of the survey questions, found in Chapter IV, served as the framework for the findings. As stated in Chapter I, the central research questions are as follows:

RQ 1. What do in-service superintendents who consider themselves to be instructional leaders have in common?

This study also addressed the following sub questions:

- a. What are the shared beliefs, if any?
- b. What are the shared activities, if any?
- c. What are the shared challenges, if any?
- d. What are the perceived benefits, if any?

RQ 2. What do current in-service superintendents, who take on the role of instructional leader, believe about the future of the evolving role of the superintendent?

The intent was to find the right structure for these superintendents to voice their beliefs, listen to their peers, and to find shared beliefs and commonalities. I determined that the Delphi method would be the best methodology to seek participant consensus.

“Consensus is the most reliable method of opinion of a group of experts by a series of intensive questionnaires” (Keeny et al., 2011, p. 14). The study results from the survey rounds were reported in Chapter IV, including identified themes.

This chapter will include a conclusive analysis of the research questions as well as alignment to the literature review found in Chapter II. It will also include the implications, recommendations, and closing comments.

## **Summary**

### **Research question 1.**

*What do in-service superintendents who consider themselves to be instructional leader have in common?* This study found several areas current in-service superintendents have in common. They established consensus as it related to various areas regarding their role. The expert panel members unanimously felt that they have the ability to influence change as relational trust grows within the district. The expert panel members also agreed that they can influence a shared vision that faculty and administration can adopt. The study also revealed that the expert panel members believed that they have too many state mandates as superintendents. Many of the expert panel members defined their role as lead administrator involved in deliberate decision-making related to instruction and equal opportunity for student academic achievement. Consequently, the superintendents agreed that they are leaders who are responsible to lead and improve the quality of education for all students.

This acknowledgement that they are academic leaders supports the original intent of the role as a superintendent. The literature in Chapter II referred to the original status of a superintendent as teacher of teachers (Houston, n.d.). Historically, the significance of

the superintendent was seen as a prominent figure within the school system. Houston (n.d.) explains that the superintendents originated from the idea that someone would serve as the lead supervisor as it relates to education.

In this study, the superintendents found consensus in their roles as district leaders who set goals for the district. This role involves establishing and providing resources and hiring staff to support the instructional goals of the district. Additionally, qualities such as interpersonal skills, people intuition, and insisting on academic rigor were factors noted by the experts in the current study. One expert wrote, “As the superintendent, I monitor school leaders and their progress in supporting student achievement.” Another wrote, “My role is to provide readings, resources, trainings, experiences and information to the administrative staff that carry out the principles of instructional leadership.”

This study underscores a shared vision that includes learning targets and improvement strategies that translates into sustained commitment. Senge (1990) contends that the key to shared visions begins with commitments and the ability to inspire and motivate members of a team. Senge (1990) argues that once resistance and reservations or doubts subside, a learning organization can come together and agree on a vision.

*(a) What are the shared beliefs, if any?* The expert panel members believe that they initiate, implement, and institutionalize the vision for innovative, personalized instruction. They believe that they make decisions based on what is best for students. The expert panel members believe they have the ability to influence instructional change. One expert panel member wrote, “The role of the superintendent could influence change as relational trust grows within the district.” This is similar to earlier literature in which Potter (1996, p. 61) writes, “When trust is present, you will usually be able create

teamwork. When it is missing you won't." Another expert panel member wrote, "I see myself as a situational leader, my role is dependent on the audience to ensure staff, faculty, parents, and students are meeting expectations."

**(b) What are the shared activities, if any?** One of the shared activities that the expert panel members agreed upon was instructional improvement by way of professional development. Also, another shared activity was strategic planning and goal setting for the district as well as monitoring school leaders and their progress in supporting student achievement. One expert panel wrote the shared activities were, "Setting the tone and making expectations clear, supporting those who plan professional development, and other activities, and actually taking steps toward sharing articles and providing workshops." Another wrote, "Professional Learning Communities, Instructional Rounds, copious feedback, professional development opportunities that are teacher centered, and implementing formative assessments, which assist the instructional staff in making critical decisions about teaching and learning is important." This includes the act of monitoring student progress and success, setting high expectations, and building a culture of trust and support, similar to what Kowalski (2005) highlights, that superintendents have a complex role. One expert panel member wrote, "We monitor student progress and success, set high expectations, and build culture of trust and support." Expert panel members in Round 1 stated that the role of a superintendent involved setting expectations and providing opportunities so students can continue to show academic growth. One expert panel summarized the same thought, writing,

I have hired a phenomenal team of administrators who I trust immensely. We are vigilant in checking lesson plans, but more important, we are visible. We are in

classes everyday, observing, conducting walkthroughs, asking critical question of students to ensure that the instruction is high quality and effective.

In essence, superintendents who are able to navigate through precise decision-making processes are successful.

**(c) What are the shared challenges, if any?** The expert panel members found consensus on the following shared challenges. Shared challenges included aspects of governing a school district that relate to mandates within the state, such as PARCC implementation; training associated with Student Growth Percentile; and demands from the Department of Education and Harassment Intimidation and Bullying laws. They all agreed that these mandates have overwhelmed the system and capacity to focus.

Although expert panel members' school districts differ in size, demographic data, and geographic location, similar challenges were mentioned. One wrote, "The challenge of balancing instructional leadership and state mandates has become increasingly difficult."

**(d) What are the perceived benefits, if any?** According to the found consensus, superintendents believed that when they act as instructional leaders, the most beneficial result is increased student achievement. As superintendents begin to work on building student-centered cultures within the schools, students will enjoy the teaching and learning cycle. One expert wrote, "A culture of risk-taking has inspired our students to pursue a more rigorous curriculum, which has, in turn opened doors of opportunity to the most selective colleges and universities." Increasing students' ability to succeed creates opportunity for all students (Kaufman, 2003). This is additionally well supported by Leithwood et al. (2004), who contend that leadership as a superintendent has the potential to make lasting impact for students and teachers.

## **Research question 2.**

*What do current in-service superintendents, who take on the role of instructional leader, believe about the future of the evolving role of the superintendent?* The expert panel members believe that the role of the superintendent will undergo continuous change. One expert wrote, “The role is always evolving as situation and people evolve.” Another expert explained, “Changing cultures demands energy, commitment, courage, and patience.” Senge (1990) maintains leaders must have a high level of personal mastery in order to remain committed in the face of change and deeply confident in the role of lead administrator of a district. One expert panel member wrote, “I try to keep it simple. The ability to effectively communicate thinking in a transparent way can ultimately influence others.” These sentiments are similar to Potter (1996, p. 185-186) who writes, “Better for most of us to start learning now how to cope with change, to develop whatever leadership potential we have, and to help our organizations in the transformation process.”

### **Implications**

There was a great interest in this topic. Originally 25 superintendents showed an interest in this study; however, of these 25, only 11 could commit to complete the first three rounds and only seven of the 11 completed Rounds 2 and 3. The implication is that given the opportunity, more superintendents would like to discuss this topic with their peers. With this in mind, New Jersey state superintendents may begin a formal round table discussion about the complex role called superintendent. Superintendents’ relationships with local universities and colleges could provide a venue to unpack the concept of superintendents as instructional leaders and the need to encourage themselves

and others to further their educational aspirations. Equally as important, superintendents could establish a website for instructional leadership practices as a public forum and model for agents of transformation. Finally, administrative associations could hold forums on instructional leadership.

### **Limitations**

A few limitations were found within this study. Originally 25 superintendents showed an enthusiastic interest in this study; however, of these 25, only 11 could commit the necessary time involved in the first round and seven of the 11 completed Rounds 2 and 3 over several months. This small sample size is a limitation. This Delphi study involved content analysis, which was based on the study of consensus. The expert panel members found agreement as it related to their role as superintendents. As a result, consensus resulted in decision-making efforts associated with leading a school district. However, it appears that all had strong opinions on statements related to the description of his or her role as instructional leaders, but no consensus emerged related to instructional leadership. The expert panel members showed enthusiasm at the onset of the study. The conversation around his or her role and establishing a common language around their role as superintendents surfaced. Many expressed the belief that their role is to lead administrators and teachers in instructional improvement and innovation. Participants within the study self-described as 18 years or older, as having worked three or more years as a superintendent, and who were currently employed as public school superintendents within the State of New Jersey. The respondents within this study self-described themselves as superintendents interested in reclaiming their roles as instructional leaders.

Furthermore, the expert panel members were superintendents from the State of New Jersey. As a result their opinion may not represent viewpoints of superintendents nationwide. All expert panel members are familiar with the state mandates and acronyms. Hence the results may only be relevant in New Jersey school district settings. The entire study from Round 1 to Round 3 (closure) took 2.5 months to complete. Within this time, the State of New Jersey had state standardized assessments and Spring break. It could be possible that many could not commit due to testing priority and convenience of time did not exist.

In addition, this research recognizes the possibility of social desirability bias. Self-identifying as an instructional leader may have an element of social desirability bias. Fisher (1993) defines social desirability bias as the tendency of some respondents to report an answer in a way they deem to be more socially acceptable than would be their "true" answer. They do this to project a favorable image of themselves and to avoid receiving negative evaluations. Nederhof (1985) contends that social desirability bias refers to the fact that in self-reports, people will often report inaccurately on sensitive topics in order to present themselves in the best possible light.

Fisher (1993) contends that respondents are often unwilling to report accurately on sensitive topics for ego-defensive or management reasons.

Anonymity of the research setting should interact with the questioning method to have a differential effect on self-reporting normative outcomes. Removal of anonymity should cause subjects answering direct question to feel greater pressure to make their responses consistent with social expectations. (Fisher, 1993, p. 305)

## **Recommendations for Future Study**

There is a limited amount of literature on the topic of superintendents as instructional leaders. The opportunity for future studies is enormous. In relation to this study, four specific areas for further study are offered.

The first is that this same study could be replicated with a larger sample to reveal similar or different outcomes. This suggestion could either increase or change the findings found within this study. The second study could focus on only one of the current findings such as Leading Administration and Teachers in Instructional Improvement and Innovation, and develop a more in-depth understanding of the attributes and practices associated with leading in instruction. The third possible study would be a replication of this study that includes a face-to face round table before Round 1 or another forum for participants to discuss opinions on mandates to which districts must adhere. A fourth study that addresses opinions associated with expanding professional development opportunities so that they are thoughtful and meaningful would also be informative.

## **Impact as a Future Superintendent**

Shared beliefs and shared practices were the cornerstone of my early years as a teacher in a professional development school. I experienced the benefits of collaboration and finding commonalities among my peers. I have experienced the success of learning in the midst of doing. I understand the need to build upon what is successful. I also understand that time and effort is mandatory if excellence is the goal. DuFour and Eaker (1998) contend that shared vision must be used to guide the daily operation and improvement of initiatives of the school, and its importance must be communicated constantly. Transforming schools into Professional Learning Communities requires the

instructional staff to be attentive to developing the building blocks of any improving organization (mission, vision, values, and goals). Placing each of these four building blocks requires a school to answer a number of difficult questions (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Schools must engage in dialogue that asks critical questions, such as why do we exist? What kind of school are we trying to create? What attitudes, behaviors, and commitments must we demonstrate in order to create such a school? Which steps should we take first? What is our timeline? What evidence will we present to demonstrate our progress? (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

The work of governing instruction relies on the urgency of making timely decisions with accuracy and precision. As I moved into administration, I wondered about the shared beliefs among educational leaders. I wondered whether many had the desire to care about instruction. I wondered if educational leaders believed in the role of instructional leader. Through course work, I understand that guiding principles of developing curricula is just as important to support professional learning communities. It is important for teachers to work collaboratively to design and implement a research-based curriculum that reflects best thinking in each subject area, and the curriculum process should enable an individual teacher, a teaching team, and the school to monitor results at the classroom, school, and district level (DuFour& Eaker, 1998). I found some confusion regarding the roles of school administrators, especially district superintendents. Inquiry about effective instructional practice remains a pillar as I articulate with teachers within my school building. Additional attributes of Professional Learning Communities involve a supportive and shared leadership team (Putnam, Gunnings-Morton, & Sharp, 2009).

Collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice along with a shift from the view of the teachers' teaching to the view of the student learning is essential during effective decision-making (Putnam et al., 2009). I found some who understood instruction and others did not. Good research begins with questions followed by a need to know. My questions centered on the evolving roles of the superintendent since its inception almost 100 years ago. The need to know prompted me to reflect upon my role as a current school building leader. Potter (1996) discusses complacency. It is so easy to change what is not broken. Over decades superintendents are tasked to govern a district. Each leader is expected to produce results that will remain sustainable.

As a school leader, I am constantly seeking ways to help encourage and inspire others to master the art of teaching and learning. The meaningful work of instruction must be rigorous. I understand that good instruction becomes beneficial for all students. I understand that it takes a body of shared thinkers. I know that this work of coaching, modeling teaching, and providing feedback is the heart of what I do everyday. This coaching style of leadership is apparent because of the discussion of goals, monitoring of skills, and progress of guiding discussions. More importantly, I know that it is in the design of a school leader. As a school leader, the position requires me to address various leadership styles. An autocratic leader will require a position of power where all are expected to complete tasks in a timely manner, and many of the important decisions come from the leader. In addition, a situational leader attempts to demonstrate the appropriate relationship between behaving as the leader and having the ability to exhibit readiness as it pertains to teachers having the ability to understand the response (Hersey

& Blanchard, 1995). As problems arise, new tasks are assigned, or new goals are established, the level of readiness may change and therefore, the leader must adjust accordingly (Hersey & Blanchard, 1995). However, as trust continues to form between the leader and the employee, relationships can change and a situational leader adjusts to the needs of the teachers and the teaching and learning cycle.

I spent many hours reflecting upon my practice. I was a novice teacher when I started 29 years ago. Hours upon hours were spent problem solving ways to master the craft called teaching. I understood that understanding the teaching and learning practice would require reflection about my practice and understandings. I recall a time when an instructional coach approached me. She expressed that my work ethic made others look bad. I promptly responded with an encouraging phrase, but that statement still resonates with me. My intention was to never make anyone look bad, but my intention was to confirm my understanding and improve my practice as well as to give it my all when I am working in this field. I still feel that way. I was given an opportunity to work alongside inner city students who dreamed of being lawyers and doctors. I worked with mentors and seasoned teachers who instilled that if I remained focused and true to rigor and learning my craft, there was nothing that I could not do. Cronin (1995) argues that we have an obligation as well as responsibility to encourage citizen leaders who will not only organize and head interest groups, but who will learn how to unite a disparate people for responsible action, and who will learn to appreciate the need for integrative thinking and understand the larger interrelationships (Cronin, 1995). More importantly, I was reminded that this profession is about ensuring that all students find learning to be rewarding (Fullan, 2001).

I continue to think about that statement, I wonder what prompted my colleague to say that. I would guess that she was unsure of how to elevate her craft. I believe that my enthusiasm surpassed the expectations she had in herself. More importantly, I would like to think that my journey toward excellence started when I understood that in order to make learning practical, I would have to collaborate and understand that this educational journey is about shared commonalities and practices and become more participative in my leadership style and adjust according to the situation (Cronin, 1995).

It was important for me to set up time to communicate systems that motivated and rewarded the work of the teachers who showed interest and sometimes motivate those to get involved. More importantly, this study confirmed that I must remain steadfast in the work of providing the best education possible for all students. This can only occur if I understand school systems and the professional development needs of instructional staff. If school districts implement relevant professional development opportunities geared toward successful practice, teachers and students will benefit. The work is muddy at times, but the heart of the work relies on embedded practice and professional development that makes good teaching and learning great teaching and learning. DuFour and Eaker (1998) support the act of embracing a professional learning community that fosters shared beliefs and building relationships. The true development of professional learning communities involves the work of uncovering what is going well. As a building leader, I must continue to align shared practices to the vision of the district. DuFour and Eaker (1998) explain that shared values provide direction that enables individuals to act independently of others. In the end, my desire is to transform so that the teachers and I emerge as a cohesive unit where we help one another to higher levels of motivation to

achieve academic success and life long learning opportunities for all stakeholders (Couto, 1995).

They work to assist a group of people to move from one-stage of development to a higher one, and in doing so address and fulfill the need to change a district for the better (Couto, 1995). Demers (2009) argues that organizational change works in perspectives. The subjective-interpretative perspective studies the way individuals and groups make sense of their world. This is when the district leader and stakeholders actively construct their own reality through a sense-making process that involves enacting, and organizational sense-making as a social construction that involves enacting and how the process makes sense for the organization.

As equally important, superintendents can be seen as democratic leaders as well. Cronin (1995) supports that a democratic leader requires refining an ability to gather and interpret evidence, marshal facts, and employ the most rigorous methods in the quest of obtaining academic knowledge.

As the lead principal of K-8 school, I aspire to be a both a transactional and transformational leader. Leithwood (1992) argues that both leadership styles complement one another. "Transactional practices is to be central in maintaining the organization-getting the day-to-day routines carried out, and Transformational leadership provides the incentive for people to attempt improvements in their practices" (Leithwood, 1992, p. 9). As principal, I must get the job done regardless of the daily demands that can pull a principal away from serving as an instructional leader.

As my journey continues, I will take the advice of scholars and Leithwood (1992), who suggest that leaders focus on helping staff members develop and maintain a

collaborative, professional, school culture; foster teacher-development; and help teachers improve on solving problems together in a more effective way.

One strategy that I will adopt is to make sure that I institute ways to build relationships with all stakeholders. Building respectful relationships allow all to accomplish more. It is imperative that I continue to understand new policies as they surface such as ESSA. However, the role of teacher of teachers and manager of policies may indeed have merit. One expert panel member wrote about specific challenges, “Too much time spent on managerial ‘things’ and demands from the Department of Education.” Another addressed instructional concerns, “Inspiring teachers to change their practices is a profound barrier. Implementing student-centered pedagogical practices is anathema to an educator-centered culture.” While policies may change, superintendents share the belief that their role is prominent and policies mandate that they remain the teacher of teachers

Currently, I serve on the state’s Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) Title 1 Committee of Practitioners (TICOP). My active involvement has afforded me the opportunity to hear upcoming expectations as they pertain to ensuring that every student is successful. It is critical and crucial to remember the whole child. It is essential to inquire about the well-being of each of my students. Thus, there is the need to stay embedded in policy and ensure that my practice is relevant.

However, in the demand to meet expectations prescribed with policy, I believe that current superintendents must establish competencies that involve interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (Kaufman, 2003) in order to sustain a growing district. I believe that the role of the superintendent is complicated, challenging, evolving, and purposeful.

Fullan (2001) discusses moral purpose. Moral purpose is acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of all (Fullan, 2001).

This Delphi study allowed me to see through the eyes of the expert panel members. Each statement revealed insight into the beliefs of current superintendents. The statements were essential and critical to a relevant topic. The expert panel members reminded me that the discussion of what constitutes a true instructional leader is complex. They confirmed that being successful takes precision and a clear understanding of how to govern complex decision-making as it relates to academic achievement. This study demonstrated that instructional leadership is dynamic and worthy of additional studies. The findings convinced me that varying experiences affected the opinions. This study also found a strong interest in superintendents who wish to have a voice, and a forum was given for someone to document the voices of their peers in what it means to be a superintendent who is an instructional leader.

Finally, the expert panel members who participated in this study were eager to document their opinions and contribute to the useful and valuable knowledge base as they reclaim their role as instructional leader, and because of the participants, I am humbled and grateful.

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## Appendix A

### Delphi Round 1 Instrument Instruction

Dear Sir/Madam,

You are invited to participate in a doctoral study: Reclaiming Instructional Leadership: A Superintendent's Impact on Teacher Development

I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at Rowan University enrolled in the Department of Educational Services and Leadership. My dissertation topic pertains to public school superintendents who are currently serving in their position as a school district leader in the state of New Jersey. As you know the role of the superintendent has evolved over the years since the early 1900s. There is a need to acknowledge and understand that there has been a notable change in the role of the modern day superintendent. I am specifically investigating the shared patterns among current superintendents who consider themselves or strive to be instructional leaders. I am interested in surveying superintendents who have three years or more of service in the role of a superintendent and who seek to meet the professional learning needs found within their district.

The purpose of this research study is linked to a doctoral dissertation and is committed to understand and investigate the shared patterns of opinions and beliefs among current in-service superintendents who wish to reclaim their role as instructional leaders. This study will help to generate opinions of current district superintendents who consider themselves instructional leaders. It is anticipated that 15 participants will be involved in this study. There are no risks or discomforts associated with this survey. The potential benefit for this study would be to revitalize dialogue with superintendents who are focused on professional learning within schools. Another benefit would be to specifically address professional development methodology as a means of impacting effective organizational change toward helping all students.

The results of this study are also intended to revitalize dialogue with superintendents who are focused on professional learning within the school district that they serve and to specifically address professional development methodology as a means of impacting effective organizational change.

Superintendents will be asked to complete three rounds of an online survey via Qualtrics link, which will take approximately 10-15 minutes. The purpose of the three rounds is designed to give you an opportunity to reflect upon your answers as compared to opinions provided by other superintendents who have agreed to participate in this study. The results of the survey and the range of answers will decrease and will be analyzed for major patterns and themes, which will be used to determine consensus.

All data will be analyzed in the dissertation without reference to school districts or superintendent. No names or identifying factors will be used. Please be assured that all

data will be kept confidential with me, the researcher.

You are included in this survey because you are a Superintendent who is considered an instructional leader. The number of subjects to be enrolled in the study will be 15.

If you volunteer to participate in the 15-member survey, we will ask that you participate in three rounds.

(1) Submit answers to questions specified on a Qualtrics survey site within two weeks of the initial invitation email by 4/3/17.

(2) Two weeks later, you will receive the Round II Survey which you will score according to the Round II Survey Instructions, and submit this to the specified Qualtrics web-site within two weeks of receipt.

(3) Two weeks later, you will receive the Round III Survey which you will score according to the Round III Survey Instructions, and submit this to the specified Qualtrics website within two weeks of receipt.

The survey may take approximately 30 minutes to complete each round.

Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this survey, do not respond to this online survey. Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey. We expect the study to last approximately 2 months.

Your response will be kept confidential and anonymous. We will store the data in a secure computer file and the file will destroy once the data has been published. Any part of the research that is published as part of this study will not include your individual information.

If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact me/or the researcher at the address provided below, but you do not have to give your personal identification.

- The Principal Investigator: [hillgl@rowan.edu](mailto:hillgl@rowan.edu)
- The Co-Investigator: [jamesk34@students.rowan.edu](mailto:jamesk34@students.rowan.edu)

Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey.

As a reminder, to participate in this survey, you must be 18 years or older, must have three or more years as a superintendent, and currently be employed as a public school superintendent within the state of New Jersey.

Please complete the click the box below.

- Yes
- No

Question One:

How do you define what it means to be an instructional leader?

Question Two:

How do you interpret your role based on your definition of an instructional leader?

Question Three:

Has your role evolved during your tenure as a superintendent?

Question Four:

If so, how?

Question Five:

How do you ensure high-quality instruction within your district?

Question Six:

Can you provide examples of activities that helped to establish quality instruction that has had a positive impact on student learning?

Question Seven:

Describe the benefits.

Question Eight:

Can you provide examples of barriers in maintaining effective instructional mandated instructional policies?

Question Nine:

Describe challenges?

Question Ten:

Additional thoughts?

## Appendix B

### Delphi Round 1 Introductory Email

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Invitation to participate in a doctoral study: Reclaiming Instructional Leadership: A Superintendent's Impact on Teacher Development

As you know the role of the superintendent has evolved over the years since the early 1900s. There is a need to acknowledge and understand that there has been a notable change in the role of the modern day superintendent.

This study has inclusion criteria, which we think you might meet. The inclusion criteria for your profession is as follows:

- Must have 3 years or more experience as a superintendent.
- Must be currently employed in your field.
- Willing to participate.

If you do meet the inclusion criteria and would be willing to participate in the study, we would be very grateful if you could complete the attached consent form. If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact the following investigators listed below:

- Principal Investigator: [hillgl@rowan.edu](mailto:hillgl@rowan.edu)
- Co-Investigator: [jamesk34@students.rowan.edu](mailto:jamesk34@students.rowan.edu).

The study will be carried out using the Delphi technique consisting of three rounds questionnaires (known as rounds) aiming to achieve consensus. The amount of time necessary for completion of each questionnaire (or rounds) will vary with each participant but should range from approximately 10-15 minutes for Round One, 15-20 minutes for Round Two, and 10-15 minutes for Round Three. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. This study is seeking your expert opinion.

We think you will find the process interesting and the results will be made available to you at the conclusion of this study.

Finally, it is important that you know that your participation is voluntary. The information that you provide will be confidential and when the results of the study are reported, you will not be identifiable in the findings. Your name will not be recorded in rounds; instead, you will be allocated a unique code that can only be identifiable to the researcher. You will remain anonymous to the other participants (or experts) throughout this Delphi study and only the researcher will be able to identify your specific answers.

Return of the completed Delphi rounds implies consent to participate.

Thank you for your time and help you may be able to offer to this study.

## Appendix C

### Delphi Round 2 Questionnaire Instructions

Dear Expert Panel Member,

Thank you for returning the first round Delphi survey. I found your responses very interesting, and I believe you will too. Your thoughtful responses and the time spent on this upcoming round will have an authentic impact on this topic.

These responses have been content analyzed and similar responses were grouped together to ensure that the survey is not repetitive and easily completed. The meaning of the responses has not been changed. You will now find the second Delphi survey link, which includes responses from participating superintendents within the state of New Jersey.

This survey attempts to find consensus, which takes on a different format than the first round. Please read the instruction carefully and complete the Delphi survey as fully as you can. Return of the completed Delphi Round Two implies consent to participate.

If you could submit the survey by May 31, we would be most grateful. If you wish to discuss any aspect of this further, please contact either the principal investigator or co-investigator.

- [hillgl@rowan.edu](mailto:hillgl@rowan.edu)
- [jamesk34@students.rowan.edu](mailto:jamesk34@students.rowan.edu)

#### Instruction

You will see a scale beside each research topic. This scale is numbered 1 to 4. Click in the box that you feel best describes the level of agreement with the research topic. Those numbers correspond to a response as below:

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Once you have completed the survey, please click submit.

Sincerely,  
VJK

## Appendix D

### Domain 1, 2, and 3 Statements

#### Domain One: Superintendent's Role

##### Superintendent's Role

- lead administration and teachers in instructional improvement and innovation
- participate/carry out goals of the district by having a thorough understanding of instruction being provided to reach goals.
- initiate, implement, and institutionalize the vision for innovative, personalized instruction personalized, and individualized instruction.
- have too many mandates.
- influence a 'shared vision' that faculty and administration can buy into.
- set clear goals for the district.
- are able to change rapidly both in focus and prioritization.
- role often is misunderstood and mitigated by a culture ignorant of education.
- provide and expand professional development opportunities.
- monitor school leaders and their progress in supporting student achievement.
- monitor student progress and success by conducting reg. classroom visits both administration peer-to-peer visits.
- implement student-centered and research based educational paradigm.
- have people-smart, defined as possessing good interpersonal skills as well as good people intuition.
- should be more involved in the classrooms.

- develop strategic plans to make a difference in that district.
- make decisions based on what is best for students.
- have the ability to influence change as relational trust grows within the district.
- can influence board policy.
- develop strong relationships, trust, a sense of directions & a willingness to make policy initiatives successful.
- provide reading, resources, trainings, experiences and information to the administrative staff to carry out.

## Domain Two: Aspects of Governing a School District

### Aspects of Governing a School District

- Scholar-practitioner superintendents who are courageous, humble and passionate, change educational paradigms.
- Differences in building leadership style and own prior teacher effectiveness impacts the role of a Superintendent.
- State interference in observation process, as well as the assessment process is problematic.
- Policy and mandates impede individualized school needs and deadlines does not lend itself to continuity.
- Turning over staff has benefits.
- Attrition and teacher mobility does not allow for instruction practices to be maintained.
- Protecting faculty from negative state policy initiatives is a current challenge.

- Matters such as PARCC implementation, training associated with MSGPs, HIB, etc. has overwhelmed the system and capacity for focus.
- Differences in building leadership style and own prior teacher effectiveness impacts the role of the Superintendent.

Domain Three: Barriers in maintaining effective instructional practices include...

Barriers in maintaining effective instructional practices include...

- staff absences and lack of qualified substitutes, frequently requiring the combining of classes and or cancellation of supports.
- undue focus on testing.
- staffing entrenchment in old habits that teachers do not want to give up.
- tardiness, which disrupt core instruction.

## Appendix E

### Delphi Round 3 Instructions

Dear Expert Panel Member,

The third round of this Delphi include those research topics that have not yet reached agreement from the participants on their importance. Below you will find a link that provides you with the results of questions that did not receive consensus.

<https://ql.tc/AEx2p2>

Your survey link-see attached shows your own individual response to the research topic.

Again this will appear as statements, which corresponds, to the scale below.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

This survey is provided as an opportunity for you to reconsider your response since Round Two. We would appreciate it you would consider your original response in the context of the group response to each statement and if you wish to change your response, please do so by clicking in the appropriate box beside each statement. Please note that you do not have to change your original response if you do not wish to.

Once you have completed the survey, please click and submit.

Sincerely,  
VJK

## Appendix F

### Delphi Round 3 Email

Dear Expert Panel Member,

Thank you for returning the second round Delphi survey. You will now find enclosed the third and final round Delphi survey link which includes details on the research topics that you have been involved in identifying and in relation to importance. Notice the statements that have already reached consensus on their importance. This does not mean that they are the most important priorities, only that they have reached consensus at an early stage.

The third round of this Delphi include those research topics that have not yet reached agreement from the participants on their importance. Below you will find a link that provides you with the results of questions that did not receive consensus.

<https://q1.tc/AEx2p2>

Your survey link, see below, shows your own individual response to the research topic.

Again this will appear as statements, which corresponds, to the scale below.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

This survey is provided as an opportunity for you to reconsider your response since Round Two. We would appreciate it you would consider your original response in the context of the group response to each statement and if you wish to change your response, please do so by clicking in the appropriate box beside each statement. Please note that you do not have to change your original response if you do not wish to.

Once you have completed the survey, please click submit.

Thank you for your continued participation in this study.

Sincerely,

VJK