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by

Hermenia Jenkins

December 2017

SUPERINTENDENTS AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS AND
ITS INFLUENCE ON STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

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Approved by Doctoral Thesis Committee:

Dr. Anthony Rolle, Chairperson

Dr. April-Peters-Hawkins, Committee Member

Dr. Keith Butcher, Committee Member

Dr. Jessica Johnson, Committee Member

Dr. Robert H. McPherson, Dean
College of Education

December 2017

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SUPERINTENDENTS AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS AND
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An Abstract
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Abstract

Background: "The intersection of what needs to be done ... varies from school to school but ... the superintendency is the only job title with the positional authority to orchestrate the intentional meshing of actors and script toward future improvement" (Bird, Dunaway, Hancock, & Wang, 2013, pp. 77-78). Superintendents each year were held accountable for their students' academic achievement that led to a district's accreditation status. The students' results on state assessments were scored, disaggregated, and categorized to assign school districts a state accountability rating. The commissioner of education used schools' accountability ratings as one indicator to assign districts an accreditation status. **Purpose:** The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine what influence superintendents' instructional leadership decisions had on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district. **Methods:** The research method for this qualitative case study was in-depth interviews with three superintendents who were purposefully selected. These superintendents, each named superintendent of the year by an organization, were interviewed face-to-face and one-on-one in their district offices. The data from their interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the constant comparative method to construct themes. **Results:** Five themes emerged from the analyzed data of these superintendents' interview transcripts: 1) they established a vision for their students, 2) they collaborated with individuals, 3) they continuously evaluated student data, (4) they focused on hiring the right people, and (5) they led with a care for others. **Conclusion:** The findings of this study indicate the possible key to instructional leadership decisions that influenced student academic achievement and aided in district accreditation was an ethic of care.

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Chapter I

Introduction

"The intersection of what needs to be done ... varies from school to school but, ... the superintendency is the only job title with the positional authority to orchestrate the intentional meshing of actors and script toward future improvement" (Bird, Dunaway, Hancock, & Wang, 2013, pp. 77-78). As the leaders in a school district, superintendents successfully obtained the highest leadership position in a school district. Each school year, superintendents were held accountable for the instructional leadership decisions implemented in their districts that influenced student academic achievement that led to a district's accreditation status. These superintendents' instructional leadership decisions for student academic achievement had to align with the curriculum standards called the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The TEKS identified what students should learn in each course or grade. Students' knowledge of the TEKS was measured each year when they took state assessments in assigned courses and grades. The students' results on the state assessments were scored, disaggregated, and categorized by the state to assign school districts one of three accountability ratings: (1) Met Standard, (2) Met Alternative Standard, or (3) Improvement Required (Texas Education Agency, 2013). The accountability rating for districts and campuses are published each year on the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website under the index entitled Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR). The accountability rating was one indicator used by the

commissioner of education to assign an accreditation status, such as accredited, accredited-warned, accredited-probation, or not accredited-revoked. These statuses were used each year by the state to determine whether a district continued to exist or not exist as a public school district (Texas Education Agency, 2013).

To examine the influence superintendents' instructional leadership decisions had on student academic achievement, three exceptional superintendents who were named superintendents of the year were interviewed face-to-face and one-on-one in their district offices. The questions for this qualitative case study were based on the Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES) superintendent exam. The TExES superintendent exam assessed the required professional knowledge an individual had in three educational domains: (1) Domain I: Leadership of the Educational Community, (2) Domain II: Instructional Leadership, and (3) Domain III: Administrative Leadership (Texas Education Agency, 2011) for an individual to receive a superintendent's certificate. This qualitative case study focused on the superintendent competencies as defined under Domain II: Instructional Leadership for the TExES superintendent exam:

Competency 005. The superintendent knows how to facilitate the planning and implementation of strategic plans that enhance teaching and learning; ensure alignment among curriculum, curriculum resources, and assessment; use the current accountability system; and promote the use of varied assessments to measure student performance.

Competency 006. The superintendent knows how to advocate, promote, and sustain an instructional program and a district culture that are conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Competency 007. The superintendent knows how to implement a staff evaluation and development system to improve the performance of all staff members and select appropriate models for supervision and staff development (TEA, 2011, pp. 13-15).

This qualitative case study further examined the influence superintendents' instructional leadership decisions had on student academic achievement that led to a district being accredited.

Background of the Problem

“Instructional leadership decisions can no longer be the domain of only campus teachers and principals, but should include more focus placed on the leadership role of superintendents and the district staff” (Belden Russonello & Stewart, 2005, p. 1).

According to a report from former President of the United States Ronald Reagan, public schools were not meeting the student academic achievement needs. This statement was based on the findings in a study by the National Commission of Excellence in Education, and alerted the country to a need for educational reforms (A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, 1983). A report by the National Commission of Excellence in Education titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* the following was reported to the U.S. and the Secretary of Education of the U.S. Department of Education expressed the following concern:

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American

prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people (A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, 1983, p. 9).

This report informed the citizens of the United States of the following “metaphorical call to arms:”

If an unfriendly power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today we might well have viewed it as an act of war . . . We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral disarmament. A Nation at Risk clearly sounded the alarm for educational reform, and a diverse group of ‘warriors’—parents, educators, business executives, governors and legislators—stepped forward to join the struggle to fulfill America’s ‘promise’ to its children. Failure to achieve the ‘twin goals of equity and high-quality schooling’ would, the Commission warned, inevitably lead to ‘a generalized mediocrity in our society or the creation of an undemocratic elitism’ (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2003, p. 3).

The Texas accountability report of students’ performances was used to determine a district’s accreditation status and superintendents who held the highest position within the districts. Thus, the superintendents’ instructional leadership decisions needed to influence student academic achievement on campuses within their districts. This accountability system measured student academic achievement in school districts using

students' performance on state assessments each school year in pre-determined grade levels and courses. Superintendents reviewed the accountability data to make and implement their instructional leadership decisions; however, superintendents should not have led autonomously.

Leadership that Works. The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel) quantitative examination, titled *Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement*, identified five district-level leadership responsibilities. Waters and Marzano (2006) found all five of these responsibilities related to setting and keeping districts focused on teaching learning goals as follows:

1. Collaborative goal-setting. Researchers found that effective superintendents include all relevant stakeholders, including central office, building-level administrators, and board members, in establishing goals for their districts.
2. Non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction. Effective superintendents set specific achievement targets for schools and students and then ensure the consistent use of research-based instructional strategies in all classrooms to reach those targets.
3. Board alignment and support of district goals. In districts with higher levels of student achievement, the local board of education is aligned with and supportive of the non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction.
4. Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction. Effective superintendents continually monitor district progress toward achievement and instructional

goals to ensure that these goals remain the driving force behind a district's actions.

5. Use of resources to support achievement and instruction goals. Effective superintendents ensure that the necessary resources, including time, money, personnel, and materials, are allocated to accomplish the district's goals. (Waters and Marzano, 2006, pp. 3-4).

With the increased focus on the education students received in public school districts, the historical leadership position of superintendents changed from individuals accountable primarily for allocating resources to the instructional leaders of school districts.

Statement of the Problem

The instructional leadership decisions for student academic achievement were primarily focused on the leadership of the campus principals and teachers. With congress being dissatisfied with student academic achievement in schools, they proceeded to implement changes that led to curriculum standards each student had to meet on pre-determined state assessments. Students were to be assessed by the state in pre-determined grades and courses, while districts were assigned an accountability rating. This accountability rating was one indicator used by the commissioner of education to determine the accreditation status of school districts. With the growing need for students to meet state assessment performance standards, superintendents needed to become the instructional leaders of their districts who worked with campus principals and teachers. Superintendents also needed to work with their central office personnel to assist them when they made and implemented instructional leadership decisions. This was important

due to the fact that “A central office reflects the philosophy, management, and priorities of the superintendent” (Miziel, 2010, p. 47).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the influence superintendents’ instructional leadership decisions had on student academic achievement, leading to an accredited district. Three superintendents were purposefully selected and volunteered to participate in face-to-face and one-on-one interviews held in each of their districts’ offices. The data collected from these interviews were transcribed and analyzed to identify emergent themes regarding their perceptions of effective leadership. All three of these superintendents demonstrated exceptional leadership abilities and were named superintendents of the year.

Significance of the Study

This doctoral thesis identified the influence these superintendents’ instructional leadership decisions had on student academic achievement that led to their districts being accredited. The data source used for this study was face-to-face and one-on-one interviews with three exceptional superintendents who were all been named superintendents of the year. They were all leaders in a Texas public school district. The data from these in-depth interviews were analyzed to identify emergent themes to examine instructional leadership decisions of superintendents and its influence on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district.

Primary Research Questions

Three exceptional superintendents were interviewed and emergent themes were identified to examine how their instructional leadership decisions had an influence on

student academic achievement that led to an accredited district. These exceptional superintendents were interviewed in their office and the data from these interviews were analyzed to answer the overall question, “What instructional leadership decisions were made by superintendents that had an influence on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district?” These superintendents were selected not only because they were named superintendents of the year, but also because their school district had a TEA accountability rating of “met standard” and their districts received an accreditation status of accredited. The research questions for this study included the following:

- How did the superintendents’ professional knowledge guide their instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement and led to an accredited district?
- How did superintendents use their central office staff when they made and implemented instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district?

Research Design

The qualitative case study research design consisted of interviews with three exceptional superintendents who were named superintendents of the year. They were leaders in Texas school districts that retained an accreditation status of accredited. The data from these face-to-face and one-on-one interviews were used to analyze their responses to pre-determined questions. The analysis identified emergent themes that were used to examine how superintendents’ instructional leadership decisions had an influence on student academic achievement. The identities of these superintendents remained confidential with the use of pseudonyms assigned as Superintendent West

(Superintendent of Schools-District 1), Superintendent North (Superintendent of Schools-District 2), and Superintendent East (Superintendent of Schools-District Three).

Limitations

The qualifier of being named a superintendent of the year was the first limitation of this qualitative case study. However, this recognition was used in order to purposefully select exceptional superintendents who were recognized by a professional education organization as leaders who demonstrated exceptional leadership skills in their districts. Additionally, the superintendents in this study were all white males from large, urban school districts. For that reason, a further limitation was there were no female superintendents, no superintendents of color, and no rural schools selected to voluntarily participate in this study.

This qualitative case study was further limited to gathering data based on open-ended questions that reflected the instructional leadership knowledge required by superintendents to pass the Texas Examinations of Educators Standards (TExES) superintendent exam in the area of Domain II: Instructional Leadership - Superintendent Competencies 005, 006, and 007 and additional open-ended questions approved by university professors. These additional open-ended questions asked about the participants' interactions with their central office staff, their perspective on how their instructional leadership decisions influenced student academic achievement, and who impacted their leadership style. Therefore, the honesty and accuracy of their responses to any of these questions could be a limitation to this study. There was a cursory member-check through digital communication with these superintendents to confirm the data collected and transcribed accurately reflected their responses when interviewed.

However, this study was further limited in that there were no independent sources to support these interviews. Those independent sources could have consisted of interviews with staff members who worked directly with these superintendents in the area of instructional leadership.

Definition of Terms

The purpose of the following defined terms was to provide clarity to the educational terms used in school districts and to understand the terminology used in this research study:

- **Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS):** The AEIS was an accountability system based primarily on student performance on state assessments. In 2013, the AEIS accountability system was replaced with the Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) (Texas Education Agency, 2015).
- **Accreditation Status:** The commissioner of education assigned an accreditation status to school districts of either accredited, accredited-warned, accredited-probation, or not accredited-revoked. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) defined each accreditation status as follows:
 - Accredited meant the TEA continued to recognize the district as a public school.
 - Accredited-warned meant the district exhibited deficiencies in performance that if not addressed would lead to probation or revocation of its accreditation status.

- Accredited-probation meant the district exhibited deficiencies in performance that must be addressed to avoid revocation of its accreditation status.
- Not Accredited-revoked meant TEA did not recognize the district as a Texas public school because the district's performance failed to meet standards adopted by the commissioner (Texas Education Agency, 2015).
- **Accountability System Ratings:** Academic standards for what students should learn were measured for every child tested each year and reported on the TEA website for the public to view. Under the TEA accountability system, schools received one of the following accountability ratings:
 - **Met Standard** – Met accountability targets on all indexes for which they have performance data.
 - **Met Alternative Standard** – Met modified performance index targets for alternative education campuses or districts.
 - **Improvement Required** – Did not meet one or more performance index targets (Texas Education Agency, 2015).
- **Assessment:** Another word for “test.”
- **Attendance Zone:** An area outlined within a community that designates where students would attend school based on the neighborhood in which their parents live.
- **Commissioner of Education:** The individual who heads the Texas Education Agency.

- **Curriculum standards:** The curriculum standards that were adopted by the State Board of Education (SBOE) and outlined what students learn in each course or grade and are called Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) (Texas Education Agency, 2013).
- **Disaggregated Data:** Students' performance results on state assessments are sorted into student subgroups and results are shown on the TAPR in each indicator (Texas Education Agency, 2015).
- **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):** ESEA, which was first enacted in 1965, is the principal federal law affecting K-12 education. The *No Child Left Behind* Act is the reauthorization of the ESEA (U.S. Department of Education, July 2013).
- **Every Student Success Act:** President Barack Obama signed this act in December 2015 and Congress put the act in place to replace the NCBL Act (U.S. Department of Education, July 2013).
- **No Child Left Behind:** Under *No Child Left Behind*, tests were aligned with academic standards to assess students in designated grades and courses (U.S. Department of Education, July 2013).
- **Student Achievement:** It is the performance standards that students, on both general and alternative assessments, must meet on state assessments (Texas Education Agency, 2013).
- **State Board of Education (SBOE):** The agency that sets the policies and standards for Texas public schools (Texas Education Agency, 2015).

- **State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR):** Beginning in spring 2012, STAAR replaced the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), and included annual grade-specific assessments students took to assess the progress of their learning (Texas Education Agency, 2015).
- **Superintendents:** The individual hired by the school board as the educational leader and administrative manager of a district (Texas Education Agency, 2013).
- **Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR):** The TAPR contains multiple sources of disaggregated data on the performance of students each year in schools and districts in Texas. TAPR were previously referred to as Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) from 1990-91 to 2011-12 (Texas Education Agency, 2015).
- **Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS):** The state curriculum standards students should know and be able to achieve at each grade level for each subject designated by the SBOE. The TEKS were adopted by the SBOE in 1997 and in the 1998-1999 school-year the TEKS were implemented as statewide curriculum for Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Superintendents were held accountable for the daily operations of their districts and establishing guidelines for all students to meet academic achievement in their districts. While superintendents balanced many responsibilities, public school districts were established to educate students. Therefore, the quality of education students received in schools must not depend on the location of a district, but on the superintendents and district staff hired to implement the instructional leadership decisions made by superintendents. School boards hired superintendents as the leaders of districts and depended on their professional knowledge to communicate the educational goals and resources needed for students to have the opportunities to learn, regardless of the students' attendance zone. Superintendents, therefore, had the responsibility of making and implementing instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement, leading in turn to accredited districts. The instructional leadership responsibility of superintendents at the time of this study was different than the original role of the first superintendents. The first position of superintendent was created a decade after the inception of public schools. Before superintendents, schools were run first by state boards, and then by local lay boards who did not have any professional help (Houston, 2013). The literature reviewed in this chapter was as follows: (1) Origins of the Superintendents, (2) The History of the Texas Accountability System, (3) Superintendents Instructional Leadership Decisions, (4) The

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel), and (5) Superintendents and Their Central Office Staff.

Origins of the Superintendents

"The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution states the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people" (Houston, 2013, p. 1). With education not mentioned in the Constitution, there was an interest in providing education to children and states proceeded to assume that responsibility (Houston, 2013). When states assumed responsibility for public education at the beginning of the nineteenth century under the Tenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, state legislatures created laws, allocated small funds to local communities, and appointed volunteer committees to monitor the use of the state funds (Houston, 2013).

Subsequently there was the creation of the state and local boards of education that would be held accountable for monitoring state funds. When the number of communities that received state funds increased, the time required to monitor these funds overwhelmed these local committees. This led to a paid state officer handling accounting activities of state funds and an overall increased number of additional responsibilities over managing education. With this increased number of responsibilities, the state created the first full-time job in New York, appointing the first state superintendent in 1812. Other states followed shortly after (Houston, 2013).

In the beginning, most state superintendents had very little influence on educational issues, as their primary focus was on data collection and distribution of state funds. However, state superintendents faced a similar issue when they became

overburdened with their duties, leading to paid county positions to conduct this work. In 1779, Thomas Jefferson introduced a proposal in the Virginia Assembly that citizens of each county would elect three aldermen to be in charge of the school: “The aldermen were to create an overseer for every ten school districts in the county. The duties included appointing and supervising teachers and examining pupils” (Houston, 2013, p. 1). These were the initial stages of development for the local superintendency, with Buffalo, New York, and Louisville, Kentucky being credited with establishing the first local superintendents in 1837 (Houston, 2013). Although the data collection and distribution of state funds overwhelmed state and local boards, it took multiple years before states embraced the idea of local superintendents. By 1870, there were more than 30 large cities with a superintendent, all whom were hired by local boards (Houston, 2013). In 1865, the National Education Association created a Superintendent’s Division, that later became the American Association of School Administrators to serve superintendents in the twenty-first century (Houston, 2013).

Superintendents were responsible for the education of their students, requiring the involvement of all district personnel and needing to know how to use central office policies, structures, and human resources to guide instructional improvement (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). To monitor student achievement in districts, the state of Texas created an accountability system that measured student performance on state assessments. The results of students’ performance on these state assessments were used to assign an accountability rating and an accreditation status to districts.

The History of the Texas Accountability System

Superintendents had the responsibility of educating all students as well as making and implementing instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement and thus determined whether a district was accredited.

Superintendents' instructional leadership decisions were measured by the state of Texas based on students' performances on state assessments. The requirement that all districts and campuses met the state accountability system started in 1980 with the first formal assessment called Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) (Cruse & Twing, 2000). In 1979, the Texas State Legislature amended the Texas Education Code (TEC) and required the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to create assessments to assess basic skill competencies in reading, math, and writing for students in Grades 3, 5, and 9 (Cruse & Twing, 2000). The TABS test was designed with the assistance of teachers, principals, and curriculum and psychometric specials because there was no statewide curriculum in place (Cruse & Twing, 2000). The TEC was further amended in 1983, requiring that all students who did not pass the TABS in Grade 9 to retake the exam each year (Cruse & Twing, 2000). Although students who failed a test had to retest, they were not held accountable to pass the state assessment. They were still eligible to receive a high school diploma without meeting the minimum passing standard on state assessments. However, schools were pressured to remediate the students who did not pass the test. There was also pressure on the schools because this test was the first time results of the assessments were released to the public: "The publication of campus and district results regarding specific performance relative to the statewide curriculum represented the beginning of

high-stakes accountability for large-scale assessment in Texas” (Cruse & Twing, 2000, p. 328).

The second assessment in 1984 was the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS), replacing TABS (Cruse & Twing, 2000). The difference in this assessment was the TEC changed the wording from “basic skills competencies” to “minimum basic skills,” with the goal of increasing the rigor of the assessments and adding individual sanctions for performances (Cruse & Twing, 2000). Students would now be held directly accountable for their performances on the state assessment. In 1987, the state again made changes to the state assessment by designating that the Grade 11 assessment would be an exit-level assessment. Grade 11 students would be required to pass the exit level test at the passing standard established by the State Board of Education (SBOE) (Cruse & Twing, 2000). Schools were still required to offer mandatory remediation and retesting for those students not meeting the passing standard on the exit level assessment.

In 1990, Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) replaced TEAMS on recommendation by the SBOE and the Commissioner of Education, who decided students should attain higher levels of academic achievement: “The primary purpose of assessment in Texas had evolved from a collection of school-level information (TABS) to assessment of curriculum-specific minimum skills (TEAMS), to school accountability of student performance (TAAS, 1990)” (Cruse & Twing, 2000, p. 330). In the spring of 1994, testing included more grade levels spanning from Grades 3-8 in reading and mathematics, as well as Grades 4 and 8 in writing (Cruse & Twing, 2000). The exit-level tests were moved to Grade 10 as a means to provide students with more time for

remediation as well as more opportunities to pass the test before graduation. The additional state assessments of social studies and science were added to Grades 5 and 8. There were also End-of-Course assessments added that included Algebra I, Biology, English II, and U.S. History. With the addition of these tests in 1996, students were given the option of passing algebra, English, and either biology or U.S. History tests as an alternative to TAAS graduation requirements (Cruse & Twing, 2000). Under TAAS, the accountability system measured the performance on TAAS of all students, including African American, Hispanic, White, and economically disadvantaged subpopulations, as well as dropout rates and attendance rates (Cruse & Twing, 2000).

The TAAS test also provided a Grade 3 Spanish version of the test to eligible English language learners (ELLs) (Cruse & Twing, 2000). TAAS remained the state assessment from 1990 to 2003. In 2001, there were three changes to the TAAS state assessment. First, Spanish versions of the EOC were created to help students fulfill graduation requirements. Second, the Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE) were used to evaluate English language acquisition of ELLs in reading Grades 3-12. Third, the State-Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA) was designed for special education students in Grades 3-8 (Cruse & Twing, 2000). Then in 2002, TAAS was administered for the last time in Grades 3-8. Although this ended TAAS for these grade levels, students in Grade 9 or above on January 1, 2001 were held accountable for meeting the passing standards on TAAS. This year also saw the end of state-mandated EOC assessments (Cruse & Twing, 2000).

In 2003, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) replaced TAAS, and was designed to measure more of the state mandated curriculum and the Texas

Essential of Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and was administered in two additional grades. By law, students for whom TAKS was the graduation testing requirement had to pass exit level tests in English Language Arts, math, science, and social studies to graduate (Texas Education Agency, 2011). In addition, the Student Success Initiative (SSI), made satisfactory performance on Grade 3 reading assessment, Grade 5 reading and mathematics assessments, and Grade 8 reading and mathematics assessments as a promotion requirement for Texas students (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

In 2004, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act required student assessments in the language domains of listening, speaking, and writing in Grades K-12, as well as in reading in K-2 that became known as the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) (Texas Education Agency, 2011). NCLB also required TEA to report assessment results using a linguistically accommodated testing (LAT) process that included eligible recent immigrant ELLs in the state's mathematics assessments in Grades 3-8 and 10 (Texas Education Agency, 2011). TEA also made changes to SDAA and renamed the assessment SDAA II to align it with statewide TAKS for special education students in Grades 3-10: "This test was for students who were instructed in the state-mandated curriculum" (Texas Education Agency, 2011, p. 3).

Another assessment was created in 2006 to meet the needs of students served in special education because the TAKS test was not the appropriate assessment, even with modifications (Texas Education Agency, 2011). This assessment, called TAKS-Inclusive (TAKS-I), replaced the SDAA II after the spring of 2007 (Texas Education Agency, 2011). Again, in response to further NCLB guidelines, LAT implemented reading and

English language arts assessments for eligible recent immigrant ELLs in Grades 3-8 and 10 and TAKS-I was administered for the final time (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

Then in 2007, the Texas Legislature enacted Senate Bill (SB) 1031 that replaced TAKS assessments in Grades 9-12 with a series of EOC assessments, beginning with the entering Grade 9 class of 2011-2012 (Texas Education Agency, 2011). In order to fulfill federal accountability requirements, the TAKS-Alternative (TAKS-Alt) assessment was implemented in 2008, replacing SDAA II and locally developed alternate assessments (LDAA). The TAKS-Alt was for those students with significant disabilities. TAKS (Accommodated) was an assessment based on the same grade-level academic achievement standards as TAKS, but the format of the test was different and there were no field-test questions (Texas Education Agency, 2011). The TAKS-Modified (TAKS-M) assessment was created as a modified test for students receiving special education service to be held to federal accountability performance standards (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

In 2009 there were TAKS-M assessments for all state assessments. In addition, the Texas Legislature enacted House Bill (HB) 3 that emphasized postsecondary readiness that linked a new series of reading and mathematics assessments in Grades 3-9 to college-and-career-readiness performance standards for Algebra II and English III EOC assessments (Texas Education Agency, 2011). By 2012, there were many challenges to the EOC requirements of high school students. Under this accountability system, high school students would not only be required to meet performance standards of fifteen assessments, but 15 percent of their high school grades would be connected to the state assessment. Students not meeting these performance measures would not be

eligible to receive a high school diploma. However, before this accountability system was implemented, the state legislation approved HB 5 in June of 2013 that required high school students to take five tests and not fifteen tests to meet graduation requirements (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

With the release each year of the state accountability guidelines, districts were held accountable for their students meeting current performance standards on state assessments. The overall students' performances on these assessments were disaggregated by TEA and the data was used to assign an accountability rating of met standard, met alternative standard, or improvement required. The ratings public school systems received were based on the below four indexes:

Index 1: Student Achievement that provided a snapshot of performance across subjects.

Index 2: Student Progress that measured year-to-year student progress.

Index 3: Closing Performance Gaps emphasized the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students and the two lowest-performing racial/ethnic student groups.

Index4: Postsecondary Readiness emphasized the importance of earning a high school diploma that provided students with the foundation necessary for success. (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

The history of the accountability system as indicated by previous state legislative decisions changes continued to be made by the state of Texas and districts were expected to prepare their students to meet performance standards on state assessments:

“Therefore, leaders determined to improve instruction would need to more readily assess

strengths and weaknesses in performance and instruction in their districts by using student data" (Togneri & Anderson, 2003, p. 27). Although multiple data exists within school districts to assess student learning, state assessment data, "if used appropriately by the superintendents could help meet the needs of the students to guide important instructional decisions about teaching and learning, particularly in collaborations with the central office and principal level staff (Togneri & Anderson, 2003, p. 28).

Superintendents' Instructional Leadership Decisions

Although they held the highest position within the district, superintendents needed to make and implement instructional leadership decisions with the assistance of their district level and campus level staff:

The intersection of what needs to be done and who is going to do it varies from school to school but in every case, the superintendency is the only job title with the positional authority to orchestrate the intentional meshing of actors and script toward future improvement. The school superintendent's pivotal organizational perch has direct and proximate access to board members, building principals, and community residents, as well as direct and promote influence on vision inception, resource distribution, and operational procedures. Practicing superintendents therefore inherit at once both opportunity and responsibility and how they execute their leadership challenges may go a long way toward determining their success in their districts (Bird et. al, 2013, pp. 77-78).

Superintendents' instructional leadership decisions needed to be made and implemented with district staff through interactions and conversations about research based best practices and student data. The tactic of mere teams of teachers creating curriculum was

a practice for a long time; however, this practice was no longer effective in terms of implementing the state curriculum standards (Mai, 2004).

The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel) quantitative examination titled *Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement* identified five district-level leadership responsibilities. Waters and Marzano (2006) found all five of these responsibilities related to setting and keeping districts focused on teaching and learning goals as follows:

1. Collaborative goal-setting. Researchers found that effective superintendents include all relevant stakeholders, including central office, building-level administrators, and board members, in establishing goals for their districts.
2. Non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction. Effective superintendents set specific achievement targets for schools and students and then ensure the consistent use of research-based instructional strategies in all classrooms to reach those targets.
3. Board alignment and support of district goals. In districts with higher levels of student achievement, the local board of education is aligned with and supportive of the non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction.
4. Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction. Effective superintendents continually monitor district progress toward achievement and instructional goals to ensure that these goals remain the driving force behind a district's actions.

5. Use of resources to support achievement and instruction goals. Effective superintendents ensure that the necessary resources, including time, money, personnel, and materials, are allocated to accomplish the district's goals (Waters & Marzano, 2006, pp. 3-4).

The McRel research found in this study that sound leadership, which effectively addressed specific responsibilities within the school district, could have a profound and positive impact on student achievement that added value to the education system (Waters & Marzano, 2006). To make and implement the district's student academic achievement goals, superintendents required teachers, campus leaders, and central office staff to work together as a team. To work as a team when instructional leadership decisions were made and implemented for student academic achievement, superintendents needed to strive for creating a positive and collaborative district culture. Positive communication relationships between central office staff and district administrators needed to be maintained throughout each school to evaluate the academic strengths and weaknesses of the students. These connections made between district and campus personnel also needed to be used to determine what happened on campuses beyond written assessments. This data would then need to be analyzed to determine how to best pursue student academic achievement on the campuses. Alongside their central and district staff, superintendents needed to ensure they worked closely with campus personnel to ensure that the attendance zone where children lived was as good as any campus in the district (Mac Iver & Farley, 2003).

Superintendents and Central Office Staff

The students' academic achievement on all campuses in each district largely

depended on the leadership of the superintendents and the superintendents' hierarchy design of the central office (Shields, 2010). The district's central office personnel had the shared responsibility with campus staff to assist superintendents when they made and implemented instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement. Honig and Copeland (2008) suggested superintendents should "engage central office administrators in learning-focused partnership relationships with schools and invest substantially in the development of central office administrators as key reform participants (p.3). Superintendents needed to use these guidelines to prepare their central office staff to support campus leadership personnel and teachers because campus personnel could no longer work in isolation to meet student academic achievement on their campuses.

For those high-performing districts, the superintendents worked to reduce the traditional isolation of teachers and created opportunities for teachers to learn from one another (Leithwood, 2010). The creation of opportunities to work together started with and through central office cabinet members, who scheduled times on their calendars to meet with campus level staff, to be visible in their districts, and to report their data to campus principals (Education Writers Association Special Report, 2003). The information gathered and shared with principals from these campus visits was used to recognize strengths and weaknesses on campuses. They were then able to collaborate with campus-level and district-level staff about these strengths and weaknesses on campuses and collaborate around how to use the strengths on their campuses that could be used on other campuses to correct their weaknesses.

Collaboration was a method used to improve instructional leadership decisions made by superintendents that could have an influence on student academic achievement. The improvement of student achievement occurred with leaders who were collaborative rather than confrontational, and they used politics to bring about change (Education Writers Association Special Report, 2003). Through this collaboration, in all districts, leaders found that central offices were powerful guiding forces where their roles included creating a district-wide curriculum, building a high-quality principal, and devising system-wide supports for new teachers (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). With all these collaborative efforts that were controlled by the superintendents, it was said that,

The ability of a superintendent or a school board to engage in community building and shared decision-making, or, for that matter, to adroitly navigate a school district's often-turbulent political waters, is meaningless unless such efforts improve student achievement (Education Writers Association Special Report, 2003, p. 11).

Summary

The role of the superintendents evolved over the years from a leadership position being responsible for allocation and distribution of financial resources to a leadership position responsible for students' academic achievement in their district. Superintendents were the individuals with the positional power to make and implement instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement. However, superintendents could not lead autonomously, but through collaborative efforts with their school board members, district personnel, campus personnel, and the community. This qualitative case study focused on the instructional leadership decisions made and

implemented by superintendents. The data gathered in this study was used to examine how three exceptional superintendents who were all named superintendents of the year made and implemented instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the instructional leadership decisions made by superintendents: superintendents were accountable to the state for the instructional leadership decisions that influenced student academic achievement in their districts. Although the orchestration of what was done in school districts varied from school to school, it was superintendents who were the only individuals with the title and authority to implement the plans for future improvement (Bird et al., 2013). The overall research question used to guide this research study was the following: “What instructional leadership decisions were made by superintendents that had an influence on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district?” There were three superintendents selected in order to interview to collect data and answer the following research questions:

1. How did the superintendents’ professional knowledge guide their instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement and led to an accredited district?
2. How did superintendents use their central office staff when they made and implemented instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district?

This chapter introduces the research questions for this study and describes the theoretical framework, research design, participant selection, and interview procedures. It will then concludes with a discussion of the data collection, data analysis method, and research quality.

Theoretical Framework

Interpretivism was the theoretical lens used to examine the data in this study. An interpretative research, which is the most common type of qualitative research, assumes that “reality is socially constructed; that is there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event. Researchers do not ‘find’ knowledge; they construct it. Constructivism is a term often used interchangeable with interpretivism” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9). “Constructivists claim that truth is relative and that it is dependent on one’s perspective. This paradigm recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). An interpretivist lens allows for data to be collected and analyzed by the researcher using the participants’ responses to the questions about their instructional leadership decisions. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) define rich and descriptive as words that convey what the researcher learned about the phenomenon and can include, as does these findings, quotes from the participant interviews to support the findings of a study.

Research Design

This qualitative case study used in-depth interviews for the research design. For these in-depth interviews, three superintendents were selected to examine their perspectives about their instructional leadership decisions: “In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews

with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation” (Boyce & Neale, 2006, p. 1). Prior to the interviews, University of Houston professors approved the questions to establish a foundation of relevance to this research study and to adhere to the research guidelines of University of Houston IRB protocol.

Participant Selection

“The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants ... that best help the researcher understand ... the research question” (Creswell, 2014, p. 239). The participants purposefully selected for this study included superintendents with the following attributes:

1. Each of the participants was named a superintendent of the year by an organization. The attribute of being named superintendent of the year included the assumption these participants were recognized by their peers as exceptional leaders of their districts.
2. They were in school districts where their districts retained their accredited status based on student academic achievement. Student academic achievement was based on the data in the TAPR as reported on the TEA accountability website.
3. Convenience sampling of the participants was used to select them “based on time, money, location, and availability of sites or respondents, and so on” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 98).
4. They were school superintendents over three years and had at least one year of experience in their current district located in Texas.

Using the above attributes, three exceptional superintendents who have all been

named superintendents of the year and from the Texas area were selected and voluntarily accepted the invitation to be interviewed for this study. Although there were no direct benefits or risks, these superintendents would have an opportunity to reflect on their professional practice within the district to evaluate the effectiveness of the academic achievement of all students. To maintain confidentiality, the superintendents were assigned pseudonyms and schools were not identified in the research findings. The research data will be maintained for a minimum of three years after completion of the project. The data will be stored on a Universal Serial Bus (USB) in Room 112 of the Farish Hall Building located on the University of Houston-Main Campus. My faculty sponsor will be in charge of maintaining the data after I have graduated from the program.

Interview Procedures

Approval from the University of Houston-Main Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) was received before this research was conducted to protect the identity of the participants and to ensure there was no harm to the participants who volunteered to participate in this research study. The superintendents were sent an email to ask them to volunteer to participate in this research study (Appendix B). The superintendents who agreed to participate in this research study were then emailed a “Consent to Participant in Research” form to sign, verifying their voluntary participation to be interviewed for this research study (Appendix C). Finally, the superintendents were interviewed in their district office at a scheduled time determined by them to accommodate their schedule, using an interview protocol created by the researcher (APPENDIX D). The face-to-face and one-on-one interviews were held in the district offices of each of the superintendents. These interviews were audio recorded using a Sony voice recorder to collect the data for

this study. The interviews each lasted for at least an hour and no more than one and a half hours.

After the interviews, the researcher listened to the recorded interviews multiple times and then typed verbatim the participants' responses to the questions. All of the superintendents were asked questions designed using Domain II: Instructional Leadership – Superintendent Competencies 005, 006, and 007 and additional questions created by the researcher (see APPENDIX D). The identified themes were triangulated using the commonalities among the school superintendents. To triangulate the information, the identities of these superintendents remained confidential by being designated as Superintendent West-SD1 for Superintendent District 1, Superintendent North-SD2 for Superintendent District 2, and Superintendent East-SD3 for Superintendent District 3. The common responses and phrases were organized according to the superintendents' responses, identifying five emergent themes that connected to the overall research question: "What instructional leadership decisions were made by superintendents that had an influence on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district?"

Data Collection

In qualitative research the researcher is the key instrument for the data collection (Creswell, 2014). Prior to the interviews, an interview protocol was used to establish a procedure to ask and record the participants' responses to the questions. University of Houston professors approved the use of the twenty-two open-ended questions for this study. This research study also followed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol approved by the University of Houston IRB committee. The first fourteen open ended

questions were based on the professional knowledge required of superintendents to meet on the TExES exam for superintendents as described in Domain II: Instructional Leadership – Superintendent Competencies of 005, 006, and 007. The remaining eight questions asked about the participants' interactions with their central office staff, their perspectives on how their instructional leadership decisions influenced student academic achievement, and who impacted their leadership style. The interviews involved open-ended questions "to elicit views and opinions from the participants" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 237-238). It is the participants' meanings and not the researchers' meanings that are collected for the data. Therefore, I kept a focus on learning the perspectives that the participants expressed about the issues, and not the interpretations that I gleaned from the data collected (Creswell, 2014).

To collect the data, a natural setting was used to conduct face-to-face and one-on-one interviews with the three participants who volunteered for this study. After their agreement to participate, I scheduled interviews by contacting the superintendents' secretary by email and personal phone conversations. When I entered the district office, the secretaries greeted me and then introduced me to the superintendents. At this point, the interview protocol process was explained before the interviews started with each superintendent. These in-depth interviews lasted from one-hour to one and a half hours in the participants' district offices. The interviews were audio recorded using a Sony voice recorder.

The purpose of these interviews was that qualitative researchers "are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Therefore, the

key concern was understanding the phenomenon from the participants' perspective, sometimes referred to as the *emic* perspective, and also known as the insider's view (Merriam, 1998). After each of the interviews, I listened to the interviews in their entirety before the data was transcribed. The participants' responses to the questions from the interviews were then transcribed verbatim by me and listened to multiple times for accuracy of my transcription of the interview recordings. I then created a Microsoft document process to analyze the data.

Data Analysis

“With data analysis steps are involved to make sense out of the text data by segmenting and taking apart the data (like Peeling back the layers of an onion) as well as putting it back together” (Creswell, 2014, p. 245). The process of analyzing the dense and rich data involved my need to ‘winnow’ the data. To ‘winnow’ the data means to focus on some of the data and disregard other parts of it (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). This part of the qualitative research “primarily employs an inductive research strategy” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). With this type of research, the researcher builds theory from observations and intuitive understandings gained in the field of education and identifies themes from the analyzed data (Merriam, 1998). To analyze the data, the researcher uses a constant comparative method to construct themes. At the heart of this method is the continuous comparison of the respondents' remarks where a unit of data was sorted into groupings that were common (Merriam, 1998).

I created a word document and placed the superintendents' responses in a table with individual sentences in individual rows (see APPENDIX E). To maintain the confidentiality of the superintendents, codes were assigned to their responses. After

placing the data in rows a third column was added to sort the data as needed throughout the analysis. Each sentence was read to assign concepts and constructs, and then themes were identified. There were five themes that emerged from the data. The identified emergent themes were used to examine how these exceptional school superintendents' instructional leadership decisions had an influence on student academic achievement.

In summary, the data analysis was a process used to develop themes that became the findings of this study (found in Chapter Four). The data was analyzed using a qualitative inquiry that was richly descriptive. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define rich, descriptive words that convey what the researcher learned about the phenomenon and can include, as does these findings, quotes from the participant interviews to support the findings of the study.

Research Quality

“All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. Being able to trust research results is especially important to professionals in applied fields because practitioners intervene in people's lives” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 237). Therefore, research is trustworthy when rigor has been used in completing the study and it was conducted in an ethical manner (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To have rigor, the study must present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, participants, or other researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To ensure rigor, the researcher reviewed Tracy's (2013) criteria for conducting qualitative research with excellence. Her eight criteria are that the research is to:

- (1) be on a worthy topic; that it be conducted with (2) rich rigor and (3) sincerity—that is transparency of methods—and (4) credibility; that the research

(5) resonates with a variety of audiences and (6) makes a significant contribution; (7) that it attends to ethical considerations; and finally, (8) that the study has meaningful coherence; that is, ‘meaningfully interconnects literature, research, questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other (Tracy, 2013, p. 230).

To establish rigor for this qualitative case study, I:

1. Solicited feedback from the people interviewed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
2. Used feedback provided by my professors who reviewed this study and used peer review by a colleague who was asked to scan the data to assess findings based on data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
3. Used rich, description to provide an ‘emic or insider’s account’ (Maxwell, 2013, p. 138).
4. Used a rich, thick description that enabled transferability to provide a description of the setting, participants included in the study, and detailed description of findings presented in the form of quotes from the participants interviewed.
5. Reviewed my notes and sections of the student accountability documents as published on the Texas Education Agency website (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Summary

This qualitative case study used in-depth interviews to collect data from the participants. The interpretivist research methodology was used to examine the

instructional leadership decisions of three exceptional superintendents with influence on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district. The quality of this research was done with member check, feedback from professors, and peer review.

Furthermore, as a researcher I did my best to be conscientious of any ethical issues that pervaded the research process and examined my philosophical orientation regarding these issues (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Chapter IV

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine three exceptional superintendents' instructional leadership decisions and its influence on student academic achievement that led to accredited districts. All three superintendents were named superintendents of the year and were leaders of a school district in Texas. The study took place at the district offices of each of the superintendents. Each participant was asked a list of pre-determined, open-ended questions based on Domain II: Instructional Leadership – Superintendent Competencies 005, 006, and 007 from the Texas Examinations of Educators Standards (TExES) superintendent exam and questions designed by the researcher. The superintendents were assigned pseudonyms and are referred to throughout these findings as Superintendent West, Superintendent North, and Superintendent East.

Superintendents' Background

The three superintendents were all recognized as superintendents of the year. Their districts included multiple high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools where the students' academic performances on state assessments were met at a level to retain the state accreditation status of accredited. The following table provided a minimum description of the superintendents' educational credentials and their professional educational experience:

Table 1

Title: Superintendents' Background Information

Superintendents' Names	Education	Professional Experience
Superintendent West	Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree Doctoral Degree	High school teacher Middle school teacher Assistant Principal Principal Central Office Administrator Superintendent (more than one district)
Superintendent North	Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree	High school teacher Middle school teacher Coach Assistant Principal Principal Central Office Administrator Superintendent (more than one district)
Superintendent East	Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree Doctoral Degree	High school teacher Middle school teacher Assistant Principal Principal Central Office Administrator Superintendent (more than one district)

Districts' Demographics

Superintendent West served for multiple years in his present district and in previous districts. He described the students who lived within the district's attendance zone as living in areas that were affluent, less affluent, higher minority populations, and lower minority population areas. With these various attendance zones in which his students lived, it was a priority to make sure all students had the resources on their

campuses to be successful and even more resources on those campuses that needed more for students to achieve academically in their classrooms. The economically disadvantaged population in his district was approximately 49 percent, with a student demographic population that consisted of approximately 17% African American students, 44% Hispanic students, 27% White students, and other ethnicities comprised about 12% of the students who identified as American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, and as two or more races.

Superintendent North was also a superintendent in his present district for multiple years and in a previous district. He described students who lived in the district's attendance zone as students who came from a challenging environment, consisting of approximately 80% economically disadvantaged students. According to him, this environment made it a challenge for his teachers to teach, but also an opportunity for his teachers to create a learning environment where students had an opportunity to meet state student academic achievement performance standards. The student demographics in his district consisted of approximately 29% African American students, 52% Hispanic students, 4% White students, and other ethnicity groups comprised about 15% of the students who identified as American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, and as two or more races.

Superintendent East served as a superintendent for multiple years in his present district and in a previous district. He described students who lived in his district as those who achieved at or above the state average on state assessments and lived within a community of very involved and highly educated parents. The economically disadvantaged population in his district was about 28% with a student demographic

population that consisted of approximately 8% African American students, 29% Hispanic students, 48% White students, and other ethnicity groups comprised about 14% of the students who identified as American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, and identified as two or more races.

These three superintendents, regardless of their students' ethnicity groups or economic statuses, made and implemented instructional leadership decisions where students met the state academic performance standards on state assessments for their districts to remain accredited districts. The qualitative findings from the face-to-face and one-on-one interviews with these superintendents were transcribed, reviewed for accuracy of the transcribed data, and analyzed by the researcher. The emergent themes were identified and will be described in this chapter as used by these superintendents when they made and implemented instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement. The following were the emergent themes: (1) They established their vision for the district, (2) collaborated with individuals, (3) evaluated data throughout the school year, (4) focused on hiring the right people, and (5) led with care for their students and personnel.

Visions for the Districts

All three superintendents established their instructional leadership visions prior to the school year to help maintain an educational environment where all campuses had the human and financial resources for students to have an opportunity for success. Their visions were based on the students' needs as determined by their central office staff meetings, meetings with committees within the district, meetings within the district and community, surveys, and conversations. After they had a vision, the superintendents

created opportunities to share their visions with district personnel and community members.

Superintendent West's vision for his district was for all students, regardless of their economic status and/or the location of the campus, to have an opportunity to learn the curriculum taught by the teachers. The curriculum expectations on the campuses in his district were established before the beginning of the school year since he was not a fad follower of the different curriculum materials that came to him throughout the school year. Once the curriculum expectations were established, he said,

The most innovative thing I do is I try to not be too innovative. What I do is I say these are my expectations and then you make it happen. Every position in this district is focused should be focused on supporting the campus principal in the classroom. So my job and everybody in this building, your job exists to make sure that those principals and those classroom teachers are successful. And how do you measure success ... students are successful.

The learning opportunity for students to be successful in his district required that all campuses received the necessary financial resources for teachers to implement his vision in all classrooms. Those necessary financial resources did not mean that all campuses would receive the same amount to implement the curriculum. As Superintendent West said,

In fact, some of the lower socioeconomic campuses will actually have more resources because it takes more as you know for kids that come from poverty it takes a little more. Anywhere you go across this district you will find an equal commitment that children in that community will be learning.

Superintendent North's vision for the district was "to ensure that the kids we have, have the best opportunity and the way they get the best opportunity is for people ... across the district to have everything they need to do the best job they can including support." This support came in the form of human and financial resources that were allocated to the campuses based on the curriculum priorities established each year. These priorities provided an academic foundation for the school year, which he said,

Allows us to not become a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none. We don't get good at anything. And so one of the things that I want to do is I want to be very thoughtful and purposeful about what is our priority.

These priorities were filtered down to the campuses to maintain balance within the district so that they did not experiment with new ideas throughout the year within the district unless the new program and/or system were piloted before it was implemented on any of the campuses. The current year's priorities were evaluated during the year for continued curriculum alignment of the curriculum standards taught to the students on all the campuses.

Superintendent East said his vision for student academic achievement in his district was one where "our purpose is deeply embedded not just within our written, taught, and tested curriculum, but our purpose is deeply embedded within our strategic plan." Superintendent East said decisions done within his district were tied to making connections throughout the district. Those connections were based on objectives for all of his campuses. He said,

Every campus has action plans attached to our specific objectives. It's part of every board meeting so we check every agenda item has to target back to the

strategic plan it has to connect. My evaluation is based on a set of superintendent targets that are derived from the strategic plan. My targets then become the district's targets. The district's targets become the campus targets. The campus targets become the principal's evaluation. There's so much tie in with everything that we do and everything that we say and any new initiative has to tie into the strategic plan and that keeps us from 'chasing rabbits.'

This strategic plan allowed alignment of the curriculum taught to all students on all campuses throughout the year. Superintendent East expected his curriculum coordinators to communicate clearly with each other and the campus staff so all students could have the appropriate content taught to them based on the strategic plan. This was accomplished by the conversations he said went as follows:

Take the approved TEKS and have conversations about what is appropriate cognitively, what is then appropriate in terms of the content, what's going to be appropriate in terms of the level that we are going to apply it, and how are we going to best assess that information. So we have that triangle of ensuring that when I have conversations with our curriculum coordinators that what is being written is also being taught and is also being tested. We have the checks and balances throughout the course of the year to ensure that whatever gaps are occurring at whatever grade level that we analyze what we're doing first. Looking at the mirror not so much what's not happening at the campus, but are we clear on our curriculum? Are we clear on our expectations? Are the TEKS really cognitively appropriate?

All three of these superintendents had in common that all students in their districts had an opportunity to learn the curriculum taught based on the districts' visions established at the beginning of each school year. In order to achieve an opportunity for all students to learn these superintendents provided additional resources based on campus needs, distributing funds to address the achievement gaps of their students. Although there was more of a challenge to provide this opportunity to learn for students in the district attendance zone of Superintendent North, the location of the students in this attendance zone was not a factor in the district retaining its accredited status.

Superintendent East's district, however, was different because it did not consist of a large number of economically disadvantaged students. With his students his vision focused on academic achievement beyond state assessments because the majority of his students performed above the state performance standards. Superintendent West's students' performances on the state assessments varied from high to low, and in some schools there was a high number of economically disadvantaged students. With his students, he focused on closing the learning achievement gap within his district.

Collaboration

To prepare students for academic success in the district and on the state assessments, the three superintendents collaborated with individuals throughout the district to determine what curriculum was taught and how students learned in the classes. This collaboration included these superintendents meeting with school board members monthly, their central office staff, and district staff. With an equal commitment to students' learning throughout the district all superintendents collaborated with individuals in formal and informal settings to understand the students' needs in the district.

Superintendent West said that before he collaborated with others he worked on creating a culture with his central office staff and district personnel where they understood he was not a superintendent who led through autonomy. He said, “I guess I could go in and say we’re gonna do it this way, but I always found that if you do that and say you’re gonna do it this way why do you need these people anyway?” He purposely made an attempt with his staff to not create an environment where individuals agreed on everything in his meetings. He wanted a healthy environment where people listened and felt safe to express their educational findings to him and the team of individuals in his academic meetings. Superintendent West said in his district, “It’s a good group and we don’t all agree on everything. And people fuss a little bit, but again nobody leaves there saying you know I hate that person and I am gonna do everything to get him.”

Superintendent West added that in such a large district he collaborated very closely with his deputy superintendent in charge of curriculum and instruction when he made and implemented instructional leadership decisions. His deputy superintendent and him met at least once a week with a group of central office personnel—executive directors, coordinators, chief financial officer, and associate/assistant superintendents. He also held weekly meetings where only his deputy superintendent and he discussed student academic achievement. In their meetings, he shared with her his expectations and she told him where the district was in meeting those expectations. He said, “She kind of keeps me updated on any of the changes that may be coming through with curriculum and instruction and the assessment.” He listened to his curriculum and instructional department leaders in his central office because he said they were the experts who worked directly with campus leaders and teachers. Superintendent West’s weekly

meetings with his curriculum and instructional department consisted of discussing curriculum expectations for the students. He said, “Of course so much of curriculum alignment, curriculum resources, and assessment ties back to our board goals.” His chief financial officer also attended meetings and was included in these senior leadership meetings so this individual would know the academic financial resources needed and how to allocate the district resources appropriately to the campuses.

Superintendent West also held campus faculty meetings at the beginning of the school year to present his student academic achievement expectations to the principals and teachers in the school district. These expectations always included any legislative updates because, and he argued, “When you’re talking about education it involves accountability and assessment” and each year the state measured the performance of students on state assessments. He also met with people in the community where he provided them with information on student academic achievement in the district. These community meetings and his meetings with district personnel provided him with the opportunity not only to share his academic expectations, but an opportunity to listen to the educational concerns for his district. He said he believed his biggest contribution as an instructional leader was the following: “I listen and then I try to provide people what they think they need” for their students to have an opportunity to learn in the classrooms. Therefore, he said, “Primarily in a large district, I work through those professionals and they keep me up to date.” He said with his deputy superintendent assigned to curriculum and instruction,

I think it’s her responsibility to make sure that any changes and anything to do with curriculum and instruction that she needs to make sure I know. And then

anything that I gather through my meetings certainly I would share with her.

Superintendent West also said that he “Visits with a lot of very, very smart superintendents in the region and across the state ... and individuals who attended the same professional organizations he attended to stay current with curriculum and instruction.” However, Superintendent West said,

But again for me to sit here I think it's more useful ... for a superintendent to say ok these are the goals that I would like to see accomplished now you figure out how to accomplish them because I am not a C&I expert and I don't claim to be. But you know our person in charge and her staff they are so they know how to make it happen. But the number one thing that I try to do again is I try to listen to those people. I am not an elementary education expert. I'm not a secondary expert. So, I try to connect with the people that are making a real difference.

Superintendent North collaborated with his cabinet level staff and depended on them to be the experts in their assigned areas. He did this not by believing they were “experts,” but rather encouraging and expecting them to be experts to the best of their abilities, treating them as experts in their given positions. He depended on his deputy superintendent of curriculum and instruction to be responsible for what was taught to the students throughout the district. His assistant superintendents were assigned to campuses within the district and they worked with the deputy superintendent of curriculum and instruction to decide on the support needed for the principals on their campuses for student academic achievement. He held weekly meetings with his deputy superintendent and another weekly meeting where they met with his cabinet members, which included

assistant superintendents and district coordinators from various assigned areas in the district. Once a month after each board meeting he met with his directors, district coordinators, and principals in the district. These meetings kept the leaders informed about what was happening throughout the district based on the board members' expectations for student academic achievement.

Beyond these meetings, Superintendent North collaborated with his campus coordinators in the area of instructional leadership, walking onto high school campuses and meeting with math coordinators, albeit not to talk about pre-calculus and calculus because those were not his areas of expertise. Instead, he asked the coordinators, "Where were they struggling, what support did they need, and where did they need help?" He said, "I can do that in any content area in any grade level. I don't have to be the expert. Quite frankly, I don't think they want me to be the expert or expect me to be the expert." He explained when he met with his staff he said he always focused on:

Providing the best opportunities for kids to be successful. So what I want people to know is we're not here to make decisions on what's best for us or what's easiest for adults. I try to involve people. I don't make decisions on my own very rarely do I make decisions. Now I make them and sometimes it doesn't make people happy.

However, for the instructional leadership decisions he did make he said his goal was "to convince you that it was your idea because you're gonna be the one carrying forward with it."

Superintendent East said, "Wherever two or more are gathered" was how he collaborated with individuals in the district. Every opportunity he had to talk to any

individual about the education of students could be used as a moment to learn about how to meet student academic achievement needs in his district. He held meetings with his central office assistant superintendents and staff where they discussed the alignment of his strategic plan throughout the school year. These meetings were held in his district office, but his central office staff and he also visited the classrooms and halls of the campuses within the district. This was an opportunity he used to have videos created to highlight high levels of student engagement. As he said,

The kids are pumped, they're excited to say here's what I'm learning, here's how I'm learning. Teachers are excited because they get to show their craft about how good they are. It's a great signature moment. It's good for me to be in the classroom to understand the trials and tribulations as well as highlight the great successes. We spend the entire period there in the gifted and talented classrooms, regular classes, and life skills classroom where most of those situations will really touch your heart.

Superintendent East also formed a committee made up of representatives from every campus where he held round table discussions with them about education in general and a pre-determined topic. According to him, "During these meeting they threw out the accolades of what's happening across the district. Then they had a discussion on a pre-determined topic about education." After meeting with this committee, Superintendent East talked about the same pre-determined topic with his high school students' advisory committee. He said that "It is important that they have a voice and it gives him an opportunity to hear answers to these questions through the eyes of the child." In addition to the students' voices, he talked to the staff so they would have a

voice. He spoke with parents as well, asking about what they thought their role should be in their children's education. He said that he had the DEIC (District Education Improvement Committee) which everybody has one of those, but he said he remained for their entire meeting because they were there to give him advice on how to meet the students' needs of the district. The other way in which he reached out to individuals was through coffee talks with people. He said these talks included discussions about educational items nationally, statewide, locally, and in the backyard of their own school. He also opened the door of his office for people to talk to him, saying that, "It's not just a thought a passing fad," but rather he's got an open door policy. He affirmed that "These meetings are not staged." He wanted people to tell him what was on their minds. In listening to the conversations in multiple settings, he said,

I see if there are any trends on certain campuses or programs. Is it isolated to this particular campus or with this particular program? More than anything else it's just good for us to have a pulse with each other. They know I know what their challenges are, they know what our challenges are, and that we work together collaboratively to resolve any of those differences.

In addition to these meetings, Superintendent East sent out electronic messages to his personnel in the district that included highlights in education and anything that was coming out to keep an eye on connected to student academic achievement. According to the superintendent, these forms of meetings and his electronic messages to personnel he said, "Served as a source of connectivity with him to make sure people knew what's going on and how we're doing along the way." His strategic plan included collaborative

participation from district personnel, students, parents, and community representatives to keep his vision aligned with the goals for his district. He said,

Part of that plan really called for people to collaborate one; talk about our system, two; and what our hopes, dreams, and aspirations were for our children. It talks about our beliefs, our mission, our objectives, and our parameters. Within the five-year district strategic plan it included survey results in which the viewpoints of students, teachers, and community members were included in this plan. Based on that we would then martial our troops--our assistant superintendents and myself--and go out to campuses and say how can we help you? We are here to support what's going on here?

These superintendents collaborated with their district level staff and depended on them to be the experts in their fields and to keep them informed about the curriculum standards taught within their district. They all went beyond their district and campus personnel and talked to the community to understand their expectations for student academic achievement. All of the superintendents, through their collaboration in different settings, knew the importance of using data from their interactions with individuals as well as student performance data to make and implement instructional leadership decisions.

Evaluation of Data

All of the superintendents reviewed their data at the beginning of the school year with their district curriculum staff and continued data evaluations throughout the school year. These superintendents looked at data to highlight the strengths of students and to address the weaknesses of the students in the district. The curriculum staff assigned to

assessment data kept these superintendents updated on the student academic achievement throughout the district. Superintendent West used students' state and district assessment data when he made and implemented his instructional leadership decisions in the district. As he asserted,

Whether we like it or not, testing is a part of the current system, and we can fuss and gripe about it all we want but the bottom line is if students ultimately do not pass that assessment then they don't get to graduate high school.

To create the learning environment for students to have the opportunity to graduate, Superintendent West and his data curriculum team evaluated state and district assessment data and identified any campus in need of assistance. Once identified as a campus in need of assistance, he sent a team of curriculum instructional leaders to the campus as well as any additional financial resources needed to close any gaps in student academic achievement. These teams were committed to those identified campuses until they had the assessment data that showed improvement had been met in the academic areas that were identified as in need of assistance. As the data was reviewed, he said, "When we get those results again it's not anything for us in the middle of the year to make sure we spend some more resources because we see a need at a certain campus." The financial resources on the campuses were continuously evaluated to provide the best opportunities for all students to enhance strengths and correct weaknesses as needed to improve their academic achievement.

Superintendent North said the evaluation of data was done with an accountability team made up of a variety of people from different divisions in the district. This accountability team became the "experts" who worked with campus personnel.

Superintendent North said he brought in people from different content areas to discuss data overall, “Because although the content may be different, the skill sets to be successful in an academic area are very similar.” When the team evaluated district data he said they looked to identify,

Where kids are struggling and where are some areas that we need to improve upon. We use a plethora of information to make those calls. A lot of what we do is in reaction to student performance and some cases on the statewide tests and some cases trial and assessment and some cases to what teachers see every day in the classroom. We look at the data to determine where it shows patterns and trends of doing very well and we make sure we figure out what we’re doing there and continue doing that ... Because I think what happens a lot of times is when you get together and you start trying to solve the problem you forget to look at does the solution to the problem you have, is it actually creating another problem over here where you have not had a problem to begin with.

Superintendent North said his accountability team evaluated student performance results throughout the year based on last school year’s state assessment and the current district data to provide him and his staff with a benchmark. He said,

What I expect our staff, our leadership staff, our teaching staff what I want them to do is to use that information, that benchmark ... as a measuring stick or as a guide as to where our kids are and then go on and react to those tests.

The test results were not used to focus only on *bubble kids*, those kids who were barely passing the benchmark assessments, but rather there was an emphasis on kids who were

performing above test results. He said he wanted to make sure “we are not ignoring those kids that are doing really well and that we continue to push them and challenge them.”

To evaluate data and review student success in his district as determined by the state, Superintendent North said,

The state takes care of what are you gonna teach and they take care of how you are gonna assess it with the TEKS and STAAR. What we have to do and I think one of my responsibilities is between determining what the TEKS are and when the assessment takes place is how do we teach it? And what are the things that have to occur for us to successfully prepare students to take the assessment?

We’ve got some challenging kids. This is a tough environment, it’s hard to teach in this district and it’s even harder to teach really well in this district. We do have good results. We can defy a lot of odds. Part of the reason we defy those odds is cause teachers have permission to teach kids and not teach to a test.

He said he did not want his staff to worry about teaching the students to only be successful on the test. He said, “People in this district know that I am not concerned about priority one being how did our kids do on the standardized test.” He added,

One of the most important things he did in his district was he relieved some of the pressure off of the almighty test. I have given principals and I have given teachers permission to not worry about that test as much as you used to worry about it. I’ve got your back, now don’t go out there and stop teaching, and don’t you dare not teach with a sense of urgency. My concern is, are we teaching them in methods in which they are gonna be able to apply this at some point? We want

to make sure kids take what they learn and be able to apply it and recall it at some point in the future and not just the day of the test and then they forget about it.

Superintendent North's guidance to his teachers was for the students to progress at the end of the year. He said he wanted,

To help each individual student not pass the test, but help them grow from the time they entered your class the first day of school until the time you assessed them there should be some growth. And if there is growth that's what my expectations are for people is to just grow kids from where they are and just keep progressing, keep progressing, keep progressing.

Superintendent East evaluated district data with not only the TAPR from the state, but he also created a district accountability report. He used district surveys completed by students, teachers, parents, and community members to develop this district accountability report. These accountability reports were used to evaluate where students were successful and where they were weak. Superintendent East said,

I am gonna take this information from our accountability report which is better, more thorough permeates the entire district than the state accountability report, to make instructional leadership decisions for the students in this district. We believe in multiple assessments so when we talk about assessments, I'm not talking about just STAAR. I'm talking about everything we do. I'm talking about project-based learning. I'm talking about our art projects. I'm talking about orchestra. I'm talking about physical education. I'm talking about many more things other than what we do in April.

In April, he said students are taking state assessments and the students' performances on these assessments were used by the state of Texas to hold districts accountable for student learning. In his district, he said they balanced state accountability via a conversation with multiple assessments. The focus on multiple assessments in his district was done he said to get district personnel "to relax a little bit and the kids to relax a little bit because there is too much pressure on passing state assessments." Concerning state assessments he said,

I have come a long way on assessment, I mean diagnosing, prescribing heck no. It was always get to the Holy Grail get to that rating and you know what after we hit that exemplary rating we said wow does that feel good. Well, it felt good for about 24 hours. Then we had to reflect on the journey. The journey is what's important. The teaching and the love of learning is what is important. You assess along the way whether or not you are getting your kids to your destination that's absolutely critical, but the high stakes and the accountability ratings we are not chasing the Holy Grail anymore. Shame on us for co-opting into that. We are not gonna do that.

He said when he looked at the assessments used by the state to assess student academic achievement he asked,

What are you assessing? Who are you assessing? Why are you assessing it and what does it mean to the student when those scores are coming in so late in the year? You send them home and what does it mean? What does it mean? Well to many it means either summer school or not. It doesn't mean anything. You met the standard ok so whoopee you met the standard? What standard was it? What

does that mean? I mastered 39% of the objectives. Well, that's a false positive. There's rigor attached I get that and there is a heck of a grading curve I get that, but what are you celebrating? I rather celebrate the balanced report card from August to May because everyday counts.

He looked at student learning with the perspective that "everyday counts," which included the overall student academic achievement outcomes of the students throughout the district and not just the scores on the state assessments. He said,

If you're not looking at outcomes, and you're just looking at initiatives without any so what so you did this check or is it you did this so now it permeates the district and creates students that are better ready for tomorrow than they were yesterday.

Superintendent East found it valuable not only for him and his staff to evaluate the curriculum outcomes, but for his district to have a curriculum management audit from outside the district. The results of the curriculum management audit found there were no thorough program evaluations. As a result of this audit, program evaluations were implemented in his district. He said, "Now anything that could be perceived as a program is going to go through an evaluation." That evaluation included his submission to the school board each school year of approximately six programs to be reviewed and approved in the summer months. The school board members were then updated in late spring each school year and their focus was "what's the outcomes, what are you gonna get" from these programs. Superintendent East said,

If you're gonna get a balanced report card you want to have outcomes. So you look at that and ... you are trying to get the best practices the best research as a

result of that and look at it with a level headed eye of scrutiny and then put forward two to three recommendations to the school board to say here's how we're gonna get better.

The data gathered through the state and district accountability results helped

Superintendent East identify any "sick" campus. He said,

If I have to get involved with a campus that is not being successful I will, but in many cases I will look through the data and call the assistant superintendent for secondary and/or elementary and the deputy superintendent and I have a discussion with them and say tell me what's going on. In many cases when you're in the forest you can't see outside of it and that forest may be a campus, it might be a department. My job is to open the horizon for them and let them know what's going on good, bad, and indifferent. We are going to be real with each other.

All of the superintendents understood the need for their students to meet the state assessment performance standards, but they also wanted their teachers to relax about the state assessments. They reviewed the state data and used it to make decisions about their instructional leadership decisions. The one difference among these superintendents in data was the response from Superintendent East that he created his own district accountability report as an additional resource that he used with the state accountability report to assess student data. All of these superintendents understood regardless of the data they reviewed to make and implement instructional leadership decisions, the success of the students depended on the quality of the personnel hired in their district.

Hiring the Right People

These superintendents placed an emphasis on hiring the right individuals to assist them in making and implementing instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district. Superintendent West relied on his staff for advice, because in his position as superintendent of a large district he said he did not need to be the smartest person in all areas of the district curriculum, but he said he could recognize talent in individuals. The qualities he looked for when he hired individuals in his district were as follows:

- Hiring individuals who were honest and smart people who love what they do was number one.
- Loyalty and not blind loyalty, but loyal to your fellow person you are working with ... when things are discussed they should never be discussed anywhere else. So, you know I call it the equivalent of a board's executive session.
- Trust was important because people know there is openness in their relationships with each other.
- Compromise is important ... because none of us get everything, even me.
- Competence is huge because not only do you need people who know what they're doing, but they must have a willingness to learn.
- Supportive individuals who understand that when a decision is made, even if it goes against what that person would want, that they leave supporting the decision that has been made.

He said it was important to “Surround myself around people that will do a good job. It’s not about me. No focus needs to be on me. It’s about the success of the students in his district.”

Superintendent North said the individuals he hired in his district were based on the following qualities:

- I try to surround myself around people that are smarter than me and I consciously do that, and I want somebody who’s way smarter than me.
- When I look at cabinet positions, I don’t want a bunch of ... the softie, touchy emotional, not crying emotional, they tend to make decisions from emotional positions. I don’t want a team full of those because we would never get anything done. But I don’t want a team of ... very structured check the box off each day and get the job done and move on.
- Obviously I look at skill set. Can they handle the job?
- I look at do they have thick skin? I know that term is used a lot, but can they take criticism because they’re gonna be criticized. They’re not gonna be the most popular kid.
- I look at what are their aspirations. I think that’s a very important question to ask people. What do you aspire to? I want someone in that job who ... aspires to do something else whether it’s superintendency or move up the chain. But I have to get a sense is that you know I want to use this and learn from this and at some point one of these days I like to have my own district.
- And last but not least and this probably should have been said first. I look at their ability to get along with people not only in my cabinet, but can you get along with

people? Are you a relationship person or are you not? Meaningful relationships are more critical than anything we do in this profession. More critical than pedagogy. More critical than curriculum. More important than anything we do is meaningful relationships. You know bad relationships eat good strategy for breakfast everyday. You can have the best plans you want, but if you've got bad relationships that plan will never see the light of day. So I want people to understand the value of building relationships with everyone, like them or not. Superintendent North said for the individuals he hired he sets high expectations for them. He said,

I expect probably more than what can be delivered and I know that. I tell you I want you to jump 12 feet, but in reality jump 10 feet. I expect people to be professional. I expect people to have good relationships to honor that. The overall expectation is to let you do your job and if you're not you will know. And have fun. We're gonna work. I expect you to find balance. I expect you to go home every day and play with your kids, be with your husband. I don't expect you to carry this stuff home with you. I say that all the time in letters to the staff find balance whatever that is, find it, just don't say it, find it.

Superintendent East said the people hired in his district had to have a continuum of learning that took place that was monitored. He said, "We want people to grow. We need successors. We need the next superintendent, the next assistant principal, the next principal, the next curriculum coordinator or the next best department head. It's our investment in them and their investment in us." When Superintendent East hired individuals he said he looked for the following qualities:

- I want people that are smart, I want people that are smarter than me.
- I want people that are solution oriented. ... You better have some options for me. ... It has to be that kind of relationship and I think that more than anything else helps them grow their capacity.
- You got to make sure that there's trust and that goes hand in hand with can you be honest? Can you make sure that when you leave that room back there after the meeting that you're not carrying some grudge with you? Can you make sure you're gonna lay that on the table because I need a *kumbaya* on the way out the door--the trust, the honesty, and being smart.
- Being real and working with each other to make sure that people aren't taking short cuts is important. This work is good. It's meaningful. It's what I do and I do a lot of it. I'm not a golfer, so I don't golf and I recommend superintendents not to golf. Quite frankly, I could be out of the office everyday and you know what I firmly believe that you have to take care of your backyard. If you're not taking care of your backyard, who is?

The qualities all three of these superintendents wanted for the staff in their district were individuals who were smart, trustworthy, honest, competent, and worked with each other as a team. They also wanted individuals, regardless of their educational knowledge and experience, who loved what they did in their profession. Above all, they wanted staff to care for students beyond academics. Staff who cared about students and created a positive learning environment where students had the opportunity to be successful in their classes.

Care for Students and Personnel

All three of these superintendents said they wanted to hire individuals who made and accepted decisions based on what was best for the students. Superintendent West said, “I think all students deserve a chance ... kids aren’t perfect. Nobody’s perfect, but we need to do everything we can to give them a chance.” Superintendent West said student academic achievement started with meeting the basic needs of the students. He posited:

I have always been a huge believer in Maslow’s hierarchical needs and if kids are hungry they can’t learn, if kids don’t feel safe they can’t learn, and if kids aren’t loved they want learn. So, I have always been a big believer in that you meet those basic needs in order to make sure all students have a chance. If you go to either of those high schools they have the same programs, they have the same opportunities, they have the same resources that are spent there.

Superintendent North said it is important to create an environment where kids are first. He said, “That means you have to have adults who sacrifice, who make sacrifices” for the students. He said, “So, what I want people to know is that we’re not here to make decisions on what’s best for us or what’s easiest for adults and a lot of times we have to ask that question of ourselves.” He said making kids first in our decisions did not mean the adults would not receive support from him as their superintendent. Superintendent North said support to his staff meant not only providing them with the resources to do their jobs, but included having a caring attitude toward his staff. He said,

I try to give positive affirmations. But the thing I try to do most that I think has the greatest impact is I try to be honest with people. I try to treat them right,

treat them with respect. In any profession not just education its just be yourself, treat people right, work hard, don't be scared to try to outwork people that you've surrounded yourself with, hire people smarter than you, don't be intimidated, and make decisions and be clear and concise and always let people know where you stand.

It was important for his staff to see him as an individual who was humble and one who wanted to be engaged with the people. He said,

They have to at least know who I am through communications whether it's written, email, personal, or I come out to staff and talk to the faculty. Regardless of what it is there has to be at least a tinge of trust. And the way I try to do that is I just try to be consistent with people. Before I start impacting the organizational health of their campus or this district there has to be a certain organizational trust of me.

Within that trust he said he wanted his staff to know,

I've got your back. Our students are challenging because they come from a tough environment, but with a sense of urgency and care provided to our students this district met that challenge. What I want us to do and what we work really hard and this district has done this very effectively well before I got here but we do try to make decisions and try to move in directions in which do provide the best opportunities for kids to be successful.

Superintendent North said one way he was engaged with knowing his students and providing opportunities for them to be successful was,

I read a lot of books on pedagogy on different strategies of reaching the at-risk kid because we got so many of them. I read a lot on just how do you reach those kids psychologically and emotionally. I want to make sure I'm knowledgeable in some of the most basic foundational issues that our kids have and psychological and emotional is it. You can't teach them if they come to you scared, crying, hungry. It's kind of you know Maslow's hierarchy. Some students will come to you with heart breaking stories and those stories are more important to understand before teaching the students.

Superintendent East said throughout his career he used the same interactions with staff and individuals to assist him when he made connections with individuals. He said, Generally speaking ... you better get to know them as a family, as a person, and the messiness of their lives and be there to support them along the way and hold them accountable. That there is respect . . . and make sure even if we may not agree on some things we're gonna leave each other with some dignity. We don't have to make it personal. We don't have to get angry with each other, but you certainly have to care and you can't teach that. You either have it or you don't. So the conversations in this office, they've gone just as when I was a teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, even as a deputy superintendent, all that stuff comes a little bit easier when people know that through your behavior, through your walk in life that you care about them even if you disagree. That relationship that theory I don't know who started it, but I just know that people have needs. They need to feel safe, they need to feel secure, they need to feel valued, and then we try to lead them with that.

Superintendent East said he felt it was important to know his staff personally and he said this was done by doing and saying the following:

How are you doing? Appreciating their job and thanking them for what they do. Not staring over their shoulders and not trying to intimidate them ... just connecting with them on a one-to-one basis. It's like how is your son doing? Tell me how are your boys doing? Of course, if you can't interject humor if it has to be all business I think that's a short run. I think there are a lot of serious things that we do and get involved in especially personnel. Those are serious moments, but by golly you better have a sense of humor and part of that is being able to laugh at your own mistakes and we make plenty of them. You're gonna make some mistakes along the way and that sense of humility is important for people to see.

He said overall he wanted his district staff to know the following:

That there's a bigger picture here and I've been able to will the people to look down the street and around the corner and know that not everything has to be high stakes. That you can love what you do and by loving what you do it seems like you never have to go to work. The pressure is not there. And on the other side of that is when you have that going ... people don't want to disappoint you. They're gonna work their tail off for you. I think that people understand that the buck will stop here, but if somebody is wrong I am gonna tell them they're wrong. But if they're wrongly accused ... I will take a bullet for them. I'm not gonna let anybody bring harm to my staff when they're doing good work at all.

Superintendent East throughout his career in education said he continued to live by the

following words of an anonymous author “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” He added, “You can’t teach people to care.”

These superintendents’ acts of care towards individuals throughout their district helped create an environment where students could learn from caring teachers.

Superintendent East said this type of environment brings about “creative advocates for children who push students beyond their own expectations with a compassion for students beyond academics.”

Summary

The findings of this study indicated these superintendents’ instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement had a possible key to the ethic of caring. “Nel Noddings is closely identified with the promotion of the ethic of care, – the argument that caring should be a foundation for ethical decision-making” (Smith, 2004, p. 1). A reason for Noddings’ passion for the ethic of care was her experiences as a student with caring teachers (Smith, 2004). This ethic of care should be an experience all students received from the adults in their educational environment. This same ethic of care should be an expectation when adults interacted with each other to create a learning environment where students accepted the learning opportunities provided by school districts. However, to understand and appreciate the ethic of care one must first know the basic ideas and language of care (Noddings, 2012). With the ethic of care there was a relational ethic where there was an encounter by the carer for the cared-for. When there was an encounter the carer was attentive and receptive to the expressed needs of the cared-for. Once the carer made this encounter she must decide how to respond to meet the needs of the cared-for. At the point of making a decision to care, the

carer felt a motivational displacement where the carer temporarily removed her own projects and directed attention to the cared-for (Noddings, 2012). When the decision was made to respond, it involved the decision of what to do and how to respond either positively if possible and if not possible to respond where the caring relationship continued to exist even when the cared-for's need is refused (Noddings, 2012). Once the decision was made how to respond to the need of the cared-for there must be an indication from the cared-for that the caring had been received. If the interaction created no response, regardless of the actions of the carer, the caring relation did not exist.

Noddings' (2012) said,

Not only does the cared-for's response complete the caring relation (encounter, episode), the response often provides further information about his needs and interests, and how the carer might deepen or broaden the caring relation. The response provides building blocks for the construction of a continuing caring relation. (p. 53)

An ethic of care built among the individuals in these districts could be the possible key to instructional leadership decisions made and implemented by these superintendents for student academic achievement. Teachers should strive to create a connection with their students where the students felt cared-for by their teachers. This connection could give teachers an opportunity to understand the needs of their students beyond their academic achievement needs in the classroom. The superintendents and district employees on all levels throughout the district and campus should also have an ethic of care in their daily interactions with students and with each other. However, the interactions by a carer is not one that is taught or one where there is a pre-determined

response to an interaction with students or other district personnel. Therefore, a characteristic of all employees should be their ability to build relationships with individuals and students. As said by Superintendent North, “Individuals should build relationships with people like them or not.”

This study addressed the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How did the superintendents’ professional knowledge guide their instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement and led to an accredited district? Superintendents made and implemented instructional leadership decisions based on students having the opportunity to learn in an environment where adults cared about the students’ basic needs, personal struggles, successes, and then taught students the curriculum standards for a course. The superintendents’ instructional leadership decisions were also guided by the students in their attendance zone, which may also indicate the academic readiness of some of their students. These superintendents’ instructional leadership decisions started with a vision they had based on their interactions with others through district committees, meetings, surveys, and informal and formal conversations with stakeholders. They shared their vision with district and campus personnel as well as community stakeholders so they would know the relevance for which their instructional leadership decisions were made for student academic achievement. This vision guided these superintendents when they worked with district personnel to determine how to meet the academic needs of all students. When these superintendents collaborated with their district personnel they continuously used data from district and state assessments to evaluate their instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement that led to an

accredited district. They continuously evaluated data to continue what was successful and addressed academic weaknesses to influence student academic achievement.

Research Question #2: How did superintendents use their central office staff when they made and implemented instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district? The central office staff—which included deputy superintendents, chief financial officers, curriculum instructional leaders, coordinators, campus principals, and campus instructional leaders—were the individuals with whom superintendents met with to give them a deeper understanding of the academic needs of the students. Therefore, these superintendents hired central office staff that not only had professional qualifications, but individuals who had the following minimum qualities:

- They wanted individuals who were smarter than they were within the area they were employed.
- They wanted individuals with integrity so they could trust these individuals to get the job done and to keep contents of meetings confidential.
- They wanted individuals who were assigned to curriculum to be able to keep informed about multiple instructional areas on all campuses within the district and state guidelines.
- They wanted individuals who collaborated together as a team with all personnel regardless of differences that may exist among team members during instructional leadership decision planning meetings.
- They wanted individuals who supported decisions and who did not try to hinder the implementation of any instructional leadership decisions made by a team.

- They wanted individuals who sought to build relationships with the people they worked with in the district, like them or not.

The differences among these three exceptional superintendents were in the demographics and economic statuses of the students who were in their attendance zone, which may have also indicated the academic readiness of the students. Superintendent West described his district as follows:

In a district this size we have affluent areas, we have less affluent areas, we have areas with a higher minority population, areas with lower so it's very important that we make sure that all of our students are achieving.

Table 2

Title: Superintendent West's District Data

Students Demographics and Economically Disadvantaged Data	Percentage of Students
African American	16.8%
Hispanic	44.3%
White	26.6%
American Indian	0.7%
Asian	9.1%
Pacific Islander	0.1%
Two or more races	2.4%
Economically Disadvantaged	48.9%

Superintendent North described his district as follows:

We always talk about it over here. We've got some challenging kids this is a tough environment, it's hard to teach in this district ... it's even harder to teach really well in this district. We do have good results. We can defy a lot of odds. Part of the reason we defy those odds is because teachers have permission to teach kids and not teach to a test.

Table 3

Title: Superintendent North's District Data

Student Demographics and Economically Disadvantaged Data	Percentage of Students
African American	29.2%
Hispanic	52.3%
White	4.1%
American Indian	1.4%
Asian	12.2%
Pacific Islander	0.2%
Two or more races	0.7%
Economically Disadvantaged	80.4%

Superintendent East described his district as follows:

We are above the state and nation on the state assessment, SAT, ACT, and tiddlywinks. I mean whatever you want to call it we're competitive enough that we have the right people in the right place to do better than that.

Table 4

Title: Superintendent East's District Data

Student Demographics and Economically Disadvantaged Data	Percentage of Students
African American	8.1%
Hispanic	29.4%
White	48.1%
American Indian	0.2%
Asian	9.8%
Pacific Islander	0.1%
Two or more races	4.3%
Economically Disadvantaged	27.6%

These three exceptional superintendents of large districts in Texas, with over 30,000 students regardless of the demographics or economic statuses of their students, made and implemented instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement, leading to an accredited district. The possible key factor for these

superintendents' instructional leadership decisions that influenced student academic achievement and led to an accredited district was that they led with an ethic of care for students in their attendance zone as well as their personnel.

Chapter V

Conclusions

Superintendents are the leaders in school districts responsible for the instructional leadership decisions that could have an influence on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district. They serve a vital purpose in "The intersection of what needs to be done ... varies from school to school but ... the superintendency is the only job title with the positional authority to orchestrate the intentional meshing of actors and script toward future improvement" (Bird et. al, 2013, pp. 77-78). Superintendents should no longer rely solely on campus principals and teachers to meet the student academic achievement needs of all students. As stated in the report *From the Top*:

Superintendents on Instructional Leadership:

Decisions about instruction have traditionally been the domain of individual teachers in classrooms and principals in schools. In recent years, many education experts have begun to champion the view that staffing schools with good teachers and principals and giving them the freedom to instruct is not enough to ensure student success. More focus has been placed on the district-level and the leadership role of superintendents and the district staff (Belden Russonello & Stewart, 2005, p. 1).

Consequently, these superintendents' instructional leadership decisions reflected not only their ability to make and implement decisions, but also their ability to work with central office and district staff. Therefore, a possible key to superintendents'

instructional leadership decisions were an ethic of care for both their students and staff. This chapter includes an overview of the study, discussion of results, implications for instructional leadership, and implications for future research.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the influence superintendents' instructional leadership decisions had on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district. The interviewed superintendents were purposefully selected for this study and volunteered, each holding the meetings in their district offices. All three of these exceptional superintendents were named superintendents of the year. The data collected from their interviews were transcribed and analyzed to identify emergent themes of these exceptional superintendents as the instructional leaders of their districts. The overall research question used to guide this research study was the following: "What instructional leadership decisions were made by superintendents that had an influence on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district?" A qualitative case study method was used to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How did the superintendents' professional knowledge guide their instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement and led to an accredited district?

Research Question 2: How did superintendents use their central office staff when they made and implemented instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement that led to an accredited district?

To collect the data, a natural setting was used to conduct face-to-face and one-on-one interviews with three participants for this study. After their agreement to participant,

I scheduled interviews by contacting the secretary of each superintendent through email, followed by phone conversations with each secretary. When I entered the district offices, each secretary greeted me and then introduced me to their superintendent. At this point, the interview protocol process was explained before the interviews started with each superintendent. These in-depth interviews lasted from one-hour to one and a half hours in each of the participant's district offices. The interviews were audio recorded using a Sony voice recorder.

To collect, analyze, and describe the data from these interviews, each superintendent answered open-ended questions based on the TExES superintendent exam that assessed the required professional knowledge an individual had in three educational domains: (1) Domain I: Leadership of the Educational Community, (2) Domain II: Instructional Leadership, and (3) Domain III: Administrative Leadership (Texas Education Agency, 2006). For this qualitative case study, Domain II: Instructional Leadership Competencies 005, 006, and 007 was used to create fourteen pre-determined questions. There were an additional eight open-ended questions that asked about the participants' interactions with their central office staff, their perspective on how their instructional leadership decisions influenced student academic achievement, and who influenced their leadership style. When data was collected, these superintendents were all asked the same twenty-two questions in the same order to establish a foundation of trustworthiness to use this data and to interrelate the responses of the superintendents. After the interviews were transcribed, the process to collect and analyze the data was to place them in a matrix to facilitate the coding process and to identify emergent themes. The analysis steps of open-coding, axial coding, and selective coding were used to

analyze the data (Punch, 2009). When open-coding comparisons were made and questions were asked to identify labels for the various pieces of data, axial coding was used to make connections between the abstract concepts and selective coding was used to identify categories. The identified emergent themes were used to increase the understanding of how exceptional superintendents' instructional leadership decisions had an influence on student academic achievement and district accreditation.

Discussion of Results

The academic achievement of students on all campuses in a district depended on the leadership roles of superintendents and their collaboration with the central offices (Shields, 2010). All three of the superintendents' responses to the interview questions aligned with the benefits of receiving educational knowledge from their central office staff. With the multiple responsibilities of superintendents, they focused on hiring cabinet office personnel who could build relationships with people and who they trusted to have the professional knowledge in their areas of expertise. These superintendents' central office staff kept them informed about the curriculum standards and instruction on the campuses so that they could make and implement instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement and led to an accreditation status of accredited.

Research Question 1: How did the superintendents' professional knowledge guide their instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement and led to an accredited district? Superintendents made and implemented instructional leadership decisions based on students having the opportunity to learn in an environment where adults cared about the students' basic needs, personal struggles, and

successes, and then taught students the curriculum for a course. The superintendents' instructional leadership decisions were also guided by the students in their attendance zone, which also might have indicated the academic readiness of some of their students. Each superintendent's instructional leadership decisions started with a vision they had based on their interactions with others through district committees, meetings, surveys, and informal and formal conversations with stakeholders. They shared this vision with district and campus personnel as well as community stakeholders so that they would know the relevance for which their instructional leadership decisions were made for student academic achievement. This vision guided these superintendents when they worked with district personnel to determine how to meet the academic needs of all students. When these superintendents collaborated with their district personnel they continuously used data from district and state assessments to evaluate their instructional leadership decisions. They continuously evaluated data to continue what was successful and addressed academic weaknesses to influence student academic achievement.

Research Question 2: How did superintendents use their central office staff when they made and implemented instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement and led to an accredited district? The central office staff—which included deputy superintendents, chief financial officers, curriculum instructional leaders, coordinators, campus principals and campus instructional leaders—were the individuals with whom superintendents met to gain a deeper understanding of the academic needs of the students. Therefore, these superintendents hired central office staff who not only had the professional qualifications, but individuals who had the following minimum qualities:

- They wanted individuals who were smarter than they were within the area they were employed.
- They wanted individuals with integrity so that they could trust these individuals to get the job done and to keep contents of meetings confidential.
- They wanted individuals who were assigned to curriculum to be able to stay informed about multiple instructional areas on all campuses within the district and state guidelines.
- They wanted individuals who collaborated together as a team with all personnel regardless of differences that might have existed among team members during instructional leadership decision planning meetings.
- They wanted individuals who supported final instructional leadership decisions and did not try to hinder the implementation of any instructional leadership decisions made by the team.
- They wanted individuals who sought to build relationships with the people they worked with in the district, like them or not.

The differences among these three exceptional superintendents existed in the demographics and economic statuses of the students who were in their attendance zones, which in turn might that may have also indicated the academic readiness of the students. Superintendent West described his district as follows:

In a district this size, we have affluent areas, we have less affluent areas, we have areas with a higher minority population, areas with lower, so it's very important that we make sure that all of our students are achieving.

Superintendent North described his district as follows:

We always talk about it over here. We've got some challenging kids, this is a tough environment it's hard to teach ... it's even harder to teach really well.

We've got some challenging kids this is a tough environment it's hard to teach in this district and it's even harder to teach really well in this district. We do have good results. We can defy a lot of odds. Part of the reason we defy those odds is because teachers have permission to teach kids and not teach to a test.

Superintendent East described his district as follows:

We are above the state and nation on the state assessment, SAT, ACT, and tiddlywinks. I mean whatever you want to call it we're competitive enough that we have the right people in the right place to do better than that.

These three exceptional superintendents of large districts in Texas, with over 30,000 students regardless of the demographics or economic statuses of their students, made and implemented instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement. The possible key factor of these superintendents' instructional leadership decisions that influenced student academic achievement and led to an accredited district was that they led with an ethic of care for students in their attendance zone as well as their personnel.

Implications for Instructional Leadership

"The intersection of what needs to be done ... varies from school to school but ... the superintendency is the only job title with the positional authority to orchestrate the intentional meshing of actors and script toward future improvement" (Bird et al., 2013, pp. 77-78). Orchestration by superintendents depended on the personnel to implement

their vision of the instructional leadership decisions for the district. These superintendents worked towards the creation of a culture where relationships were built with individuals. They strived to build relationships with their employees beyond their job title. Above all, they wanted to create a culture where all district employees had an ethic of care for students beyond academics. This type of environment could create an environment where students not only had an opportunity to learn, but where students were successful in their learning environment.

The role of superintendents is to ensure they provide an opportunity for student academic achievement, but they must have the human and financial resources and the support of all stakeholders to achieve their instructional leadership decisions. The literature review and findings of this study were used to make the following recommendations:

1. The state of Texas accountability system placed demands on superintendents to meet the performance standards on assessments that included over an inch wide, mile long curriculum. With this demand, superintendents needed to be leaders with professional knowledge to implement their instructional leadership decisions through the creation of their vision and collaboration with all district personnel.
2. The superintendents' responsibilities for the instructional leadership decisions in their districts also required them to build relationships with the individuals who implemented their instructional leadership decisions. Superintendents should collaborate with many stakeholders, including school board members,

students, parents, educators, and community and business leaders to implement instructional leadership decisions.

3. The superintendents should continuously evaluate their student data to ensure they continued what was successful for their students, as well as implement any necessary changes to prepare students to meet the district curriculum and performance standards on the state assessments.
4. The superintendents should not only place the right people with the right knowledge in the ideal positions to implement their instructional leadership decisions, but individuals who also cared about students beyond academics.
5. The superintendents should try to build an ethic of care culture for all students and employees.
6. The superintendents should be visible within their community to understand the needs of the community and how that connected to the student learning in their district.
7. Superintendents hired by districts should be the instructional leaders who not only implemented the instructional leadership decisions that had an influence on student academic achievement, but also leaders who connected with their students and personnel.

Implications for Further Research

The findings from this qualitative case study were that the role of superintendents in the area of instructional leadership had a possible key to an ethic of care. These superintendents could have used an ethic of care when they created a vision for the district, evaluated data, collaborated with others, hired the right individuals, and cared

about the interactions among their students and staff. However, instructional leadership decisions did not exist in isolation of the additional superintendents' responsibilities for their districts. Further research on potential influencing factors on the instructional leadership skills of a superintendent could take a look at Domain I: Leadership of the Educational Community and Domain III: Administrative Leadership on the Superintendency exam. Studies in these domains could indicate how to employ well-rounded superintendents as leaders of districts who could provide an opportunity for all students to have the appropriate resources and facilities to learn in a positive and safe environment in their attendance zone.

In addition to the instructional leadership decisions of these superintendents, this qualitative case study indicated that superintendents within large school districts relied heavily on their deputy superintendents and other central office staff in the area of curriculum and instruction when they made and implemented instructional leadership decisions. Therefore, further research could also be done with the aforementioned individuals to understand their roles in relation to superintendents in the development of instructional leadership decisions. The last area of further research could be in the area of spirituality used by leaders. Although superintendents in public schools may not initiate any religious activity within the district, it is possible these individuals used their spirituality when they made and implemented instructional leadership decisions. Houston (2002) said, "The work done by superintendents is more of a calling and mission than a job." The connection to their use of spirituality was based on the superintendents' responses to the interview question: "How would you describe your leadership style and is there any individual who impacts your leadership style?" Superintendent West said

there was an advantage to being a preacher's son in that his religious foundation gave him the ability to connect with all individuals regardless of their personalities.

Superintendent North said he had a mentor who influenced his leadership style and whom he still contacts for advice. He said he compared his mentor's advice to the saying, "what would Jesus do?" Finally, Superintendent East said his leadership style was one based on his faith being his rock when he made instructional decisions.

Analyzing spirituality might provide a challenge because it is "mysterious and defies succinct definition, we know it is distinct from religion and forms the context or basis for religious belief to arise (Stokley, 2002). Religion is based on beliefs that may contribute to how individuals interact within their environment. Stokley (2002) says some philosophers refer to this spirituality as a "world view" that could determine how individuals act and conduct their behavior in society. Within a public school system that society could consist of superintendents who as instructional leaders have the challenge to meet the academic needs of students who have different learning needs and who come from different backgrounds that could contribute to students' social and emotional needs. Stokley (2002) emphasized the following:

These are challenging times for educators. Outside forces such as state standards, high-stakes testing and the influence of a violence-saturated commercial culture put conflicting pressures on us. Just at the time when a more holistic student-centered approach to learning is needed, it's becoming harder to provide. ... For many children today, school may be the only place where they can learn positive social and emotional skills and experience a sense of connection to a larger community. Going in this direction means moving into our hearts too. As we

look within and examine ourselves, we will be better able to take care of the whole of every child we work with, to use our own empathy and compassion for children, to dissolve the barriers between heart and intellect, and to help them develop their spirit as well as their minds.

The superintendents' responses in this qualitative case study indicated a possible spirituality rooted in understanding that the needs of children are important when they made and implemented instructional leadership decisions. Superintendent West said, "I think all students deserve a chance ... kids aren't perfect. Nobody's perfect, but we need to do everything we can to give them a chance." He posited,

I have always been a huge believer in Maslow's hierarchical needs and if kids are hungry they can't learn, if kids don't feel safe they can't learn, and if kids aren't loved they want learn. So, I have always been a big believer in that you meet those basic needs in order to make sure all students have a chance. If you go to either of those high schools they have the same programs, they have the same opportunities, they have the same resources that are spent there.

Superintendent North said, "You have to have adults who sacrifice ... I want people to know that we're not here to make decisions on what's best for us or what's easiest for adults and a lot of times we have to ask that question of ourselves." He continued:

Making kids first in our decisions did not mean the adults would not receive support from him as their superintendent. ... What I want us to do, and what we work really hard and this district has done this very effectively well before I got here, but we do try to make decisions and try to move in directions in which do

provide the best opportunities for kids to be successful. ... You can't teach them if they come to you scared, crying, hungry. It's kind of, you know, Maslow's hierarchy. Some students will come to you with heart breaking stories and those stories are more important to understand before teaching the students.

Superintendent East said when adults create a connection with students, it can bring about "creative advocates for children who push students beyond their own expectations with a compassion for students beyond academics." Superintendent East further said,

Throughout his career he found ... just as when I was a teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, even as a deputy superintendent all that stuff comes a little bit easier when people know that through your behavior, through your walk in life that you care about them even if you disagree. That relationship, that theory, I don't know who started it, but I just know that people have needs. They need to feel safe, they need to feel secure, they need to feel valued, and then we try to lead them with that.

The superintendents' responses to this qualitative case study indicated they valued the connections they made with their students and staff and connections made by the staff with students. Hoyle (2002) said, "The road to victory in American education will be won by gifted, well-prepared system administrators who lead with both head and heart to ensure that every child ... will find success and happiness in his or her life." Spirituality could be a quality in superintendents' leadership styles that, regardless of the attendance zone a child lives in, he or she will experience an ethic of care and an opportunity for academic success at his or her campus.

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Appendix A

Approval from the University of Houston Human Subject Research Committee

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

August 25, 2014

Ms. Hermenia Jenkins
c/o Dr. Julie Fernandez
Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Ms. Hermenia Jenkins,

The University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1) reviewed your research proposal entitled "Superintendents of Schools as Instructional Leaders and Its Implications toward Practice" on August 15, 2014, according to institutional guidelines.

The Committee has given your project approval pending clarification of the stipulations listed below:

1. The response to question 27 of the application should indicate "No" as the waiver of consent is to use publicly available data (reports) specific to each school. Thus, the study is minimal risk.
2. The investigator must confirm that the time commitment stated in the application is adequate; will 1 hour will be sufficient to address all 22 questions?
3. The response to question 8 of the application must state the names of the participating school districts.
4. The response to question 6.06 of the application should state how it will be determine that the inclusion/exclusion criteria have been met. The information provided suggests that potential subjects have already been identified, but does not explain specifically how many were eligible and why these specific individuals were chosen.
5. Please remove the duplicate documents that have been uploaded, or label one of each as the final version. The recruitment email was uploaded 5 times and the interview questions twice.
6. The title of the project and the sentence used to introduce the purpose of the study in the consent document should be reviewed for consistency with standard English usage and syntax.
7. Prior to final approval the following members must complete the Human Subjects training requirement: Dr. Angus MacNeil. Please refer to our link: <http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/irb-cphs/hs-training/> . Clarify in your resubmission that all training has been completed.

You must submit evidence of compliance with the above stipulations online via the Research Administration Management Portal (RAMP), by September 15, 2014. The material you submit to meet these contingencies must be certified by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects as acceptable before you may begin data collection. If you fail to respond by this date, your approval may be revoked. This would necessitate your reapplying to the Committee prior to initiation of your research project. Research without the Committee's sanction could result in an administrative block to the receipt of your degree.

316 E. Cullen Building Houston, TX 77204-2015 (713) 743-9204 Fax: (713) 743-9577

COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS.

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON
DIVISION OF RESEARCH

In order to expedite review, please prepare a cover letter that explains the response to each item. Once you met these requirements, this project must be reviewed annually, or prior to any change approved procedures.

If you have any questions, please contact Samoya Copeland at (713) 743-9534.

Sincerely yours,



Dr. Daniel O'Connor, Chair
Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1)

Protocol Number: 14535-01

Full Review: ____

Expedited Review: X

Appendix B

Invite to Participate in Research Study

Email of Invite to Participate in Research Study

Hello Superintendent:

My name is Hermenia “Mary” Jenkins and I am currently pursuing my degree from the Department of Education Executive Ed.D. Program at the University of Houston. I am writing to invite you to take part in my research study of successful superintendents. This research study is under the supervision of Dr. Steven Busch and Dr. Robert Borneman, UH faculty sponsors.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the relationship that exists between instructional leadership and the superintendent of schools and its influence on student academic achievement. This research study will focus on the leadership of superintendents from three school districts in the state of Texas. The organizational chart and results from the Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) for these districts as published on the Texas Education Agency website will be reviewed. The data from this study will be analyzed for emergent themes of three superintendents to increase the understanding of the work of successful superintendents in the area of instructional leadership that results in student academic achievement. This study will take no more than one and a half hours of the subject’s time during the one-on-one interview.

I would very much appreciate the opportunity to interview you for my study. If you decide to participate, would you please let me know by email and I will call your district office to schedule a time for the interview.

Thank you.

Hermenia “Mary” Jenkins
University of Houston Doctoral Student

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in Research Study

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

PROJECT TITLE: Superintendents as Instructional Leaders and Its Influence on Student Academic Achievement

You are being invited to take part in a research project conducted by Hermenia “Mary” Jenkins from the Department of Education Executive Ed.D. Program at the University of Houston. This research is part of a dissertation being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Anthony Rolle.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Taking part in the research project is voluntary and you may refuse to take part or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any research-related questions that make you uncomfortable.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the relationship that exists between instructional leadership and the superintendent of schools and its influence on student academic achievement. This research study will focus on the leadership of superintendents from three school districts in the state of Texas located in Region IV. The organizational chart and results from the Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) for these districts as published on the Texas Education Agency website will be reviewed. The data from this study will be analyzed for emergent themes of the superintendents to increase the understanding of the work of successful superintendents in the area of instructional leadership that results in student academic achievement. This study will take no more than one and a half hours of the subject’s time during the one-on-one interview.

PROCEDURES

You will be one of three subjects invited to take part in this project.

The single interview will take place in your district in a public location, at a day and time that is convenient to your schedule. The actual interview should not take more than one and a half hours of your time. You will be asked questions about your leadership practices based on Domain II: Instructional Leadership - Superintendent Competencies 005, 006, and 007 and some open-ended questions. To provide you an opportunity to prepare for the interview, I will send you the questions prior to the interview. I will audio tape your responses and transcribe them for your review. You may read your transcript and make changes if you feel your answers did not completely reflect your current practices.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your participation in this project. Each subject's name will be paired with code letters and a code number by the principal investigator. The code letters and code number will appear on all written materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the assigned code letters and code number will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There should be no foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences during this study.

BENEFITS

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation will provide an opportunity for you to reflect on your professional practice within the district to evaluate the effectiveness of your leadership and its influence on student academic achievement.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations; however, no individual subject will be identified. AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF AUDIO TAPES

If you consent to take part in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be audio taped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the audio tapes can be used for publication/presentations.

☐ I agree to be audio taped during the interview.

☐ I agree that the audio tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.

☐ I do not agree that the audiotape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.

☐ I do not agree to be audio taped during the interview.

CIRCUMSTANCES FOR DISMISSAL FROM PROJECT

Your participation in this project may be terminated by the principal investigator:

- if you do not keep study appointments;
- if you do not follow the instructions you are given;
- if the principal investigator determines that staying in the project is harmful to your health or is not in your best interest;
- if the study sponsor decides to stop or cancel the project

SUBJECT RIGHTS

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.
2. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any question.
3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me, as have any potential benefits.
4. I understand the protections in place to safeguard any personally identifiable information related to my participation.
5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Hermenia “Mary” Jenkins at 713-594-6166. I may also contact University of Houston faculty sponsors Dr. Steven Busch at 713-743-3902 or Dr. Robert Borneman at 713-743-3382.
6. Any questions regarding my rights as a research subject may be addressed to the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713-743-9204). All research projects that are carried out by Investigators at the University of Houston are governed by requirements of the University and the federal government.

SIGNATURES

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions to my satisfaction. I give my consent to participate in this study, and have been provided with a copy of this form for my records and in case I have questions as the research progresses.

Study Subject (print name): _____

Signature of Study Subject: _____

Date: _____

I have read this form to the subject and/or the subject has read this form. An explanation of the research was provided and questions from the subject were solicited and answered to the subject’s satisfaction. In my judgment, the subject has demonstrated comprehension of the information.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Participant: _____

Location: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Prior to the Interview

Hello, my name is _____ and thank you for your voluntary participation in this research study. (The researcher did converse with the participant prior to the interview to help create an atmosphere that would be comfortable for both individuals during the interview).

The title of this qualitative research study is “Superintendents as Instructional Leaders and Its Influence on Student Academic Achievement”. The purpose is to examine how school superintendents’ instructional leadership decisions have an influence on student academic achievement that leads to an accredited district with a focus on student accountability.

This interview will be recorded and I will also type notes during the interview. There will also be times when I will take a quick glance at my audio device to make sure it is still recording the interview.

If you have no questions for me, the interview will begin at this time.

Interview Questions

The following fourteen open-ended questions were based on the TExES exam for superintendents as described in Domain II: Instructional Leadership - Superintendent Competencies of 005, 006, and 007:

1. How do you ensure alignment of curriculum, curriculum resources, and assessment for all campuses in the district?
2. How do you develop and implement collaborative processes for systematically assessing and renewing the curriculum to meet the needs of ALL students and ensure appropriate scope, sequence, content, and alignment?
3. How do you use district assessment to measure student learning, diagnose student needs, and determine effectiveness of the curriculum to ensure educational accountability?

4. How do you ensure that district staff members have a working knowledge of the accountability system and are monitoring its components to increase student performance?
5. How do you advocate, promote, and sustain a district culture that is conducive to student learning and staff professional growth?
6. What motivational theories and strategies do you use to encourage staff, students, families/caregivers, and the community to strive to achieve the district's vision?
7. How do you facilitate the ongoing study of current best practice and relevant research and encourage the application of this knowledge to district/school improvement initiatives?
8. How do you analyze instructional resource needs and deploy instructional resources effectively and equitably to enhance student learning?
9. How do you analyze the implications of various organizational factors (e.g., staffing patterns, class scheduling formats, school organizational structures, student discipline practices) for teaching and learning?
10. What do you do to improve teaching and learning by participating in quality, relevant professional development activities and studying current professional literature and research?
11. How do you implement strategies to increase the expertise and skill of staff at the district level?
12. How do you work collaboratively with district personnel to plan, implement, and evaluate professional growth programs?
13. By what means do you deliver effective presentations and facilitate learning for both small and large groups?
14. How do you assess and support the organizational health and climate by implementing necessary strategies to improve the performance of all staff members?

The remaining open-ended questions were asked to gain additional understanding of the school superintendents' instructional leadership skills:

15. When you became superintendent of schools did you redesign the organizational chart? If so, what changes did you make and why did you make these changes?

16. Will you or did you make any changes to the organizational chart for the 2014-2015 school year? If not, why did you decide to leave the current organizational chart as it was last school year?
17. Who are the cabinet members who work directly with you to ensure all students are provided the best educational opportunities to prepare students to meet or exceed performance standards on state assessments?
18. How do you build positive team relationships with your central office staff?
19. What guiding principles do you use when selecting your cabinet members?
20. Is humor a part of your leadership style with your central office staff? If so, how do you use humor in your leadership role?
21. As you reflect on your instructional leadership skills, what is the most important thing you have done that makes an impact on student academic achievement?
22. How would you describe your leadership style and is there any individual who impacts your leadership style?

Appendix E

Journal of Qualitative Data Analysis

JOURNAL OF THE QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS.

The data from the interviews with the superintendents were transcribed, analyzed, and reviewed in an electronic journal. The sections below summarize the steps typed in the electronic journal to complete this qualitative data analysis.

Steps Prior to the Interviews with the Superintendents

- Superintendents who have been named superintendents of the year were selected to participate in this research study.
- An email was sent to the superintendents that requested their voluntary participation in this research study.
- An email was received from the office of the superintendents that gave their consent to participate in this research study.
- “Consent to Participate in Research” forms were sent to the superintendents seeking their voluntary participation in this research study.
- The face-to-face and one-on-one interviews were scheduled by contacting a representative from each district by email and telephone.
- Prior to beginning the face-to-face and one-on-one interviews the signed “Consent to Participate in Research” forms were collected.

The Face-to-Face and One-on-One Interviews with the Superintendents

- The superintendents were interviewed in their district office using the following procedures:
 - The interviews were audiotaped using a Sony voice recorder.
 - The interviews lasted at least an hour but no longer than one and a half hours.
 - There were additional questions asked for clarification during these interviews as needed.
- The face-to-face and one-on-one interviews were listened to in their entirety before they were transcribed.
- The text was transcribed and reviewed for accuracy.
- A meeting was scheduled with Dr. Amanda Rolle for her professional guidance on how to analyze the transcripts.

Creating a Process to Place and Analyze Data in a Matrix

- A Microsoft Word document was used to place the responses of the superintendents in a table. The responses to the questions were separated into individual rows of sentences using a word command function.
- This Microsoft Word document was copied and placed in an Excel document. The data was copied into an Excel document to sort the data.
- To maintain the confidentiality of the superintendents and their districts, the sentence responses to the questions were coded as follows:
 - Q1.AS1.1. The code is defined as Q1 for Question #1, AS1 for Answer of Mr. West Superintendent SD1, and “1” is the sentence number of the response to the question. The code of “1” changed with each new sentence to indicate the appropriate sentence to the response of the superintendent of schools.
 - Q1.AS2.1. This code is the same as the above except AS2 is the answer of Mr. North Superintendent of Schools SD2
 - Q1.AS3.1. This code is the same as the above except AS3 is the answer of Mr. East Superintendent of Schools SD3
- A column was added and the rows were numbered sequentially to sort the data to its original sequential order as needed.

The Conceptualization, Coding, and Categorizing of the Transcribed Data

- The data was used to interrelate the responses to the questions of the three superintendents to identify emergent themes.
- Mr. West SD1’s transcribed text was read sentence-by-sentence and concepts, constructs, and themes were identified.
- Mr. North SD2’s transcribed text was read sentence-by-sentence and concepts, constructs, and themes were identified.
- Mr. East SD3’s transcribed text was read sentence-by-sentence and concepts, constructs, and themes were identified.
- The coded text was read multiple times to review the identified themes.
- The transcribed text and coded data of Mr. West SD1, Mr. North SD2, and Mr. East SD3 were combined and the information was copied to a new worksheet within the same excel document.
- A column was added and the rows were numbered to sort the data to its original sequential order as needed.

Analyzing the Identified Emergent themes

- The transcribed data was highlighted sentence-by-sentence for each superintendent of schools as follows:
 - Mr. West SD1 transcribed text was highlighted in the color blue.
 - Mr. North SD2 transcribed text was highlighted in the color green.
 - Mr. East SD3 transcribed text was highlighted in the color yellow.
- The transcribed text was placed on a new worksheet within the same Excel document and sorted to identify the emergent themes.

Labeling the Identifying Emergent themes

- The transcribed document was sorted to identify emergent themes by verifying the number of responses from each participant.
- The number of responses were coded within a new worksheet of the same Excel document and triangulated among the three superintendents transcribed data.
- The coded data was reviewed and five themes emerged from the data. The identified emergent themes were connected to the literature in this research study.
- The emergent themes were vision, collaboration, evaluation of data, hiring, and caring.
- A column was added to the coded document to identify the responses to use in the research study. Within the rows of the column the letter “Y” for *yes* and the letter “N” for *no* were typed to indicate if the responses would be included in this research study.
- The “yes” and “no” columns were sorted to further identify which responses from the emergent themes would be used for this research study.
- The superintendents responses were highlighted using the following colors:
 - a yellow marker to consider using the responses by the superintendents
 - a green marker to indicate the responses would be used
 - an orange marker to highly consider using the responses